

Disaster Capitalism, Settler Colonialism, and Indigenous Environmental Justice in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic was experienced by nearly every person around the world. However, while the pandemic was borne by everyone, the weight of everyone's burden was not equal and was heavily influenced by preexisting inequalities and harmful social structures. As they have in the past, Indigenous peoples in Canada, as well as around the world, experienced disproportionate impacts and losses from this most recent crisis. This may be largely connected to the ongoing presence of settler colonial ideologies and structures which, among other issues, resulted in a lack of necessary infrastructure needed to manage the pandemic within First Nations, as well as a patronizing disregard for Indigenous pandemic decision-making. In conjunction, *disaster capitalism* ensued throughout the pandemic, a practice defined by Naomi Klein as the exploitation of crises by the powerful to further their own agendas, which worked to further compound and hinder Indigenous efforts to ensure community safety and well-being. However, First Nations nonetheless determinedly asserted their self-determination, challenging harmful decision-making and prioritizing community well-being. This project utilizes two cases (*Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba* and *Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario*) to examine how the pervasive ideologies of settler colonialism interacted and influenced disaster capitalism during the pandemic, as well as how Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ) was then enacted by communities. An analysis of these cases demonstrate that, while disaster capitalism and IEJ were prevalent during COVID-19, the specific circumstances were nonetheless shaped by distinct, place-based histories and relationships among settlers and Indigenous peoples. Moreover, this project explores the narratives surrounding these cases, including how they were presented to the public by various Mainstream, Alternative/Advocacy and Indigenous news outlets by utilizing a media analysis. This analysis notably observed the considerable inclusion of

settler narratives/biases by Mainstream sources, while Alternative/Advocacy, and Indigenous sources specifically, highlighted Indigenous voices/experiences and the context of sovereignty. Lastly, and being mindful of the general disregard and absence of Indigenous voices within academia and news media, the inclusion of a community experience chapter highlights place-based Indigenous experiences and ways of knowing regarding the Keeyask case study; Demonstrating the complexity of Indigenous relationships with industry and settler government, these experiences moreover spoke to a dedication to continue to take action, heal and move forward in a good way. By exploring these subjects of settler colonialism, disaster capitalism and Indigenous Environmental Justice through various lens' (case studies, media analysis and community experiences) and by utilizing a two-eyed seeing approach which borrowed from qualitative and Indigenous methodologies, this project demonstrates the value of employing multiple perspectives and storytelling when striving to formulate contextualized, respectful and meaningful research.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context

This project originated in 2021, with an interest in how the forces of settler colonialism, disaster capitalism and Indigenous Environmental Justice intersected in Canada during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As resulting circumstances were unfolding in real time, the most abundant sources of information were those provided by the news. So, I began gathering media from many different sources and from all over Canada; As time progressed and as I collected and analysed more data, it became clear that there had been a proliferation of *disaster capitalism* across Canada, a practice defined by Naomi Klein (2007) as the exploitation of a crisis to continue, implement and/or intensify neoliberal ideologies which prioritize economic expansion and capital accumulation. Moreover, not only were these circumstances extensive, they also heavily impacted Indigenous communities; For instance, examples include: the prioritization of mining projects in the Yukon and Quebec, which took precedent over the health concerns and wishes of local Indigenous communities (Bell, 2020; Gignac, 2020; Robertson, 2020a; Macleod & Hosgood, 2021); The continuation of oil and gas projects, such as the Coastal GasLink pipeline which strategically sustained its invasion of Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia, exasperating communities' ability to both keep themselves safe and resist the project (Simmons, 2021); As well as policy and legislative changes, many of which were fast tracked without consultation, such as the elimination of coal protections in the Alberta Rocky Mountains (Cruickshank, 2020).

What also became evident over the course of my initial gathering of data, was that many of the actions taken by government were to further prioritize and enable resource/energy

development. This decision-making inevitably impacted Indigenous communities, as resource development in Canada largely occurs on Indigenous traditional territory and therefore (should) prompt the government's duty to consult which stems from inherent and treaty rights, as well as newly adopted rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) which promises free prior and informed consent (Winter & Boyd, 2024).

However, Canadian courts have frequently enabled the government's avoidance or offloading of these duties (Craft, 2022a; King et al., 2019) and consequentially, the expansion of industries, such as oil and gas, "is tightly linked to the continued displacement, pacification, and expropriation of unceded and treaty guaranteed lands historically inhabited and cared for by Indigenous peoples," (Spice, 2022b, p. 46). This disregard for Indigenous sovereignty and rights was evidently continued during the pandemic by the sustained and intensified push and prioritization of the resource industry. Indeed Klein, as well as other researchers, writers and activists have documented such disaster capitalist behaviour as occurring extensively during the pandemic, as government and industry have worked to push through and essentialize development projects, pass neoliberal legislation, and maintain a business-as-usual status quo (Klein, 2020a; Klein 2020b; Núñez, 2020; Sordi et al., 2022; Spark & Williams, 2022).

Meanwhile, and amid government and industry disaster capitalist decision-making, Indigenous communities were preoccupied handling disproportionate impacts from COVID-19, as such disasters are known to intensify and compound existing inequalities caused by structures of colonialism and capitalism, such as a lack of infrastructure, housing and access to healthcare (Bonilla, 2020; Kopp, 2024; Power et al., 2020). Therefore, the actions of government compounded the strain placed on Indigenous communities, who were not only faced with managing the direct threat of the pandemic, but also unilateral government decision-making

which posed a future threat to their rights and well-being. However, while examining these irresponsible and destructive measures, what further stood out were the incredible stories of Indigenous environmental justice (IEJ), strength, solidarity, sovereignty, and cultural resurgence which conversely resisted and reinserted self-determination and ways of being during the pandemic. Efforts which were presented by Indigenous leadership and community members as being centred on collective community well-being (Barrera, 2020; Hobson, 2020a; Turner, 2021a). These protocols have been honed and implemented in response to generations of discriminatory treatment by settler government and industry; Moreover, the actions taken by Indigenous peoples stem from experience, from a history of enduring and managing frequent and various infectious diseases, leading back to early colonization (Loukes et al., 2022; Martens, 2020; Nickel et al., 2024; Olynick, 2020; Rowe et al., 2020). It is due to the cyclical, and what will likely be the increasingly frequent nature of crises, that there is a need for examination of how disaster capitalism operates within a settler colonial society and how Indigenous communities challenge that decision-making and enact and assert Indigenous conceptions of justice and well-being.

1.2 Research Purpose and Questions

The main purpose of this project is to combine different sources of data, from that of media, literature, Indigenous knowledge, as well as different methods of data organization, ranging from case studies, media analysis and community experiences, and to then respectfully and holistically explore the intersecting structures of settler colonialism, disaster capitalism, and Indigenous Environmental Justice. In connection, this project will strive to examine:

- 1) How disaster capitalism has manifested within a Canadian settler colonial society to shape government and industry priorities with respect to Indigenous communities during COVID-19
- 2) How disaster capitalism during COVID-19 has affected the decision-making and well-being of Indigenous communities
- 3) How Indigenous communities have asserted their rights in response to actions by governments and industry in the context of COVID-19

1.3 Organization of Project

This project is largely segmented into three chapters: Case Studies; Media Analysis; Community Experiences. These chapters are tied together by the theories of settler colonialism, disaster capitalism and Indigenous Environmental Justice, and approached through a decolonial and two-eyed seeing methodology, which will be outlined in a Literature Review and Research Approach chapter respectively. The individual chapters each offer a distinct perspective which, together, contribute to an inclusive and expansive exploration of my research questions and of the two circumstance I have chosen to focus on: the Keeyask Generating Station in Manitoba which involves four northern Cree Nations, and the Ring of Fire mining development in Ontario which involves numerous Anishinaabe and Anishini communities.

Following the Literature Review and Research Approach chapters, and with the understanding that these occurrences of disaster capitalism did not spontaneously come into being but were an extension of and shaped by settler colonial ideologies, I will begin with a Case Studies chapter. This chapter will contextualize and compare the cases by analysing their respective and relevant histories of settler colonialism and industry prioritization, how those

harmful patterns intensified during the pandemic in the form of disaster capitalism, and, importantly, how these actions intersected with the many forms of intergenerational Indigenous environmental justice. This chapter will demonstrate that, while disaster capitalism has been pervasive throughout Canada, the expression of each circumstance is distinct to each place-based history of settler/Indigenous relationships. However, as much of my data from this chapter will be sourced from news media, and as the media plays a huge role in public perception and the maintenance of shared understandings/worldviews, a Media Analysis chapter then becomes necessary in order to further examine how the media was portraying the circumstances of the two case studies. This chapter will include a comparison of rhetoric and discourse utilized across media sources, which is necessary to examine how settler ideologies, biases, and assumptions are held and presented by different news outlets, as well as how Indigenous voices, experiences and worldviews are included/excluded. Finally, this project necessarily includes a Community Experiences chapter which is shaped around the voices of eight community members involved in the Keeyask case study. I strived for this chapter to act as a space for Indigenous ways knowing, recognizing and respecting the shared knowledge I have recorded as inherently valuable lessons of trauma, healing and solidarity.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Settler Colonialism, Industry Prioritization, and Indigenous Environmental Justice

Settler colonialism is built and maintained by several ideologies and beliefs. For instance, settler colonialism may, in part, be upheld by the fantasy that this land, now known as Canada, was empty, or at the very least, empty of ‘civilized’ people when Europeans arrived; An assumption otherwise known as, *terra nullius*: the understanding that a territory is, “not

recognized as belonging to another political entity,” (Asch, 2002, p. 24). This is a theory which erases the presence of numerous, complex Indigenous nations which stretch back millennia by dismissing them and their sovereignty as too primitive or uncivilized to be recognized as legitimate by The Crown. As well, and in addition to the underlying title and sovereignty this theory provides The Crown, the authority of the Canadian state is further based on the fabrication that Indigenous peoples knowingly and willingly ceded their land through legal treaties (Asch, 2002). Furthermore, the sovereignty of the settler state is maintained by the continued belief in the myth of the *Vanishing Indian*, which promises that one day, every Indigenous person will be gone or assimilated; Even if they were here to begin with, their time is past, and their demise was and is inevitable (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023). This theory notably acts to assuage settler guilt, indeed, “it is a mode of perception that informs the whole history of settler colonial endeavours” (Veracini, 2010, p. 82) and is important for understanding the mindset of settlers which perceive an inevitable settler future and obstinately view Indigenous peoples as the interlopers of their space, not the other way around (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023; Veracini, 2010). Therefore, settler colonialism can also be understood as the ongoing process of disappearing Indigenous people through various methods, including assimilation, expulsion, extermination, and incarceration (Veracini, 2010); Processes which are necessary for a settler future, as the continued existence of Indigenous peoples threatens the legitimacy of the sovereignty and authority that settlers claim to have and exert over the land (Veracini, 2010).

This *logic of elimination*, as Wolfe (2006) describes, is also necessary to justify settler ownership and decision-making power over land and other natural materials (Greaves, 2022; Wolfe, 2006). Furthermore, as described by K. Wayne Yang and Indigenous [Unangax̂] scholar Eve Tuck, this logic enables the settler worldview that the land is there for their benefit and that

settler civilization and identity, requires excessive production of land and its resources (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Practices of extracting, removing, and manipulating nature for our own needs have undeniably become a normalized and idealized characteristic of our relationship with nature (Tuck & Yang, 2012), shaping our society, and notably interacting with the ideologies of capitalism to translate into a prioritization of the resource industry. Settler colonial and capitalist ideologies indeed coexist near seamlessly; Capital accumulation demands, “the transformation of subsistence production into capital and producers into wage laborers,” (Burow et al., 2022, p. 60) while settler colonialism aids in the commodification and dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples, as well as the destruction of their non-capitalist, reciprocal relationships with land which comprise many Indigenous ontologies and ways of life (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012). The product of a colonial/capitalist state may be observed for instance, by the fact that the settler state of Canada has long, “been characterised as a natural resource-based economy,” (Bowles & MacPhail, 2018). This characterization has, and likely will continue, as in 2019, Canada’s natural resource industry contributed 16.9% to the national GDP (Natural Resources Canada, 2020), of which, the energy sector was the major contributor, with oil and gas alone contributing 6.4% to the GDP, or 139.2 billion (Kaplan, 2023). In addition, as of 2020, Canada was, “the 4th largest producer and exporter of crude oil and is historically a top-five producer and exporter of natural gas,” (Alahdad, et al., 2020). The country’s prioritization of the extraction of resources, such as oil, may also be observed by the extent of government investments, as those, “sunk into the oil and gas sector are greater than those of any other sector of the Canadian economy,” (McCormack & Gordon, 2020, p. 40). In connection, while difficult to determine exactly, due to a lack of transparency, government subsidies in the form of tax reductions, loans, or reduced royalties are also significant; Between 2018 and 2020, Oil Change International reported Canada as the top

G20 country providing fossil fuel subsidies, estimating approximately \$14 billion a year being provided by the country (Chung, 2022). While another environmental group, Environmental Defence, recently determined that the federal government contributed \$20 billion in fossil fuel subsidies in 2022 alone (Shingler, 2023).

While resource industries like oil have flourished under the guise of settler colonial conceptions of progress and development, this continued prioritization and exploitation of land is also synonymous and dependent on Indigenous displacement and dispossession of land (Veracini, 2010). Therefore, the continued construction of projects to acquire these resources, aided by a ‘critical’ or ‘essential’ status classified by the Canadian Government, concurrently serves several critical purposes of settler colonialism. For instance, Indigenous [Tlingit] researcher Anne Spice argues that by labelling resource projects as critical and a matter of national security, this works to undermine and criminalize Indigenous opposition and action against those projects and in turn, legitimize settler ‘defensive’ tactics against those movements and Indigenous people’s way of life (Spice, 2022b). The establishment of these projects on Indigenous land also forwards settler colonialism, as these infrastructures act to expand settler logics and assert jurisdiction within Indigenous territory (Spice, 2022b). As Spice states,

By facilitating capitalist exchange, reproducing and encouraging new forms of white land ownership, and cementing settler ontologies that naturalize the existence, and domination of the nation-state, colonial dispossession travels through infrastructures, as they are used to extend settlements’ reach into Indigenous territories that remain uncaded, unsundered to the Canadian state, or protected under treaty agreements with Indigenous nations. (Spice, 2022b, p. 47)

However, while the ideology of settler colonialism has persisted and adapted, it is important to acknowledge that the settler future has yet to be achieved, Indigenous peoples have not been erased and communities continue to resist and reassert their sovereignty, ways of being and conceptions of justice. For example, Burow et al. (2022) describe Indigenous initiatives to contest settler ideologies of land, which, “include revitalization of land-based practices such as caring for and collecting culturally important plants, and the use of settler legal institutions to seek redress for dispossession and expand the landholdings of Indigenous polities,” (p. 59). As well, Indigenous [Bilagáana/Diné] Professor Melanie K. Yazzie (2022) describes the work of Diné land defenders to counter the injustice created by settler development and infrastructure which results in an unequal distribution of, “harm, exploitation, and underdevelopment...to tribal nations where resources are extracted,” (p. 31). Yazzie (2022) notes that the action of land defenders has the power to not only resist the settler state, but also enact a relational worldview, it is multidimensional in that it is, “both defensive (as in to defend life against the destruction of extraction) and generative (as in to caretake life through an ethos and practice of kinship obligation),” (p. 36). In connection, Indigenous [Anishinaabe] academic Deborah McGregor has discussed extensively the idea of Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ) (McGregor, 2021; McGregor, 2022; McGregor et al., 2020). IEJ recognizes the harm of settler systems (colonialism and capitalism) as well as the limitations of settler solutions and ideas of justice which largely maintain those same, unsustainable systems and consequently fail to address the harm inequitably held by Indigenous peoples (McGregor, 2022; McGregor et al., 2020). At the same time, IEJ recognizes the strengths, experiences, knowledges, relationships, and ways of being of Indigenous peoples and offers a framework which is shaped around community’s specific histories, needs and legal systems to enact, “*Indigenous-determined futures*,” (McGregor et al.,

2020, p. 37). In connection, many Indigenous authors and academics have similarly discussed the concept of Indigenous resurgence. For example, Indigenous [Kanien'kehà:ka] writer Taiaiake Alfred and [Cherokee] scholar Jeff Corntassel discuss the constantly changing/adapting nature of the colonial system and its strategies to placate and coerce through narratives which normalize (whatever the settler state deems) 'the common good'. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) argue that addressing these infiltrating narratives of the colonial agenda, requires self-examination and, "regenerating one's indigeneity," (p. 614) with the understanding, "that our true power as Indigenous people ultimately lies in our relationships with our land, relatives, language, and ceremonial life," (p. 605); Further asserting that,

Indigenous pathways of authentic action and freedom struggle start with people transcending colonialism on an individual basis – a strength that soon reverberates outward from the self to family, clan, community and into all of the broader relationships that form an Indigenous existence. In this way, Indigenousness is reconstructed, reshaped and actively lived as resurgence against the dispossessing and demeaning processes of annihilation that are inherent to colonialism. (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 612)

Indigenous [Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg] scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011) has similarly discussed the importance of Indigenous resurgence originating from within, from a nourishing of self, that it is, "trying to center Indigenous practices and thoughts in our lives as everyday acts of resistance, and grow those actions and processes into a mass mobilization," (Simpson, 2016, p. 24). As well, Simpson (2011) has discussed resurgence in relationship to Indigenous storytelling, and the intergenerational sharing and passing on of teachings, resistance, and survival, saying, "I often think of Dibaajimowinan [stories, teachings] as the stones our Ancestors cast in the lake, echoing or reverberating out through time and space into the present,"

(p. 65). Moreover, clarifying that storytelling is not one-directional, it is interactive and emergent, meaning is creating through the relationship between storyteller and listener and,

It can take many years after hearing a story to know the meaning of that story in one's heart—for it to become a truth—yet the process of it becoming heart-knowledge or Debwewin is the process of integrating that echo into one's experience. (Simpson, 2011, p. 66)

It is the everyday acts of resurgence, the embodiment of ways of being that generations of Indigenous peoples have held and passed on, that Simpson (2011) stresses is so important as, “if we do not live our stories and our teachings, the echoes become fainter and will eventually disappear,” (p. 66). However, Alfred (2005) has also discussed the importance of building and organizing resurgence movements and action, structured on Indigenous values and political systems; It can then be understood that the concept and practice of Indigenous resurgence and justice is expansive and ever-evolving, just as it is both a critical countering and decolonizing force to settler ideologies and infrastructure, as well as it an integral (re)assertion of Indigenous life-ways and sovereignty in so-called Canada.

2.2 Indigenous Well-being and COVID-19

Indigenous peoples bearing disproportionate harm during pandemics is not a new circumstance and has been occurring since Europeans first landed here and introduced new diseases like smallpox and measles which contributed to a 90% decline of the Indigenous population (Hallberg & Ladner, 2020). A more recent case was the H1N1 outbreak in 2009, in which Indigenous populations overrepresented in patients (over 50%) in Manitoba which were hospitalized and/or in the ICU (Hallberg & Ladner, 2020). The inequitable health impacts born

by Indigenous peoples may be directly linked to the dispossession and settler development of land, and the accompanying loss of relationships, language, and culture which ensure and strengthen Indigenous health (Joseph, 2021; Josewski et al., 2023). However, alongside that history of loss and harm, is also one of resurgence. For example, Indigenous [Squamish] researcher Leigh Joseph (2021) describes the interrelated nature of Indigenous conceptions of health and well-being, focusing on the value of plant relationships and harvesting as a form of radical resurgence which enacts cultural, ceremonial and physical well-being. Other Indigenous researchers similarly discuss the importance of entwined and reciprocal relationships between people and the environment in terms of health. For example, Indigenous [Mi'kmaw] researcher Elder Albert Marshall asserts the need to rekindle relationships between the human and non-human, arguing we must,

Come to realize that everything that we do to the water, the air and the earth, we also ultimately do to ourselves...and only with the understanding that all must be maintained and that all must be equal, will we be healthy. This is the path of understanding that will lead us to good health and wellness – for humans and all others in our environment and the Earth herself. (Bartlett et al., 2015, pp. 288-289)

Furthermore, this interconnected understanding of environment and Indigenous health also contains the significance of place-based relationships, which are unique to every Indigenous person and population as, “Indigenous people, though deeply heterogeneous and greatly varied, are in and of place, anchored in a connection to homelands, even if separated from those homelands upon which their kinship and genealogical being stretch back beyond time itself,” (Josewski et al., 2023). Examples of this relationship can be observed throughout Indigenous focused research. For instance, a case study project conducted in 2015 focused on the

relationship between an Inuit population and sea ice. Participants stressed the importance of sea ice, not only for facilitating travel and access to culturally significant places and foods, but also in regard to their mental, spiritual and physical health. In contrast, when participants were asked about the impact of not being able to go out on the ice, “Participants described how they would “have no health”, feel like they “can’t breathe”, “get sick”, “be very sad”, “be lost”, “go crazy”, and that their “appetite and mind would go”,” (Durkalec et al., 2015). Another recent Canadian 2020 photovoice research project found a main theme within the pictures captured by inner-city Indigenous youth expressed the importance of relationship with nature in regard to maintaining mental health and instilling feelings of calm, hope and resilience (Hatala et al., 2020). While a 2009 Australian study, which was focused more on quantitative medical results, also found a positive relationship between Indigenous people’s health and environment. In this case, health aspects such as BMI, blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol were measured in participants who practiced *caring for country*, meaning the participation, “in interrelated activities on Aboriginal lands and seas with the objective of promoting ecological, spiritual and human health,” (Burgess et al., 2009) and could include activities such as wildfire abatement, conservation and various cultural maintenance activities. The results showed, “caring for country was associated with better nutrition, more frequent physical activity and fewer chronic disease risk factors and diagnoses,” (Burgess, et al., 2009). Demonstrating undeniably, that connection to environment and traditional activities results in benefits to Indigenous health.

However, as noted, an important determinant of Indigenous health is settler colonialism (Manitowabi & Maar, 2018); The structures of which extend beyond initial causes, such as removal from land, to include the way in which the resulting impacts to health are addressed within a colonial system rampant with issues of racism and mistreatment. A 2015 study by Allan

and Smylie examining Canadian healthcare, notably placed the state of Indigenous health within a colonial context by examining the many influences of the Indian Act, residential schools and other colonial policies. The study argues race-based policies, like the Non-insured Health Benefits program (which exempts Metis and non-status First Nations, as well those who live off reserve) provides uneven health services (Allan & Smylie, 2015). In addition, many Indigenous people have described racist treatment from healthcare workers both as a barrier to receiving proper treatment, as well as acting as a deterrent for seeking healthcare in the first place (Allan & Smylie, 2015). Though the authors also importantly note the incredible resilience of Indigenous communities in the face of this systemic racism and describe several Indigenous-led initiatives aimed at addressing these problems (Allan & Smylie, 2015). However, colonial initiatives which impact Indigenous health also extend to government policies and programs that are implemented to address the issues which colonial actions created in the first place. For example, Professor Marion Maar and Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Darrel Manitowabi's 2018 case study which focuses on the Anishinabek concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin* (to live a good life), found that ongoing colonial, western-centric interventions towards First Nations socio economic wellbeing have had detrimental effects. Many communities have experienced a decrease in health and wellbeing over the decades due to colonial policies such as the Indian Act and are suffering from increased drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues and loss of cultural practices (Manitowabi & Maar, 2018). Community members also described a decrease of self-determination and community-centred practices in response to government initiatives (such as welfare and economic programs), as these initiatives worked to increase the reliance of community members on the government and promote settler ideals of materialism and individualism (Manitowabi & Maar, 2018). This was notably contrasted by memories of past Indigenous community systems

which centred on land-based practices like hunting and gardening, socializing, being physically active, and passing on knowledge to youth, which community members stressed were all integral for *mino-bimaadiziwin* (Manitowabi & Maar, 2018).

Over the course of COVID-19, and within/despite these harmful settler colonial structures, Indigenous conceptions of health and well-being were maintained, as well as resurgence and self-determination enacted, as numerous communities took proactive measures, establishing their own safety protocols during the pandemic which often went above and beyond provincial guidelines (Craft et al., 2020; Richardson & Crawford, 2020). For example, the James Bay First Nations (Moose Cree, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, and Attawapiskat First Nation) who are largely remote and susceptible to food insecurity (an issue which was heightened during COVID-19 due to supply-chain disruptions) enacted, strengthened, and adapted ongoing measures to enable food security and sovereignty, such as traditional hunting and trapping, as well as agricultural initiatives, including the creation of ‘bush gardens’ which allowed social distancing (Moriarity et al., 2023). Other First Nations, utilizing multiple sources of authority (e.g. inherent, treaty, and UNDRIP), have enacted, “lockdowns, travel restrictions, curfews, 24-hour surveillance, checkpoints, as well as failure-to-comply fines,” within their territories (Craft et al., 2020, p. 59). While yet other Indigenous peoples focused on adapting cultural activities and traditions, cultivating mental and spiritual wellness during a time of fear and isolation (Johnson, 2020); For instance, Indigenous [Cherokee] artist America Meridith has described how Indigenous peoples around the continent created face masks, integrating traditional designs and materials, such as animal hide, beads and herbs, as seen in Figure 1 (Meridith, 2021).



Figure 1. Cree Artist Dolores Gull wearing hand-made face mask constructed of caribou-hide.

As well, social-distancing was facilitated by Indigenous dancers who, as in-person pow wows were not possible, instead dressed up in traditional regalia and shared videos online (Banning, 2020). These actions to maintain wellness and hope drew from cultural traditions and generations of endurance, as Meridith states,

Dancing and masking are integral to healing ceremonies among Indigenous communities. No doubt, we were able to collectively take action because we had long memories of facing ghastly diseases with unknown outcomes and praying for healing... The communities danced through their sorrows and fears to find hope in the future. Masks today embody beauty and humor, two tools that have helped Native people survive through the worst of times. Knowing that our ancestors endured far worse situations than what we face today gives us strength. (Meridith, 2021, para 6-7)

These and similar actions across First Nations in Canada initially resulted in far lower COVID-19 numbers than predicted (Richardson & Crawford, 2020), an achievement despite systemic colonial conditions that have generated numerous obstacles such as underlying health conditions, inadequate housing, employment in high-risk occupations, and barriers to healthcare (Richardson & Crawford, 2020); Issues which worked to increase chances of exposure and, compounded by a lack of government funding, aid and recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction and right to pandemic decision-making (Craft et al., 2020; Hillier et al, 2020), nonetheless resulted in an overrepresentation of COVID-19 cases held by Indigenous populations (Manitoba, 2021).

2.3 Neoliberalism and Disaster Capitalism

To begin, due to disaster capitalism acting as an extension or form of neoliberalism (which is an emergence of capitalism itself), it is important to examine the objectives and motivations of neoliberalism as an ideology. Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism is mainly predicated on the belief that, “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade,” (p. 22). This ideology may be traced back to the 1940s, and notably to the 1947 Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), a group comprised of economists and philosophers from Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, including Friedrich von Hayek, James Buchanan and Milton Friedman (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015). Over the decades, the ideologies of neoliberalism have since become overtly prevalent all over the world, forwarded by various members of MPS (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015) and maintained by dominant nations and international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the World Health Organization (Navarro,

2007). Neoliberalism's ability to become so pervasive in societies around the world, is partly contingent on the exploitation of ideologies of individualism and freedom, by promising to ensure and promote the total free will of the self-determining consumer (Klein, 2007). Within a neoliberal context, these ideologies are dogmatically believed to be the cornerstones of civilization, so much so, as Hoskins (2023) argues, "that any alternative model to free-market economy is unscientific and an affront to freedom," (p. 224). Moreover, this ideology has become embedded in the rhetoric of western political, economic, and societal belief systems to the extent that neoliberalism has become, "incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world," (Harvey, 2007, p. 23). This incorporation is integral for the continuation of neoliberal theory and practice, along with an ongoing discourse that portrays any failings of neoliberalism on personal or cultural weaknesses and not on the neoliberal reforms themselves (Harvey, 2007); Discourse which points away from the structural failings of neoliberalism is essential as, from the perspective of the lower-class population, neoliberalism has utterly failed in its promise of economic and social well-being, as inequalities and class divisions have actually widened all over the world (Navarro, 2007). This reality firmly demonstrates that the promises and benefits of neoliberalism are limited to a certain group of people, as Navarro (2007) argues, "neoliberalism is the ideology and practice of the dominant classes of the developed and developing worlds alike," (p. 53); Neoliberal reforms, such as those found in disaster capitalism, and which often interact with ideologies of settler colonialism are used to maintain and increase the status of the upper-class through the exploitation of people and the environment (Fast, 2014; Mascarenhas, 2012; Preston, 2017).

In connection, the term *disaster capitalism* was coined by Naomi Klein in her 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine*, in which the practice was explained as, "orchestrated raids on the public

sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities,” (Klein, 2007, p. 6). This term is used to describe a pattern of exploitation that occurs alongside a crisis, wherein people with power advantageously implement neoliberal reforms with the intention of capital gain (Klein, 2007). Klein argues that the roots of this practice began in the 1950s, with the teachings of economist Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. Friedmans staunch belief in the sanctity of free-market capitalism, and its ability to self-regulate the perfect balance of supply and demand, inspired the ideology of Chicago School economics, which would go on to influence changes around the world (Klein, 2007). However, such reforms often faced opposition, as they involved, “the creation of markets in areas that had once been considered sacrosanct - in areas such as water, education, health care, worker safety, social security, and environmental pollution,” (Mascarenhas, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, those in power would implement, “the brutal tactic of using the public’s disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures,” (Klein, 2017) which, among such crises, may go unnoticed or seem more rational. For example, Klein (2007) documents numerous instances of disaster capitalism implemented during the 1970s, notably pointing to the 1973 coup in Chile and the concurrent capitalist actions which resulted in enormous profits for private companies; Klein (2007) observed that the substantial profits generated from this act of disaster capitalism encouraged further reproduction of those actions alongside other crises throughout the 1980s, such as during England’s Falklands War and Poland’s transition from communism. As well, Klein concludes her 2007 book with an examination of a more recent example in the early 2000s: the United States quasi-permanent ‘War on Terror’ ongoing in the Middle East (Klein, 2007). Furthermore, while all these crises varied drastically, the accompanying actions of disaster

capitalism were all strategically similar and largely included: the removal of regulations (so-called red tape), severe cuts to social programs, the selling of state assets to corporations and privatization of state-run facilities like schools, natural resource industries, and national parks (Klein, 2007). These examples made by Klein demonstrate how disaster capitalism is an exploitative use of neoliberal ideology during a crisis when reforms are more easily implemented due to ‘justified’ extended governmental powers, in combination with the public’s preoccupation with managing the impacts of the crisis (Klein, 2007).

Furthermore, since Klein first coined the term, the notion of disaster capitalism has since been utilized, as well as expanded on by many different researchers over the years. For instance, Schuller and Maldonado (2016) discuss the 2010 Haiti earthquake and BP oil spill, noting that the significance of these events is better understood by focusing not on, “the disaster event itself, but rather the disaster *after* the event that reproduced social inequalities,” (p. 61). Further detailing how the former disaster was followed by intense privatization of land at the cost of local land rights to facilitate the expansion of mining, high-end tourism and factories, while the latter included government lobbying by BP to block legislation which would have increased their accountability (such as monetary contributions) for their oil spills (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016). Another study by Hoskins (2023) centred on an earthquake which occurred off the coast of Ecuador in 2016 and resulted in the death of over 700 people, as well as the destruction of homes and livelihoods resulting in the mass displacement of residents. Hoskins (2023) argues that the following actions of the government “exacerbated dislocation by moving the most adversely affected communities further from their traditional beachfront fishing homes,” (p. 222) in order to enable multinational investment in the area and utilize disaster relief funds to build a shopping mall and cruise ship port which catered to tourists and the wealthy as, “neither

employed those from the community nor sold local resources,” (p. 222). However, Hoskins (2023) notably discusses the resistance among local Indigenous populations which countered the implementation of harmful disaster capitalist initiatives and responded with direct action which embodied an alternative vision for the future: *Buen Vivir*; A concept which may be translated to living well, a way of life which is centred in community, reciprocity and traditional values (Hoskins, 2023). Another example of disaster capitalism research is discussed by Hutchings and La Salle (2015) who connect the concept to archaeology, as well as to ideologies of colonialism, arguing the practice has been one, “characterized by dispossession and violence,” (p. 701). The authors contend that the majority (97%) of archaeology taking place in British Columbia is *compliance archaeology*, meaning it is not an expression of academic exploration, it is a result of resource industries required by law to employ archaeologists to facilitate the commencement of industrial use of the area (Hutchings & La Salle, 2015). The authors then argue that the consequence of archaeology being reliant and driven by the expansion of the resource industry, not to mention conducted for the benefit of private or state interests, makes the practice of archaeology then complicit in the resulting acquisition and commodification of Indigenous land, as well as the, “destruction of heritage landscapes, both natural and cultural,” (Hutchings & La Salle, 2015, pp. 710-711) which has contributed to the growth of archaeology into a billion dollar industry. As demonstrated by these few examples, disaster capitalism research has been utilized by many researchers in a variety of fields, and importantly, has been increasingly explored alongside settler colonial and Indigenous justice research, showing that the theory of disaster capitalism is flexible and may be built upon; While typically utilized to discuss the ways in which a disaster is exploited for capital expansion, disaster capitalism theory may also be useful in exploring the ways disasters are used to reinforce colonial systems which uphold settler

interests and authority over that of Indigenous peoples, in conjunction with capitalist systems which prioritize profit over Indigenous well-being.

2.4 COVID-19 and Disaster Capitalism

The utilization of the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for disaster capitalism has been recognized by numerous researchers over the last few years. For instance, Bainton et al. (2020) has discussed the problematic issue of extractive industries using the pandemic as an opportunity for corporate social responsibility greenwashing. The authors observe that, over the pandemic, many mining companies have donated what equates to billions of dollars in aid money. While seemingly done in good faith, Bainton et al. (2020) argue that such action has been conducted by the companies in an effort to portray themselves in a positive light and justify continued operation despite the many grievances they continue to make towards the environment and surrounding communities (Bainton et al., 2020). In connection, Artiga-Purcell et al. (2023) have documented that in, “response to the resulting health catastrophe and economic recession, Latin American governments of various political leanings have turned to socio-ecologically degrading extractive development as the solution,” (p. 173). Under the guise of the pandemic crises, the authors argue that governments in Chile, Ecuador and Honduras have essentialized extractive industries and criminalized public opposition, “deepening extractivism during the COVID-19 pandemic,” (Artiga-Purcell et al., 2023, p. 173). Furthermore, Jacobs (2021) conducted research on the role that combined oppressive societal systems, such as racism, classism and capitalism, have had on shaping the COVID-19 pandemic. While, through a feminist perspective, Foster and Foster-Palmer (2023) have discussed the concept of *racialized patriarchal disaster capitalism* which, “situates an intersectional analysis of disaster opportunism more squarely within a larger context of advanced global capitalism that is fueled

by a complicated web of variable and historically and socially situated heteropatriarchies and racialized structures,” (p. 798). The authors specifically focus on the how pre-existing disparities that surround transgender peoples and those requiring reproductive health services have been exasperated during the pandemic due to harmful and opportunistic policy changes (Foster & Foster-Palmer, 2023).

There has also been documentation of disaster capitalism specifically occurring across Canada during COVID-19, consequences of which being directly tied to the rights and well-being of Indigenous people. For instance, within a Canadian Dimension article, Professor Sean Carleton (2020) called for the need to, “remain vigilant in these tumultuous times,” noting provinces, such as Alberta who are attempting to utilize the, “crisis to push through controversial ideas that prioritize private profit,” such as the privatization and selling of 67 hectares of Treaty 7 land without the necessary consultation of First Nations. The Tyee similarly pointed to actions by the Alberta government, notably the dismantling of barriers for the oil and gas industry through amendments to legislation, such as, “the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, Pipeline Act, Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, Water Act, Public Lands Act and the newly implemented Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Regulation to mitigate against “undue hardship” to the oil and gas industry,” (Alexander & Stanley, 2020). Additionally noting that, not only is COVID-19 a barrier to public opposition of these changes but, “under the current states of public health emergency in provinces along the pipeline’s route, acts of land defence and environmental protests are outright illegal,” which worked to further criminalize Indigenous opposition (Alexander & Stanley, 2020). As well, another Tyee article discussed British Columbia and TC Energy’s continued construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline despite Wet’suwet’en opposition (Hosgood, 2022). The article notes this behaviour is aligned with

disaster land grabbing, the opportunistic dispossession of Indigenous territory, with a Gidimt'en Clan member, Molly Wickham, observing that COVID-19 and the resulting community lockdown provided, "a way for them to do the work without any Wet'suwet'en resistance and without any eyes on the significant increase in work," (Hosgood, 2022).

Klein herself has also been vocal throughout the pandemic; In several media interviews and articles, she has described the multiple ways that government and industry have exploited the pandemic to push through controversial ideas and increase profit, calling this specific expression of disaster capitalism: *coronavirus capitalism* (Klein, 2020a). For instance, in a video produced by *The Intercept*, Klein discusses President Trump's initiatives in 2020 to outsource pandemic relief to private health insurers, bailout the oil and gas industries and privatize social security (Klein, 2020a). While in an article produced by *The Guardian*, Klein elaborates on how tech industries have leveraged their status as 'essential' during the shift to at-home school and work, to lobby for an increased presence in public sectors such as public schools and hospitals (Klein, 2020b). However, alongside this discussion which focuses on how the pandemic is exposing and intensifying underlying inequalities, Klein has also described the possibility of utilizing this crisis to instead implement positive changes, saying,

We either lose a whole lot of ground, get fleeced by elites and pay the price for decades, or we win progressive victories that seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier. This is no time to lose our nerve. The future will be determined by whoever is willing to fight harder for the ideas they have lying around. (Klein, 2020a)

This perspective was also voiced by activists such as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, who have described this moment as an opportunity for ordinary people to organize and question the

conditions of a capitalistic society founded on an, “unbroken cycle of extraction, poverty, racism, sexism, oppression, exploitation and struggle,” (Núñez, 2020). Taylor calls for the exploration of ways to more effectively connect and collaborate to challenge the status quo and, “remake our society for the greater good,” (Núñez, 2020); While those in power have utilized the pandemic to the effect of exasperating societal inequalities, grassroots initiatives can conversely build off the attention and exposure of those injustices which have come to light and instead motivate large-scale movements which demand positive change (McMaster Humanities, 2022; Klein, 2020a, Núñez, 2020).

3 Research Approach

3.1 Decolonial Research

It is important to self-identify that I am a white settler living within Treaty 1 territory and on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininiwak, Anisininewuk, Dakota Oyate and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation (University of Manitoba, n.d.). As well, it is similarly important to recognize that much of environmental justice and settler colonial research in Canada, which has been produced by colonial institutions and universities, has narrowly focused on environmental damages and harms born disproportionately by Indigenous people (Mascarenhas, 2012; Mitchell & D’Onofrio, 2016). This limited, one-sided approach to research has had a detrimental impact on Indigenous communities as Indigenous [Unanga] scholar Eve Tuck (2009) describes, “the research on our communities has historically been damage centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken,” (p. 412). Tuck (2009) reasons that this form of research may be well intentioned, as many social science researchers use the occurrence of damage as a form of proof to help encourage

accountability or positive change. However, Tuck (2009) further questions whether the promises of damage-centred research is really, “worth the longterm costs of *thinking of ourselves as damaged?*,” (p. 415). In response, Tuck (2009) argues for a shift towards a *desire-based* framework which offers a more comprehensive approach by recognizing the roots and scale of harm and injustice held by communities, but also showcasing Indigenous self-determination and hope by, “depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered,” (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). It is not my intention for this project to further contribute to a construction that reduces Indigenous peoples to victims and erases decades of community resistance, resiliency and resurgence. It is my intention to share the complexities within the circumstances explored in this project; To display the inequitable logics of settler colonialism and neoliberalism and to highlight the different forms of Indigenous justice which persevered over the decades and necessarily resisted and confronted the settler state and its logics of disaster capitalism during COVID-19.

I therefore endeavoured to practice a decolonial approach throughout this project. Decolonization and the processes involved, as well as the challenges, has been described by many researchers; For instance, Tuck and Yang (2012) note the importance of decolonization existing as more than simply another enabling narrative for settler *moves to innocence*, a way for settlers to alleviate guilt and procrastinate reconciliation. Rather, Tuck and Yang (2012) describe decolonization as necessarily unsettling, for it to move beyond figurative and metaphorical conceptions which, “problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity,” (p. 3) and to expand into literal, physical and structural changes, such as, “the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted,” (p. 7). Hoffman (2011) similarly states

that, “in its deepest sense, decolonization means recapturing a way of life and reinvigorating a prior set of cultural and social relationships that were repressed as a functional part of colonial control,” (p. 105). While, regarding research, Indigenous [Māori] academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) describes practical decolonization as, “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.” (p. 22). Decolonization, and by extension, a decolonial research approach involves the mindful centring of colonial ideologies and how they have and are influencing the external world, as well as our own internal worldviews.

Therefore, the very inception of decolonial research must include an understanding that no research is entirely objective (Murphy, 2020) and every project is approached with some form of conceptual framework inspired by the researchers’ worldviews and beliefs (Held, 2019). In connection, Barnes (2018) notably states that decolonizing research embraces reflexivity, a concept described by Indigenous [Cree and Saulteaux] scholar Margaret Kovach (2021) as, “the researcher’s own self-reflection in the meaning-making process,” (p. 32). This self-reflection includes a consideration of what our beliefs are, how they impact our perception, and importantly how those worldviews, those taken-for-granted assumptions, will impact the way we perform research and how we draw/interpret meaning within it. Moreover, Barnes (2018) states that decolonizing research,

Raises questions about who we focus our research on, the types of questions that are asked, the relationship between researchers and participants, the values underpinning research, what can be inferred from the study, and the contributions to equality and justice. Decolonising methodologies also focus on the research enterprise itself, its

pedagogies, systems, exclusions and power that privilege certain knowledges over others (para 4).

Throughout this project, I intend to be continuously reflexive about my position of race and class privilege, to be aware of and respectful of the space I am taking up in Indigenous research, and to strive to be receptive to and learn from Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Moreover, my intention to perform research which is respectful, accountable and reciprocal, included a continuous review of literature surrounding decolonial and Indigenous methodologies.

3.2 Grounded Theory

In connection, this project also aligns with a *grounded theory* approach. This is an approach largely used within qualitative research, and I believe both may act as appropriate frameworks when applying a decolonial approach and striving to learn from Indigenous methodologies. For instance, while qualitative research may be traced back to the early 1900s, a more recent reiteration of the methodology notably gained traction during the 1970s and 1980s from the work of social (e.g. feminist) researchers, intending to critique dominant perspectives and give voice to the experiences of those who faced marginalization (Jovanovic, 2011; Lichtman, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, this research approach is essentially, “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 18) and is often characterized by its fluidity and reflexivity of methods (Lichtman, 2017). Additionally, qualitative research highlights the importance of the researcher’s role in every step of their project by understanding that a person’s worldviews, beliefs and assumptions inform the

very questions that a project is built around, as well as the methods and interpretation of data that follow (Lichtman, 2017).

Grounded theory is similarly interested in the worldviews and values of the researcher and participants in regard to how research is conceived and conducted and how meaning is formed and interpreted (Chun Tie et al., 2019). While grounded theory was founded by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, it has since expanded and diverged along different philosophical perspectives, such as positivism, constructivism and symbolic interactionism (Chun Tie et al., 2019). However grounded theory is largely understood as an inductive approach to research (Chun Tie et al., 2019), as it is the, “collecting and analysing of qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves,” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). Though utilized across this project, this method is perhaps most notably observed in my media analysis chapter which extensively and continually coded and analysed news media in order to better interpret and understand the relationships between data and relevant theory (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, a rendition of grounded theory especially relevant to this project is Redman-MacLaren and Mills’ (2015) *transformational grounded theory*, an approach which focuses on the redistribution of power between researcher and participants/co-researchers/community members by viewing knowledge as subjective and situated. This approach recognizes the importance of context, and the value of research which is shaped by data that is grounded within place, culture, history, and importantly, community experiences (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). This approach aligns with numerous Indigenous researcher’s conception of methodologies regarding the place-based and contextual nature of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) (Kovach, 2021; McGregor, 2022; Smith, 2021), for instance, Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Deborah McGregor who notes IK “should not and cannot be removed from the people or the land in which it is based,” (McGregor,

2004, p. 392). Moreover, transformational grounded theory explores, “connections and interfaces between the individual and society,” (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015, p. 4), in part by joining literature/theory with place-based, lived experience; A method which my community experiences chapter will notably utilize.

3.3 Indigenous Methodologies

While, as a non-Indigenous person, I must endeavour to not take-up or appropriate Indigenous methodologies, I believe it is also my responsibility to make room for and learn from them, as “Indigenous methodologies can provide a lens to critically examine the ongoing colonising language and practice of non-Indigenous research practice,” (Lewis, 2018, p. 47). Furthermore, as this research is largely focused on issues surrounding, impacting and determined by Indigenous peoples, it is first important to reflect on the history of academic research in relation to Indigenous peoples; Specifically western academia, which has traditionally operated as an exploitative method to maintain and advance colonial logics which simultaneously dismiss Indigenous knowledge and worldviews (Held, 2019). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), in her 3rd edition of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, describes, “‘research’ remains a dirty word for many of the world’s Indigenous peoples and communities,” (pp. xi-xii). Initially, Indigenous peoples were perceived as research subjects, to be measured and sorted, their sacred sites dug up, categorized and shipped away to be sold or shelved behind glass (Smith, 2021). Later, western ‘health’ research involved the non-consensual experimentation on Indigenous peoples, including children who, in one study, were malnourished and denied adequate nutrition, leading not only to great pain, and trauma, but also physical developmental problems and many deaths (Macdonald et al., 2014). All this so-called research practiced on rather than with Indigenous peoples was justified through the settler colonial belief that Indigenous peoples were primitive, a

dehumanizing perspective which disregarded the existence and validity of both Indigenous rights and knowledge systems (Smith, 2021).

In connection, Vine Victor Deloria Jr. (1999) an Indigenous [Sioux] scholar and activist has discussed the differences between Indigenous and western knowledge systems and how (in addition to discriminatory ideology) the rigidity of the latter's approach has preventing acceptance of the former. Deloria (1999) describes that Indigenous knowledge is gathered through, "dreams, visions, and intraspecies communications," (p. 67) and held and shared intergenerational, individually, and collectively, with the task being, "to make sense of the experience or withhold judgment on its meaning until a sufficient number of similar experiences reveal the pattern of meaning that is occurring," (p. 67). While western knowledge is largely reductive, as it works, "to classify certain kinds of phenomena under major generalizations and then to accept or reject all additional data," with the goal of finding a, "concept or model that best explains all phenomena," (p. 68). Consequentially, due to western knowledge's ideals of objectivity, experimentation and repeatability, which conflict with Indigenous peoples focus on experiential, individualistic and relational methods, western academia has historically dismissed and excluded Indigenous knowledge (Deloria, 1999). Moreover, while western academia has, very slowly, been recognizing different ways of understanding and of doing research, Deloria (1999) points out that many so-called discoveries by settler scientists (e.g. controlled forest fires) have been known by Indigenous peoples for millennia, saying,

The common knowledge of Indian tribes, when discovered by non-Indian scientists, is seen as an exciting breakthrough. But from the Indian perspective, it is mere child's play. It is information that traditional people expected youngsters to acquire as a matter of course. (p. 69)

This observation draws important attention to the limitations western science unreasonably sets for itself, the value of different, complimenting knowledge systems, as well as the need for continued efforts to decolonize western academia. Though notably, some progress has been made, as across Canada, numerous organizations have implemented ethical guidelines for research involving Indigenous peoples; One example being the policy of Canada's Tri-Council Agencies on "Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada", to which university and other institutional adherence is a requirement for funding (Government of Canada, 2022).

However, it is Indigenous researchers, activists and writers who have been the driving force of change and have accomplished much in past decades to address structures of colonialism and forward Indigenous knowledge into academia. As Indigenous [Mi'kmaq] scholar Michelle Pidgeon states, "Indigenous communities in Canada, and elsewhere, are reclaiming and recentring their knowledges, languages, and cultural practices as part of the research processes and projects they undertake," (Pidgeon, 2019, p. 421). Indigenous peoples, as described by Smith (2021), are countering the normalizing influence of settler research by *researching back*, enacting, "a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination," (p. 8). Now commonly known as Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous research is recognized not only for its contributions of data and content but as well for the way the research itself is conceived and conducted (Gone, 2019). Along with the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Vine Victor Deloria Jr., numerous Indigenous scholars have discussed and written about Indigenous research, methodologies and ways of knowing, including Margaret Kovach [Cree and Saulteaux], Robin Wall Kimmerer [Potawatomi], and Shawn Wilson [Cree]. For instance, Shawn Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony* stresses that a foundational aspect

of Indigenous knowledge is viewing the world as a web of relationships and connections. Challenging the western idea of owning and discovering knowledge, *Research is Ceremony* (2008) describes Indigenous knowledge as existing in the relationships between people and between the world, it is making visible those relationships. Wilson, in collaboration with Métis and settler researchers, further discuss an Indigenous paradigm, *Indigenist research*, in *Research and reconciliation: unsettling ways of knowing through indigenous relationships* (Wilson et al., 2019). The group describes that this kind of research, “is about who we are, how we know and engage with Knowledge, what we do as researchers, and the ways we enact relational accountability,” (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 7). This ontology is based on the understanding that an Indigenous researcher’s relationships with family, culture, land, even ideas, define them and their reality, and to that extent the kind of research that is conducted. As well, Wilson et al. (2019) describe Indigenous knowledge as not only relational, but continuously and actively emerging so that ideas may change and evolve along with the relationships of those who hold them.

Furthermore, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) tells an Anishinaabe story about the First Man, Nanabozho. As Nanabozho was the newest arrival on earth, “his role was not to control or change the world as a human, but to learn from the world how to be human,” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 208). This learning involved a journey in all four directions and the receiving of council and teachings from his relatives, both animal and plant folk; As Kimmerer (2013) explains, “the lessons Nanabozho learned are the mythic roots of Native science, medicine, architecture, agriculture, and ecological knowledge,” (p. 210). Importantly, this journey, and the resulting systems of knowledge, was/is only possible due to the relationships between Nanabozho/humans and nature; A relationship which, as Kimmerer observes, has become fractured and unbalanced, as settler states and structures of colonialism

and capitalism take from the land, but neglect to give back. Kimmer (2013) explains that her book offers, “a braid of stories meant to heal our relationship with the world,” (p.x) it is the braiding of, “Indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist...of science, spirit, and story,” (p.x) and of (re)learning how to give and act in reciprocity.

Margaret Kovach (2021) has similarly described how Indigenous methodologies may coexist with western methodologies; However, she stresses that this will require non-Indigenous scholars to recognize past and current practices of exploitative research practices and become receptive to different/alternative methodologies. Moreover, within Margaret Kovach’s (2015) *Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies* she highlights four specific aspects of Indigenous methodologies as having significance: “Indigenous knowledge foundation, the relational, the collective, and the methods,” (p. 53). In that regard, Kovach (2015) notes the importance of recognizing that Indigenous methodologies stem from distinct Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies, and that individual, “Indigenous knowledge systems are the heartbeat of Indigenous methodologies,” (Kovach, 2015, p. 57). Further noting that, as Indigenous knowledge was/is traditionally shared orally, Indigenous methodologies are then, “fluid, nonlinear, and relational,” (Kovach, 2015, p. 53) reflecting the nature of ever-changing stories being passed between sharer and listener. Kovach (2015) also stresses the importance of a *relationship-based* model for research which prioritizes accountability and reciprocity for the collective journey taken by researchers and community, which necessitates the appropriate use of methods which, “capture alternate ways of knowing,” (p. 55).

3.4 Two-Eyed Seeing

As someone non-Indigenous, it is my responsibility not to appropriate these methodologies and ways of knowing, but to learn from, respect and highlight the knowledge and experiences discussed by these researchers and of the community members I speak with. To this end, I will apply a *two-eyed seeing* approach, a concept which was created and adapted by Mi'kmaw Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall, along with researcher Cheryl Bartlett and may be understood as,

Learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335)

Albert Marshall has also explained that the concept of two-eyed seeing is about bringing together, “our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place,” (Bartlett et al., 2015, p. 295); Two-eyed seeing is more than a research approach, it is a worldview which expands outside of academia and may be understood as, “a guiding principle that covers all aspects of our lives,” (Bartlett et al., 2015, p. 296), a continued openness and exploration of different perspectives in the hope of finding a, “better way of doing things,” (Bartlett et al., 2015, p. 296). In connection, it is also important to mention that this concept has been similarly theorized and enacted by other Indigenous writers/researchers, such as Kimmerer’s concept of braiding ways of knowing together, and notably by Indigenous [Anishinaabe] researcher Myrle Ballard who has discussed *three-eyed seeing*. Ballard describes this concept as, “incorporating three lenses...the Indigenous science lens, the western science lens, and the lens of our relations, which are those that cannot speak for themselves, like the flora, fauna, water, land, etc...that’s

the third lens,” (Co-management Commons, 2024, 0:04:25). Three-eyed seeing is especially relevant in terms of reevaluating the extractive/exploitative settler relationship with the environmental, as Ballard further describes, in utilizing a third lens, the land, water and other non-humans are recognized as ‘alive’, as deserving of inherent respect; This perspective de-centres humans and our needs and prioritizes our responsibility to listen and learn from the world around us (Co-management Commons, 2024). Furthermore, the importance of recognizing and respecting different worldviews may be better understood by Figure 2, created by Bartlett et al. (2015) and which is meant to symbolize the way in which different perspectives are akin to pieces of a puzzle, “and that all of the world’s cultures...have understandings to contribute in addressing the local to global challenges faced in efforts to promote healthy communities,” (p. 297). Moreover, two-eyed seeing embraces and respects different perspectives and ways of doing research, allowing the researcher to learn and borrow from the most appropriate teachings depending on the context of research (Bartlett et al., 2012).

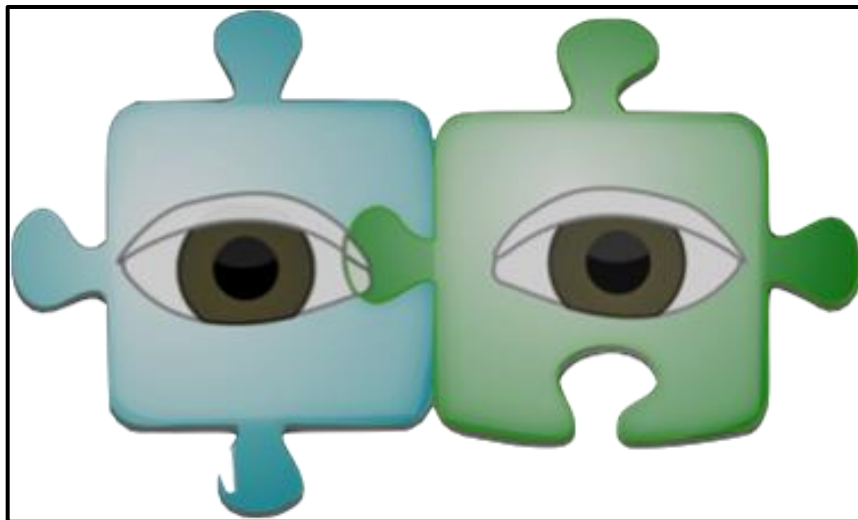


Figure 2. Two-eyed seeing jig-saw puzzle pieces illustrate the plural and collective nature of knowledge.

This flexible, adaptive, and multi-perspective approach is incredibly relevant to this project which, while endeavouring to be mindful of the overarching aspects of disaster capitalism, settler colonialism and Indigenous Environmental Justice, simultaneously takes a place-based, bioregional approach towards both case studies; Recognizing that each case demonstrates distinct circumstances of industry development and settler/Indigenous relationships. Perhaps most demonstrable by the life cycle stage of each project: the Ring of Fire was and is a project in its infancy; The how, when and even ‘if’ of it all are still in question and First Nations are, justifiably, responding cautiously to new development on their land. While Keeyask, now completed, was a project well under way and with the partnership of four First Nations, a position which offered a form of ‘social license’ to Manitoba Hydro and restricted the First Nations options regarding opposition/action.

Furthermore, my endeavour to holistically explore the case studies through multiple methods necessarily involved three distinct chapters. I chose to begin with a comparative analysis of the cases (the Case Studies chapter), using a combination of literature, theory and news media to formulate my own narrative regarding each case. This is then followed by a Media Analysis chapter, a necessary examination of the narratives presented by the news media utilized within the previous chapter. Finally, the Community Experiences chapter contains the personal and invaluable narratives and experiences of those involved in the Keeyask Lockdown, which were lacking within Mainstream news sources. Furthermore, and in accordance with two-eyed seeing, how each chapter is approached also varied accordingly. For instance, the Community Experience chapter focuses heavily on aspects of Indigenous Justice and therefore endeavours to learn from and integrate Indigenous research methods, such as storytelling. While the other chapters, although still striving to integrate a decolonial framework which highlights

Indigenous voices and ways of knowing, borrow more heavily from western theory and organizational structures. Therefore, each chapter will include a short methodology section which will discuss the specific approach each section will take.

4 Case Studies

4.1 Summary

Through the lens of settler colonialism, neoliberalism/disaster capitalism and Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ), this chapter introduces and explores two case studies: *Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba: A Legacy of Industry Prioritization* and *Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario: Pushing Through a Controversial Project*. Furthermore, this chapter will comparatively analyse these cases, utilizing three themes: *A History of Settler Colonialism and Industry Prioritization*, *Settler Colonialism, Disaster Capitalism and COVID-19 Intersect to First Nations Detriment*, and *First Nations Continue to Enact Multiple Forms of IEJ*. This analysis demonstrates that Indigenous well-being and capacity to manage the pandemic was hampered by disaster capitalist decision-making, which was influenced by the settler colonial ideologies of both provincial governments. However, that decision-making, as well as the resulting Indigenous action, was specifically shaped by distinct, place-based histories and relationships.

4.2 Introduction

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous peoples in Canada were burdened with disproportionate impacts; A reality that is perhaps most saliently demonstrated by a Statistics Canada analysis which documented Indigenous peoples had suffered a 4.5 times higher COVID-19 mortality rate than non-Indigenous people in Canada (Kopp, 2024). This has been linked to

several different determinants of health, such as a lack of infrastructure and access to healthcare (Kopp, 2024), inequities which are productions of ingrained colonial structures, as Richardson and Crawford (2020) state,

Colonialism is not only a historical phenomenon; its forces and structures continue to affect the well-being of Indigenous Peoples worldwide, underpinning many adverse social determinants of health experienced by Indigenous Peoples but also disrupting access to protective determinants such as language, traditional governance, land-based activities and healing practices. (p. 1098)

Many First Nations asserted self-determination during COVID-19 by enacting pandemic plans which were culturally appropriate and grounded within the local context and ways of knowing of each individual community, as well, “often implementing far stricter measures than those enacted by local municipalities, such as closures and checkpoints,” (Richardson & Crawford, 2020, p. 1100). These measures resulted in initially low COVID-19 numbers within First Nations (Richardson & Crawford, 2020) however, colonial structures and decision-making nevertheless resulted in Indigenous people holding a disproportionate share of COVID-19 burdens (Kopp, 2024).

An additional system, interwoven and interacting with colonialism during the pandemic was capitalism, or more specifically, neoliberalism. While colonial ideologies have long enabled the exploitation and commodification of Indigenous land (Blume, 2022) neoliberalism, a heightened form of capitalism, encourages ceaseless capital accumulation through the removal of all barriers to economic expansion (Gare, 2021). Neoliberal ideology has also been known to be advantageously expressed by those in power during crises; An occurrence coined *disaster*

capitalism, which consequentially exacerbates social inequities and harm within communities that have been marginalized (Klein, 2007; Schuller, M. & Maldonado, 2016). This chapter intends to document how the ideologies and structures of disaster capitalism and colonialism combined during the pandemic to forward settler agendas and negatively impact the well-being of Indigenous peoples. As well, this chapter strives to explore the many ways Indigenous communities resisted and challenged those ideologies by asserting self-determination and enacting justice through ways of knowing which centre on collective well-being and a responsibility to relationships (Blume, 2022; McGregor, 2022; Whyte, 2021a).

4.3 Methodology and Methods

This chapter will utilize a multiple case study approach, exploring two different expressions of disaster capitalism, as well as accompanying settler colonialism and Indigenous action, within *Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba: A Legacy of Industry Prioritization* and *Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario: Pushing Through a Controversial Project*. Case study research is understood in a variety of ways, though widely, it is the holistic and contextualized study of phenomenon (Tight, 2017). This approach, which allows an exploration of causal relationships, “is particularly useful when the researcher is trying to uncover a relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring.” (Gray, 2014, para. 3). This is important, as I will be analysing how and why disaster capitalism during COVID-19 expressed itself within the colonial and neoliberal contexts of each project and how Indigenous sovereignty and justice actively responded to such government and industry decision-making. Therefore, I intend to examine past decision-making and policy relevant to the projects as well as Indigenous action by utilizing theory of Indigenous environmental justice, settler colonialism, neoliberalism and disaster capitalism.

Environmental justice (EJ) is a grassroots, place-based movement which is concerned with addressing the inequity of harm and benefits held by different groups of people (Murdock, 2021). As Bolin and Kurtz argue,

At the core of EJ is a concern with distributional justice– how environmental risks are distributed in space, and how marginalization based on race and class produces differences in exposure. It also examines procedural justice concerns: the historical, geographic, and institutional processes that have promoted inequalities in people’s exposure to these negative externalities. (2018, p. 197)

EJ allows for an examination of the multiple intersecting components of injustice, including social, political, economic and technical aspects (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018). However, Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Deborah McGregor has argued that, “a distinct formulation of Indigenous environmental justice (IEJ) is required in order to address the challenges of the ecological crisis as well the various forms of violence and injustices experienced specifically by Indigenous peoples,” (2021, pp. 405-406). Further arguing that injustices faced by Indigenous people are, “tied to, and symptomatic of, ongoing processes of colonialism, dispossession, capitalism, imperialism/globalization and patriarchy,” (McGregor et al., 2020, p. 36). As these processes are enveloped within western law and government, structures which are responsible for many of the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples (McGregor, 2022), IEJ includes searching for solutions outside of these structures, utilizing Indigenous knowledge and worldviews to enact Indigenous notions of justice which are inherently tied to sovereignty and self-determination (McGregor, 2021). Furthermore, as Indigenous peoples are diverse, so too are IEJ frameworks (McGregor, 2022). However, a commonality among frameworks may be a focus on relationality, and recognition and responsibility to the relationships existing between human and non-human

beings. McGregor discusses this within the holistic, “Anishinabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin* (well-being),” (2022, p. 12) which, “considers the critical importance of mutually respectful and beneficial relationships among not only peoples but all our relations,” (2022, p. 12). While Indigenous [Potawatomi] scholar Kyle Whyte discusses IEJ within the interdependent notion of *kinship* (Whyte, 2021a) which, “refers to relationships connecting members of a society together through responsibility,” (Whyte, 2021b, p. 48) where the notion of ‘members’ may be extended to non-humans and the environment (Whyte, 2021a). Reflecting on the interconnection and interdependence within an across relationships, Whyte (2021a) further highlights the quality of reciprocity within these relationships, saying, “to be in a reciprocal bond with one another is to take to heart that one is committed to honoring gift givers and devoted to taking actions that support the well-being of the givers (i.e., giving back),” (p. 268). Whyte argues that, “kinship relationships serve to facilitate a society’s responsiveness to changes that affect its members’ safety, well-being, and self-determination,” (Whyte, 2021b, p. 48) therefore, respecting and maintaining reciprocal relationships remains an important aspect of IEJ.

Whyte has also discussed settler colonialism as an integral aspect of environmental injustice for Indigenous peoples (2022), noting that accompanying, divisive acts of violence and oppression act as an, “assault on kinship relationships,” (Whyte, 2021a, p. 270). Whyte further defines settler colonialism as,

complex social processes in which at least one society seeks to move permanently onto the terrestrial, aquatic, and aerial places lived in by one or more other societies who derive economic vitality, cultural flourishing, and political self-determination from the relationships they have established with the plants, animals, physical entities, and ecosystems of those places. (2019, p. 227)

Wolfe (2006) similarly discusses settler colonialism as an ongoing structure which, “destroys to replace,” (p. 388). In connection, Wolfe (2006) also describes the settler *logic of elimination*, which is, “premised on the securing—the obtaining and the maintaining—of territory,” (p. 402). Whyte describes this harmful process as erasure, as, “settlers are literally seeking to erase Indigenous economies, cultures, and political organizations for the sake of establishing their own,” (2019, pp. 227-228); This erasure of Indigenous peoples, ways of knowing, being and governance, is integral for the continued legitimation of settler authority and decision-making over land (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012). Importantly, as noted by Indigenous [Cherokee] scholar Jeff Corntassel, settler colonialism takes many forms, it is a *shape-shifting entity* (2021), it is multi-dimensional and, “intrinsically shaped by and shaping interactive relations of coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism, and ableism,” (Snelgrove et al., 2014 p. 2). Such interactions also extend to disaster capitalism, a term first coined by Naomi Klein in 2007 and described as a neoliberal exploitation of crises by governments and corporations committed to, “the elimination of the public sphere, total liberation for corporations and skeletal social spending,” (p. 17), resulting in, “an ever-widening chasm between the dazzling rich and the disposable poor,” (p. 18). As described by Harvey (2007), neoliberalism is a theory which asserts, “that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade,” (p. 22). Beginning in the 1970s, Neoliberal thought has since become imbedded in western society, as well as around the world; Masquerading as a corridor to capital accumulation, its projects have instead brought destruction and division between people and nature (Harvey, 2007). Mascarenhas (2012) argues that neoliberal reforms are inherently racialized, disproportionately impacting Indigenous peoples;

Neoliberalism embeds nature within the rhetoric of the free-market, consumption and privatization (Mascarenhas, 2012), a framing that is inherently opposed to the relationality and reciprocity of many Indigenous ways of being (McGregor, 2021). Moreover, neoliberalism interacts with settler colonialism to further produce harm, for instance, while settler colonialism acts to erase Indigenous governance, privatization by neoliberalism which limits “entitlements such as access to clean air and water have become increasingly dependent on one’s ability to self-govern; in other words, on one’s (white) privileged ability to purchase healthy products and unpolluted environments,” (Mascarenhas, 2012, p. 81). As well, neoliberal ideals of individualism also obscure structural and systemic inequalities by instead offloading responsibility on individuals. So, when environmental de-regulation or increased extraction projects inevitably place the burden of harm on communities which lack the resources to address them, the neoliberal idea of self-responsibility further contributes to settler colonial Indigenous stereotypes of laziness or in-expertise (Mascarenhas, 2012). Disaster capitalism takes the opportunity of a crisis, of people’s preoccupation and vulnerability, to accelerate such ideas and projects which otherwise would have received pushback and public resistance (Klein, 2007). In response to the numerous instances of disaster capitalism occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, Klein (2020a) adapted a new term: *coronavirus capitalism*. As discussed in Cheek et al., (2023), there was a worldwide proliferation of disaster capitalism during the pandemic. Evidence of disaster capitalism was documented thoroughly by news media in the US and Europe, and while perhaps less documented, also occurred in countries such as India, Chile, Brazil, Colombia, Japan and South Africa, a similarity being that rather than a great leveller, “the pandemic only made more evident the social, political and economic inequalities,” (Cheek et al., 2023, p. 419) within and across populations.

As a result of colonization and capitalist development, Indigenous peoples in Canada face many inequities, notably bearing the brunt of past pandemics such as smallpox, tuberculosis and the more recent H1N1 outbreak, with communities made more vulnerable due to systemic government (in)action and underfunding (Hillier et al., 2020); A Yellowhead Institute policy brief argued that the consequential, “housing, water, community and health infrastructure deficits on First Nation reserves create ideal conditions for the transfer of viral infection,” (Pasternak & Houle, 2020, p. 1); Unfortunately, this lack of prioritization toward Indigenous health and well-being was maintained during COVID-19, as First Nations were forced to express, “persistent and extreme concern,” (Hillier et al., 2020, p. 1000) towards gaining adequate funding and aid, ultimately asserting their own authority to establish appropriate safety measures. In addition to the strain of managing the pandemic, disaster capitalism, though expressed in many different ways, ultimately acted to further compound the crises and struggles within Indigenous communities. For example, Nnoko-Mewanu (2021) argues that Indigenous land governance and rights were disregarded during the pandemic in the Global South, a combination of policy changes and lack of oversight allowing for land grabs (dispossession) and exploitive development to occur on Indigenous territory. In Canada, Carleton (2020) observed numerous examples showcasing that, “capitalist accumulation by colonial dispossession is continuing amidst the current pandemic,” including Coastal GasLink’s continued construction of a pipeline in British Columbia through unceded Wet’suwet’en territory. In addition, Alexander and Stanley discussed the Alberta Government’s use of executive powers to deregulate and bailout the oil industry, taking advantage of, “a time when dissent has effectively been silenced. People are preoccupied with survival, discouraged from leaving their homes and banned from gathering in groups. Demonstrations are not only impossible, they are forbidden by law,” (2020). Schuller

and Maldonado (2016) argue that, “disasters create (at least the illusion of) the blank slate, *terra nullius*,” (p. 64) providing space and opportunity for neoliberal reforms. This same concept, a denial of Indigenous presence and governance, was and is used to validate settler claim and decision-making over land (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023). As these two exploitative structures meet, Indigenous people suffer disproportionate levels of harm as, “disaster capitalism causes Indigenous peoples to experience not only physical and economic losses but also social and cultural losses,” (Bajracharya, 2023, p. 110) due to colonial and capitalist projects disregard and destruction of Indigenous relationships and ways of being (Burow et al., 2022).

However, while disaster capitalism research is useful in exploring how power is exploited and expressed during a crisis, it has also been criticized for being fairly limited in terms of considering long-term structures (such as colonialism) and instead focusing more narrowly on the aftermath of disasters (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016). This chapter will therefore strive to holistically examine the two case studies through a comparative analysis of three overarching themes: A History of Settler Colonialism and Industry Prioritization; Settler Colonialism, Disaster Capitalism and COVID-19 Intersect to First Nations Detriment; First Nations Continue to Enact Multiple Forms of IEJ. This analysis will provide a brief history of the systems of settler colonialism and neoliberalism, as they relate to the current prioritization of industry projects within each case study; Each case study will then explore the recent expressions and interactions between settler colonialism, neoliberalism/disaster capitalism during COVID-19, as well as discuss the many different expressions of IEJ which manifested and continued post-pandemic.

4.4 Overview of Case Studies

4.4.1 Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba: A Legacy of Industry Prioritization

Located in Treaty 5 territory, on the Nelson River, about 752 kilometres north of Winnipeg, as seen in Figure 3 (Keeyask Hydropower Limited Partnership, n.d), the Keeyask Generating Station is a 695-megawatt hydro project developed by Manitoba Hydro in ‘partnership’ with four Cree First Nations: Tataskweyak First Nation, War Lake First Nation, York Factory First Nation, and Fox Lake First Nation (Manitoba Hydro, n.d.a). The Joint Keeyask Development Agreement (JKDA) was signed by the four First Nations and Manitoba Hydro in 2009 and Keeyask became the latest project in a long line of dams in Northern Manitoba, with those on the Nelson River alone including Jenpeg, Kettle, Kelsey, Long Spruce and Limestone (Craft & Blakley, 2022).



Figure 3. Map showing Keeyask Generating Station and four First Nations: Tataskweyak First Nation, War Lake First Nation, York Factory First Nation, and Fox Lake First Nation.

Along with the physical alterations marked by numerous dams in the North, Manitoba Hydro’s legacy is one of First Nation harm and removal from land; For many northern Indigenous

communities in Canada, hydro power has meant encroachment of settlers into Indigenous land, forced relocation, increased dependency on government assistance, and social, political, and economic disruption and deterioration (Hoffman, 2011; Rosenberg et al., 1995). However, the industry has recently been attempting to shroud this legacy in a pretence of partnership with First Nations by framing their newest projects, like the Keeyask Generating Station, as a form of economic reconciliation (Robertson, 2020a). Nevertheless, over the years, Keeyask has also been marred with longstanding issues characteristic of past hydro developments, including a lack of consent, discrimination and violence (APTN National News, 2019; Dipple, 2022; Froese, 2018).

As COVID-19 entered Manitoba in March 2020, Keeyask construction was yet to be completed and, at the behest of the four First Nations (Tataskweyak, War Lake, York Factory, and Fox Lake First Nation), who voiced concern about hydro workers potentially acting as vectors for COVID-19 entering their communities, Manitoba Hydro agreed to scale back their workers on the Keeyask project (Lefebvre, 2020a; Manitoba Hydro, 2020a). However, On May 1, 2020, Tataskweyak First Nation received a notification from Manitoba Hydro stating they planned to return to standard worker rotations and double its staff numbers to approximately 1,400 on construction of Keeyask by May 19 (Robertson, 2020a). This decision was made without the input or consultation of the four First Nations, who reiterated their concern to the industry of, “suffering potentially devastating consequences, resulting from our lack of inclusion in the development of the pandemic response,” (Fox Lake Cree Nation et al., 2020; Robertson, 2020a). Yet these concerns went ignored by Manitoba Hydro and consequentially, on May 15, 2020, Tataskweyak First Nation mandated a community Lockdown and created a blockade across Provincial Road 280, as seen in Figure 4 (Hobson, 2020b) preventing access to the

Keeyask project (Samson, 2020). This was shortly followed by Fox Lake First Nation initiating their own Lockdown and forming another blockade, this time on the South Access area of the road (Frew, 2020a), while York Factory and War Lake First Nation added their support at the blockades (Bergen, 2020a).



Figure 4. Image by Nathan Neckoway of highway blockade and supporters.

The First Nations action was met with an injunction by Manitoba Hydro (Hobson, 2020a) along with criminalizing rhetoric by the industry and government leadership (Bergen, 2020c; Sinclair, 2020). Yet the First Nations steadfastly asserted their right to decision-making regarding pandemic planning and protecting their communities within their traditional territory (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b; The Canadian Press, 2020a). Finally, ten days into the Lockdown, Manitoba Hydro and the leadership of the four First Nations came to an agreement which included both the removal of the blockades and the injunction, as well as the inclusion of First Nation decision-making in future pandemic planning (Hatherly, 2020; Rutgers, 2020). The First Nations kept their end of the bargain and took down the blockades, allowing a

more gradual increase of workers to arrive at Keeyask (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020c). However, as the pandemic progressed, Manitoba Hydro failed to adhere to its side of the agreement, delaying the removal of the injunction and limiting the inclusion of First Nations when a COVID outbreak did in fact occur at Keeyask later that year (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020b). The colonial structures entrenched in Manitoba Hydro were very clearly demonstrated during the pandemic by their patronizing behaviour and unilateral decision making. More recently, and now that the Keeyask project has been completed, First Nations remain committed to challenging Manitoba Hydro's continued presence and legacy in the North, fighting for an equal share of benefits (York Factory First Nation, 2022), as well as reparation for past and ongoing harm (Bettens, 2024).

4.4.2 Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario: Pushing Through a Controversial Project

This case study documents the numerous opportunistic actions, notably during the pandemic, taken by the Ontario Government to encourage and enable development on a controversial mining project within Indigenous territory. In the early 2000s, a crescent-shaped patch of land, now widely recognized as the Ring of Fire, was determined to be rich in mineral deposits, including nickel, copper and chromite (Wilt, 2020). The Ontario government, along with various mining companies, have been attempting to develop mines in the area ever since. What has so far been hindering their attempts is the location of Ring of Fire, which is a remote area, approximately 5,000 square km in size, located 500 km northeast of Thunder Bay (Government of Ontario, 2022a), and about 330 km from any established road infrastructure (Slowey, 2022), as seen in Figure 5 (Kitching, 2022b).



Figure 5. Map of Ring of Fire location and surrounding First Nations.

It is also located on the ancestral and Treaty 9 lands of Anishinaabe and Anishini communities which are largely secluded and only reachable by plane, though some have access to all season and/or sporadic winter roads (Matawa First Nations, n.d.; Scott & Boisselle, 2019; Scott, 2023). Additionally, the Ring of Fire is also located on the world's second largest peatland ecosystem which (among other environmental benefits) is responsible for storing 35 billion tonnes of carbon (Wilt, 2020). What has been aiding the governments efforts, however, is their colonial interpretation of Treaty 9, which has allowed the creation of legislation which prioritizes resource development, while simultaneously disregarding Indigenous sovereignty, rights, and well-being (Drake, 2015).

In the years following the discovery, Indigenous peoples have continued to enact solidarity and assert their sovereignty over the area. For Instance, the Matawa Nations are a tribal council made up of nine First Nations (Aroland First Nation, Constance Lake First Nations,

Eabametoong First Nation, Ginoogaming First Nation, Long Lake #58 First Nation, Marten Falls First Nation, Neskantaga First Nation, Nibinamik First Nation, and Webequie First Nation (Matawa First Nations, n.d.) and it is largely their traditional territory which encompasses the Ring of Fire, or as they recognize it, the Breathing Lands (known in Cree as, *Yehewin Aski* or *Bakitanaamowin Aki*) (Raven, n.d.). In 2011, the Matawa Nations signed a Unity Declaration, affirming their commitment to work together to address the foreseen resource extraction efforts by government and industry on their lands (Scott, 2023). However, both the liberal and now conservative Ford government have continuously disrespected that solidarity, instead meeting with First Nations on an individual basis (Barrera, 2018; Vis, 2018).

Consequently, due to the government's refusal to meet with First Nations on appropriate terms, over a decade has passed since the minerals were first discovered and little progress has been made in the Ring of Fire. Then, in 2020, COVID-19 presented an opportunity for the Ford government to jumpstart development. Justified through rhetoric of COVID-19 recovery and climate change mitigation, numerous bills were passed in a matter of weeks, which removed many environmental protections and expanded governmental jurisdiction (Canadian Environmental Law Association, 2020b; McIntosh, 2020d; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020) while forwarding Premier Ford's goal of fostering an electric battery and car manufacturing supply chain in Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2019). The legislation was also passed without Indigenous consultation, who were understandably engrossed with managing the pandemic at the time (TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). The changes subsequently faced considerable push back from First Nations, as well as environmental organizations, who enacted solidarity, rose awareness through the media and conducted several lawsuits against the province (McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a).

Meanwhile, the Ontario government was also continuing with Ring of Fire consultations regarding road construction to the area, despite opposition from several First Nations who indicated they were unable to participate during the pandemic (Porter, 2020a). These concerns were dismissed by the government, who continued their approach of meeting with communities individually, ultimately forming an agreement with two First Nations (Marten Falls and Webequie First Nation) to become proponents for three roads connecting the Ring of Fire to the First Nations and to Southern Ontario (Grech, 2020; Office of the Premier, 2020), as seen in Figure 6 (McIntosh, 2023b).

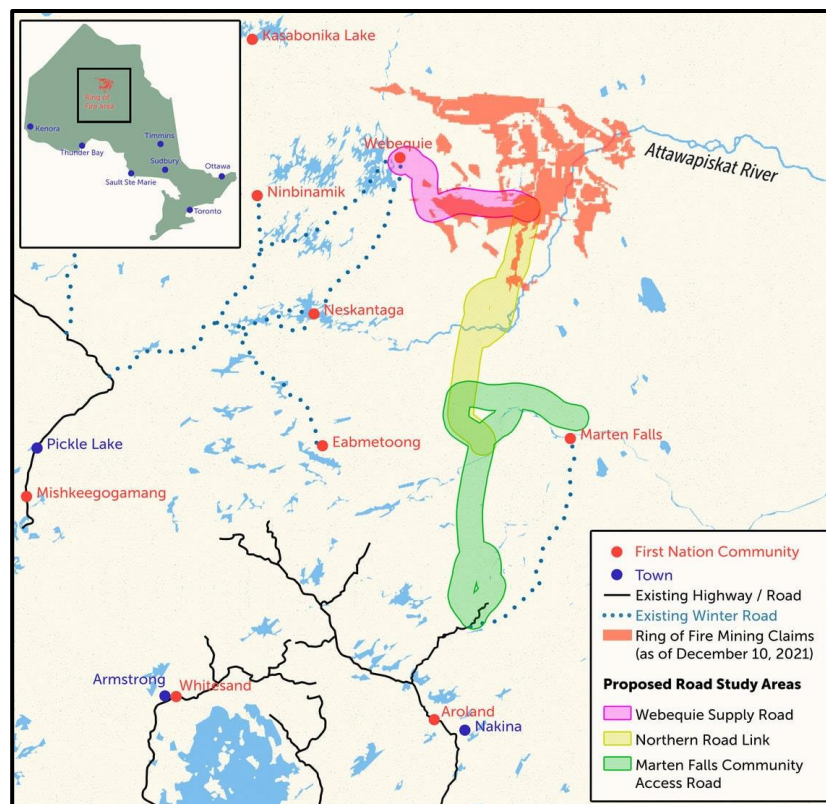


Figure 6. Map of proposed road development being led by Webequie and Marten Falls First Nations.

In addition, the province moved forward with environmental assessments (EAs) for the roads, which were finalized in 2023, despite dissent from several First Nations (McIntosh, 2023a).

In an effort to compensate for the piecemeal approach of the (EAs), not to mention the lack of Indigenous involvement, Aroland First Nation, as well as the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada and the Osgoode Environmental Justice and Sustainability Clinic demanded the federal government conduct a regional assessment (RA) of the Ring of Fire (Kitching, 2020a). Ideally, this assessment would consider the cumulative impacts of development in the area, reflecting the interconnected nature of the Breathing lands, as well as view First Nations as equal decision-makers and ensure First Nations benefit from any future development (Scott et al., 2020). However, the terms of reference for the RA have continued to fall short of those aspirations (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022; Turner, 2022a) and, at the request of numerous First Nations, is currently still being re-written by Matawa and Mushkegowuk First Nations and the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, 2024). While the pandemic may have provided an opportunity for the Ontario government to enact legislation designed to pave the way for Ring of Fire development, First Nations have continued to enact solidarity and challenge the province's assumed authority over their land and prioritization of the mining industry, whether that be through collaboration with the government or legal and direct action.

4.5 Comparative Analysis

While the context and First Nations discussed within each case study are distinct, as reflected by the unique forms of disaster capitalism and community action expressed in each case, there are also similarities observed within the settler colonial structures maintaining both provincial governments. Furthermore, similarities may be drawn between First Nations continued maintenance and renewal of environmental justice which simultaneously functions to

enact sovereignty, solidarity and well-being. Three themes containing these intersecting and singular realities which were observed across the two case studies will now be discussed.

4.5.1 Theme 1: A History of Settler Colonialism and Industry Prioritization

When examining the history of each province, in relation to the respective industries and First Nations involved in the case studies, both demonstrate a clear prioritization of industry over the rights and well-being of First Nations which stretch back generations.

4.5.1.1 Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba

Manitoba Hydro has a very long history of building dams without consultation or consent of the Indigenous peoples whose lands are consequently flooded and drastically changed (Elkaim, 2020). Northern Manitoba Hydro development began in the 1900s and accelerated in the 1970s with the Churchill River diversion (CRD) and Lake Winnipeg Regulation projects (LWR) which were deemed necessary to meet the province's growing energy needs (Hoffman, 2011). After completion, the CRD reversed and increased the water flow of the Churchill River into the Nelson River, while the LWR artificially regulated Lake Winnipeg's water levels to ensure optimal energy outputs (Hoffman, 2011). As a result, "the projects irreversibly altered the hydrological and ecological characteristics of some 30,000,000 acres, or 50,000 square miles, of northern boreal rivers and forest," (Hoffman, 2011, p. 111). Notably, these massive projects were made possible by actively ignoring the sovereignty and interests of the Indigenous peoples located on the impacted areas (Hoffman, 2011). Kulchyski (2014) further argues that Treaty rights have continuously been ignored by the industry, noting that while there is an extinguishment of Indigenous rights clause in Treaty 5 (of which many Manitoba Hydro dams exist within, including Keeyask), that clause does not specifically include an extinguishment of

rights over water. Kulchyski (2014) additionally notes the *Van der Peet* (1996) Supreme Court of Canada decision which stated, “that an Aboriginal right is any ‘custom, practice or tradition that is integral to the distinctive culture’ of the indigenous peoples in question,” (p. 6). Water undoubtedly plays a role in Northern Cree traditional activities and Manitoba Hydro’s role in the pollution of local water sources, along with the flooding of traditional territory has impacted First Nations ability to maintain their way of life and well-being (Kulchyski, 2014).

In addition to dismissing treaty rights, Craft (2022a) further argues that Manitoba Hydro has actively avoided its duty to consult by claiming it is merely an ‘agent’ of the Crown and therefore not responsible for carrying out the duties and Honour of the Crown. Those duties being to consult and accommodate First Nations during circumstances when their rights may be impacted; Though more widely, it is the responsibility of the Crown to act honourably in its interactions with Indigenous peoples, “particularly to the solemn promises it has made, including fulfilling Treaty obligations,” (Craft, 2022a, p. 251) as well as constitutional obligations. By framing itself only as an agent of the Crown, Manitoba Hydro has argued that it is not beholden to duties to consult in addition to those of the province. However, Craft argues that, while the industry may not beholden to the Crown’s duty to consult, due to Manitoba Hydro’s extremely close relationship with the Crown, as, “Manitoba (the Crown) is the administrative decision maker and the consultative body,” (Craft, 2022a, p. 255) of the industry, Manitoba Hydro should therefore still, “be subject to the duty of the Honour of the Crown,” (Craft, 2022a, p. 255). Yet, time and again, Manitoba Hydro has failed to uphold this duty by undermining, if not altogether breaking its promises to First Nations. For instance, following the Supreme Court of Canada’s 1973 *Calder* decision (which affirmed Indigenous peoples land rights), industries like Manitoba Hydro, who very much depend on the use of Indigenous land, where forced to change their

tactics from straightforward land theft to ‘negotiation’ with Indigenous peoples (Wera & Martin, 2011). It was also during this time that, in response to the damage caused by the CRD and LWR, the impacted communities of Nisichawayasihk First Nation, Pimicikamak First Nation, Tataskweyak First Nation, York Factory First Nation and Norway House First Nation organized the Northern Flood Committee (NFC) and the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) was created and signed by the NFC, the Manitoba Government, the Government of Canada and Manitoba Hydro in 1977 (Loney, 1995). For the Cree communities, the NFA at the time was a promise to remediate some of the environmental impacts and receive compensation for the damage and loss they had experienced (Loney, 1995; Niezen, 2010). However, Manitoba Hydro had no intention of fulfilling those promises. No funds were set aside to meet NFA obligations and research conducted by Manitoba Hydro argued that the issues communities were facing had little, if anything, to do with the hydro projects, instead implying that these issues were widespread and inherent among Indigenous populations throughout Canada (Loney, 1995). This response reflects the neoliberal narrative of individualism and self-reliance (Schuller, 2008), placing responsibility for the struggles Indigenous peoples faced on their own shortcomings. As well, Manitoba Hydro’s narrative reflects Veracini’s (2010) idea of a *narrative transfer* (brought on by a *transfer of coerced lifestyle change* when ecosystems and therefore livelihoods were destroyed) whereas Indigenous peoples are inherently seen as ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’ by settlers in order to disavow themselves of responsibility and justify their actions in the name of modernization. Moreover, this behaviour is the result of a refusal to recognize Indigenous mixed or non-capitalist economies as valid and oftentimes prosperous systems, as Hoffman (2011) argues,

From the viewpoint of the dam-builders, relocation, the dismantling of a landbased economy, and the subordination of Aboriginal lifestyles were not unfortunate realities

occasioned by the necessities of progress. Quite the contrary: everything done to the communities was represented and understood as positive steps that would bring about the necessary transformation of a backward-looking and ultimately unsustainable way of life. (p. 127)

As a result, communities were forced to fight long, protracted litigations for the few and small damages that Manitoba Hydro would take responsibility for (Niezen, 2010).

This failure to behave honourably, in addition to one of negligence, by Manitoba Hydro and both the provincial and federal government continued over the years into the 1990s as they attempted to avoid the obligations of the NFA by cutting funding to the NFC, and reminiscent of divide and conquer techniques used in past treaty (Dipple, 2022) and hydro negotiations (Waldram, 1993), met with each community on a one-on-one basis to sign Master Implementation Agreements (MIAs) (Hoffman, 2011; Niezen, 2010). The key function of these agreements was an immediate transfer of money in exchange for, “the extinguishment of all Aboriginal land claims and their transfer to the government of Canada, which, in turn can make them available to private parties for development,” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 119). This privatization of Indigenous land to make way for capital accumulation is indeed a common practice of settler colonialism throughout Canada and is often achieved through legal mechanisms like treaties, land claims and other agreements such as the MIAs (Hall, 2015; Hoffman, 2011). These ‘negotiations’ or ‘agreements’ are largely one sided with the government holding much of the negotiation power (Hall, 2015), as was the case with the MIAs, since the damage to the land was already done and continued construction of hydro projects seemed inevitable (Hoffman, 2011). Only one community, Pimicikamak First Nation, has continued to decline to sign another agreement and demands that the promises of the NFA be fulfilled, as Chief David Monias

argues, “it’s a contractual agreement...It’s our right and our entitlements are written in there. And we should get those things. We shouldn’t have to fight for those things and we shouldn’t have to negotiate those things,” (Read, 2020).

Upon examination of Manitoba Hydro’s legacy, Thompson (2015) has argued that, “the destruction of livelihoods, health risks and undermining of natural habitats is occurring due to hydroelectric development, water regulation and flood management by the province and Manitoba Hydro,” (p. 247). The damage inflicted by hydro development has been so extensive, these areas are now recognized as sacrifice zones. Various scholars, activists and journalists have differently defined this concept over the years. Klein herself comments on the concept in her 2014 book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Klein links sacrifice zones to systems of imperialism, colonialism and racial superiority, and describes these places as areas that, “somehow don’t count, and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress,” (2014, p. 169). Mention of sacrifice zones has become fairly common when discussing extractive industries like oil and mining and are especially relevant within a colonial context which promotes a continuation of this behaviour as, “the colonial mind nurtures the belief that there is always somewhere else to go and exploit once the current site of extraction has been exhausted,” (Klein, 2014, p. 170). Moreover, Klein argues that sacrifice zones are advanced by the colonial mindset of domination over both nature and the people subjected to oppression located in these disposable peripheries which are exploited to feed an insatiable (settler) core. Unfortunately, this behaviour is not restricted to fossil fuel projects, as the growth of green energy projects and climate mitigation measures (which dams commonly fall under) has demonstrated a continuation of environmental injustice, including sacrifice zones (Scott & Smith, 2017). Built on the same structures of settler colonialism that

extractive industries have long profited from, dams displace and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their traditional land in exchange for relocations or forced lifestyle changes that ignore the importance of place-based relationships (Scott & Smith, 2017). As settler states, like Manitoba, continue to dismiss these relationships, along with Indigenous sovereignty, decision-making and ancestral and treaty rights, First Nations, “become ‘sacrifice zones’ in the broader development of settler capitalist society in Manitoba, continuing and perpetuating its colonial legacy” (Thompson, 2015, p. 250).

4.5.1.2 Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario

While hydro also plays a role in the dispossession of land from Ontario First Nations, the mining industry has likewise undergone considerable prioritization from the province. This can notably be observed within the very treaty which governs the area now known as the James Bay and Hudson Bay watersheds in Ontario, of which numerous Indigenous peoples have traditionally lived on and with for time immemorial (Government of Ontario, n.d.b). Both the land, and the people became a part of The James Bay Treaty, also known as Treaty 9, in 1905 after it was decided by the Federal and Ontario government that, “increasing settlement, activity in mining and railway construction...rendered it advisable to extinguish the Indian title,” (James Bay Treaty, 1964, p. 3) in Northern Ontario. Consequently, treaty negotiations took place in 1905 and 1906, with later adhesions in 1929 and 1930, between the settler governments and the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe and Algonquin) and Cree (Omushkegowuk) peoples, as well as other Indigenous nations of the area (Government of Ontario, n.d.b). For years, Indigenous peoples had also been interested in a treaty negotiation with the government due to the influx of European settlers into their territory, enabled by railroad construction, which had been impacting many community’s subsistence activities (Calverley, 2009).

Treaty 9 plays an important role in its application towards resource development in the province, especially in the eyes of the government, as the written document states that Indigenous people agreed to,

Cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada for His Majesty the King and His Successors forever, all our rights, titles and privileges whatsoever in all that tract of land, and land covered by water in the Province of Ontario.
(James Bay Treaty, 1964, p. 29)

Furthermore, the treaty involved the creation of reserves, yet also made clear promises to respect the subsistence rights of Indigenous peoples, stating, “His Majesty the King hereby agrees with the said Indians that they shall have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract surrendered,” (James Bay Treaty, 1964, p. 20). However, the wording of the treaty was also careful to include a caveat to those promises, directly after stating that such rights are,

Subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by the government of the country, acting under the authority of His Majesty, and saving and excepting such tracts as may be required or taken up from time to time for settlement, mining, lumbering, trading or other purposes. (James Bay Treaty, 1964, p. 20)

As it turned out, this stipulation was critical in the Ontario Government’s interpretation of their agreement with Indigenous peoples. Over the years, the province has found ample reason to ‘take up’ land at the expense of Indigenous rights and well-being, as Treaty 9 proceeded to enable numerous legal tactics which continued to dismiss and/or contest Indigenous sovereignty, while furthering the acquisition of and jurisdiction over Indigenous land.

Moreover, making Treaty 9's role in past and future mineral development in Ontario additionally significant was the (re)discovery of the diary of treaty commissioner, Daniel George MacMartin in 2006 (Kovacs, 2015). Languishing in the archives of Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario since 1968, the mislabelled diary contains many different notes on the commissioner's experiences of treaty-making in 1905; Importantly, this includes evidence that the commissioners had indeed promised Indigenous communities that their traditional hunting practices would be respected, on and off reserve (Government of Ontario, n.d.a). It seems that multiple times during treaty negotiations, concerns were raised by Indigenous community members about the treaty's possible impact on their subsistence activities in regard to limiting their land use, and in response, MacMartin (1905) writes,

It was explained to them that they could hunt and fish as of old and they were not restricted as to territory, the Reserve, merely being a home for them where in which no white man could interfere, or trespass upon, that the land was theirs forever. (p. 28)

These promises were made orally, and not by the commissioners themselves (they did not speak any Anishinaabe or Cree) but by translators, a practice in itself which is problematic as Long (2010) argues, "translating Treaty No. 9 from English into Ojibwe or Cree would have required ambiguous new words to convey foreign concepts," (p. 331); As settler and Indigenous ways of knowing differ drastically, translating intangible ideas, such as owning or surrendering land, would have been near impossible without a shared understanding of land in the first place (Long, 2010). In addition, not only were these promises likely misconstrued and misunderstood, they were also hollow, as the stipulations of the treaty were pre-written by both the federal and provincial government and commissioners were not allowed any leeway in terms of altering the treaty at the behest of Indigenous communities (Long, 2010). Therefore, these oral promises,

which contradict the written text, can be understood as an effort to mislead community members into signing a document which consequentially provided an, “illusion of consent,” (p.352) to which future governments could (and would) point to again and again as justification for their actions (Long, 2010). As Long argues, “these deliberations with chiefs and headmen were an essential tool of colonialism, for obtaining their signatures on the parchment was the objective of the commissioners’ visit,” (p. 338).

The result of this so-called ‘consent’ to surrender land stipulated in Treaty 9 was an expansion of industrialization in Northern Ontario, notably during the 1800s, as the province focused on extracting resources from the North in order to export those materials to outside markets and support the growing settler population in the South (Di Matteo, 2022); Made possible by the creation of Canadian Pacific Railway, and subsequent other lines such as Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific, “the region was to be an investment frontier for private capital while providing government revenues via timber and mining fees,” (Di Matteo, 2022, p. 169). Through heavy investments and industry-friendly policy creation, by the early 1900s, Ontario was Canada’s top mining province, responsible for 40% of the country’s outputs (Di Matteo, 2022).

One industry-friendly policy which furthered Ontario’s exploitation of natural resources by dismissing Indigenous rights, and which is critical to this case study, is the 1990 Mining Act. The act initiated a *free entry system*, which,

Not only allows anyone to freely acquire, with few constraints and at low costs, a right of ownership over the mineral resources of a territory, but it also allows the mining

entrepreneur to obtain guarantees of being able to explore them and, in the event of a discovery, to exploit them. (Lapointe, 2010, para. 8)

Lapointe (2010) further argues that such systems, which prioritize the extraction of minerals, consequently perpetuate, “an imbalance between the rights of citizens, communities and the environment in relation to the rights of mining entrepreneurs,” (para. 11) as well as marginalize other interests or relationships with the land, such as non-exploitative, reciprocal connections inherent in many Indigenous communities. Moreover, by granting prospectors the right to minerals, “without owning the land in question and without obtaining the Crown’s permission,” (Drake, 2015, p. 190) the regulation distances the Crown from its responsibility to consult. As a result, the Mining Act not only disregards Indigenous ancestral rights, law and land use decision-making, but Canadian law as well by ignoring rights promised in Treaty 9, along with those laid out in Section 35(1) of the 1982 Constitution Act (Drake, 2015). The Mining Act therefore demonstrates a neoliberal removal of state intervention in the issues of mineral extraction, influenced by the settler colonial economic prioritization of land and enabled by the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty. Though notably, the Mining Act’s prioritization of industry over Indigenous rights backfired numerous times on the province when communities asserted their sovereignty anyways, refusing entry to mining companies; Companies who then blamed the province for not being informed about the potential conflict with Indigenous rights and sued for millions of dollars (Drake, 2015; Lapointe, 2010). Furthermore, Lapointe (2010) has argued that revisions made to the act in 2009, in response to mounting Indigenous opposition, were largely unsuccessful in fostering any meaningful change, as the act continued to prioritize extraction, failed to require full EAs and still did not require the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples. Similarly, Drake (2015) argued that another set of revisions made to the act

in 2013 continued to undermine Indigenous rights and violate Anishinaabek land use protocols by failing to require consultation prior to the staking and recording of a mining claim, as well as allowing the commencement of exploration activities.

Another more recent policy initiative, which was notably created around the same time as the discovery of the Ring of Fire, is the province's 2010 Far North Act. The province has argued that the purpose of the 2010 act would be to increase decision-making for First Nations communities in the form of community-based land-use planning (Gardner et al., 2012). However, Gardner et al. (2012) argue that the true intentions for the policy lie more in the province's desire to enable resource development as a response to a stagnating economy, saying, "Ontario's economic growth and prosperity is intimately tied to developing the Far North region of northern Ontario, and there appears to be a sense of urgency tied to this development," (p. 5). Moreover, Gardner et al., (2012) argue that the very creation and purpose of the Far North act was undermined by colonial behaviour from the beginning, as the act was created and passed by assembly without Indigenous community-based consultation, a process which is at odds with Section 35(1) of the Constitution, as well as UNDRIP in regard to Indigenous people's rights to adequate consultation and decision-making. In addition, the act was passed during a time when many communities were fighting for and asserting their rights and jurisdiction over their territory. In previous years Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), an organization representing 49 First Nations across Treaty 3 and 9 (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, n.d.), had been organizing a consultative framework to address resource extraction on traditional lands, including the passing of several Tribal Council Resolutions, and they were in the process of meeting with provincial representatives; NAN argued the creation of the Far North Act disrespected that work and those conversations by completely disregarding their plans (Gardner et al., 2012). As well,

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation was similarly asserting their decision-making during this time; Having been held in contempt in 2008 for enacting their laws and refusing mining on their lands, they subsequently created their own Watershed Declaration and Consultation Protocol in the hopes of forming a joint decision-making relationship with the province (Scott & Cutfeet, 2019). This proposal was also rejected by the province (Scott & Cutfeet, 2019).

The way in which the government initiated the Far North Act, sidestepping consultations and restricting Indigenous initiatives to assert their authority and decision-making, seems to be in direct contrast to the purpose of the act itself. In theory, the act is supposed to enable community-based land use planning in the Far North by creating a, “joint planning process between the First Nations and Ontario,” (Far North Act, 2010, s.1(a)) which is, “done in a manner that is consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, including the duty to consult,” (Far North Act, 2010, s.1(c)). In practice, it has been argued that the act has failed in its purpose to uphold Indigenous rights; Such a lack of respect towards these rights was described by Chief Randy Kapashesit of the MoCreebec Council,

In the course of developing this document, the Far North Act, I’ve seen no initiative to actually be engaged with our communities, to say, “What is it that you’re interested in?” I see this more as an imposition, a continuation of a higher power at work, if you will, telling us that this is the way it has to be. “Never mind your human rights, never mind your historical rights; we’re not interested in that”: That’s what you’re saying by producing this kind of document and expecting us to participate. (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 17)

NAN has gone on to call for a repeal of the act, stating it is, “an invalid law and a new form of colonialism,” (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2019). Scott and Indigenous [Anisininew] academic John Cutfeet similarly argue, “the fundamental and enduring problem is with the underlying colonial architecture and the broader set of assumptions upon which the Far North Act rests,” (2019, para. 8). In connection, Gardner et al., (2012) argue that the act maintained paternalistic behaviour set out in Treaty 9 by including stipulations that ensured final decision-making would rest with the province, as long as it was, “in the social and economic interests of Ontario,” (Far North Act, 2010, s14(4)). Tsuji (2021) argues this exemption acts as a form of environmental assimilation by restricting Indigenous decision-making and authority over land in order to enable settler development, “to the extent whereby the environment can no longer support Indigenous cultural activities,” (p. 1). Northern First Nations have voiced their opposition to these exemptions which supersede Indigenous decision making, with Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Hall stating,

I take this as an insult. This is essentially saying that my community could prepare a land use plan, identify an area of land which, for whatever reason—whether cultural, traditional or environmental—is off limits for mining development and the government has the authority to basically say that there are economic and social interests of the province which are more important than my community’s interest and proceed to permit the mine. (Tsuji, 2021, p. 20)

The Far North Act therefore indicates how little the current attitude of the Ontario government has evolved since Treaty 9 negotiations regarding resource development and Northern Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, as both the Mining Act and Far North Act, along with their facilitation of resource extraction, have been maintained, Ontario has continued to be

the leading producer of minerals in Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.b). However, more recently the province has been sharing the title with British Columbia and Quebec (Government of Canada, n.d.b). Now, determined to stay relevant in the industry, the Ontario Mining Association is working to reframe itself as a, “reliable supplier of the raw materials that are essential to the green economy,” stating its commitment to contribute to the, “growing global demand for clean energy and other low-carbon, environmentally-friendly technologies,” (Ontario Mining Association, n.d.b).

4.5.2 Theme 2: Settler Colonialism, Disaster Capitalism and COVID-19 Intersect to First Nations Detriment

The two case studies involve examples of each province’s recent reiteration of industrial prioritization; A pattern of behaviour which would magnify during COVID-19 in the form of disaster capitalism.

4.5.2.1 Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba

As noted, within subsequent years following the signing of the JKDA, a critical narrative grew to surround the Keeyask project, as well as reveal a continuation of the problematic relationship between Manitoba Hydro and the four First Nation partners, as observed in Figure 7 (headlines retrieved from: Brake, 2018; CBC News, 2016; CBC News, 2018c; CBC News, 2019; Fontaine, 2016; Froese, 2018; Martens, 2018; McNabb, 2017; Paul, 2018; Ward, 2018). The illustrated headlines indicate the state of the relationship between Manitoba Hydro and the four First Nations pre-pandemic; The articles outline various issues of mismanagement, cost overruns, delays, systemic discrimination, and environmental impacts due to hydro development.

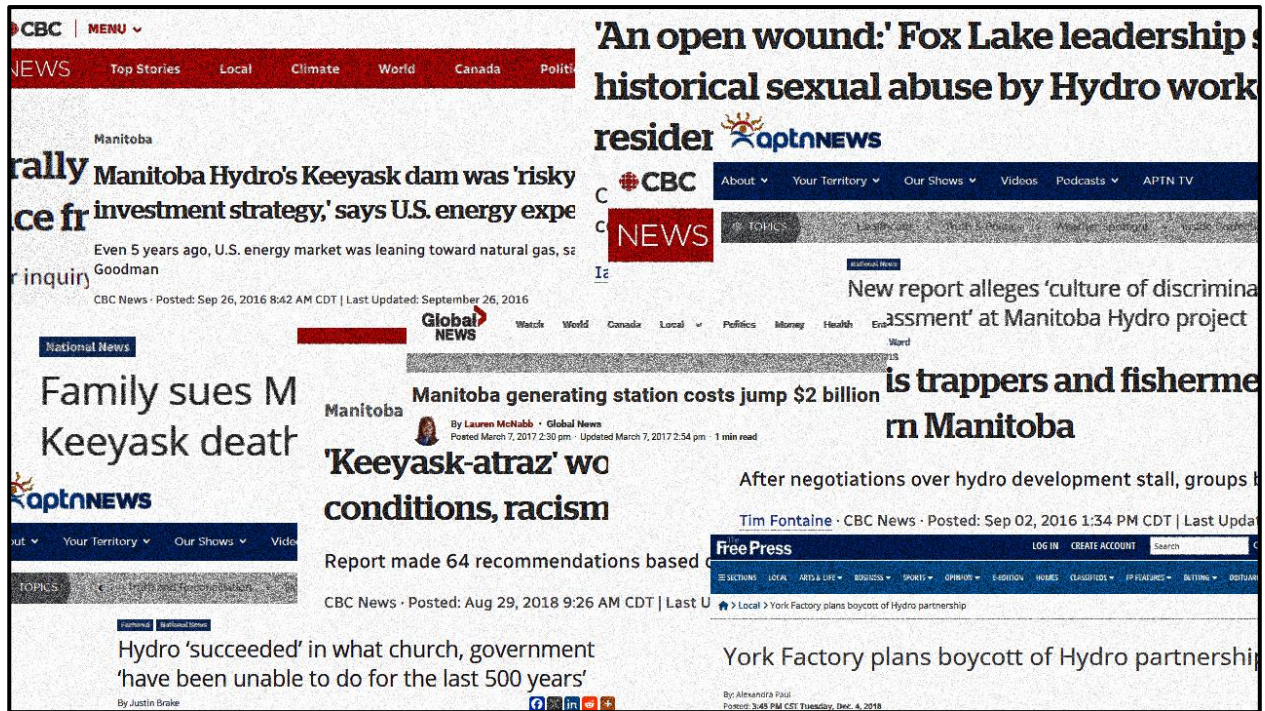


Figure 7. CBC News, Global News, Winnipeg Free Press and APTN News articles portraying situation between Manitoba Hydro and Northern First Nations.

The apparent cracks in the JKDA partnership would only grow with the onset of COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (The Canadian Free Press, 2020c). By March 19th, there were over 1000 COVID-19 cases in Canada and 12 related deaths (Jackson, 2021). On March 20, 2020, Manitoba declared a state of emergency which proceeded into the following month as COVID-19 continued to spread across Canada, with the country surpassing 2000 deaths and over 50,000 cases as of April 28, 2020 (The Canadian Free Press, 2020c). It was only a few days later that Tataskweyak First Nation was told by Manitoba Hydro that they had decided to increase the number of on-site workers at Keeyask (Robertson, 2020a). In addition to the issue of being left out of decision-making, leadership of the four First Nations indicated their concern to Manitoba Hydro regarding the arrival of outside workers into the North; The letter to former President of Manitoba Hydro, Jay Grewal further stated,

Manitoba Hydro promised the KCN Partners a comprehensive plan and protocol, approved by Public Health, which would protect our communities from an outbreak of COVID-19. This plan, which was set out in the document “Future Measures Plan-Keeyask Returning to Regular Rotations”, was received on May 1, 2020. It was developed solely by Manitoba Hydro, without the participation or input of your partners in this project, the KCN communities, who stand to suffer the most in the event of an outbreak. (Fox Lake Cree Nation et al., 2020)

Even now, during a pandemic, Manitoba continued to act dishonourably by again breaking a promise to the First Nations by unilaterally creating and initiating a pandemic plan which would directly impact the local communities. Furthermore, not only would First Nations be the ones impacted by an arrival of COVID-19 in the North, the letter also points out that the effects would be intensified by the community’s lack of resources and infrastructure, which would hinder their capacity to manage an outbreak (Fox Lake Cree Nation et al., 2020; Kidd, 2020). A continued disregard of this reality by Manitoba Hydro led Tataskweyak First Nation to take their well-being into their own hands and enact a Lockdown, as reiterated by Band Councillor, Nathan Neckoway, “we’re here to protect our community, we’re here to protect other communities and all in all we’re here to protect northern Manitoba from COVID-19,” (Hobson, 2020a).

However, in the days following the Lockdown, rather than respect the safety measures of the First Nations, Manitoba Hydro defended their intention to ramp up project development by stressing the support of the Chief Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Brent Roussin, as well as pointing to an injunction that was granted to them against the blockade (Malone, 2020). Dr. Roussin’s affidavit was indeed present within the May 18th injunction (*5900345 Manitoba Ltd & Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board v Tataskweyak Cree Nation et al.*, 2020), further showcasing the

collaboration that took place between the provincial entities of Manitoba Hydro, The Queen's Bench, and Manitoba Health. This injunction, an order to end the Lockdown, worked to criminalize the First Nations action, asserting settler law onto First Nation territory and ignoring the First Nations sovereignty and rights to decision-making. In addition, Manitoba Hydro simultaneously justified their actions and condemned those of the First Nations by pointing to the economic costs of the delays resulting from the Lockdown, as well their concern for the well-being of the workers that had been on site for an extended period (Waldman, 2020). Manitoba Hydro also dismissed the First Nations concerns by stating they were medically and scientifically unfounded, all the while contradicting the communities claims regarding a lack of transparency by maintaining they had preserved open communication throughout the pandemic (Waldman, 2020).

Neoliberal narratives of 'expertise', such as that utilized by Manitoba Hydro in their promotion of Dr. Roussin's support, dismiss the notion that First Nations are the true experts regarding their community's needs (Mascarenhas, 2012). In conjunction, settler colonial and neoliberal discourses interact to define Indigenous peoples as backward and incompetent; Rather than recognize First Nations place-based knowledge as legitimate and First Nations as experts with, "a deep understanding of ecological systems, public health, and modern technology," (Mascarenhas, 2012, p. 122) instead, "local contextualized knowledge is subordinated by technical "credentialized" expertise," (Mascarenhas, 2012, p. 122). Along with obscuring and ignoring the structural inequities managed by First Nations (of which an outside 'expert' would know little about), this discourse also serves to exclude Indigenous participation in decision-making which impacts their health (Mascarenhas, 2012). This was observed by Grand Chief Settee who commented on the lack of input the First Nations had in the creation of the Keeyask

pandemic plan, describing the resulting frustration in being denied that decision-making power and then additionally being dismissed by an injunction, saying, “in one sense, you feel that this is an ongoing, paternalistic and colonialistic approach to dealing with First Nation people by just applying the law to make sure they’re kept out of the way,” (Fiddler, 2020).

Further dismissal of First Nations concerns, as well as criminalization of the Lockdown followed as a Manitoba Hydro spokesperson referred to the blockade as, “illegal,” (Bergen, 2020c) and former Manitoba Premier, Brian Pallister similarly stated, “we need to follow the rule of law and we need to make sure that we respect it,” (Sinclair, 2020). These statements overtly imply that settler law is absolute and above that of Indigenous sovereignty, and the utilization of such legal ideals and devices, such as the injunction, did not go unnoticed, as Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) former Grand Chief Alren Dumas stated, “it is unfortunate that Manitoba Hydro continues to manipulate and abuse regulatory and legal constructs to achieve their fiscal goals,” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a). Furthermore, the origin of the notion of settler rule of law, which has since been normalized and often used to justify settler actions, is largely predicated on the Doctrine of Discovery, “the legal means by which Europeans claimed rights of sovereignty, property, and trade in regions they allegedly discovered,” (Reid, 2010, p. 336). By proclaiming the land *terra nullius*, or newly ‘discovered’, the doctrine maintains that Indigenous people were not sovereign nations and had no rights to ownership, the resulting insinuation being that the Crown has underlying title to all lands (Reid, 2010). This concept has permeated Canadian law so deeply that even Indigenous rights cases, such as the Supreme Court’s 2014 *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia* decision which recognized Indigenous title, still claimed that settler law had underlying title from the moment European colonists asserted their sovereignty (Beaulieu, 2021). Moreover, the utilization of settler law alongside logics of

development, such as Manitoba Hydro's narrative of economic hardship resulting from the blockades, has continued to be a routine tactic by settler states to discourage and/or invalidate Indigenous sovereignty (Yazzie, 2022).

While the Lockdown continued, community leadership described the situation as a divergence of interests, as the First Nations priority of community safety conflicted with Manitoba Hydro's economic and corporate interests. Manitoba Keewatinowí Okimakanak (MKO) Grand Chief Garrison Settee observed that, "it appears their interests are not our interests...I think it's unethical for a corporate entity to push their own agenda at the expense of human lives and the safety of our people," (Waldman, 2020). Community members also brought attention to the inequitable treatment Manitoba Hydro was receiving by the government in being allowed to overstep the province's non-essential travel regulations by allowing workers to come from outside provinces; A double standard which, according to Grand Chief Garrison Settee reveals, "when it comes to the project it seems like [construction] is a priority over everybody else's safety," (Hobson, 2020a). This overt prioritization of a hydro project can be understood as an extension of disaster capitalism practices during COVID-19. Through collaboration with the province, Manitoba Hydro was privileged from adhering to certain provincially mandated safety measures as well as granted extended powers which aided in the overruling of Indigenous sovereignty. Moreover, as the neoliberal pro-market ideology of disaster capitalism simultaneously exists within the settler structure, the concept of essential resource projects and, "the business-as-usual status quo," (Cheek et al., 2023) was normalized during a global pandemic. In connection, Sparke and Williams (2022) have characterized COVID-19 as a *neoliberal disease*, arguing, "the same neoliberal plans and policies advanced around the world in the name of promoting wealth have proved disastrous in terms of protecting health in the

pandemic,” (p. 16) further stating that, “market rule, pro-market ideas and marketized societies have variously and concurrently undermined public health in the pandemic,” (p. 16). Manitoba Hydro chose to continue to prioritize the construction of Keeyask, framing the potential economic losses as more important than that of the First Nations health and safety concerns. The implementation of travel restrictions by the Manitoba Government, then near immediate exemption made for Manitoba Hydro furthermore provides a rather obvious display of the government’s economic priorities during the pandemic. These actions were in direct opposition of the First Nations wishes and disregarded their concerns and rightful involvement in pandemic planning for Keeyask. More than a demonstration of a problematic partnership, this displays the hypocrisy and ongoing settler colonial mentality of a government whose Prime Minister states, “every community needs to make sure they’re taking decisions to protect their members,” (Hobson, 2020a) during the pandemic, while concurrently denying First Nations that right by paternalistically claiming they know what’s best for them.

4.5.2.2 Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario

The chromite deposits within Matawa First Nation territory were discovered by Noront Resources Ltd. in 2007 (Scott, 2023). The company, which has since undergone new ownership and been renamed Ring of Fire Metals (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022d) dubbed the area, ‘the Ring of Fire’ after the Johnny Cash song (McIntosh, 2022b; Scott, 2023). News of the chromite discovery, along with other minerals such as nickel, copper, and gold, resulted in immediate interest from other mining companies, resulting in approximately 8,000 mining claims in the Ring of Fire by 2009 (McGee & Gray, 2019; Talaga, 2010). Interest was also displayed by the Ontario Government, notably in a 2014 governmental report which estimated that potential mining of the area would contribute between \$5.1-\$10 billion to the province’s

GDP in just the first 10 years (Chong, 2014). However, the report also conceded that there are extensive challenges to acquiring the minerals, noting potential ecological impacts, lack of infrastructure/remoteness of the area and, “First Nations issues,” (Chong, 2014, p. 7), which have continued to persist in recent years, impeding initiatives to begin development. The Ontario Government’s burgeoning optimism was further tempered somewhat by an increasingly oversaturated chromite market, which consequentially lowered the price of the mineral (CBC News, 2013b). However, rather than abandon mining plans, the Ford government’s interest in the Ring of Fire shifted to the area’s nickel deposits, which, among other uses, is an important component of electric car batteries (Scott, 2023).

The Ford government has demonstrated numerous times its priority of electric vehicle manufacturing over the years. For instance, as part of the province’s 2019 ‘Driving Prosperity: The Future of Ontario’s Automotive Sector’ plan, the province has stated its goal to expand its auto sector by building 400,000 electric vehicles by 2030 (Government of Ontario, 2019). As well, both the federal and provincial government have invested billions of dollars in an attempt to convince auto companies like GM, Stellantis and Honda to manufacture electric vehicles in Ontario (Tumilty, 2022). A critical part of both government’s plans being the ability to create a domestic electric battery supply chain which, in Phase 2 of Ontario’s 2019 plan, notably involves, “the exploration, mining and production of critical minerals for the fabrication of electric batteries in Ontario,” (Government of Ontario, 2019). The development of the Ring of Fire plays an extremely important role in achieving these plans, made blatantly obvious by Premier Ford’s (in)famous declaration which promised, “if I have to hop on that bulldozer myself... we’re going to start building the roads to get to the mining,” (CBC News, 2018a).

As noted, the Ontario government already has numerous policies in place which enable and prioritize industry development, however, further prioritization of land and resource development was enabled during COVID-19, in part through policy creation and regulation/policy rollbacks. In March 2020, Ontario declared a provincial emergency, thereby granting itself power to, “enforce the necessary emergency orders to protect the health and safety of individuals, families and communities from the threat of the COVID-19 virus,” (Government of Ontario, 2023). One use of these powers was to create exemptions for Part II of the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights, in both the ‘Public Participation in Government Decision-Making’ and ‘Ministry Statement of Environmental Values’ sections (Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993; Ontario Regulation 115/20, 2020). These changes, as outlined by the non-profit, Ecojustice, would mean that, “the Ontario government does not need to consult the public on laws, regulations, policies or projects, no matter how “environmentally significant” they may be, (Ecojustice, 2020) and remove the requirement for ministries to consider environmental values when making decisions.

In addition to suspending environmental protections, several bills were passed under the guise of pandemic recovery legislation which also made changes to environmental regulations. For instance, Bill 229: Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act was passed in December 2020 and notably made several amendments to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act (1994) and Conservation Authorities Act. A notable concern raised about the bill was the lack of consultation provided to communities before its passing, as the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) pointed out,

CELA has on-going concerns regarding the lack of opportunity for meaningful public input, absence of appropriate engagement with Indigenous communities, and expedited

legislative process. Proceeding with significant legislative amendments affecting forests, species, waters, and lands should not occur when many First Nation communities are unable to consult directly with their members due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. (Canadian Environmental Law Association, 2020b)

The government's rationale for not providing public consultation, a requirement under the Environmental Bill of Rights (1993), was that the amendments were a part of a budgetary bill, which allowed them a loophole to avoid public input, as well as potential opposition (Khan, 2021).

This continuation of industry prioritization and circumvention of public consultation was also displayed with Bill 197 which was created and promoted as the COVID-19 Recovery Act in July 2020 (Baiguzhiyeva, 2021). The bill, which was passed without public or Indigenous consultation (and included a clause that retroactively exempted it from these consultations), included changes to Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act and the Planning Act (Bill 197, COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020). A key amendment for the former eliminated the requirement for environmental assessments on projects unless regulations specifically require them (Kitching, 2020c). While an alteration to the Planning Act granted a broader use of ministerial zoning orders, allowing the government to bypass land planning processes and consultations; Combined with the former alteration, these changes have worked to limit oversight on projects, making it much easier for development to occur in Ontario (McIntosh, 2020d). Furthermore, during the first reading of the act, it was argued by Progressive Conservative MPP Steve Clark that the amendments to the Environmental Assessment Act were to, "ensure stronger environmental oversight and will focus our resources on projects that have the highest impact on the environment while also helping key infrastructure projects get going

without unnecessary red tape,” (Clark, 2020, Statements by the Ministry and Responses 1340). Clark also argued that the increased powers afforded to the minister’s zoning order authority were to, “reduce approval delays on critical projects that local communities need, like those that support our economic recovery,” (Clark, 2020, Statements by the Ministry and Responses 1340). Further justifying the bill by arguing that Ontario’s economic recovery relied on the need to appear, “open for business,” (Clark, 2020, Orders of the Day 1450) and that this bill contributes to enabling Ontario’s, “business friendly environment,” (Clark, 2020, Statements by the Ministry and Responses, 1331).

These environmental regulation rollbacks and new legislation are prime examples of what Naomi Klein describes in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007): government/industry circumvention of public consultation and opposition during a crisis to implement policy changes which advance a neoliberal agenda. By examining past policy initiatives and government behaviour, it becomes clear that enabling industry development, notably in Ontario’s Far North, has been, and continues to be, the government’s priority. While Klein has discussed this kind of behaviour occurring in the past with crises like Hurricane Katrina in her 2007 book, other writers and academics have more recently discussed numerous accounts of governmental deregulation enabling development during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Sordi et al. (2022) discuss the deregulation of meat processing in Brazil, where the Minister of Environment promoted the notion *passando a boiada*, translated as, ‘setting the cattle loose,’ a metaphor for deregulation. The authors go on to describe a system of prioritization of the meat industry in Brazil. This includes labelling the processing plants as ‘essential’, thereby circumventing safety orders and resulting in high numbers of COVID-19 among workers which, due to a high percentage of Indigenous workers, has been linked to many outbreaks in Indigenous communities; This

prioritization also included attempts to introduce and amend acts which would scale back health and safety protections for workers, which was justified by employers as, “necessary to fight ‘excessive bureaucracy’ and ‘rationalize operating costs’,” (Sordi et al., 2022, p. 10). The language here is notably very similar to the Ontario government’s rhetoric which demonises environmental protections and regulations, not to mention adequate Indigenous consultation, as time consuming, expensive and unnecessary ‘red tape’ in the face of economic development.

Moreover, a prominent aspect of the disaster capitalism occurring in Ontario was the, arguably intentional, circumvention of Indigenous consultation and decision-making. Several First Nations voiced concern about the Ontario government instituting these changes during the pandemic, for instance, Nibinamik First Nation Chief Sheldon Oskineegish stated,

Our rights cannot be swept under the rug by Crown governments passing legislation designed to clear the way for mining and development on our lands without our consent. It’s shameful that Ontario is proceeding in this way and attempting to use the COVID-19 global pandemic as a smokescreen to ignore their constitutional duties to First Nations. (TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020)

Drawing connections between Bill 197 and Ring of Fire, former Grand Chief of the Mushkegowuk Council, Jonathan Solomon also criticized the government for implementing the bill during the pandemic which impacted the government’s duty to consult on the development. Solomon called the bill, “bulldozer legislation,” (CBC News, 2020a) arguing the bill would offer the government a way to circumvent First Nations rights and authority, saying, “they think they have the legal right to start encroaching on our territory without any consideration to accommodate, consult - and the biggest part is consent,” (CBC News, 2020a). While not outright

using the label of disaster capitalism, these comments certainly align with the concept by characterizing the government as opportunistically pushing forward with their development agenda.

In addition, while Bill 229 and Bill 197 were broad attempts to enable resource development in Ontario, a more specific push forward for the Ring of Fire during the pandemic included amendments to The Far North Act made in Bill 43: Build Ontario Act. In November 2020, the Ontario government proposed several changes to provisions of the act they argued were, “hindering economic development,” (Turner, 2021a). The government’s 2021 Fall Statement clearly link these alterations to the Ring of Fire development by stating under the ‘Building the Ring of Fire’ section, “the proposed amendments to the Far North Act, 2010 would support a more stable environment for investment that will bring jobs and prosperity to workers in Ontario’s North,” (Bethlenfalvy, 2021). Additionally, a press secretary to Greg Rickford claimed the changes set forth in Bill 43 would be about, “enabling the development of all-season roads, electrical transmission projects and mineral development while maintaining community-based land-use planning and environmental protections,” (Crawley, 2021). Changes to enable development included removing the protection of 225,000 square km of land, removing the restriction of development on land that does not have a community-based land-use plan, and allowing the joint Ontario/First Nation advisory body to move forward with only seven of the 31 First Nations participating (Crawley, 2021; Mahony et al., 2021). First Nations again criticized the government’s decision to make important changes to land planning policy during the pandemic and while under a state of emergency. For example, a press release from the Matawa First Nations further characterizes the government as enacting disaster capitalism behaviour during the pandemic, stating,

During the COVID-19 crisis first declared on March 17 2020, the Ontario government has proceeded with the numerous legislative, policy and regulatory changes to position government, industry and investors to prepare for access to wealth and resources in the remote north of Ontario. (Matawa First Nation, 2021)

Lastly, another specific policy change which prioritized Ring of Fire development occurred in 2022 when Premier Ford announced the funding of a \$29 million new Critical Minerals Strategy (Crawley, 2022); essentializing minerals like chromite, cobalt, nickel, copper and lithium by arguing they play an important role, “as the world shifts to a greener, more connected and more tech-driven economy,” (Government of Ontario, 2022b, p. 5). Through new mining exploration in the North and the creation of manufacturing plants in the South (Government of Ontario, 2022b), the strategy is designed to help support Ontario’s goal of becoming both a leading producer of minerals and a leading auto-motive manufacturer, as Minister, Greg Rickford states, “we believe we have an incredible opportunity to connect and vertically integrate our northern and southern economies to build a made-in-Ontario supply chain for innovative technologies like electric vehicles and battery storage,” (Crawley, 2022). Premier Ford’s throne speech also drew specific attention to the Ring of Fire’s role in the Critical Minerals Strategy, saying, “the cornerstone of this strategy is the Ring of Fire,” and once developed would “unlock the full potential of Ontario’s economy,” (Global News, 2022). Accompanying legislation was then introduced by the province to support the Critical Minerals Strategy; A little over two months after being introduced, in May 2023, Bill 71: Building More Mines Act was passed (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2023a). Yet another amendment to the Mining Act, the bill is designed to increase the production of mines by shortening the timeline of approvals and permitting (McBride, 2023). While Mines Minister Greg Pirie has argued the

changes will not impact the province's duty to consult, many First Nations have opposed the bill, including the Matawa Chiefs Council (Dufour, 2023). Other First Nations have also released their response to the bill, noting foreseen problems with Bill 71, such as a lack of consultation, a minimization of project oversight, and a limitation of required site restoration (Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, 2023). Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation asserted that the community's, "inherent Treaty rights will be adversely impacted by the proposed changes in Bill 71 as it further perpetuates the cycle of resource exploitation in our reservation and traditional lands," (Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, 2023). The latest amendment to the Mining Act indicates that the Ontario government, rather than learn from its past contempt toward Indigenous sovereignty (and resulting opposition), is intent on continuing to unilaterally embed the neoliberal ideology of economic freedom and deregulation within the provinces legal framework.

However, changing legislation to reflect a more neoliberal approach to development while limiting and dismissing Indigenous decision-making is not the only way the Ford government prioritized industry development during COVID-19; The province has also been specifically promoting and progressing the Ring of Fire project through a pro-mining narrative. This notably includes numerous comments from Premier Doug Ford, including a 2020 March parliament session where the Premier was promoting the Ring of Fire, saying, "this is going to create up to 5,500 jobs annually, \$9.4 billion in gross domestic product, \$6.2 billion for Ontario's mining industry, and \$2 billion in government revenue," (Ford, 2020; Gray, 2020). However, a significant aspect of promotions centre more around the environmental benefits of mining the Ring of Fire, which has been connected to the production of electric car batteries and their apparent importance in shifting to a green economy. Mines Minister George Pirie has gone so far as to claim a shift to a green economy is entirely reliant on mining the area, saying, "you can't be

green without mining. You can't develop as Ontario wants and transform our economy into a green economy without accessing the critical minerals out of the Ring of Fire," (Turner, 2022b). While CEO Luca Giacobazzi of Australian company Wyloo Metals (the owner of renamed Ring of Fire Metals), who owns one of the largest shares of mineral claims in the Ring of Fire, has stated, "Ontario has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to become a world-leading hub for the production of the critical minerals the world needs to de-carbonize and we want to play our part in connecting the minerals in the north with the manufacturing might in the south," (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022d). Prime Minister Trudeau has also more generally praised the mining industry as an important player in shifting to a greener economy post-pandemic saying, "innovations across this sector will be crucial for a green recovery and will help drive the clean transition that we need...From the nickel and cobalt that are used in electric vehicles and solar panels, the mining sector is really important in building a better future for us all," (Ross, 2020). By using 'green' and 'sustainable' language while promoting their projects, industry and government, "make extraction the most logical course of action for addressing environmental crises," (Paliewicz, 2022, p.233). As a result, the ideology of disaster capitalism has influenced Ontario's behaviour twofold during the pandemic, as the province has been essentially utilising two compounding crises (the pandemic and climate change) as a strategy to enable development and promote the extraction of resources in the Ring of Fire. Fletcher (2012) makes this connection between disaster capitalism and climate change, arguing that an increasing number of capitalist actors are viewing the climate crisis as a new market for accumulation, noting huge growth in carbon offset and trading markets in recent years. Fletcher (2012) also argues that an important factor enabling the framing of climate change as an opportunity or frontier for economic growth (akin to how the Ring of Fire is perceived), is the neoliberalization of resource

governance: framing the answer to the climate crisis as market-based solutions. This can be observed by Ontario's numerous business friendly changes to environmental regulations, such as Bill 229, Bill 197, Bill 43, and Bill 71, along with government narratives which prioritize electric vehicle manufacturing and sell consumers the belief that they can buy their way out of the climate change crisis.

Furthermore, by necessitating technological solutions to climate change (such as electric vehicles) which appear non-political, (rather than addressing structural factors of climate change, such as neoliberal policy), this works to maintain normalised ideas of *extractivism* which depend on unequal power relations and the exploitation of both nature and people (Dorn, 2022; Paliewicz, 2022). Extractivism refers to the practice of industry and government commodifying, appropriating and exploiting resources for economic profit while the negative consequences are largely born by local environments and peoples (Bruna, 2022; Nygren et al., 2022). As Klein (2014) argues, extractivism is, “a nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking...It is the reduction of life into object for the use of others,” (p. 169). Extractivism has historically been entrenched within fossil fuel and mining practices, though recently ‘green’ extractivism has increasingly adapted around public support of environmentally friendly alternatives and climate crisis mitigation (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022); Green extractivism finds legitimacy in the apparent need for the extraction of transition minerals, “whereby extraction and valorisation of mineral resources is rendered not only compatible with ‘sustainable development’, but necessary to it and the possibility of a ‘low-carbon’ future,” (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022, p. 802).

In connection, the Ontario government has also stressed the many benefits of mining, and the consequential all-season road that would accompany it, in regard to Northern First Nations.

Emphasizing the opportunities for jobs, partnership deals, and access to health care, Premier Doug Ford has framed this whole operation as, “a massive win for the First Nations community,” (Crawley, 2021). While Greg Rickford has called the proposed roads a, “corridor to prosperity,” (Jenish, 2021) stating that, “this is not about building a road to get a mine... This is about building a network of roads so that Indigenous communities have better access to health, social services, broadband and a clean alternative to diesel-generated electricity,” (Jenish, 2021). Premier Doug Ford made similar claims in a news release, saying, “together, with First Nations partners, we are creating a clear path forward to unlock unprecedented social and economic prosperity in the Far North,” (Office of the Premier, 2020). This rhetoric, and the actions that follow are aligned with what some researchers are calling *green colonialism*. The idea being that, like the extraction of oil and coal before it, a shift towards ‘green’ technology to combat climate change will continue to operate within the long-established structure of settler colonialism (Singh, 2022). This recent evolution of colonialism is becoming more prevalent around the world as countries attempt to address the climate crisis through decarbonization goals, observed in initiatives like America’s Green New Deal and Canada’s 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan (Government of Canada, n.d.a; Dorn, 2022). However, these initiatives, which hinge on new technological solutions, also rely on increasing amounts of raw materials, which so far, have been largely sourced from areas entrenched in settler colonialism, such as the Global South (Dorn, 2022). As Ramirez et al. (2023) state, “green colonialism is a novel form of exploitation and domination, with governments and corporations using climate change mitigation efforts to reinforce systemic oppression and perpetuate power imbalances in Indigenous territories,” (pp. 19-20). Furthermore, mining expert, Teresa Kramarz argues that climate solutions which rely on materials within Indigenous lands will further enable governments to dismiss the rights of

impacted communities, saying, “the urgency of this transition is also...in my view, threatening the kinds of careful consultations that need to take place, negotiations with communities that are going to be in zones of extraction and that are affected,” (Georgieva, 2023). Dayna Scott, advisor to Neskantaga First Nation, has indeed noted the communities concern about this latest justification for extraction, saying, “they are definitely worried that that will lead to governments thinking that they should fast track or expedite the mining,” (Karim, 2023). Validating narratives of sustainability and urgency, arguments which essentialize mining for a green transition and for the settler future, consequentially minimize and silence the opposition and alternative narratives of Northern First Nations (McIntosh, 2022b).

Lastly, while numerous policy changes and government promotion during the pandemic helped to pave the way for Ring of Fire development, more direct progress on mining the area also occurred. On March 2, 2020, a signing ceremony was performed between the Ontario Government and two of the previously mentioned First Nations, Marten Falls First Nation and Webequie First Nation, signalling an agreement to move forward in the creation of all-season roads which would connect their two communities and the Ring of Fire to Southern Ontario (Grech, 2020; Office of the Premier, 2020). Martin Falls and Webequie First Nation leadership stressed at the signing that their motives were to benefit all surrounding communities, with Martin Falls Chief Bruce Achneepineskum stating, “we are moving ahead with this agreement so all communities in the region can connect to the next phase, which is to secure and bring good-paying jobs in mining, construction and other skilled trades to our communities,” (Office of the Premier, 2020). Moreover, the Chief’s stressed that this was not a blanket agreement to development, noting that this was an initial step to ensure First Nations were, “true partners,” (Raymer, 2020) and maintained decision-making over their traditional territories which would

ensure sustainable practices (Kitching, 2020b). The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in future development decision-making is indeed integral; Not only regarding the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty, the right to dictate development on their own terms (McGregor et al., 2020), but also regarding the interconnected, reciprocal qualities within Indigenous ways of knowing which are necessary for a sustainable future (Breidlid et al., 2020; McGregor et al., 2020).

Though nonetheless, this partnership also displayed yet another example of the province's divide and conquer techniques (Wilt, 2020), as they attempted to frame this agreement, which only included two communities, as proof of First Nation consent, while the remaining First Nations involved were left out of the arrangement (Grech, 2020). Several First Nation leaders spoke out about the partnership and lack of consent from other surrounding communities. For example, Fort Albany Chief Leo Metatawabin drew attention to the government's duty to consult, saying,

It is deeply concerning that Fort Albany has been excluded from important intergovernmental leadership meetings on a project of this scale, which will have major impacts on its traditional territory... This raises serious concerns about free, prior and informed consent, the transparency and integrity of the environmental assessment processes, and whether Ontario is meeting its duty to consult (Grech, 2020)

Yet the agreement continued to move forward with the initiation of environmental assessments regarding road construction, as well as a federal regional assessment for the Ring of Fire. Consequentially, the decision to progress Ring of Fire development during the pandemic pit First Nations against one another, as well as limited Indigenous decision-making. For instance,

Neskantaga First Nation criticized the province and Webequie First Nation for moving ahead with consultations in September 2020 while they were occupied with community safety during the pandemic (Porter, 2020a), with Chief Chris Moonais stating, “people in our communities are overstretched and exhausted. It should be obvious that we would be currently unable to engage meaningfully with proponents and government bodies due to capacity issues and health and safety concerns stemming from the pandemic,” (Barrera, 2020). Chief Chris Moonais further illustrated the lack of respect the First Nation received when consultations nevertheless continued and the community’s safety and well-being during the pandemic was further impacted by a complete shutdown of water services, saying,

We’re in the middle of evacuation due to a water crisis, a public health emergency, and we are right in the middle of a pandemic. We’re not able to fully inform the community members on what is going on...and we do not support what the proponent communities are doing because of the fact that we cannot participate. (Turner, 2020b)

Neskantaga First Nation has been under a boil water advisory since 1995, resulting in numerous health impacts, including skin infections and mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder related to a deep-rooted distrust of water safety (Scott & Cowen, 2020; Ward, 2023). This lack of critical infrastructure (in addition to a housing shortage) demonstrates the compounding issues First Nations have managed in addition to the global pandemic, all while the government continued to prioritize the development of the mining industry (Scott & Cowen, 2020). In fact, the only location along the Attawapiskat River, where Neskantaga and other First Nations live, that has been provided continuous safe drinking water is the De Beers Victor Diamond Mine (Scott & Cowen, 2020), demonstrating that the installation of such water systems is possible, but only when it aligns with the government’s interests. A reality which makes

Premier Doug Ford's boast of jobs and infrastructure to accompany the Ring of Fire, seem less like a benevolent promise, and more like leverage held over communities who, for decades, have been denied their basic rights.

4.5.3 Theme 3: First Nations Continue to Enact Multiple Forms of IEJ

Indigenous peoples have been actively addressing the harmful decision-making of settler governments and industry for generations. The pandemic was, unfortunately, no exception. In addition to managing the exasperated consequences of COVID-19 within their communities, First Nations, through multiple forms, enacted resistance to ensure their well-being, and the well-being of future generations.

4.5.3.1 Case Study 1: Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba

As discussed, Manitoba Hydro has been building dams in Indigenous territory for decades without the consent of the local First Nations. At the same time, First Nations have been enacting solidarity and fighting to assert their sovereignty and hold Manitoba Hydro accountable for its past and ongoing harm, as notably observed by the formation of the NFC and the signing of the NFA in the 1970s. In connection, as Keeyask was presented by the industry as a departure from their past behaviour, some First Nations viewed the JKDA with tempered optimism and as a way to enact self-determination. For instance, during a 2013 Clean Environment Commission public hearing in York Factory, Former York Factory Chief Ted Bland discussed the difficulties of caring for his community while under the constraints of Federal Government funding, saying, “the Federal Government has a strangle hold on First Nations, they dictate everything, they dictate the amount of money that we get every month. We have to split it up with housing, education, social, infrastructure, and we can barely make it,” (Manitoba Clean Environment

Commission, 2013, pp. 51-52). In this sense, Keeyask was not just seen as an opportunity for new employment, but as a way to achieve autonomy from a settler state whose sustained neglect has caused the deterioration of well-being in the community. Far from ignorant of the harmful history of Manitoba Hydro, Bland notes their role in harming the land and waters (so much so that he no longer believes they can sustain their community), as well as the possible risk of this newest project. However, he reasonably concludes that participating in the projects may be worth the risks if it means a chance of alleviating some of the issues in his community and growing their independence from the government. Yet, as the project continued over the years, it became exceedingly evident that the partnership was balanced inequitably in Manitoba Hydro's favour. Whereas the partnership and its outward appearance of consent granted the industry a form of *social license*, allowing Manitoba Hydro to project themselves as a 'socially responsible' organization and source of energy (Dipple, 2022). First Nations conversely described the industry as failing to conduct themselves as equal partners, as well as adequately address the continuation of harm characteristic of past dams; As Band Councillor Nathan Neckoway stated, "we as the Cree Nation Partners are not being listened to. We're not being taken seriously about what's happening within the project. Racism, harassment, discrimination, even assaults, are happening at all levels within the project," (Stackelberg, 2019). Manitoba Hydro's consistent failure to listen to First Nations and treat them as true partners consequentially renders the resulting direct action by the four communities during the pandemic as rather inevitable.

Furthermore, as the collaboration between the four First Nations during the Lockdown presented a united front, as demonstrated in Figure 8 (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b), solidarity and support of the action was also demonstrated by the MKO (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a) and AMC (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a).



Figure 8. Image depicting solidarity at Keeyask Lockdown.

As well, the Allied Hydro Council of Manitoba, which is made up of 17 hydro construction and trade unions, also voiced support, as some groups had members working on the Keeyask project (Capkun, 2020; Manitoba Building Trades, n.d.). Amnesty International also expressed their solidarity with a press release which included a statement from their Indigenous Rights Campaign Advisor, Ana Collins,

Without question, these communities have an inherent responsibility and right to control access into their territories to protect their communities from COVID-19 and prevent unsustainable pressure on healthcare systems in rural and remote areas. Governments should be applauding and actively supporting these efforts, not ignoring the concerns of First Nations and criminalizing community Elders and leaders. (Amnesty International, 2020)

This statement from Collins succinctly captures the behaviour of Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government. As noted, criminalizing rhetoric was indeed displayed by the Manitoba

government and Manitoba Hydro who asserted the settler rule of law above that of Indigenous sovereignty (Bergen, 2020c; Sinclair, 2020). However, the normalized narrative and so-called authority of settler rule of law has been challenged by numerous Indigenous communities, activists and scholars over the years. For instance, Indigenous [Dene] scholar Glen Coulthard (2007) questions the effectiveness of recognition-based tactics (such as the aforementioned *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* Supreme Court case) for asserting Indigenous sovereignty and argues that attempts to gain recognition within the settler law system, “promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend,” (p. 439) since this recognition is dependent on the colonial structure whose authority is based solely on the racist ideals of the Doctrine of Discovery (Coulthard, 2007). In addition, by referring to the Kanesatake Resistance (Oka Crisis), Westra (1999) turned the practice of settler rule of law on its head by arguing that the actions of the Mohawk to prevent development on their land,

Should not be viewed as crimes against the law, but as self-defense, conscientious objection, and affirmation of religious and cultural self-identity. That in turn makes the actions of both police and government in support of ecological violence and repression possible forms of state terrorism. (p. 116)

In connection, Nicole Latulippe and Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Deborah McGregor discuss the impact of settler law and regulation in regard to Indigenous water governance. They argue that Canadian legislation, like the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, both asserts settler jurisdiction over Indigenous land, as well as, “violates inherent and Treaty rights,” (Latulippe & McGregor, 2022, p. 2) However, they go on to document an Anishinaabe community-led project titled “Zaagtoonaa Nibi (We Love the Water)”, in which they, “work

with the community to reconstruct their historical relationship and responsibilities to the water, and to research, explore, and engage the community on how best to reclaim their water rights and revitalize water laws (responsibilities),” (Latulippe & McGregor, 2022, p. 3). Moreover, other Indigenous peoples, such as the Wet’suwet’en, are actively asserting their laws and authority by practicing peaceful protests, blockades, evicting outside workers, and (re)occupying their traditional lands (Champ & Robidoux, 2021). All of these voices and actions demonstrate the myriad of ways Indigenous peoples have challenged the presumed neutrality and authority of settler rule of law. Community members participating in the Keeyask Lockdown also challenged the assumption of settler law, perhaps most distinctly when Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence tore up the injunction from Manitoba Hydro after receiving it from the RCMP (Bergen, 2020b). A powerful demonstration of leadership and a refusal to accede to settler authority, Nathan Neckoway recalled, “we all took a piece of that ripped injunction and put it in the fire.... It was very strong, what our chief did,” (Bergen, 2020b). In addition, Indigenous peoples have simultaneously and actively been resisting neoliberal ideologies that exist within settler states. Though, as Fenelon and Hall (2008) argue, “by their very continued existence, they [Indigenous peoples] pose a major challenge to neoliberal capitalism on the ground, politically, and ideologically,” (p. 1872) as Indigenous ways of being that centre reciprocity, relationships and communal well-being inherently conflict with a neoliberal ideology. By enacting a Lockdown, First Nations both enacted resistance towards the neoliberal ideology which prioritizes capital accumulation, as well as asserted their sovereignty, enforcing their right to decide who may enter their land in order to protect their community.

Moreover, by interpreting the Lockdown as an assertion of IEJ, the action clearly asserts a prioritization and responsibility to the relationships between community members; By halting

construction of the Keeyask project, the First Nations were demanding a true voice in pandemic decision-making that prioritises the safety of their communities by limiting the number of workers allowed on project work sites (Fiddler, 2020), as Tataskweyak Cree Nation Chief Doreen Spence explained, “bringing in a significant number of new workers to the Keeyask camp is an unacceptable and dangerous risk to our community...We have no other choice in order to protect our community, and all others in northern Manitoba,” (Sinclair, 2020). A position reiterated by Nathan Neckoway stating, “we are trying to do everything we can to protect the safety and wellness of our citizens. As a sovereign Nation, this is our right,” (The Canadian Press, 2020a). Similar sentiments were demonstrated across the country by Indigenous communities who proactively organized pandemic planning and implemented their own safety measures, including lockdowns and demands that ‘essential’ industrial projects be shut down. These assertions of sovereignty, demonstrations of solidarity among and across communities, and pre-emptive safety measures, while place-based and contextualized, also demonstrate First Nations acute awareness of the wider structures of settler colonialism which have enabled a long and harmful history of pandemics in Indigenous communities (Hallberg & Ladner, 2020). Some of these decisions were made within the understanding that COVID-19 is a very real threat, not only to Indigenous health, but to the very existence and continuation of Indigenous communities. This concern among Indigenous people spanned the world; for instance, on returning to her home in the Philippines, previous United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz stated her concern that COVID-19, “could wipe us off the map,” (Hansen, 2020). In Canada, this awareness was expressed throughout many news articles in respect to past pandemics experienced by the communities, systemic health issues, lack of infrastructure, ongoing environmental degradation, and concern for the particular vulnerability of

Elders and the impact their loss could have on the continuation of culture and traditions. For instance, president of Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, Judith Sayers, related this concern by saying, “our most vulnerable people are normally our most knowledgeable: They hold our histories, our protocols, our family lines, our traditional ecological knowledge,” (Hagar, 2020); A comment which further frames Indigenous actions, such as the Lockdown, as expressions of IEJ. As described by McGregor (2022) within the Anishinabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin*, IEJ is holistic, it incorporates many different aspects of well-being (including environmental health, sovereignty and self-determination) and calls for engagement in, “appropriate relationships with all of Creation, thereby establishing a sustainable and just world,” (p.12). Taking action to prioritize community health and safety, not only demonstrates an assertion of sovereignty and First Nations responsibility to relationships between one another, such action also serves to maintain Indigenous relationships with the world, both human and non-human, by preserving the knowledge and ways of being that are held and shared by Elders. This enactment of IEJ is not new, and has persevered and adapted throughout past pandemics, as Sayers reflects upon in a separate article regarding the many Nuu-chah-nulth communities whose lockdowns, which sometimes face opposition from local businesses, are born from past experiences, saying “we’ve learned things from those viruses... We’re protecting our people because the chiefs have said over and over again, people before economics,” (Hunter, 2020). Similarly, when implementing dissuasion points at the entrances to Oka provincial park, Kanesatake Grand Chief, Serge Simon reflected on how First Nation awareness of the history of pandemics within their communities had translated into these safety measures enacted when Quebec began to raise travel restrictions, “if you look at what decimated First Nations populations in the Americas, it was a virus: small pox, rubella, tuberculosis, Spanish flu... We were almost extinguished just by

a virus,” (Humphreys, 2020). Tataskweyak Cree Nation Chief, Doreen Spence made a similar statement, additionally connecting historical and present inequities faced by her First Nation to the legacy of hydro projects in the North, saying,

For the better part of the 20th century, Tataskweyak and other Indigenous communities have disproportionately borne the brunt of disease brought in from outsiders (and) the impacts of hydroelectric development in the province...An outbreak of COVID-19 in our community will continue this cycle and devastate our community. (Waldman, 2020)

The importance and validity of the Lockdown enforced by the four First Nations, in addition to their sovereign right to decide how to protect their community, is further demonstrated by numerous instances across Canada where a prioritization of industry projects did indeed result in the spread of COVID-19 to First Nation communities. Notably is a case that occurred prior to the Keeyask Lockdown. In April 2020, outbreaks within several Northern Saskatchewan First Nations, along with the death of two Elders, had been linked to the Alberta Kearl Oil Sands fly-in fly-out work camp (McIntosh, 2020b). The four First Nations in Manitoba were acutely aware of this outbreak and the role the work camp played in facilitating it, as War Lake First Nation Chief Betsy Kennedy stated in a May 19th, 2020 news release by the AMC,

During the current pandemic, we have seen the devastating effects that resource extraction projects and man camps can have on nearby First Nations in other Treaty areas. In fact, at least two beloved Elders of other First Nations have been exposed to COVID-19 as a result of resource extraction projects and, tragically, have lost their lives after succumbing to the effects of the novel coronavirus...We will not allow this to happen to our Elders. Injunctions and other legal fictions will not stop us as leaders from

doing what we must do, and that is protecting our peoples who are in turn protectors of our sacred lands, waters and air. (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a)

The very real consequences stemming from essentialized resource projects during the pandemic clearly played a role in the First Nations decision to enforce a Lockdown, as Nathan Neckoway expressed, “we don’t want a repeat of what happened in northern Saskatchewan. It only takes one person to infect the community,” (Lefebvre, 2020b). Moreover, Indigenous leadership directly challenged the very notion of a project like Keeyask being essential, with MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee reasonably clarifying that the dam was not providing an essential service, the, “construction site is not providing any hydro-electric power at this point,” (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a) it is just a structure being built. Yet, as the pandemic stretched on, resource/extraction projects remained categorized as ‘essential’, and as Indigenous leadership and First Nations anticipated, the relationship between COVID-19 outbreaks and work camps continued to grow. For instance, there were numerous outbreaks at oil sands work camps across Alberta, including those at Syncrude, Chevron, Suncor, Imperial Oil, and Canadian Natural project locations (Tuttle, 2020); by the fourth wave of the pandemic in 2021, more than 5,000 oilsands workers had confirmed cases of COVID-19, with over 400 of those workers travelling from out of province (McDermott, 2021). Notably, rather than requiring the movement of workers, “from various parts of Canada and the United States, including regions hit hard by COVID-19 such as Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia,” (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a), Manitoba First Nations provided (and demanded) an alternative mode of action which would prioritize community safety. A press release by MKO, which included a statement from York Factory First Nation Chief, Leroy Constant, describes this solution put forth by the First Nations,

We have raised the issue of putting Keeyask into ‘care and maintenance mode,’ which would mean the operation is reduced to 250 workers without advancing construction. If Manitoba Hydro was to reduce the number of people working at the project while we come to terms with this pandemic, it would show respect for the concerns we have for our people’s health and wellness. (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a)

While Manitoba Hydro continued to refuse slowing down construction to that degree, on May 23, 2020, leadership of the four First Nations did meet with Manitoba Hydro’s president and an agreement was made that apparently involved more decision-making power for the First Nations along with the removal of the blockades (Hatherly, 2020; Rutgers, 2020). A press release by MKO stated,

The agreement made between the Chiefs and Manitoba Hydro includes the removal of blockades, the lifting of the injunction against Tataskweyak Cree Nation, as well as planning exercises, a move towards implementing the project plan for Keeyask, and an in-person meeting between the CEO and the leadership of the four Cree Nations. (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b)

The agreement also included the recommencement of regular shipments of supplies to the construction site as well as a gradual increase to 1,000 workers which are required to test negative for COVID-19 prior to arriving (Graham, 2020). MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee described the agreement as a move forward, saying,

I think that people are happy because that’s what they wanted. They wanted to have their voice heard and they wanted to be respected as partners and they also wanted to ensure

that these decisions that are being made are not in exclusion of them...They had no decision making, they had no input. (Hatherly, 2020)

While Manitoba Hydro remained fairly quiet and vague about the agreement in the media, a spokesperson did describe it as both a win for the industry and the First Nations, saying, “Manitoba Hydro is pleased that we were able to reach an understanding with our Keeyask Cree Nation partners that will see construction on Keeyask resume safely, while protecting both workers and the surrounding communities,” (DePatie, 2020b). However, the industry’s dismissive behaviour, and not to mention avoidance of accountability, would not be so easily forgotten, as York Factory First Nation Chief, Leroy Constant stated in a press release,

This was an extremely frustrating and unnecessary situation. If Manitoba Hydro had fully engaged with its Cree partners from the beginning, this situation would not have happened. We are living in a pandemic and we know what is best for our communities. (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b)

This frustration expressed in regards to the problematic ‘partnership’ during the Lockdown also demonstrates Manitoba Hydro’s contradictory nature of framing themselves and their relationships with Indigenous peoples as beneficial and benevolent, while continuing to conduct colonial behaviour which disregards the rights of community members. Manitoba Hydro ignored and limited the decision-making power of the First Nations to the point where, “it took a stance from the First Nations to be able to get that message across,” (Hatherly, 2020) as stated by MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee. This behaviour is simply not consistent with an industry whose Indigenous Relations Commitment Statement characterizes the industry as, “committed to

respecting and supporting Indigenous peoples in all aspects of our business,” (Manitoba Hydro, n.d.b).

As the pandemic progressed, the inequitable relationship between Manitoba Hydro and its First Nation ‘partners’ continued to cause friction. In November 2020, as the four First Nations predicted, there was a COVID-19 outbreak with workers at the Keeyask generating station and again, Manitoba Hydro displayed a lack of transparency and inadequacy of managing First Nations concerns which impacted their ability to protect their communities (Petz, 2020). First Nation leadership called for a temporary shutdown of Keeyask with York Factory First Nation Chief Leroy Constant deeming the worksite a potential, “super spreader,” for the virus due to the project’s proximity to the communities, combined with the employment of approximately 200 community members (Hobson, 2020c). The four First Nations again had the support of the MKO and AMC and utilized the media quite effectively to illustrate Manitoba Hydro’s failure to manage the outbreak. In addition, it was pointed out in a November 4 press release by the MKO that the promises made by Manitoba Hydro in the blockade agreement with the First Nations, regarding the removal of the injunction and inclusion in pandemic planning had yet to be honoured (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020c). Furthermore, Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence importantly called attention to the long and familiar nature of Manitoba Hydro’s behavior towards the First Nations saying, “it’s business as usual for Manitoba Hydro... We’re not involved and we’re only called partners when it suits them,” (Frew, 2020b). Furthermore, a MKO press release included Chief Doreen Spence recounting the now undeniably valid actions of the Keeyask Lockdown in the spring, saying, “we were forced to lockdown the north, to protect our members and communities, and have our concerns taken seriously. Now our worst fears have come true. (Manitoba Keewatinowi

Okimakanak, 2020c). However, Manitoba Hydro again failed to respect the wishes of its First Nations partners and unilaterally decided to increase the workforce just a few weeks later, notably while the province was experiencing the highest per capita infection rate in Canada and the second highest number of on-reserve First Nation COVID-19 cases (Pauls, 2020).

The November outbreak at Keeyask also notably coincided with Manitoba Hydro's first Corporate Social Responsibility Report. The report made numerous claims, framing Manitoba Hydro as a responsible and accountable industry regarding their relationship with First Nations. For instance, the report claimed, "our organization first established mitigation programming in the late 1970s to address the past, present and ongoing effects of historical hydroelectric development," (Manitoba Hydro, 2020b, p. 34) pointing specifically to the NFA. However, as discussed, not only was the NFA pushed for by Northern First Nations, but Manitoba Hydro also actively undermined and refused to adhere to the agreement. Numerous similar claims in the report led AMC to release a statement contesting such virtuous framing of the industry, with Grand Chief Arlen Dumas stating,

It is astonishing and deeply disappointing that Hydro would seek to congratulate and pat themselves on the back on their self-proclaimed Corporate Social Responsibility Report while completely ignoring First Nations and the glaring issues that the AMC has brought to their attention on multiple occasions. What they have done is an exercise in shiny public relations rhetoric. They have avoided and denied any meaningful engagement, consultation or collaboration with First Nations in Manitoba. (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020c)

In February 2021, just a few months after the Keeyask outbreak, and a full six months ahead of schedule, Keeyask's first unit turned on and began generating electricity (Rosen, 2021). Yet with project costs increasing from the initial budget of \$6.5 billion to \$8.5 billion and a 2020-2021 reported net loss of \$2 million by the four First Nation partners, the extent of benefits the First Nations will receive from Manitoba Hydro's newest dam is unclear (CBC News, 2021b; Da Silva, 2022). In connection, on February 11, 2022, York Factory released a statement calling for a rewrite of their agreement with Manitoba Hydro on the basis that the economic benefits promised to the community are no longer feasible and will be far outweighed by the social and environmental costs (York Factory First Nation, 2022). Noted additional costs by the First Nation include cost overruns and schedule delays, along with unaddressed systemic racial and gender discrimination, increased COVID-19 risks due to workers and an increase in drug flow and drug use in the community. Furthermore, the press release states, "the benefits to our people from contracts and employment are currently overshadowed by a mental health crisis and an epidemic of addictions in our community that is unlike anything we have seen before," (York Factory First Nation, 2022). The demand for a rewrite was seemingly acknowledged, as an updated version of the financial terms for the JKDA was signed on July 31, 2023 (Keeyask Hydropower Limited Partnership, 2024). It is unclear if all the First Nations wishes were respected; The agreement available through the Keeyask Hydropower Limited Partnership (2024) website is bereft of any mention of how Manitoba Hydro will address the many social, health and cultural impacts of the dam, however the new agreement does promise an increase in distribution payments and annual partnership revenue for the four First Nations.

Furthermore, the industry has seen some recent changes post-pandemic. Under NDP Premier Wab Kinew's leadership, the former Progressive Conservative government's order,

which restricted Manitoba Hydro from engaging with First Nations, was removed in 2023 (Kives, 2023; Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2023). The Manitoba Hydro board was also replaced, resulting in the firing of CEO Jay Grewal, a decision which was commended by the AMC who characterized the previous CEO's management as lacking in both their reconciliation efforts and meaningful engagement (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2024). The new CEO, Allan Danroth, began the position on August 6, 2024, and a week later, board members travelled to Gillam to meet with the leadership of the four First Nations, a trip which had not been made by the hydro board since 2015 (Sanders, 2024). While leadership from Tataskweyak and York Factory First Nation were unable to attend due to wildfire management, Manitoba Hydro board Chairman Ben Graham stated he believed the trip presented, "a real spirit of collaboration and moving forward ... of 'how do we work together in the future?'" (Sanders, 2024). However, as demonstrated throughout this case study, Manitoba Hydro is very adept at voicing good intentions, while following through on those promises is another story. Consequently, First Nations are not passively waiting for change to come from within the industry and have actively continued to practice different modes of IEJ. A notable action occurred in December 2021 as a national class-action lawsuit, which was co-founded by Tataskweyak First Nation and involved numerous First Nations under drinking water advisories across the country, won an \$8 billion settlement from Canada (APTN National News, 2021). Due to pollution caused by Manitoba Hydro development (Kulchyski, 2004; Shebahkeget, 2023) Tataskweyak First Nation had been under a boil advisory since 2017, and as part of the settlement, is now set to receive a new water pipeline and treatment centre by 2025 (Government of Canada, 2024b). Though another aspect of the settlement, the co-development of Bill C-61: First Nations Clean Water Act, which is meant to affirm First Nation sovereignty over water and ensure safe drinking water for future

generations, is still underway (Cimellaro, 2024). Unfortunately, the bill has been facing criticism from multiple First Nations, including the Vice-Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations who stated that the language of Bill 61 conversely,

Narrows our jurisdiction until there is very little room to move...Fresh water will become highly valuable in the near future, and we see the legislative overreach and C-61 as part of a larger strategy of Canada to strengthen their decision-making over water. (APTN National News, 2024)

This comment reflects past issues with First Nation water governance. Latulippe and McGregor (2022) have similarly argued that the previous legislation in place, the 2013 Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, was just, “another settler-state assertion of jurisdiction over First Nations lands that violates inherent and Treaty rights,” (p. 2). Evidently, while First Nations technically won the class-action lawsuit which forced Canada to implement new legislation, ensuring that legislation does not simply follow in the settler colonial footsteps of its predecessor remains an ongoing issue.

A more recent demonstration of IEJ can be observed by the Southern Chiefs’ Organization (SCO), who issued a Statement of Claim to Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government regarding their negligent treatment of Lake Winnipeg which has resulted in environmental, social, and economic impacts for numerous First Nations (Bettens, 2024). SCO, with the support of several water protectors, is demanding that Lake Winnipeg (Weeniibiikiisagaygun) be declared a living entity and provided Charter Rights (Bettens, 2024; Southern Chiefs’ Organization, 2024). This is a legal distinction which would reflect the relationality of the First Nations worldviews, as described by Indigenous [Anishinaabe] water

protector and researcher Taylor Galvin, “Weeniibiikiisagaygun is our greatest teacher...we are part of her, and she is part of us. Sadly, her spirit and health are slowly dissipating. We must listen to her as she carries a spirit and teachings,” (Southern Chiefs’ Organization, 2024). Moreover, this action is in keeping with Indigenous [Anishinaabe] scholar Myrle Ballard’s concept of three-eyed seeing (Co-management Commons, 2024), a research method which highlights our responsibility to listen and learn from the non-human world around us, to respect and give voice to those who cannot speak for themselves, such as Weeniibiikiisagaygun.

Furthermore, this action is also in keeping with the Rights of Nature movement; Stemming from varied ideas of ecocentrism and Indigenous worldviews, assigning nature legal personhood has been a tactic utilized by Indigenous peoples around the world. A notable example is the Treaty of Waitangi which granted personhood to lands and waters in Te Urewera, the traditional territory of the Tūhoe people of Aotearoa New Zealand (Tănăsescu, 2020). This concept challenges the western dichotomy of people/nature and the neoliberal ideology which frames nature as a resource and commodity, while also recognizing and making room for Indigenous ways of knowing, including the understanding that nature has inherent value (Guzmán, 2019; Valladares & Boelens, 2017). The Rights of Nature movement is not without its critiques and limitations, and has been performed with various levels of success, however it does present an opportunity for IEJ by offering, “an epistemological, legal, and political resistance platform for indigenous peoples,” (Guzmán, 2019, p. 62). In Québec, the Magpie River (Muteshekau Shipu) became the first body of water to be granted legal personhood in Canada and was the result of a joint effort by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality in 2021 (Townsend et al., 2021). So, the granting of personhood to water is not entirely new in Canada. However, the accompanying rights, such as that to sue and be sued,

has not yet been enforced and/or challenged in Canadian courts (Berge, 2022). Therefore, if the SCO are successful in granting Lake Winnipeg personhood, the actual ability for the lake to be able to hold the province and Manitoba Hydro accountable for decades of mistreatment, is still rather uncertain. What is certain, is the continued determination of First Nations in Manitoba to adapt and assert justice; Whether through direct action, such as the Lockdown, through the western legal system, such as class action lawsuits, or through a new, pluralistic legal system which enables collaboration and mutual respect for different ways of being, First Nations visions and enactment of justice continue to resist and challenge the neoliberal settler colonial ideologies which have sustained industries like Manitoba Hydro for far too long.

4.5.3.2 Case Study 2: Ring of Fire, Ontario

For millennia, First Nations within the Ring of Fire region have asserted their rights, jurisdiction, laws, protocols and traditions, and have continued to do so in the face of harmful colonial frameworks such as Treaty 9, which have nonetheless resulted in a lack of infrastructure and safe drinking water, as well as systemic health issues, including addiction and suicide (Scott, 2023). Various actions initiated by communities throughout the years may be understood within an IEJ framework, as they have been shaped and driven by Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being, as described by Neskantaga First Nation Chief Wayne Moonias,

We believe that our lands are held collectively by our community, and our Anishinaabe laws require us to collectively manage and protect our homelands. We have our own forms of governance, protocols, law, authority, and jurisdiction, which are informed by the foundational principles of: *Mino-bimaadiziwin*, good life; *Onda-tisiwin*, the source of life; and *Bima-chiwin*, the sustaining of life. ... These *aadizookaanag*, or “sacred

teachings,” are passed on orally from generation to generation so that we will always know who we are, where we come from, how we fit into the world, and how we need to behave in order to ensure a long life. (Scott, 2023, p. 70)

McGregor (2022) has similarly described the Anishinabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin* (well-being) as a guiding concept, “involving living on respectful and reciprocal terms with all of Creation on multiple planes,” (p. 12) which may be utilized to envision and guide Indigenous forms of justice. In keeping with Chief Moonias’s description of Anishinaabe law, a responsibility to collectively care for the land, in 2011, the Matawa Tribal Council renewed the solidarity between its nine First Nations with a Unity Declaration and faced the previous Wynne Liberal Ontario government as a united front in negotiations for developing the Ring of Fire. Concerned about the impacts of mining, yet committed to addressing their communities growing economic and infrastructure needs, the Matawa Tribal Council initiated a process of negotiating with the provincial government in 2013, who together signed a Regional Framework Agreement (Scott, 2023). These negotiations, “attempted to craft wide-reaching agreements on major challenges such as inherent jurisdiction, revenue sharing and environmental assessment,” (Scott et al., 2020). However, over the years, talks between the nine First Nations and the provincial government broke down, with several First Nations speaking out about the lack of respect for their decision-making shown by the Wynne Liberal government, with Chief Elizabeth Atlookan of Eabametoong First Nation saying, “we have worked on community-based solutions for how to do this the right way – carefully considering all the impacts and development scenarios so we can arrive at informed regional consensus, but our suggestions are not taken seriously,” (Vis, 2018). In 2018, the newly elected Ford Progressive Conservative government ended the agreement altogether (Scott et al., 2020) in exchange for creating individual deals with

communities (Barrera, 2018); with Greg Rickford, Ministry of Energy, Mines, Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs justifying the move as Ontario, “taking a new, pragmatic approach to unlocking the Ring of Fire’s potential, one that includes working directly with willing First Nation partners,” (Jeffords, 2019) who, “want to move at the speed of business” (Thompson, 2019). Many First Nation leaders criticised the actions of the government as divide and conquer tactics designed to forward infrastructure development for the Ring of Fire by only dealing with First Nations who are in favour of road development, as Chief Elizabeth Atlookan stated, “it caused a rift among the nations,” (Barrera, 2018). The Ford government’s action to scrap the agreement and ignore the solidarity of First Nations demonstrates both a dismissal of Indigenous law, as well as a disregard for the authority of the Matawa First Nations.

However, despite government intentions, which were strategically pursued during the pandemic, Indigenous communities have continued to voice their concern and take action regarding potential development on their lands. For instance, First Nations were incredibly vocal in their opposition to Bill 197, with some, such as Fort Albany Chief, Leo Metatawabin, calling for the bill to be repealed and criticizing the government’s economic priorities, saying,

These changes are part of an ongoing effort by this government to overhaul Ontario’s environmental protection regime in support of its promise to ‘cut red tape’ in support of economic interests...Too often this has seemed to mean weakening protections for vulnerable species and ecosystems based on the false idea that we can have a healthy economy without a healthy environment. (De Luigi, 2020)

While Jonathan Solomon, former Grand Chief of the Mushkegowuk Council dismissed the idea that Bill 197 modernised or improved environmental protections, saying the changes were a,

“major step back,” (De Luigi, 2020) for environmental assessments, as well for treaty relations between the Ontario government and First Nations within Treaty 9 territory. Solomon drew attention to treaty promises that ensure Indigenous consultation on matters affecting their territory, notably pointing to the findings of Treaty Commissioner, MacMartin’s diary (De Luigi, 2020). Solomon stipulated treaty promises as those that were heard and understood by the Indigenous signatories, stating, “those promises are part of the bedrock of our nation to nation treaty relationship...my peoples’ use, and control of our homelands was recognized and affirmed, permanently,” (De Luigi, 2020). These comments both assert Indigenous sovereignty over traditional territory, as well as hold the Ontario government accountable to agreements made between two nations, promises that cannot be dismissed by a bill created and passed without Indigenous consultation, as Solomon states, “those rights and obligations require that your government, and resource companies given permits by your government, cannot proceed with projects in our Aski/homeland, in our forests, on our waterways, on our ore-bearing lands, without our consent,” (De Luigi, 2020). Chris Moonias, Chief of Neskantaga First Nation also asserted his First Nation’s authority and drew connections between Bill 197 and Treaty 9, noting the long held industrial priorities of the Ontario government that can be traced back to the writing of Treaty 9, saying,

We all know that when Ontario and Canada made Treaty their goal was simple; to get our people off the land to make way for mining, forestry, dams and other so-called developments...Bill 197 is just the latest in the long history of attempts by Ontario to break the Treaty and violate our rights. The reality is that without the consent of our people resource development in the North simply will not happen (TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020)

Furthermore, as the government continued to ignore demands to reverse the bill, Several First Nations, with the support of the Chiefs of Ontario (an organization of 133 First Nations) collaborated together to file a lawsuit against the government regarding Bill 197 (McIntosh, 2020f). The group argued the Ontario government both failed in their duty to consult prior to passing the bill, and that following promises made to consult about the changes of the bill were insincere due to the province's failure to provide the funding which would enable adequate expertise and legal representation (Kitching, 2020c). In September 2021, the courts did find that Ontario broke the law with Bill 197, however the ruling was limited to the government's failure to, "satisfy the requirements of the EBR [Environmental Bill of Rights]," (Ecojustice, 2021) by not consulting the public regarding the ministerial zoning order changes in the Planning Act (Oromoni, 2021). This ruling was in response to a separate court case led by CELA which represented the environmental groups Earthroots and Ontario Nature, as well as a 16-year-old activist named Cooper Price and Michel Koostachin of Attawapiskat First Nation (McIntosh, 2021a). The lack of other public and Indigenous consultation for the bill was deemed permissible, as the courts recognized the bill's, "retroactive deeming provision," (Oromoni, 2021) which exempted them from consultation required in the Environmental Bill of Rights, (Oromoni, 2021). As well, courts dismissed the First Nations challenge to changes made to the Environmental Assessment Act and Bill 197, arguing that they, "did not provide sufficient evidence," (Dino, 2024) that said changes would adversely impact their rights. This decision demonstrates yet another example of settler colonial erasure of Indigenous law and jurisdiction (not to mention the likely land alienation resulting from the legislative changes) which continues to be enabled by settler courts that are, in part, designed to ensure continued settler privatization and economic utilization of land (King et al., 2019). Indigenous authority and self-determination

will continue to be dismissed so long as settler courts privilege the Crown's underlying jurisdiction and claim of the right to decide when and what requires the Crown's duty to consult (King et al., 2019).

As the pandemic wore on, First Nations continued to express their opposition to the government's methods to develop the Ring of Fire without their consent. For instance, in 2023, Chief Chris Moonias notably contextualized the current mining push within the history of First Nations relationship with Ontario's mining industry, describing other First Nations who have suffered from mining and unfulfilled promises, saying,

Looking at other projects that are around, I don't see Attawapiskat prospering from the Victor Mine. They're still under a boil water advisory, there's still a lack of houses. I've seen other communities, other nations around Musslewhite that haven't really prospered from those... We want to make sure that if, if we're ever going to decide to allow development, we want to make sure that we meaningfully participate, and we benefit. (Ward, 2023)

However, in March 2023, terms of reference for the environmental assessments of all three roads became final (McIntosh, 2023a). As well, that Fall, the courts dismissed the legal action against the province launched by Neskantaga First Nation (Ross, 2023c), whose challenge was, "about the extent of the Duty to Consult and Accommodate Indigenous communities in crisis, as it relates to Environmental Assessments in Ontario," (Scott, 2023, p. 79). The case concerned the failure of Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act to specifically require consultations with First Nations, of which Scott (2023) has argued,

The Act completely fails to implement the unique duties imposed by the settler state legal regime -- the DTCA [duty to consult and accommodate], the Honour of the Crown, and the principles of reconciliation. Additionally, and more importantly, the regime fails to account for the conditions on the ground in affected First Nations. (p. 79)

The settler colonial mechanisms of the act which fail to ensure the provinces duty to consult, coupled with the act's failure to, "not contemplate any situation where a First Nation faces additional, extraordinary barriers to participating in consultation activities," (Scott, 2023, p. 80) such as the COVID-19 pandemic, combined to enable disaster capitalism: legitimizing and progressing Ring of Fire development during the pandemic by legally allowing Indigenous rights to be ignored. This was further enabled by the Ontario Superior court who denied any responsibility or authority to judge the extent of the provinces duty to consult, let alone make any changes to the act (Ross, 2023c). Yet, regardless of the court's maintenance of settler law and refusal to acknowledge Treaty and inherent Indigenous rights, Neskantaga First Nation has continued to express their opposition to the project.

Moreover, without the full consent of all First Nations, Chief Moonias has wisely warned the province, "you don't have stability when you don't have all the First Nations that are going to be impacted on board," (McIntosh, 2023a), arguing that the government's actions were not only ensuring strong opposition from the communities, but also creating uncertainty for investors in the Ring of Fire. This notion was also reiterated by Marten Falls First Nation Chief Achneepineskum (one of the road proponents) who stated, "as I see it, if we don't have the willing participation from other communities in the nearby area, things will be delayed and even halted," (Scott, 2023, p. 78). This was a salient point, as Indigenous rights and sovereignty have become an increasingly important aspect of investor certainty and confidence in resource

projects; While the settler state has fought to maintain the myth of terra nullius, which negates Indigenous rights, Indigenous peoples continued assertion of the contrary has gained both recognition and numerous legal victories (Blackburn, 2005). So much so that failing to gain Indigenous support and consent, which often leads to legal and direct action by First Nations, has increasingly resulted in large settlements or an increase in project costs (Hofschneider, 2024). For instance, Fredericks et al. (2018) performed a financial analysis regarding the impacts stemming from Indigenous opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). The analysis estimated that costs incurred by investors, “with an ownership stake in DAPL for the entire project are not less than \$7.5 billion,” (Fredericks et al., 2018, pp. 3-4) with the analysis further concluding, “companies must create disclosures inclusive of social risks so that investors can have a clear understanding of the total risks inherent in a development project,” (Fredericks et al., 2018, p. 4). This was advice that mining company Noront (Ring of Fire Metals) did not heed, as in 2021, Osgoode Hall Law School’s Environmental Justice and Sustainability Clinic found that, in Noront’s submission to the Ontario Securities Commission, “the company had disclosed almost nothing about the fierce Indigenous opposition to its projects in Ontario’s Ring of Fire region,” (Scott & Peerla, 2021). The company did however reference partnerships with Martin Falls and Webequie First Nation, presenting the illusion of stability and Indigenous support (Scott & Peerla, 2021) in a similar fashion to which Premier Doug Ford has presented the partnership. As industry and government strive to avoid constitutional and inherent duties to consultation for extraction projects, this kind of social licence garnered through agreements with First Nations, such as impact-benefit agreements and memorandums of understanding, are becoming more commonplace. As Scott and Boisselle (2019) argue, these deals are becoming a, “‘stand-in’ for expressions of consent in neoliberal frameworks...The successful conclusion of a

deal provides both crucial legitimization for political actors supporting contested resource projects, and a valued asset for companies seeking to market their projects to potential investors,” (p. 5).

This illusion has apparently succeeded, at least somewhat, within the Ring of Fire, as after months of negotiating a takeover battle, Noront was purchased in late 2021 by Australian-owned Wyloo Metals (Reuters, 2021). This deal was later finalized in April 2022 with the company rebranding Noront into Ring of Fire Metals (MacDonald, 2022), a name which clearly highlights the company’s interest, not to mention confidence, in mining the area.

Furthermore, while the development of EAs has continued, there remains to be formidable opposition and criticism regarding the design of the assessments. Scott et al. (2020) indeed highlights the historic lack of inclusion of Indigenous peoples, their ways of knowing and their rights in western EAs, arguing,

Traditional assessment methods are woefully inadequate for considering the potential regional impacts of the Ring of Fire on the land, waters and communities. The roles and responsibilities that Indigenous peoples take on as ecological stewards, in tandem with their spiritual and cultural connection to the land, are poorly understood and generally have not been integrated into federal and provincial project level assessment mechanisms. (pp. 5-6)

The environmental assessments have also been criticized as failing to holistically analyse the area, and in response to demands for a more cumulative assessment from Aroland First Nation, the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada and the Osgoode Environmental Justice and Sustainability Clinic, the federal government agreed to additionally perform a regional assessment for the Ring of Fire in 2020 (Kitching, 2020a). However, the regional assessment has

also failed to establish itself as an improvement from small scale, paternalistic assessment processes, as argued by Attawapiskat, Eabametoong, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, and Neskantaga First Nation in a letter to Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault in January 2022 (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022; Turner, 2022a). In the letter, the chiefs characterize the regional assessment as reckless, dangerous, narrow in scope and exclusionary towards Indigenous peoples, “from all but token roles,” (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022). The First Nations strongly assert their sovereignty, and longstanding relationship with and responsibility to the environment, stating,

We Indigenous Nations are born of the Breathing Lands and it is our duty to protect them. The Breathing Lands need us as its guardians. We have millennia of knowledge, wisdom and a holistic worldview that understands these Lands. We have Inherent Jurisdiction to carry out our responsibilities here. We do not need the Crown’s permission to do so. You baldly assert sovereignty here; we have it. What we have asked you to do is to stop sabotaging our efforts and to instead use your laws and tools to work with us. (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022)

The First Nations further called for a redesign of the regional assessment, demanding the creation of an Indigenous governing body that will ensure the assessment is, “equally co-developed and co-led and co-enforced,” (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022) by Indigenous people. The letter also reminded the government that failing to meet these demands would result in a reinforcement of the moratorium put in place in 2021 that, in part, also stemmed from the lack of Indigenous involvement and decision-making in the regional assessment. The moratorium was initiated by three First Nations: Attawapiskat, Fort Albany and Neskantaga First Nation, in response to the government’s continued dismissal of their concerns (Papineau,

2021). Specifically, The First Nation's referred to the Ontario and Federal Government's continued development of the terms of reference for the regional assessment during the pandemic, despite an agreement made with First Nations to postpone until the communities were not so preoccupied with COVID-19 (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022). The First Nations argued that Ontario and the Federal Government were ignoring Indigenous law, inherent rights, treaty rights, UNDRIP, and Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution by disregarding their authority and restricting their right to develop the area on their terms, which would ensure a sustained environment for future generations (Attawapiskat First Nation et al., 2022).

In February 2023, Minister Guilbeault finally agreed to co-develop new terms of reference with the First Nations and a draft was expected to be released in 2024 (Hessey, 2023b; McIntosh, 2023a), however, as of writing, it is still under review. Furthermore, one of the latest comments posted to the Government of Canada site by Charles Hookimaw, a community member of Kattawapiskak (Attawapiskat) First Nation, rejected the most recent draft created by the Co-Led Regional Assessment Working Group. The October 1, 2024, comment argued that the draft, "lacks clear, objective and attainable provisions for guiding the regional assessment to understand the potential and real cumulative impacts in the headwaters and watershed of Kattawapiskak Sipi (Attawapiskat River)," (Hookimaw, 2024, p. 1). The comment notably contextualizes the Ring of Fire within the history of harm to First Nations stemming from resource development, bolstering the need for an adequate adverse effects assessment, "in order to rebuild credibility," (Hookimaw, 2024, p. 2) regarding the reputation of industry proponents, as well as the government. The comment also details the draft's continued disregard for a holistic assessment which recognizes oral and written Treaty 9, as well as inherent Indigenous rights, further describing the draft's continued failure to consider and address the social, economic,

spiritual and health issues which are currently experienced by First Nations, and which will likely increase due to mining development (Hookimaw, 2024). The apparent continuation of such issues within the 2024 draft, which had been similarly brought up by First Nations during the first draft of the regional assessment, does not instil much optimism towards the most recent attempt from the government to adequately co-develop the assessment. Moreover, it lends credence to the need for an Indigenous-led assessment (Scott et al., 2023), as the settler colonial ideology guiding the structure of the current regional assessment exemplifies the veracity that, “dominant Western political, structural, and legal systems do not often serve the interests of Indigenous peoples in Canada,” (McGregor, 2022, p. 12). With McGregor (2022) further arguing that, “it is reasonable to assume that continuing to rely on government and other non-Indigenous systems to resolve environmental injustices may not serve Indigenous peoples in the manner necessary and may in fact be to our detriment,” (p. 13). While continuing to fight for a truly co-led, decolonized regional assessment is important, a collaborative, holistic, Indigenous-led framework (such as those begun by the Matawa Tribal Council, NAN and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in the past) which encompass the many First Nations visions and needs, and which is, “based on the worldview, philosophies, traditions, and values that govern Indigenous peoples’ relationships with the natural world,” (McGregor, 2022, p. 13) may also serve as a way to enact IEJ within the area.

In recent years, Treaty 9 First Nations have indeed been enacting IEJ in many ways, challenging the settler colonial and neoliberal ideologies informing the Ring of Fire development. For instance, in April 2023, ten First Nations launched legal action against Ontario, arguing that the province has repeatedly violated Treaty 9 by passing numerous laws and regulations which have enabled resource extraction without Indigenous consent (McIntosh,

2023c) and restricted Indigenous use of land (Nay, 2023). As previously noted, the rediscovered treaty commissioner diary confirmed that oral promises were made to Indigenous peoples, assuring that Treaty 9 would not restrict their continuation of traditional activities (MacMartin, 1905). This lawsuit, which aims to create a co-jurisdictional relationship between First Nations and the province, is both a challenge of the Ontario government's continued colonial interpretation of the treaty, as well it is an assertion that First Nations did not cede their land, and indeed maintain sovereignty and jurisdiction over their territories, including the Ring of Fire (McIntosh, 2023c; Nay, 2023). Moreover, this action is a revitalization of Indigenous ways of knowing; As Whyte (2021) explains, many Indigenous peoples practiced treaty-making as a way to foster kinship relationships between nations pre-colonization. After settlers arrived, Whyte argues that a form of IEJ was treaty-making with settlers, the intention being to, "forge bonds of kinship," (2021, p. 273) and create a reciprocal relationship between two peoples. However, "despite Indigenous peoples' intentions to maintain kinship relationships through treaties, their treaty rights have been repeatedly violated," (2021, p. 273). The lawsuit may then be understood as an attempt to rectify and reform the treaty into what it should have been from the beginning, inserting Indigenous sovereignty and concepts of reciprocity which, during its initial creation, were denied and erased.

In connection, six First Nations jointly launched legal action against the province in August 2024 (McIntosh, 2024b). The First Nations are challenging the province's free-entry system sanctioned within the Mining Act, arguing the legislation violates their Treaty and Charter rights, as Apitipi Anicinapek Chief June Black stated,

The Ontario Mining Act is a piece of racist legislation that bulldozes over First Nations lands and rights...It says to the world that the land in Ontario is free for the taking and

drilling and blowing up. These are not your lands to give away, Ontario. (McIntosh, 2024b)

A few weeks earlier, a Treaty 3 First Nation, Grassy Narrows (Asubpeeschoseewagong Anishinabek) also took legal action against the province regarding the Mining Act, similarly arguing the free-entry system violates their treaty rights, as well as UNDRIP (Law, 2024). The occurrence of these near identical challenges is not accidental, they are a direct result of the provinces recent promotion and prioritization of the Ring of Fire, coupled with industry friendly legislation which, in recent years, has further enabled prospecting by allowing the staking of mining claims online (McIntosh, 2024a). According to the non-profit Wildlands League (2023), there has been a surge of mining claims over the last few years, with 2023 producing the highest number of claims registered in the last six years, totalling more than 31,000 in the Ring of Fire region. The exponential growth of claims is understandably overwhelming First Nations who are already managing numerous emergencies in community and do not have the resources to review each jargon-leaden claim, as Neskantaga First Nation Chief Moonias states, “we are busy making sure that our nation members are being taken care of and we can’t be worrying about hundreds of notices that we get for mining claims,” (Law, 2023c). The six First Nations legal action, if won, would remove the free-entry system and insert required consultation within the Mining Act, shifting priorities away from the mining industry and towards the well-being and rights of First Nations (McIntosh, 2024b).

In addition to legal action, the Land Defence Alliance (LDA), a grass roots coalition of several First Nations, is a demonstration of both Indigenous solidarity and direct action. The LDA was founded in January 2023, when four First Nations: Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (Grassy Narrows), Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (Big Trout Lake First Nation),

Wapekeka First Nation and Neskantaga First Nation, signed a mutual cooperation agreement (Carver, 2023). Muskrat Dam First Nation and Onigaming First Nation later joined the group (Stimpson, 2024) of Treaty 9 and Treaty 3 First Nations who all have a long history of managing issues related to land encroachment and have experienced a sharp rise in mining claims after Premier Ford took office in 2018 (Karim, 2023). The formation of the LDA acted as an assertion of sovereignty from First Nations, a promise to defend their lands and their right to decide what and when development occurs; As Grassy Narrows Chief Rudy Turtle describes, they would rather negotiate nation to nation, however, “if we have to stand up physically or take some physical action, then we’re going to do that,” (Casey, 2023). Such an action did occur in September 2023 after Premier Ford refused the First Nations invitation to formally meet outside Ontario’s Queen’s Park Legislative building (Erum, 2023; Gonzales, 2023) as seen in Figure 9 (Schalk, 2023).



Figure 9. Land Defence Alliance outside Ontario’s Queen’s Park Legislative building.

The LDA consequentially organized a march through Toronto, ending outside the Legislative building where ceremonies and speeches took place, criticizing the province's continued disregard of First Nation decision-making, specifically through policies like the Mining Act (Erum, 2023). In addition to the solidarity demonstrated between First Nations, the march also had the support of numerous organizations and labour unions, with over 6,000 people showing up to support the LDA's mission to halt further exploitation of their traditional territories and preserve the ecological integrity of the Breathing Lands (Bacher & Mohawk; Erum, 2023). Moreover, the LDA enables the practice of nourishing solidarity across First Nations and treaty boundaries, working to renew and maintain the relationships integral within many Indigenous ways of being (McGregor, 2021). Simultaneously, the LDA is also a countermeasure to the province's divide and conquer tactics, an active form of resistance as Neskantaga First Nation Chief Chris Moonias states, "our very existence is under attack...We need to rise as nations and stand together against colonialism and oppression to defend our lands and our ways of life for future generations," (Stimpson, 2024).

4.6 Discussion

An examination of the histories behind both case studies demonstrates a clear prioritization of industry expansion and capital accumulation, made possible by the dismissal of Indigenous sovereignty and well-being. In Manitoba, driven by the need to nurture a growing southern settler population, Manitoba Hydro was created through the dispossession of Indigenous lands and erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, further maintained by the fostering of a green energy narrative and the collective failure of settler courts to hold the industry accountable (Hoffman, 2011; Manitoba Hydro, 2023). While Manitoba Hydro presented Keeyask as a shift away from their colonial past, the project was nevertheless marred by the industry's prioritization

of economic growth and continued disregard for Indigenous decision-making and well-being. Ontario's prioritization of resource extraction similarly behaved to foster a southern settler population at the expense of Northern Indigenous people's well-being. Ontario's manipulation of Treaty 9, from its creation, enabled numerous legislative decisions, such as the Mining Act and the Far North Act, which prioritized northern industry development over the rights of Indigenous peoples. The discovery of the treaty commissioner's diary has only provided further confirmation of what First Nations have been arguing for generations, that Ontario has not only been manipulating Treaty 9, but extensively and repeatedly violating it, reducing the agreement from what could have catalysed a reciprocal relationship between nations to, "a contract of self-dispossession and the relinquishment of political authority," (Snelgrove, 2023, para. 2) for Indigenous peoples. As a result, colonial and neoliberal ideology remains embedded within government decision-making and has continued to inform Ontario's relentless pursuit of developing the Ring of Fire.

Over numerous generations and resource developments, these colonial and neoliberal legacies within both provinces, which resulted in spiritual, social and economic disparities within Indigenous communities, consequentially hampered their capacity to address the COVID-19 pandemic (Blume, 2022). In addition, and reminiscent of past pandemics such as smallpox, the Spanish Flu, and H1N1 (Richardson & Crawford, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic, "exposed weaknesses and exacerbated disparities in public health and social security systems, leaving indigenous peoples behind in national responses and compounding the wider range of systemic violations they already faced," (Calí Tzay, 2020, p. 23). This situation was further compounded within First Nations who additionally faced and managed neoliberal and disaster capitalist decision-making by the government. The Ring of Fire case study demonstrated numerous

different strategies to accelerate the mining industry by the Ontario government. In addition to temporary environmental regulation rollbacks, several bills were quickly passed, many without Indigenous consultation, which removed environmental protections and public oversight, while also increasing government power and jurisdiction within Indigenous territory. As well, the government's continuation of 'consultations' with First Nations during the pandemic strategically allowed a further disregard of Indigenous decision-making, as well as fostered division between communities. The disaster capitalism which unfolded in Northern Manitoba, at the Keeyask project site, took a different form. Rather than push through additional legislation, Manitoba Hydro doubled down on ingrained colonial and neoliberal ideologies which enabled a continued business as usual attitude during a global pandemic crisis. Amid First Nation demands to restrict the movement of outside workers (and the COVID-19 virus) into the North and into communities which, due to colonial government and industry actions, lacked adequate infrastructure, Manitoba Hydro continued to prioritize the completion of non-essential project over the well-being of First Nations.

An interesting observation of the narratives applied by government and industry during the pandemic to justify their prioritization of resource projects were the different utilizations of rhetoric within each case study. For instance, while 'clean' and 'green' language has been utilized quite effectively by hydro industries over the decades, as Manitoba Hydro's 2023 Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Report states, "our abundant green, clean, renewable hydropower positions Manitoba to lead the country in efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as part of the fight against climate change," (p. 51); This narrative was largely absent from the Keeyask case study, as Manitoba Hydro largely focused on utilizing a criminalizing narrative and the so-called authority of the settler rule of law against the First

Nations Lockdown. However, green rhetoric, in concert with the framing of extractive development as an economic opportunity for Indigenous communities, was utilized heavily by the Ontario government during the pandemic to reframe the mining industry and the Ring of Fire. Although, while the specific language used to justify the intrusion into Indigenous lands and exploitation of resources may have shifted to green and redwashing, the paternalistic behaviour guiding the rhetoric remains the same. Indeed, many First Nations, who are very familiar with similar established colonial tactics, criticized the government for attempting to shroud their intentions with buzz words. For instance, MPP Sol Mamakwa stated, “they call it the corridor of prosperity...It’s the corridor of oppression and colonialism. That’s what they are doing. It’s pretty much a divide and conquer approach and that’s what colonizers do,” (Needham, 2022). While Neskantaga Chief Chris Moonias denounced the greenwashing of extraction projects which inevitably continue to harm the land, saying, “now we have these companies coming in clear-cutting our land, drilling holes in our land. They often say as well that the methods we use today are eco-friendly. We have better techniques now that’s a lie. A total lie,” (Cross, 2023). Lending weight to the concerns of Ontario First Nations and the problematic nature of green rhetoric is the damage caused by the extraction of so-called green or transition minerals which can be observed in other parts of the world. For instance, the growth of lithium mining in South America, a mineral which, similar to those in the Ring of Fire, has often been over-inflated and promoted by industry and government in regard to a green transition, specifically in electric batteries (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022). In places like Chile and Argentina, much of this extraction occurs on Indigenous territories with long histories of colonization and communities have criticized the failure of the government and industry to acquire meaningful consent; Further concern towards inadequate environmental assessments,

environmental protections, and issues of water contamination and extreme water usage resulting from mining have led communities to respond with direct action, such as roadblocks, in order to prevent further projects (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022). The President of the Ontario Mining Association, Chris Hodgson has indeed used the negative environmental and social impacts of ‘green’ mining in areas like Chile and Argentina as further reason to develop mines in Canada, arguing, “even ardent environmentalists are looking at the role mining plays in the greening of the world...Smart people who care about climate change realize we need more minerals coming from jurisdictions like Canada,” (Jenish, 2021). Ontario’s Minister of Mines, George Pirie has also praised the province’s mining industry as having, “world-class environmental standards,” (Law, 2023c). Yet these apparent standards do not seem to apply to Canadian-owned mining companies operating outside the country, as they have not been immune from the same criticisms. For example, Canadian-owned First Quantum Minerals was shut down in 2023 by the Supreme Court of Panama after they found its twenty-year contract to be unconstitutional (Schalk, 2023). The copper mine was opposed by many activists, labour unions and Ngäbe-Buglé Indigenous groups due to a lack of transparency and consultation (Schalk, 2023). The group Panama Vale Más Sin Minería (Panama is Worth More Without Mining) was also very concerned about the cultural and environmental harm stemming from the mine, considering they had discovered, “according to the company’s own reporting, 295 environmental infractions were committed in the last three years alone,” (Herrera, 2022). Notably, many of the issues involved in green mining in South America, including those conducted by Canadian mining companies, such as a lack of consent, inadequate environmental assessments and concern for environmental impacts, have all been voiced by Indigenous people and environmental organizations in regard to the Ring of Fire in Ontario, as seen in Figure 10 (headlines retrieved from: Chamandy, 2023;

Cross, 2023; Forester, 2022a; Francis, 2023a; Hart, 2010; Matawa First Nations, 2023; Maynes, 2022; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022b; Porter, 2015; Ray & Chetkiewicz, 2020; Taschner, 2024); Causing considerable doubt regarding the Ontario Mining Association's claim that their, "mining industry is a world leader in environmental protection," (Ontario Mining Association, n.d.a) which prioritizes, "respectful, mutually-beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities," (Ontario Mining Association, n.d.c).

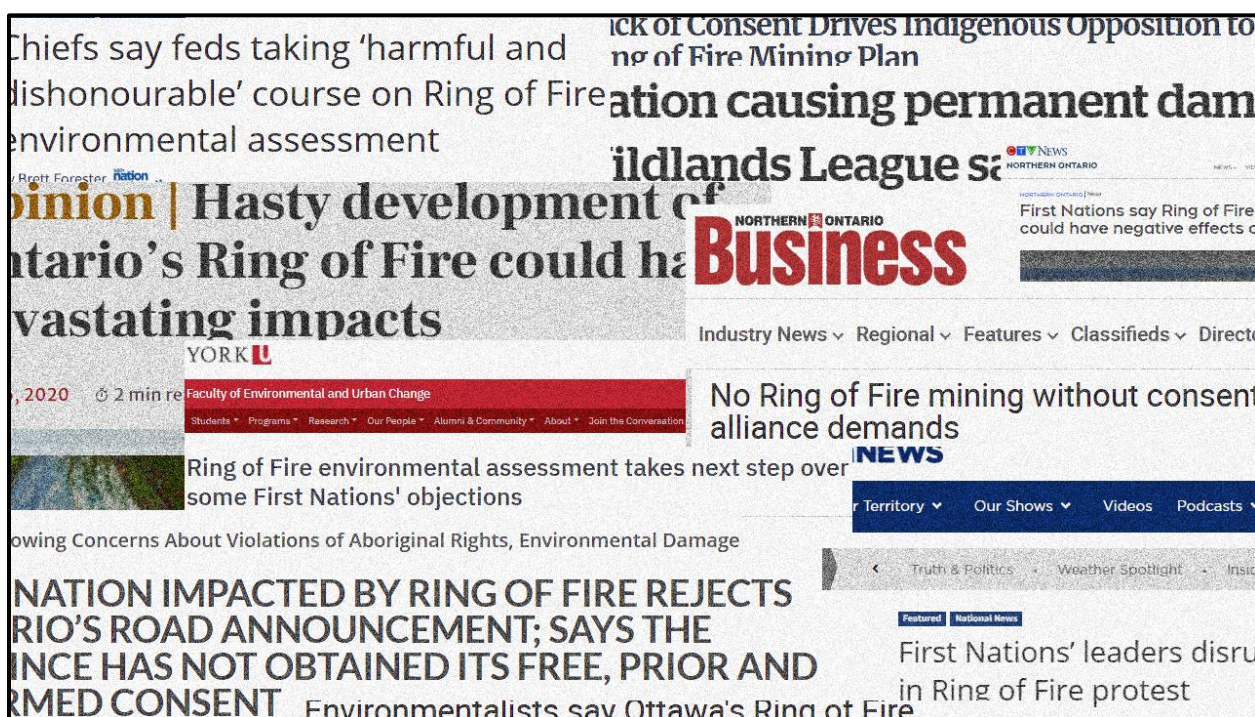


Figure 10. APTN, CBC News, CTV News, The EnergyMix, Matawa First Nations, MiningWatch, Northern Ontario Business, Toronto Star, and York University articles portraying concerns/critiques around Ring of Fire Development.

Furthermore, and akin to the way Ontario is adapting its colonial behaviour around the use of green rhetoric and Indigenous prosperity, Manitoba Hydro, now through the guise of partnerships and reconciliation, has continued to exert their so-called authority over Indigenous communities by using age-old settler colonial tactics of criminalization and erasure to justify

their actions. In connection, Indigenous [Ojibwe] researcher Dr. Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark has described how settler law is continuously evolving in ways that expand its jurisdiction over Indigenous people, in part, by framing them as ‘uncivilized,’ and therefore the imposition of Canadian law as ‘necessary’ and in their best interest (2016). This was observed by Manitoba Hydro’s use of Dr. Roussin’s ‘expertise’ which framed the Lockdown as an unwarranted overreaction and rationalized the use of an injunction to remove the blockades. Stark further argues that, “settler colonialism, then is not just reductive, it is productive, actively producing both the settler state and its accompanying legitimating narratives,” (2016). The tactics used by Manitoba Hydro during the pandemic similarly work to extend the legitimacy of its authority, both through its overt criminalization of the blockade and use of settler law, as well through its language of concern for the safety and well-being of its workers which acted to extend and validate their decision-making power over that of the four First Nations. Moreover, the neoliberal ideology of disaster capitalism further compounded these modes of settler colonialism, validating narratives of economic prioritization and the continuation of business-as-usual practices.

However, harmful government narratives and decision-making did not go unnoticed or unanswered by First Nations who, in different ways, asserted IEJ in addition to managing the pandemic and the community issues which it compounded. In Manitoba, IEJ was expressed as a Lockdown; a physical blockade which asserted Indigenous sovereignty and decision-making and prioritized community well-being. As well, solidarity was expressed within and throughout the First Nation Keeyask partners, along with numerous Indigenous organizations and supporters in Winnipeg. Previously discussed was the notion of hydro sites as sacrifice zones. Juskus (2023) describes sacrifice zones as, “sites of conflict between competing conceptions of sacrifice, love,

and life,” (p. 5). I believe this is an accurate depiction of what occurred at Keeyask, especially during the pandemic, as MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee explains, “this is a case where our values are different from theirs... We value the lives of humans more than anything else. We value our First Nations’ safety and well-being over corporate interests,” (Waldman, 2020). This value system inherently conflicts with the neoliberal nature of Manitoba Hydro who consistently demonstrated their economic priorities over the well-being of the First Nations over the course of the pandemic by ignoring First Nation demands to slow down construction. It is then reasonable to conclude that First Nation well-being was indeed deemed expendable in Manitoba Hydro’s efforts to redeem a project that was becoming increasingly over budget, overdue, and whose profitability was arguably overestimated (Braun, 2020; Elkaim, 2020; Wall, 2020; York Factory First Nation, 2022). Moreover, within an IEJ framework, the Lockdown may be understood as both an assertion of self-determination and an affirmation of kinship relationships. Indigenous [Cree] scholar Shawn Wilson describes the deeply held bonds and interconnection which exists between many Indigenous peoples, saying, “we ‘are’ our relationships with other people,” (Wilson, 2013, p. 313). Whyte (2021b) further describes such responsibility to relationships as an integral aspect and motivation behind community movements. This responsibility can be observed by numerous First Nations, throughout both case studies, commenting on their priority to keep their communities safe. However, the IEJ taking place in Ontario, while similarly enacting solidarity between First Nations and across Treaty boundaries (exemplified by the expansion of the LDA) was expressed through different tactics, which perhaps reflect the distinct realities of each situation. First Nations in Manitoba were faced with an external and physical threat (outside workers) which, as the project site is remote and with limited access, could therefore be managed by a physical barrier. First Nations in Ontario were facing less tangible and

less situated threats on multiple fronts; While the manipulation of colonial legislation and rhetoric enabled further and future erosion of Indigenous rights and alienation of land, the continuation of project consultation during the pandemic strategically limited the input and decision-making of First Nations. The multiple forms of IEJ performed by First Nations reflected the complexity and variety of those threats: moratoriums, legal action, public displays of opposition, raising awareness in the media, collaborating with environmental organizations and fostering solidarity between First Nations.

The multifaceted and adaptable nature of IEJ, observed for instance, by the LDA's call for nation-nation talks, and by the four First Nations attempts to negotiate a scale-down of Keeyask construction which, when both were ignored, resulted in direct action, also demonstrate an awareness about the limitations of settler political and legal recognition in regard to assertions of Indigenous sovereignty. As Spice (2022a) argues,

The colonizer now knocks on our doors to invite us to the table, to join in negotiations.

The colonizer wants reconciliation without giving up control. The timeless colonial techniques fold in new tactics to pacify us: the politics of recognition holds up our cultures but not our law and governance. (Note 3)

The Ontario government is now promising prosperity for Northern First Nations, Manitoba Hydro is now promising reconciliation through partnership. Yet, as both government and industry continue to ignore the sovereignty, decision-making and well-being of Indigenous peoples, these promises become impositions. Involuntary burdens levelled on First Nations who are denied the option of saying, 'no thank you' to the futures setter government and industry have decided for them. Efforts to decolonize settler law remain important, as witnessed by the

First Nations recent action regarding Treaty 9 and the Mining Act, as well as the collaborative legal action regarding clean water and the future First Nations Clean Water Act; Though, as both case studies have shown, settler law remains a very effective tool in limiting the jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples. Settler interpretation of the Honour of the Crown and its duty to consult often takes a reductive approach, minimizing said duty to one based on concepts of rights and obligations. Conversely, Indigenous understandings of law and legal traditions, as described by Craft et al. (2021) are embedded in relationships and the trust and responsibility that are necessary to fulfil those relationships in a good way. IEJ, which is therefore necessarily adaptive and resilient, offers a meaningful and powerful means which Indigenous people have and continue to utilize to both assert their ways of knowing and challenge persistent colonial and neoliberal ideologies which validate modes of extraction and exploitation.

4.7 Conclusion

The objective of this case study analysis was to explore why and how disaster capitalism was expressed during the COVID-19 pandemic within a settler colonial context, as well as the many ways Indigenous peoples asserted their sovereignty and took action to protect and ensure the well-being of their communities. It was important to place these case studies within the context of the historic structures of settler colonialism and the events that led up to the pandemic, along with the events that followed them more recently. In doing this, by focusing on two similar, yet distinct instances of disaster capitalism, these case studies can be discussed, not as exceptions to the conduct of government and industry, but as moments in time which the settler state exploited to progress and reinforce its neoliberal agenda. By demonstrating the significant and varied opportunities which crises, like a pandemic, provide to government and industry within a settler colonial society, to the detriment of Indigenous rights and well-being, this chapter

also supports the need for further research regarding the relationship between settler colonialism, neoliberalism and crises. In the future, disasters, such as pandemics and the numerous expressions of climate change, are only going to multiply and intensify (Haileamlak, 2022; IPCC, 2022; McGregor, 2021), and as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has displayed, the privileged and powerful have grown adept at utilizing economic and societal inequity to fashion themselves more wealth and more power (Blume, 2022). Therefore, our responses to disasters, whatever they may be, are only growing more important. The responses of government and industry will be to employ the neoliberal ideas which they have lying around (Klein, 2007) likely continuing their efforts to confine solutions to those which are market-based and prioritize capital accumulation (Klein, 2014). This chapter supports and expands Klein's argument about the importance of fostering new, better ideas to implement during times of crises (Klein, 2020a), ideas which focus on just, life-affirming solutions, ideas which may, perhaps, bolster our immunity to the 'neoliberal disease' (Sparke & Williams, 2022). This chapter also supports the need for this re-learning and re-envisioning to be led by Indigenous ways of knowing and IEJ, communities which hold generations of knowledge of resisting and challenging settler colonial and neoliberal ideologies (McGregor, 2021). Communities who have lived through numerous crises, pandemics, violence, assimilation, genocide, and who have inequitably been burdened with harm at the cost of settler prosperity. As noted by numerous First Nations in each case study, they have lived through and are living within these moments of exploitation and harm; While methods may have shifted to narratives of reconciliation and climate solutions, the ongoing structures of colonialism and neoliberalism which enable and shape projects like Keeyask and the Ring of Fire remain. Therefore, future research must strive to support existing IEJ projects and movements, prioritizing Indigenous knowledge, law, and ways of knowing

which reject the colonial/capitalistic roots of the climate crisis (McGregor, 2021) and pandemics (Blume, 2022; Jolly, 2022), and instead emphasise a responsibility to reciprocal relationships between each other, nature, past and future generations (McGregor, 2022).

5 Media Analysis

5.1 Summary

This chapter performs a media analysis, examining how the Keeyask and Ring of Fire case studies were presented by Mainstream, Alternative/Advocacy, and Indigenous news outlets. Two themes for each case study were utilized to explore how settler narratives and bias were maintained, as well as how settler colonial context and Indigenous experiences and sovereignty were in/excluded. This chapter demonstrates the need for further decolonial and self-reflexive efforts by Mainstream media, notably regarding the need for increased inclusion of settler colonial and Indigenous sovereignty context, as well as addressing the problematic idealization of objectivity as a standard for journalism. Conversely, this chapter also demonstrates the importance of Indigenous news sources regarding the sharing of Indigenous perspectives and the countering of settler narratives, as well as the role Alternative/Advocacy sources play in supporting and furthering Indigenous voices and narratives.

5.2 Introduction

This project, though particularly the Case Studies chapter which analyzed the *Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba: A Legacy of Industry Prioritization* and *Ring of Fire, Ontario: Pushing Through a Controversial Project*, benefited from the utilization of news media in tracking and organizing the stories and timeline of events which took place during the pandemic. Due to

media's role in shaping this project, it is consequentially necessary to analyze the way different media sources were, in turn, shaping the stories surrounding the Indigenous peoples involved in Keeyask and the Ring of Fire. This media analysis will critically analyze the way three different media sources (Mainstream, Alternative/Advocacy, and Indigenous) framed the narrative of two themes for both the Keeyask Lockdown case study (*Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro legacy persists through pandemic* and *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*) and the Ring of Fire case study (*Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19* and *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*). This analysis will provide a better understanding of the way different media sources potentially maintain and foster settler colonial ideologies, and, in connection, also examine how different media highlight and advance Indigenous perspectives and rights.

Moreover, a media analysis within this project is made especially relevant when considering the historically damaging narratives surrounding Indigenous people in media. For instance, Harding (2006) found that news discourse surrounding Indigenous people throughout the 1800s and 1900s consistently framed issues, “in ways that protect dominant [settler] interests and signify aboriginal people as a threat to such interest,” (Harding 2006, p. 224). Harding (2006) further discusses that, while early news coverage largely excluded Indigenous voices, more recent inclusion of these voices remains problematic as, “their impact is diluted through techniques of deflection, decontextualization, misrepresentation and tokenization,” (p. 225). Arianne Eason and Indigenous [Salish] researcher Stephanie Fryberg also provide a commentary on the pattern of, “commissions (i.e., what is there) and omissions (i.e., what is left out),” (Fryberg & Eason, 2017, p. 554) in media coverage; They argue that settler bias is produced through media by both including harmful representations and stereotypes of Indigenous people,

and by excluding appropriate and accurate cultural representations, as well as historical context (Fryberg & Eason, 2017). The authors additionally suggest the latter may be the more challenging to address, as people are left unaware as to what is missing, enabling the continuation of violence and harm (Fryberg & Eason, 2017). Furthermore, a recent analysis of the media's framing of the Wet'suwet'en Blockade also supports the argument of Mainstream media's continued role in forwarding dominant settler colonial narratives while delegitimizing Indigenous action (Hume & Walby, 2021). The authors describe Mainstream media as framing land defenders as adversarial and divided, as well as generally failing to frame their actions within the context of Indigenous sovereignty; Further stating that, "Canadian news media perpetuate the flawed notion that Indigenous peoples and land defenders engage in criminal activity when undertaking actions to defend their territories," (Hume & Walby, 2021, p. 528) therefore undermining and discrediting actions to assert Indigenous sovereignty.

The dominant framing of settler biases and inclusion/exclusion of information has, of course, been challenged and addressed by Indigenous peoples over the years. This has included lobbying for Indigenous voices in Mainstream media, as well as the creation of Indigenous owned/controlled media which offer more holistic discourses (Harding, 2006; Harding & Ray, 2021). Furthermore, Professor Miranda Brady and Indigenous [Haida] Professor John Kelly discuss the many ways Indigenous peoples disrupt and challenge settler narratives in *We interrupt this program: Indigenous media tactics in Canadian culture* (2017). Included in the book is an interview with Indigenous [Anishinaabe] CBC reporter, Duncan McCue. McCue discusses the importance of Indigenous peoples having a presence in Mainstream media, arguing the value of influencing settler institutions from within by placing respect and relationality at the foreground of telling Indigenous stories. As well, the inclusion of Indigenous voices and

perspectives in Mainstream media additionally allows those alternative and countering narratives to settler ideology to then reach a wider (settler) audience (Brady & Kelly, 2017) who may otherwise not have gone out of their way to expose themselves to Indigenous narratives. Therefore, a continued analysis regarding if, how and to what degree Mainstream news outlets are decolonizing their content remains important alongside supporting the growth of Indigenous-led outlets.

5.3 Methodology

As discussed by Altheide and Schneider (2013), studying media can provide us a glimpse into the relationships and understood reality of our society. By considering the context (in this case, settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty), the process (how the articles were composed) and emergence (how meaning was shaped or framed within those articles), we can begin to understand how the media is defining the situation, as well as possible consequences of that definition (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). To aid in this endeavour, I applied an inductive approach (Lichtman, 2017), utilizing methods of thematic, framing and critical discourse analysis. While there are many different approaches to thematic analysis (TA), this project is largely informed by Braun and Clarke's (2023) idea of reflexive TA which, "view the practice of TA as inherently subjective, emphasize researcher reflexivity, and reject the notion that coding can ever be accurate—as it is an inherently interpretative practice, and meaning is not fixed within data," (p.2). This approach seemed a good fit for a project striving to learn from decolonial and Indigenous methodologies which commonly highlight the importance of relational accountability and reflexivity in research (Ferland et al., 2021; Kovach, 2021). Furthermore, understanding themes as, "patterns of shared meaning," (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 331) and analyzing how they are being framed within discourse provides us with the, "taken-for-

granted,” (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 53) (e.g. settler colonial) perspective at work in these articles. While Entman (1993) states that framing is about “selection and salience”, that, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation,” (p. 52). Framing essentially works to define reality by highlighting certain aspects of a situation, while glossing over or leaving out others (Entman, 1993). This is very relevant to research taking place in a settler colonial society where common-sense ideas about colonial relations, “settler occupancy and jurisdiction are realized, regularized, and actively produced as if inert context in everyday articulations, interactions, practices, and sensations,” (Rifkin, 2013, p.327). In recognizing the settler colonial context in which this media exists, and in striving to practice anti/decolonial research, it is then important to examine, question and challenge, “the normalizing gaze of the dominant in the construction of what constitutes valid and invalid knowledge and experience,” (Kempf, 2009, p.14). In connection, while discussing critical discourse analysis, van Dijk (1993) similarly notes the importance of examining, “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance,” (p. 249). Van Dijk (1993) argues critical discourse analysis, used in conjunction with relevant theory, is beneficial to understanding social issues of power relations, inequality and injustice. As well, Indigenous [Kanien’kehá:ka] researcher Sandra Styres discusses the importance of critical literacy for decolonial efforts, in regard to challenging settler colonial ideologies through understanding, “the ways power, privilege, and colonial relations continue to inform our ways of knowing and being in the world,” (2018, p. 26). Styres further describes the inherent power of language (and consequently media) to heal or harm, build or destroy, stating,

Language is never neutral—it can teach us, inform us, entertain us, persuade us, and manipulate us—it can misguide and misdirect truths, thereby perpetuating colonial myths and stereotypical representations, or it can disrupt normalizing and hegemonic dominant discourses and liberate critical thought. (2018, p. 25)

5.4 Methods

I began this analysis by gathering a wide range of media articles in 2020 from ProQuest and Google News by using key word searches like, ‘disaster capitalism’, ‘COVID-19’, ‘Indigenous sovereignty’, and ‘Indigenous protest’. Searches were also performed on Indigenous news sites themselves, as results from these sources did not always appear on ProQuest and Google News. From these search results, I narrowed in on my two case studies and further refined my search codes (as seen in Table 1) and continued to gather relevant data over the next three years (2020-2023).

Table 1. Refined search codes.

Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4	Concept 5	Concept 6
Disaster Capitalism	COVID-19	Indigenous	Indigenous Sovereignty	Manitoba Hydro	Ontario
Shock Doctrine	Coronavirus	First Nation	Indigenous Action	Keeyask	Ring of Fire
Policy	Pandemic		Indigenous Protest	Lockdown	Mining
Bill			Indigenous Opposition	Blockade	

Using Dedoose software, I familiarized myself with the data, and over the course of three reviews, applied codes and eliminated data which was determined to be outside the scope of this project. I then identified and refined two common themes for each of the case studies which

reflected the data, my research questions and corresponding conceptions of settler colonialism, disaster capitalism, Indigenous action and sovereignty. This also involved the identification of three types of media sources: Indigenous, Mainstream, and Alternative/Advocacy. Indigenous sources being those that were written by and largely for Indigenous peoples. While Mainstream sources were those I considered to have large public audiences and/or ties to corporate/government interests. The decision to include Alternative/Advocacy sources (where Advocacy refers to sources such as MiningWatch and Amnesty International who largely operate as corporate and governmental watchdogs) was made in response to their contribution of a substantial portion of data. In fact, Alternative/Advocacy news sources, have become an increasingly popular supplier of information for the public, with many options available that reflect various ideological/political positions (Rauch, 2020). As well, while there may be overlap and similarities between Mainstream and Alternative/Advocacy sources, a binary approach to Alternative-Mainstream sources is useful in this case for organizational purposes (Rauch, 2020); Categorizing the sources I found to be left leaning and/or focused on social/environmental change as ‘Alternative/Advocacy’ sources will be useful for observing any differences in the way they frame the subjects and events taking place, as well as possibly identifying any harmful frames that contradict the sources missions of advocacy. Lastly, following the identification of themes and sources was a discourse analysis on the relevant data to explore how the three different sources each framed the themes. This included observing descriptors and lexical differences (how different actors and events were described), positive/negative word association, and argumentative and rhetoric strategies.

5.5 Findings of Keeyask Lockdown Media Analysis

Between 2020 and 2023, 66 articles (n=66) were gathered from 24 different media sources (n=24), as seen in Table 2. Of those, the majority were Mainstream sources (n=11), followed by Indigenous sources (n=6) and Alternative/Advocacy sources (n=6). From those articles, two themes were created: *Manitoba Hydro legacy persists through pandemic* and *Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*.

Table 2. Distribution of news media collected for Keeyask Lockdown.

Publication	Ownership	Number of Articles
<i>Mainstream Sources</i>		
Anglican Journal	Anglican Church of Canada	1
CBC	Crown Corporation	13
CityNews Winnipeg	Rogers Communication	1
CTV	Bell Media	6
Global News	Corus Entertainment	3
National Post	Postmedia	1
The Globe and Mail	The Woodbridge Company	1
Thompson Citizen	Glacier Media	3
Winnipeg Sun	Klein Group (previously owned by Postmedia)	4
Winnipeg Free Press	FP Canadian Newspapers Limited Partnership	12
Vancouver is Awesome	Glacier Media	1
<i>Alternative/Advocacy Sources</i>		
Amnesty International Press Release	Amnesty International	1
Canadian Dimension	Dimension Publications Inc.	2
Community Peacemaker Teams	Community Peacemaker Teams	1
The Marxist-Leninist Weekly	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada	1
The Narwhal	Non-profit	1
The Uniter	University of Winnipeg	1
<i>Indigenous Sources</i>		

APTN	Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Inc.	4
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Press Release	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	2
Indigenous Watchdog	Non-profit	3
Manitoba Keewatinowi	Manitoba Keewatinowi	2
Okimakanak Press Release	Okimakanak Inc.	
Treaty One Media Release	Treaty One	1
Windspeaker	Aboriginal Multi-Media Society	1

5.5.1 Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro legacy persists through pandemic

This theme concerns the ongoing relationship between Manitoba Hydro and northern First Nations, as well as any connections made between past colonial actions of Manitoba Hydro and its behaviour during the pandemic. Moreover, this theme was created by examining the numerous instances of articles discussing the actions of Manitoba Hydro to maintain Keeyask construction during the pandemic and increase the number of workers on site, despite the wishes of its First Nation partners. The aspects involved in this theme include the framing of the history/legacy of Manitoba Hydro, the relationship/partnership between Manitoba Hydro and First Nations, and the prioritization of the industry during COVID-19.

5.5.1.1 Framing by Indigenous News Sources.

The legacy of Manitoba Hydro was a topic that occurred in several Indigenous sources and was framed as both occurring in the past and as having detrimental impacts on First Nations in the present. These articles covered a range of topics related to Manitoba Hydro and Northern First Nations, including the newest Keeyask dam (York Factory First Nation, 2022), as well as other events that occurred over the span of the pandemic, such as the licensing for the Churchill

River Diversion (Stranger, 2021) and the lifting of a government gag order by the new NDP provincial government in 2023 (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2023). Indigenous sources characterized Manitoba Hydro's actions in the North negatively, noting environmental, social, and economic impacts that dated back to the mid-1900s (Stranger, 2021; York Factory First Nation, 2022). For instance, MKO included a quote by Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying,

I am from the hydroelectric impacted Cree Nation of Pimicikamak at Cross Lake and I have seen firsthand the human impacts and environmental devastation of hydroelectric development. Manitoba Hydro has, not only an environmental legacy in the North, but also cultural, social, economic and spiritual impact legacies upon the people of northern Manitoba. (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2023)

As well, a York Factory press release specifically framed this legacy to include current Manitoba Hydro projects, like Keeyask, by including a quote from Chief Leroy Constant saying, "once again, the adverse effects of yet another major hydroelectric project have been imposed on remote Indigenous Peoples for the benefit of distant non-Indigenous governments and peoples," (York Factory First Nation, 2022). Moreover, this statement notably frames the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as inequitable and extractive. MKO's released statement, again quoting Grand Chief Garrison Settee, also alludes to this inequity by calling for the Manitoba government and Manitoba Hydro to recognize hydroelectricity as a, "shared resource," (2023). Government and Manitoba Hydro decision-making during the pandemic was also framed within this inequity by APTN who quoted Nathan Neckoway criticizing the so-called right of, "people in the southern areas," (Hobson, 2020a) to make decisions that involve First Nations in the North. Such framing drew attention to the disconnect between settler

decision-makers and First Nations and asserted that First Nations who have traditionally lived in the area are the rightful decision-makers.

Manitoba Hydro's relationship with First Nations was further stressed as inequitable through characterizations of a bad partnership. For instance, APTN included a quote from York Factory First Nation Chief Leroy Constant arguing, "this is not how a partnership is supposed to operate," (Hobson, 2020a) and MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee stating the four First Nations, "are not treated as partners," (Hobson, 2020c). Other language characterized Manitoba Hydro as, "dismissive," (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a) and, "not interested," (Hobson, 2020a; Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a) in listening to concerns voiced by the First Nations. However, a more optimistic framing of the relationship between Manitoba Hydro, the Manitoba government (under the new leadership of First Nation Premier, Wab Kinew) and the First Nations was later described in a 2023 MKO press release; Regarding the NDP's removal of the previous conservative government's order for Manitoba Hydro not to engage with Indigenous governments, the statement included a quote from Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, "we look with hope to the future that reconciliation and decolonization will begin to unfold in earnest with bold actions and declarations as demonstrated by Premier Kinew," (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2023).

Indigenous sources also highlighted the prioritization of Manitoba Hydro during the pandemic (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a; Windspeaker, 2020). For instance, a released statement from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) said, "Manitoba Hydro circumvents all of our collective efforts for their own financial gain," (2020a) in response to the decision to bring in new workers to Keeyask. As well, Indigenous sources sometimes characterized industry prioritization as directly in conflict with the community's priority of

safety, for instance APTN include a quote from MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, “when it comes to the project it seems like [construction] is a priority over everybody else’s safety,” (Hobson, 2020a). By discussing hydro prioritization in contrast to First Nations goals to, “protect,” their communities (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a; Hobson, 2020a; Hobson, 2020c) Indigenous sources framed community well-being as the rightful and moral priority in contrast to economic gain, while also framing Manitoba Hydro as a threat to community well-being. For instance, a Windspeaker article noted the blockades were erected, “over concern for the health and safety of their [four First Nations] people,” and included a quote from Shamattawa First Nation Chief Eric Redhead saying, “mining and hydro developments are allowed to place our health and safety at risk,” (2020). This threat is even characterized as criminal by an AMC (2020a) press release arguing Manitoba Hydro, “manipulate[d] and abuse[d],” the law by not following provincial health orders which restricted travel. The potential consequences of prioritizing Manitoba Hydro were also framed to include all of Manitoba, not just northern First Nations (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a). For instance, Windspeaker (2020) quoted Barren Lands First Nation Chief John Clarke saying, “the hard work of all Manitobans, especially our communities in our region, to reduce the spread of the Pandemic will be for not should new cases spark up once the out of province workers arrive at the Keeyask work site.” Quotes such as this, which perhaps strategically garner non-Indigenous support, work to frame the issue of incoming workers as a result of unbalanced, not to mention dangerous decision-making by Manitoba Hydro in contrast to communities trying to stem the tide of COVID-19 in Manitoba.

Indigenous sources also often included solutions to the issues or conflicts that were being discussed. For example, the AMC included a quote by Grand Chief Arlen Dumas saying the four

First Nation partners in Keeyask had indeed brought up, “workable solutions,” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a) that would be more appropriate than Manitoba Hydro’s decision to bring in more workers. This solution was further clarified in a released MKO statement and APTN article which quoted York Factory Chief Leroy Constant saying, “we have raised the issue of putting Keeyask into ‘care and maintenance mode’,” a plan that would temporarily defer any project advancement and reduce the workforce to 250 people (Hobson, 2020a; Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020a). More wide-reaching solutions were also offered in a statement by MKO, primarily regarding Manitoba Hydro’s new Integrated Resource Plan and the need to better acknowledge Indigenous land rights and advance reconciliation efforts (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2023). By describing the various communities or Indigenous leaders as creating and promoting appropriate solutions, Indigenous sources framed First Nations as proactive decision-makers, rather than passive actors.

5.5.1.2 Framing by Alternative/Advocacy sources.

Contextualizing Keeyask within the legacy of Manitoba Hydro was included by numerous Alternative/Advocacy sources. For instance, Amnesty International ends their article by tying Manitoba Hydro’s failure to adhere to First Nations decision-making during the pandemic into a larger pattern of harm, saying,

This is not the first time that Manitoba Hydro has violated the rights of First Nations.

Decades of Manitoba Hydro operations in the north of the province are associated with harms to the land, water, and animals, as well as profound adverse impacts on the health, safety, and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. (2020)

The contextualization of Keeyask within Manitoba Hydro's legacy was also the focus of a Narwhal article, titled: *State of erosion: the legacy of Manitoba Hydro* (Elkaim, 2020). This powerful photo essay frames the Keeyask partnership within the context of Manitoba Hydro's historically colonial behaviour by providing snapshots of community-level harm stemming from decades of hydro development in the North. For example, a picture of a young girl wearing a Keeyask hat is captioned,

Elders often speak about how they used to swim and play in the shallow waters...They lament that their grandchildren are unable to do the same as the shoreline is normally flooded and the polluted waters are known to cause rashes. (Elkaim, 2020)

The author also included a picture of the Manitoba Hydro mural in Winnipeg and challenged Manitoba Hydro's portrayal as a sustainable, "clean and green," (Elkaim, 2020) energy source. However, the Narwhal photo essay also notably displayed images of community initiatives, such as traditional knowledge programs, as well as the continued economic enterprises of the fur trade and fishing industry, which remain very important to communities (Elkaim, 2020). In combination with the photo essay's display of the harm produced by Manitoba Hydro, photos of resilience frame First Nations as actively working to maintain their traditions and pass them on to the next generation. Amnesty International also framed First Nations as solution orientated by including an excerpt from an MKO statement recommending, "that the Keeyask project enact the 'Care and Maintenance Mode,'," (Amnesty International, 2020). While The Marxist-Leninist Weekly similarly noted that the 'care and maintenance' mode was proposed as a solution by First Nations, further characterizing the Keeyask Lockdown as a proactive strategy by writing, "Northern Manitoba First Nations have taken action to protect their communities by managing access to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19," (Biley, 2020).

Furthermore, Alternative/Advocacy sources framed Manitoba Hydro as an inadequate partner who ignored First Nation concerns, moving forward with its plans unilaterally. For instance, Amnesty International wrote, “Manitoba Hydro has not worked collaboratively to obtain consent to this most recent decision to expand operations and is ignoring requests by the four partner First Nations,” (2020). The article also framed the relationship between First Nations and the government as unbalanced and colonial by quoting an Indigenous Rights Campaign Advisor saying the, “assumed Crown Sovereignty,” displayed by this decision-making relies entirely on, “repudiated papal doctrines of discovery and terra nullius,” (Amnesty International, 2020). The Marxist-Leninist Weekly also framed the partnership as unbalanced by including a quote from York Factory First Nation Chief Leroy Constant saying, “we have been discussing these issues for weeks, but it seems that our partners at Manitoba Hydro are not interested in hearing our concerns. This is not how a partnership is supposed to operate,” (Biley, 2020). The Narwhal photo essay focuses more broadly on the relationships between Manitoba Hydro and First Nations, framing those relationships as diverse and nuanced. For example, A picture of a Fox Lake community member, who works for Manitoba Hydro, is quoted as saying, “I’d never thought I’d work at hydro for 25 years...Hydro isn’t all bad, you know. They did a lot of bad in the past, but it’s changed — they can’t get away with what they used to,” (Elkaim, 2020). While another photo showing a Tataskweyak First Nation priest who participated in the cultural awareness program at Keeyask is quoted as saying, “us Elders, we are sad in our hearts ... each time I go there, I cry,” (Elkaim, 2020). Community members relationships were framed very differently throughout the photo essay, some characterized by hope for the future, others by dread, though overall, the relationship was not framed as equal, let alone a partnership.

Lastly, Alternative/Advocacy sources framed Keeyask construction as prioritized, for instance, Amnesty International noted that, “the province deemed construction of the Keeyask dam as an essential service,” (2020). As well, The Marxist-Leninist Weekly wrote, “in Manitoba, as in other provinces, major construction projects have been exempted from travel restrictions and deemed ‘essential’ work,” (Biley, 2020) additionally framing the situation within the larger occurrence of exemptions being made for resource industries across Canada and importantly drawing attention to the widespread prioritization of industry over Indigenous well-being. A prioritization of Keeyask was also framed negatively in contrast to First Nation priorities of community safety, as Amnesty International stated, First Nations were, “upholding their responsibility to protect their territories and people,” (2020). As well the Marxist-Leninist Weekly included a quote from Union of BC Indian Chiefs saying it was imperative for, “all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, to recognize and respect First Nations jurisdiction and decisions as they take actions to protect their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic,” (Biley, 2020). While the Narwhal framed Industry prioritization as ingrained as early as first talks between Manitoba Hydro and First Nations, as the author described First Nations as signing on to the project because, “they were told, and believed, the Keeyask dam would be built with or without their cooperation,” (Elkaim, 2020); Therefore framing the industry as one that, from the beginning, would always put its agenda above First Nation decision-making.

5.5.1.3 Framing by Mainstream sources.

A commonality among Mainstream sources was the failure to include the context of Manitoba Hydro’s colonial legacy, which then aided in the framing of the Keeyask Lockdown as an exception, and not demonstrative of the problematic relationship between Manitoba Hydro and the First Nations. Though a notable outlier was a Winnipeg Free Press article written by

Indigenous [Anishinaabe] professor and writer, Niigaan Sinclair. In the article, Sinclair notes that, “Canadian normality has been defined by building economies off taking First Nations lands and resources and — until the past few decades anyways — ignoring First Nations rights,” (Sinclair, 2020) thereby connecting Manitoba Hydro’s dismissal of First Nations wishes during the pandemic to a longer pattern of colonialism, specifically exploitative resource extraction, in Canada.

The continuation of Keeyask construction by Manitoba Hydro despite the wishes of First Nations was included by Mainstream sources in several different ways. For instance, the decision to continue Keeyask construction was sometimes framed as rational and justified, usually by sources pointing to approval by health authorities and/or by sources including or referencing quotes by Manitoba Hydro representatives (Malone, 2020; Robertson, 2020a; Samson, 2020). For example, CBC included a quote from a Manitoba Hydro spokesperson saying their pandemic plan, “responds to recommendations and advice from public health officials and has been endorsed by the chief medical officer of Manitoba,” (Bergen, 2020c). Some sources also directly pointed to, or stated, health officials approval of Manitoba Hydro’s plans, such as The Globe and Mail stating, “Manitoba Hydro’s enhanced safety measures have the backing of the province’s chief public health officer,” (Fiddler, 2020) and The Winnipeg Free Press writing, “chief public health officer Dr. Brent Roussin said he endorsed, reviewed and consulted on Hydro’s protocols, and that they met current public health guidelines,” (Waldman, 2020). Additionally, several sources framed the situation as one of conflicting views about safety, rather than an issue of prioritization. These sources would frame First Nations priority as keeping their communities safe, largely by including community voices, but those voices were then set against the voices of Manitoba Hydro representatives stating their own priorities of worker safety, consequently

obscuring the issue of industry prioritization taking place (Hatherly, 2020; The Canadian Press, 2020a). For instance, CBC included a quote from Tataskweyak First Nation councillor Nathan Neckoway saying, “we’ve been saying our safety and well-being is at risk since the beginning,” (Bergen, 2020c), however that was preceded by a quote from Manitoba Hydro spokesperson Bruce Owen saying the First Nations blockade was, “impacting the safety of those at site and their well-being by blocking shipments of food, waste removal and other critical supplies,” (Bergen, 2020c). Though some Mainstream sources did also include a critical framing of industry prioritization by including quotes from various Indigenous peoples (Bergen, 2020a; Bergen, 2020c; Frew, 2020b; Malone, 2020), such as the aforementioned Winnipeg Free Press article which also included quotes from MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee who argued Manitoba Hydro was pushing, “their own agenda at the expense of human lives and the safety of our people,” further arguing against the labelling of Keeyask as essential, saying, “our first priority is the safety of our people,” (Waldman, 2020).

Mainstream sources did often note that the four First Nations were partners with Manitoba Hydro, however they often limited the framing of the First Nations perspective of that partnership to an inadequate amount of decision-making regarding pandemic planning (Bergen, 2020a; Bergen, 2020c; Samson, 2020). Certain articles from The Winnipeg Free Press, Vancouver is Awesome and Global News even neglected to mention the partnership at all (Glacier Media, 2020; Robertson, 2020a; The Canadian Press, 2020a), with one article from Global News labelling Keeyask as a, “collaborative effort,” (Malone, 2020). By not including the important fact that the First Nations are partners in Keeyask, the articles remove some of the accountability from Manitoba Hydro’s actions and frame First Nations concerns as those of mere, “neighbouring communities,” (Malone, 2020; Robertson, 2020a; The Canadian Press,

2020a). As well, by excluding a more comprehensive First Nation critique of the partnership, sources further frame the Lockdown as an isolated event, and not representative of more extensive issues in the overall relationship. There were some exceptions to this, with a CBC and Globe and Mail article including comments from Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence which pointed to more expansive issues within the partnership, such as, “we’re not involved and we’re only called partners when it suits them,” (Frew, 2020b) and “we’re supposed to be considered partners,” (Fiddler, 2020). As for how the partnership was framed in respect to the removal of the blockade, there was some inclusion of First Nation critique of the partnership, though again limited to the situation surrounding the Lockdown. For instance, the National Post included a quote from York Factory First Nation Chief Leroy Constant calling the situation, “extremely frustrating and unnecessary...If Manitoba Hydro had fully engaged with its Cree partners from the beginning, this situation would not have happened,” (The Canadian Press, 2020b). In articles discussing the removal of the blockades, Mainstream sources also skewed towards framing the partnership as moving forward optimistically, excluding discussion of any need for a structural review of the partnership (Rutgers, 2020). For example, CBC described Manitoba Hydro as, “pleased to reach an understanding,” and MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee as viewing the agreement as, “a move forward for the partnership,” (Hatherly, 2020).

5.5.2 Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty

This theme places the decision-making of the four First Nations to form a Lockdown into the context of Indigenous sovereignty and rights and was created by observing vocal and physical declarations of sovereignty, as well as challenges to that sovereignty, over the course of the Lockdown. The aspects involved in this theme include the framing of the Lockdown, First Nation decision-making and support of the action.

5.5.2.1 Framing by Indigenous Sources.

Indigenous sources framed the Lockdown as a legal, justified activity which was performed in solidarity between the four First Nations. This is observed by APTN describing Tataskweyak First Nation councillor Nathan Neckoway as saying the, “blockade is uniting communities in northern Manitoba (Hobson, 2020b), Windspeaker stating, “the four Cree Nations stand in solidarity,” (2020), as well as sources which noted support by Indigenous organisations like the KTC (Windspeaker, 2020), AMC (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a) and MKO (Hobson, 2020a). Including words like “solidarity” and “support” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a; Windspeaker, 2020), as well as including quotes of direct support from the MKO and AMC also framed the Lockdown as legitimate and supported. For instance, MKO included a quote by Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, “I commend the Chief and Councillors for stepping up in a major way to protect their people. I am proud to stand with them,” (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b). As well, APTN further framed the Lockdown as having wider public support by noting a, “small prayer camp,” and rally being held at the Manitoba Legislature in Winnipeg (Hobson, 2020b).

Furthermore, Windspeaker and an AMC press release inferred sovereignty and land rights by labelling the First Nations as, “Treaty 5 First Nations,” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a) and saying the Keeyask station was, “being built in their respective land use areas,” (Windspeaker, 2020). However, outright inclusion of words like sovereignty or rights was absent, perhaps due to an underlying assumption of this sovereignty by Indigenous reporters, as also absent was any framing of the Lockdown as being illegal or unjustified. APTN even framed the Lockdown as having the support of law enforcement by providing a quote from an RCMP representative saying, “the RCMP respects and protects the right to peaceful demonstrations as

guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Everyone has a right to peaceful freedom of expression,” (Hobson, 2020b). There was also a general lack of inclusion of words characterizing the communities as vulnerable, though an AMC statement did include a quote by Grand Chief Dumas stating Manitoba Hydro’s decision would, “expose our most threatened and vulnerable populations,” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a) and APTN noted that Winnipeg rally attendees, “stated inadequate healthcare systems in First Nations leave communities vulnerable if the virus was to make its way up north,” (Hobson, 2020b).

However, the Lockdown was largely framed from a strength-based perspective by Indigenous sources, describing First Nations actions as being motivated by the responsibility to protect their communities (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b). For instance, APTN included a quote by Tataskweyak First Nation councillor Nathan Neckoway saying, “we’re here to protect our community, we’re here to protect other communities and all in all we’re here to protect northern Manitoba from COVID-19,” (Hobson, 2020a). An AMC statement additionally framed legal action against the Lockdown as illegitimate in the face of First Nations rights by including a quote by War Lake First Nation Chief Betsy Kennedy saying, “injunctions and other legal fictions will not stop us as leaders from doing what we must do, and that is protecting our peoples who are in turn protectors of our sacred lands, waters and air,” (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2020a). The community’s actions were also further validated and legitimized by Indigenous sources describing the Lockdown as authorized by, “leadership,” of the four First Nations (Hobson, 2020a; Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b; Windspeaker, 2020). Overall, the sovereign right of First Nations to enact a blockade, assert their decision-making and protect their communities was framed more as a common-sense response by Indigenous sources, more so than an overt declaration of sovereignty.

5.5.2.2 Framing by Alternative/Advocacy Sources.

Framing of the Lockdown as an expression of sovereignty was slightly more overt by Alternative/Advocacy sources. Several sources framed the Lockdown within the context of land rights by noting the First Nations decision-making was taking place within their, “land,” (Amnesty International, 2020) “territory,” (Amnesty International, 2020; Indigenous Watchdog, 2020) or, “borders,” (Devlin, 2021). Some sources also explicitly characterized the First Nations actions as an assertion of sovereignty. For instance, Amnesty International described the First Nations as, “exercising their rights to self-determination and territorial defense,” (2020) and Canadian Dimension referred to the tearing of the injunction by Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence as a, “defiant exercise of Indigenous sovereignty,” (Devlin, 2021).

Furthermore, several Alternative/Advocacy sources noted the support of the MKO for the First Nations and their Lockdown (Amnesty International, 2020; Biley, 2020; Indigenous Watchdog, 2020), as well as outside public support that was taking place at the Manitoba Legislature in Winnipeg (Biley, 2020). Sources also notably used their own platforms to directly support the Lockdown. For instance, Amnesty International (2020) produced an article titled, “Manitoba Hydro must respect Indigenous rights at Keeyask dam,” in which the author states, “Amnesty International is firmly in solidarity with First Nations who are peacefully exercising their rights to self-determination and territorial defense,” (Amnesty International, 2020). While the Marxist-Leninist Weekly (Biley, 2020) produced an article titled, “Manitoba First Nations’ Justified Blockade of Keeyask Dam Site,” in which the author states, “Northern Manitoba First Nations...should be supported by federal and provincial government leaders and health authorities,” (Biley, 2020); Amnesty International also noted the need for governmental support of the First Nations by quoting an Indigenous Rights Campaign Advisor, saying, “Governments

should be applauding and actively supporting these efforts,” (Amnesty International, 2020). In addition, the Marxist-Leninist Weekly noted similar situations of industry prioritization in Alberta, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador, while Amnesty International (2020) noted the support of the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous People, both of which worked to frame the Lockdown as part of a much larger, even international fight for Indigenous rights during COVID-19.

Alternative/Advocacy sources also framed the government negatively for reckless decision-making and/or dismissing the First Nations sovereignty. As noted, a Marxist-Leninist Weekly article stated that the First Nations action to protect their community from COVID-19 should be supported, which consequentially framed government decision-making as irresponsible (Biley, 2020). While Amnesty International (2020) framed settler government sovereignty as illegitimate and colonial by characterizing the government as, “criminalizing,” the First Nations and describing the injunction as an expression of, “assumed Crown sovereignty,” which was carried out, “against the First Nations, and community members and leaders upholding their responsibility to protect their territories and people according to their laws and protocols,” (Amnesty International, 2020). As well, an Indigenous Watchdog article titled, “Keeyask Hydro Project Duty to Consult Failure,” framed Manitoba Hydro as failing in its legal obligation to treat First Nations as partners, also including a quote from MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, “it is imperative that corporations working in our territory are full partners and in agreement with plans to open up the North,” (Indigenous Watchdog, 2020). The Canadian Dimension also connected the Lockdown to the Alberta and Manitoba governments intentions (of which the former succeeded) to pass Protection of Critical Infrastructure Acts (PCIAs), which would criminalize protests on infrastructure like pipelines, railways and hydro

development (Devlin, 2021). After noting the fact that Manitoba Hydro had little trouble receiving an injunction against the Lockdown in the first place, the article raised the question, “will the PCIA strengthen Manitoba Hydro’s hand against sovereign Indigenous nations taking action to protect their communities from COVID-19?” (Devlin, 2021). As a result, the article framed the provincial government as attempting to further dismiss and criminalize Indigenous sovereignty through legal manipulation in order enable continued industry prioritization.

Lastly, there was slightly more framing of the First Nations as vulnerable by the Alternative/Advocacy sources, though this was closely associated with the lack of health care infrastructure/support available to the communities (Amnesty International, 2020; Biley, 2020). In addition to this, the sources also consistently included a strength-based framing, describing the First Nations motivations of protecting their communities. For instance, Indigenous Watchdog included a quote by MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, “their ultimate concern was in protecting their communities from the threat of COVID-19,” (2020). The Canadian Dimension and Marxist-Leninist Weekly also both stated that First Nations during COVID-19 were taking action to, “protect their communities,” (Biley, 2020; Devlin, 2021), while Amnesty International included a quote by an Indigenous Rights Campaign Advisor with Amnesty International Canada, noting, “these communities have an inherent responsibility and right to control access into their territories to protect their communities,” (Amnesty International, 2020).

5.5.2.3 Framing by Mainstream Sources.

There was a general failure to frame the Lockdown within the context of Indigenous sovereignty and land rights in Mainstream sources and there was little mention of Keeyask and the Lockdown occurring on Indigenous land. Though a few exceptions included an Anglican

Journal article which referred to Bishop Larry Beardy saying the Lockdown was occurring on, “First Nation Territory,” (Kidd, 2020). A CBC and Winnipeg Free Press article also quoted the MP for Churchill-Keewatinook Aski, Niki Ashton and Tataskweyak First Nation Councillor, Nathan Neckoway stating the Keeyask station was on First Nation, “territory,” (Bergen, 2020a; Waldman, 2020). As well, there was little framing of the Lockdown as a decision made by sovereign nations, though one exception was a Global News article which included a quote from Nathan Neckoway stating, “as a sovereign Nation, this is our right,” (The Canadian Press, 2020a) regarding their decision to enact the Lockdown.

Many Mainstream sources did include a strength-based framing of the First Nations decision to protect their community with the Lockdown, however this often was combined with the inclusion of Manitoba Hydro and/or government aspirations to protect the public and/or workers at Keeyask (Hatherly, 2020; Malone, 2020; The Canadian press, 2020a), or in combination with deficit-based approaches to the Lockdown (Waldman, 2020). For instance, a CBC article included a quote from a Manitoba Hydro spokesperson stating their pandemic plan, “protects both our workers and neighbouring communities,” (Frew, 2020a) as well as a quote from MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee stating, “as leaders, our role is to protect our people,” (Frew, 2020a); Therefore, framing the situation as more of a disagreement between Manitoba Hydro and the First Nations on how best to protect their people and not of one about the right of sovereign nations to dictate what does or does not happen on their land. Furthermore, a Globe and Mail article included multiple quotes of Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence and Fox Lake First Nation community member, Robert Wavey stressing their goals to, “protect,” (Fiddler, 2020) their communities and workers, though the article also included quotes from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee which framed the First

Nations as, “vulnerable,” (Fiddler, 2020). Other examples of sources focusing more heavily on deficit-based approaches include a CTV News article neglecting to include a frame of strength-based motivations for the First Nations entirely, instead limiting the framing to a, “vulnerable community,” (Izri, 2020). Several CBC articles also included a fear-based framing of First Nations motivations (Bergen, 2020a), for instance, one article highlighted a quote from Tataskeweyak First Nation Councillor Nathan Neckoway in a headline which read, “Community members ‘scared’: councillor,” (Samson, 2020).

In addition, Mainstream sources included the framing of the First Nations decision to enact the Lockdown as misguided, harmful and unlawful. For instance, in reference to the Lockdown, CBC included a quote by former Premier Brian Pallister saying, “we need to follow the rule of law and we need to make sure that we respect it,” (Bergen, 2020b) and a quote by a Hydro representative saying, “the illegal blockade was impacting the safety of those at site and their well-being by blocking shipments of food, waste removal and other critical supplies,” (Bergen, 2020c). Including a criminalizing frame without framing the First Nations as sovereign nations consequentially frames settler law as legitimate and undisputed and fails to encourage audiences to think critically past the common-sense notion of settler ‘rule of law’. As well, the quote presented in CBC which framed the blockade as actively harmful to workers was similarly conveyed by another Manitoba Hydro representative in a Globe and Mail article claiming, “the inability to move supplies such as food and other essential provisions past the blockades is now putting those workers at risk,” (Fiddler, 2020). In addition, many Mainstream sources also included framing of the Lockdown as costly to Manitoba Hydro, and notably the public, as seen in Figure 11 below (excerpts retrieved from: Bergen, 2020c; DePatie, 2020a; Frew, 2020a; Malone, 2020; Rutgers, 2020; The Canadian Free Press, 2020a; Waldman, 2020).

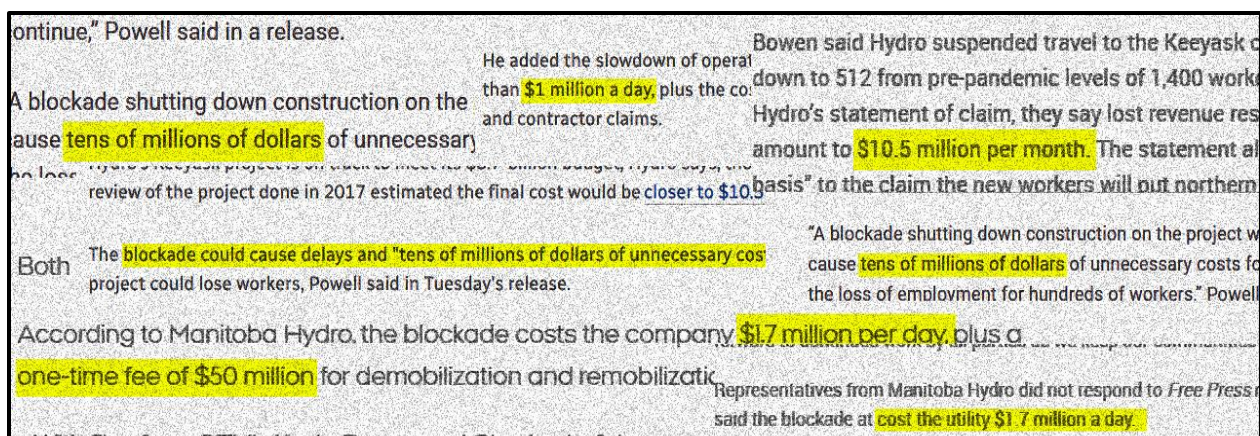


Figure 11. Excerpts of Mainstream media framing Lockdown as costly.

Framing the blockades as creating million-dollar consequences that would not only be borne by the industry, but by the public, encourages widespread support, as well as casts Manitoba Hydro in a positive light while placing blame squarely on the shoulders of the First Nations. Moreover, these quotes contribute to negatively framing the First Nations Lockdown as threatening and reckless, while also shifting attention away from their motivations of community safety and conversely presenting Manitoba Hydro favourably as concerned for the health and economic well-being of their workers and customers.

The inclusion of quotes or references to statements made by ‘experts’ in support of Manitoba Hydro’s decision-making further framed First Nations concerns and decision-making as unfounded, and unscientific (Bergen, 2020b; Begen, 2020c; Malone, 2020; Samson, 2020). For instance, a Globe and Mail article states, “Manitoba Hydro’s enhanced safety measures have the backing of the province’s chief public health officer,” (Fiddler, 2020). As well, a Winnipeg Free Press article, after pointing to an affidavit signed by Dr. Roussin in which he endorses Manitoba Hydro’s pandemic plan, then includes a quote from Director of Keeyask, David Bowen, saying there is, “no scientific or medical basis,” (Waldman, 2020) behind the First Nations decision-making. Though a Winnipeg Free Press article did frame Dr. Roussin’s

involvement as potentially disingenuous, stating, “Hydro convinced provincial health authorities to exempt Keeyask construction from a northern travel ban,” (Robertson, 2020b).

The injunction served to the First nations was also framed by Mainstream sources as superseding the decision-making rights of the First Nations and justification of Manitoba Hydro’s decision-making. For instance, a Global News articles states, “the injunction gives the RCMP authority to remove the blockade,” (The Canadian press, 2020a). While CBC and CTV News included a quote from Manitoba Hydro spokesperson Scott Powell saying, “this injunction further proves the plan we have to safely resume regular work rotations at Keeyask protects both our workers and neighbouring communities from COVID-19,” (Frew, 2020a; Izri, 2020). This framing was further compounded by the lack of framing of the Lockdown as an expression of Indigenous decision-making, and instead a response of a, “concerned,” community (Bergen, 2020a; Bergen, 2020b), as displayed in two Global News articles titled, “Indigenous group continues blockade over COVID-19 concerns in northern Manitoba,” (Malone, 2020) and “Injunction calls for removal of Manitoba blockade set up over COVID 19 concerns,” (The Canadian press, 2020a). Even the term, ‘decision’ or ‘decision-making’ was mostly reserved for Manitoba Hydro (Bergen, 2020c; Waldman, 2020) or for characterizing First Nations lack thereof (Hatherly, 2020; Rutgers, 2020). Though there were exceptions, and some sources did provide a countering frame to the criminalization of the Lockdown. For instance, a Globe and Mail article included a quote by MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee saying, “in one sense, you feel that this is an ongoing, paternalistic and colonialistic approach to dealing with First Nation people by just applying the law to make sure they’re kept out of the way,” (Fiddler, 2020). Furthermore, some Mainstream sources did include negative framing of Manitoba Hydro, noting a failure to prioritize community safety (Frew, 2020a; Waldman, 2020), and a lack of inclusion

of First Nations in pandemic planning and/or not listening to their concerns (Fiddler, 2020; Rutgers, 2020). As well, the aforementioned Winnipeg Free Press (Waldman, 2020) and Globe and Mail (Fiddler, 2020) articles included the sole framing of Manitoba Hydro actions as colonial.

Regarding framing solidarity between the four First Nations, there were three instances of use of the word, “solidarity,” (Bergen, 2020b) in CBC sources, however two of those instances were limited to photo captions (Bergen 2020c; Hatherly, 2020). Inclusion of external support was slightly more common; One CBC article did note the support of the KTC and AMC (Frew, 2020a) and another noted Amnesty International’s support (Bergen, 2020a), though the other instances of the word were either used in a photo caption (Bergen, 2020a) or used vaguely without discussing the source of support (Samson, 2020). Two notable exceptions were a CTV article which highlighted support in Winnipeg, titled, “Protestors rally in support of Keeyask hydro project blockade,” (Izri, 2020) and an Anglican Journal article which featured many quotes from Bishop Larry Beardy in which he states support from the church, as well as Amnesty International and Manitoba Building Trades (Kidd, 2020).

However, another notable form of support that was included in Mainstream sources was that used to frame support for Manitoba Hydro. For instance, CBC included a quote from Prime Minister Trudeau, which, while hedging the issue, arguably supports Manitoba Hydro’s goals by stating the First Nations must,

Move forward in a way that protects Canadians, but also allows for progressive return to normality... Every community needs to make sure they’re making decisions to protect their members, but I think there are many ways of going about it. (Bergen, 2020b)

More direct examples include a Winnipeg Free Press article which describes the director of Keeyask, David Bowen's, "support of the injunction," which was served to the First Nations (Waldman, 2020) and a CBC article which included a quote of Premier Brian Pallister supporting the injunction, saying, "we need to follow the rule of law," (Bergen, 2020b). Not to mention, the very notion of an injunction against the blockades, the existence of which was noted in almost every article, framed judicial support for Manitoba Hydro, while simultaneously criminalizing the First Nations action. In connection, and as discussed previously, support for Manitoba Hydro was notably framed by many sources noting Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Dr. Brent Roussin's endorsement of Manitoba Hydro's pandemic plan (Bergen, 2020b; Frew, 2020a; Malone, 2020; Waldman, 2020).

5.6 Findings of Ring of Fire Media Analysis

Between 2020 and 2023, 162 (n=162) articles were collected from 33 (n=33) different media sources, as seen in Table 3. Of those, the majority were Mainstream sources (n=16), followed by Alternative/Advocacy Sources (n=11) and Indigenous sources (n=6). The following themes were created through examination of the data: *Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19* and *Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*.

Table 3. Distribution of news media collected for Ring of Fire.

Publication	Ownership	Number of Articles
Mainstream Sources		
CBC News	Crown Corporation	32
CTV News	Bell Media	4
Canadian Mining Journal	The Northern Miner Group	1
Global News	Corus Entertainment	3
Globe and Mail	The Woodbridge Company	11
Law Times	Key Media	1

Mining.com	The Northern Mining Group	1
National Post	Postmedia	3
Northern Ontario Business	Village Media	24
Ontario Newsroom	Government of Ontario	1
Reuters	Thomson Reuters	1
Sault Star	Postmedia	1
Sudbury Star	Postmedia	10
TBNewsWatch	Dougall Media	2
Timmins Press	Postmedia	2
TVO	Government of Ontario	2
<i>Alternative/Advocacy Sources</i>		
Canadian Dimension	Dimension Publications Inc.	1
Corporate Knights	Corporate Knights	1
Energy Mix	Energy Mix Productions Inc.	1
MiningWatch	Non-profit	2
National Observer	Observer Media Group	12
NetNewsLedger	NetNewsLedger	1
Now Toronto	Gonez Media	1
Ricochet	Non-profit	2
The Breach	Non-profit	1
The Conversation	Non-profit	4
The Narwhal	Non-profit	10
<i>Indigenous Sources</i>		
Anishinabek News	Anishinabek Nation	3
APTN	Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Inc.	10
Matawa Media Release	Matawa First Nations	8
Turtle Island News	Lynda Powless	1
Wawatay News	Wawatay Communications Society	3
Windspeaker	Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta	2

5.6.1 Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19

This theme involves the Ontario government's expansion of authority and prioritization of industry during the pandemic through the passing of several bills, as well as their failure to consult Indigenous peoples and the public. This theme focuses on how legislative changes were framed and how those changes were viewed as an extension of government power during the pandemic, along with the perceived impacts on First Nations and the public.

5.6.1.1 Framing by Indigenous Sources.

Data collected from Indigenous sources regarding legislative changes during the pandemic was limited to Bill 197, Bill 71, Bill 23 and exemptions for the forestry industry made in the Environmental Assessment Act. The changes involved in these bills were often characterized as a weakening of environmental protections (Chiefs of Ontario, 2022; Matawa First Nations, 2020; Wawatay News, 2020). As well, many Indigenous sources included a discussion of the impact to ancestral and treaty rights through use of direct quotes and statements as seen in Figure 12 below (excerpts retrieved from: Anishinabek News, 2021; Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, 2023; Garrick, 2020a; Garrick, 2020b; Matawa First Nations, 2020; Wawatay News, 2020).

Nations as rejecting the changes (Garrick, 2020a; Matawa First Nations, 2020). Many sources also focused on the Bill 197 court case, framing First Nations as actively managing the situation, by describing them as, “challenging,” the bill (Anishinabek News, 2020; Garrick, 2020b) and, “fighting back,” (Garrick, 2020b). Furthermore, Indigenous sources framed First Nations as solution-orientated to the situation, noting demands for a partnership to be better formed between themselves and the Ontario government (Wawatay News, 2020). For instance, Matawa First Nations and Wawatay News included a quote from Nibinamik First Nation Chief Sheldon Oskineegish stating the need for decision-making to be made, “in deep partnership with us,” (Garrick, 2020a; Matawa First Nations, 2020). In connection, Indigenous sources extensively framed the Ontario government as failing to properly consult Indigenous peoples in decision-making which impacts their rights. While Indigenous peoples were framed as seeking partnership, words such as, “unilaterally,” (Anishinabek News, 2021; Narine, 2023a; Wawatay News, 2020) or “unilateral,” (Chiefs of Ontario, 2022) and, “abuse of power,” (Chiefs of Ontario, 2022) were conversely used to frame the government as disregarding First Nation decision-making rights. Moreover, Indigenous sources noted a lack of consultation during the creation of the bills (Garrick, 2020b; Wawatay News, 2020), for instance, an Anishinabek News article included a quote from Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Reg Niganobe saying, “every single one of the letters that were sent and attempts at correspondence with the government of Ontario have gone unanswered, (Garrick, 2022). Indigenous sources also framed First Nations concern as extending to the lack of consultation sanctioned by the bills themselves, for instance Matawa First Nations argued Bill 197 would allow the government to, “absolve itself of its Crown obligations,” (Matawa First Nations, 2022) to gain First Nation consent. In connection, an overarching framing of Indigenous sources was that of First Nations demanding

reparations from the government due to their failure to consult about legislative changes.

Indigenous sources notably substantiated these demands by making connections to, “inherent,” rights (Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, 2023; Garrick, 2020a; Wawatay News, 2020) and Treaty rights, as well as noting constitutionally protected (Section 35) rights (Garrick, 2020b; Matawa First Nations, 2020). Conversely, this included sources using words to describe the Ontario government as acting, “unlawfully,” (Matawa First Nations, 2020) and the passage of bills as, “illegal,” (Wawatay News, 2020) and, “unconstitutional,” (Anishinabek News, 2021; Garrick, 2022).

In addition to criminalizing the actions of the Ontario government, Indigenous sources also contextualized the bills within the pandemic, framing the decision to make these legislative changes during COVID-19 as immoral, using descriptive words such as, “dishonourable,” (Matawa First Nations, 2020), “tactic,” and, “very sneaky,” (Garrick, 2020a), suggesting these were decisions made with the awareness of wrong doing. Some sources also commented on the speed in which the legislation was passed (Wawatay News, 2020), with Anishinabek News (2021) describing the government as having, “rammed,” through the changes. This framing similarly draws attention to the timing of the legislative changes and questions the justification of passing such bills in the middle of a pandemic. For instance, in regard to Bill 197, Anishinabek News (2021) and Wawatay News (2020) note that the government had plans for the bill in place well before the pandemic, therefore critiquing the justification of labelling the bill the ‘COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act’ and even overtly stating the changes, “have little to do with crisis response,” (Wawatay News, 2020); While Matawa First Nations (2020) and Wawatay News (Garrick, 2020a) included Nibinamik First Nation Chief Sheldon Oskineegish’s quote, which described the government as using COVID-19 as a, “smokescreen.” Indigenous sources certainly

infer that the Ontario government took advantage of the pandemic to push through legislative changes that it previously had on the books, though Wawatay News was the only source to clarify COVID-19 as an added barrier to consultation by including Fort Albany First Nation stating, “we do not have the resources or capacity to meaningfully engage,” (2020).

Numerous sources also added more context to Ontario’s decision-making by describing a history of industry prioritization and colonization (Wawatay News, 2020). For instance, in response to Bill 71, Building More Mines Act, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek (2023) framed the recent legislation as a continuation of the harmful legacy of mining by noting past developments, “were started without our free, prior, and informed consent,” and stating that Bill 71, “further perpetuates the cycle of resource exploitation.” While Matawa First Nations (2020) and Wawatay News (Garrick 2020a) included a quote from Neskantaga First Nation Chief Chris Moonias who connected the current prioritization of industry in Bill 197 back to the historic and initial intention behind Treaty 9, saying the province’s, “goal was simple; to get our people off the land to make way for mining, forestry, dams and other so-called developments.”

Lastly, the inclusion of Treaty rights by Indigenous sources was commonly used to form a narrative of Indigenous sovereignty in the form of co-jurisdiction. For instance, Windspeaker included excerpts from a statement of claim being put forward by ten First Nations which described Treaty 9 as not including, “the ceding, releasing, surrendering or yielding up of Jurisdiction, but rather sharing of Jurisdiction,” (Narine, 2023a); Matawa First Nations (2020) similarly stated, “under the James Bay Treaty # 9, Ontario does not have singular authority to govern the region.” As well, other language was used to imply sovereignty, decision-making rights, and the long-standing history and connection between First Nations and the land. For instance, statements included in a Matawa First Nations press release and Anishinabek News

described the region as, “traditional territory,” (Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, 2023; Chiefs of Ontario, 2022; Matawa First Nations, 2020) and Wawatay News included Fort Albany First Nations description of the muskeg as their, “homeland,” and, “the foundation of our identity and culture,” (Wawatay News, 2020). The priority of environmental protection was also common among Indigenous sources (Anishinabek News, 2021; Garrick, 2020b; Wawatay News, 2020), sometimes occurring alongside the framing of First Nations as not anti-development. This framing was included in many sources. For instance, Wawatay News included a statement from Fort Albany First Nation clarifying that the community, “understands the need for economic opportunity. However, development must be ecologically responsible and culturally sustainable,” (Wawatay News, 2020). While others focussed on the need for development to be in partnership and of value to the community (Garrick, 2020a, Narine, 2023a). That representatives from Fort Albany First Nation (Wawatay News, 2020), Aroland First Nation (Narine, 2023a), and Matawa Chiefs Council (Garrick, 2020a) felt the need to stress this, and various Indigenous sources saw the value in including it, suggests they were aware of the stereotypical framing of Indigenous peoples in the media as ‘anti-development’.

5.6.1.2 Framing by Alternative/Advocacy Sources.

Alternative/Advocacy sources covered a larger span of the legislative changes implemented by the Ontario government during the pandemic. The changes covered included those discussed in the Ring of Fire case study, as well as some additional legislative changes that were not included due to the limited scope of the study. These topics included: The Extension of Time and Exclusion of Time policy, Bill 197, Bill 229, Bill 71, Bill 23, Bill 69, Bill 46, Powering Ontario’s Growth policy, A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden

Horseshoe (amendment to Places to Grow Act, 2005), and more general suspension of environmental protections.

Alternative/Advocacy sources largely focused on an oppositional narrative towards legislative changes, which was sometimes accomplished by noting numerous First Nations, organizations and individuals who spoke out in opposition (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2020g). It was also accomplished through descriptive word use, such as describing public reaction as in, “opposition,” to the changes (McIntosh, 2020g; Syed, 2022) or describing the bills themselves as, “contentious,” (McIntosh, 2021b). Articles also noted calls to, “repeal,” (McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh & Syed, 2024) and, “reverse,” (McIntosh, 2020g) the changes. Including and highlighting action, such as lawsuits, taken by different groups to challenge the legislative changes also portrayed opposition (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a; Syed, 2022). Included in this oppositional frame, Alternative/Advocacy sources also contextualized Indigenous opposition to legislative changes within treaty rights, as well as the government’s failure to consult (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a; Syed, 2022). This was mostly done by including quotes from First Nation leadership, for instance from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council saying that changes, “will significantly impair, infringe and interfere with the established and constitutionally protected rights and interest of the Haudenosaunee,” (Syed, 2022).

Several Alternative/Advocacy sources notably included a government narrative which acted to contrast oppositional arguments to legislative changes. As well, while the articles did lean towards a focus on oppositional framing, sometimes government narratives, both through quotes and relayed by authors, did frame legislative changes as beneficial (McIntosh, 2020g). For instance, the National Observer included statements from a government spokesperson who

stressed the legislative changes were to, “modernize,” environmental policy (McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh, 2020e) and that Bill 197, “enables public consultation,” (McIntosh, 2020d) and includes, “provisions that protect treaty rights,” (McIntosh, 2020e). In connection, also included was the government narrative which framed some legislative changes as an essential response to COVID-19. For instance, Premier Doug Ford’s motivations for Bill 197 were included through a National Observer author stating, “Premier Doug Ford has said Bill 197 is aimed at helping the province speed up key infrastructure projects, which he says will help Ontario recover economically from the shutdowns caused by COVID-19,” (McIntosh, 2020d), a sentiment which was similarly repeated in other articles (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a). Another commonality across Alternative/Advocacy sources was the inclusion of government voices which responded to and often denied any wrongdoing in regard to the legislative changes, instead voicing their, “commitment,” (McIntosh, 2020c; McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh, 2020f) to consultation or transparency in their actions. Also included, though to a lesser extent, was a framing of inter-governmental conflict regarding the changes. For instance, a National Observer article which discussed the resignation of conservation authorities in light of Bill 229 included critiques from NDP and Liberal representatives (McIntosh, 2020g).

Alternative/Advocacy sources often framed legislative changes as expanding and/or consolidating government power, while also limiting the oversight over that power. For instance, the Narwhal reported that, through Bill 197 the, “Ontario mining minister has taken power away from technical staff and given it to himself,” (Dunne, 2023). Articles also utilized words such as, “expanded,” (McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh, 2021a) “expansion,” (McIntosh, 2021b) and, “concentrate,” (McIntosh & Syed, 2024) to describe the legislative impacts on government power, and, “removed,” (McIntosh, 2020c), “skirt,” (McIntosh, 2020a), and, “reduced,” (Syed,

2022) to describe the reduction of oversight of governmental power. This narrative was further expanded by articles, both through direct quotes and the authors themselves, framing the changes as a removal of accountability by and for the government (McIntosh, 2020a; McIntosh, 2020c; McIntosh & Syed, 2022).

Alternative/Advocacy sources also framed legislative changes as prioritizing industry, sometimes by using descriptive words like, “prioritizing,” (Syed, 2022) “streamlined,” (McIntosh, 2020d), and “fast-tracked,” (McIntosh & Syed, 2022) or describing legislation as making it, “easier” for development to take place (McIntosh & Syed, 2024). Articles also included quotes which were critical of the prioritizing actions, for instance the National Observer included a quote from Ontario NDP climate critic Peter Tabuns saying, “people have had enough of Ford working for powerful developers and not in the best interests of the province,” (McIntosh, 2020g). To a lesser extent, Alternative/Advocacy sources also included the historical context of industrial prioritization by the Ontario government. For instance, the National Observer noted the many environmental laws and protections Premier Doug Ford had eliminated since taking office, therefore placing the environmental exemptions executed during the pandemic within a, “pattern” of government behaviour (McIntosh, 2020a). The Narwhal similarly discussed environmental policy in a holistic manner by producing several articles detailing the many changes the Ford government has instigated over the years, as seen in articles titled, “First, Doug Ford ‘stopped the carbon tax’: how Progressive Conservatives reshaped Ontario’s environmental policy,” (McIntosh & Syed, 2022) and, “Here’s the dirt: how Doug Ford is shaping Ontario’s environmental laws in his second term,” (McIntosh & Syed, 2024). By producing articles which include information on the changes the Ford government made throughout their time in office, such as comparing the number of municipal zoning orders used

by the Ford government in 2019 (5) to those used in 2020 (32), (McIntosh & Syed, 2022), Alternative/Advocacy sources provide the audience with a frame of reference for the degree to which the government amplified their use of powers during the pandemic.

There was also a widespread framing of legislative changes as weakening environmental protections by Alternative/Advocacy sources (McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh & Syed, 2024; Syed, 2022). The National Observer also framed the changes as regressive, describing them as, “rollbacks,” (McIntosh, 2020c), and included a quote from former Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon saying Bill 197 was a, “major step back,” (McIntosh, 2020e) for environmental progress. Also included, to a small degree, was concern about environmental harm as a result of the legislative changes, framing the changes as not only passive or regressive, but actively dangerous and threatening. For instance, the National Observer included a quote from an Ontario Liberal environment critic saying, “it’s one thing to not protect the environment, it’s another thing to destroy what we have,” (McIntosh, 2020g). There was also an inclusion of the narrative that the passing of certain legislation was illegal. For example, The Narwhal noted the Chiefs of Ontario had deemed Bill 23, “unlawful,” (McIntosh & Syed, 2024) including a quote by Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Chief Kelly LaRocca saying, “the government’s decision to pass Bill 23, knowing that consultation had not taken place, suggests a wanton disregard for our constitutionally protected rights,” (Syed, 2022); While National Observer articles noted numerous First Nations and environmental groups describing Bill 197 as, “illegal,” (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f) or that the province acted, “illegally,” (McIntosh, 2021b). Many National Observer articles also included a quote from Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk describing Bill 197 as, “not compliant,” with public consultation requirements in Ontario’s Environmental Bill of Rights,” (McIntosh, 2020d;

McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a; McIntosh & Syed, 2022). Moreover, Alternative/Advocacy sources largely framed legislative changes within the public's right to consultation by noting concern about a lack of consultation preceding the changes, as well as consequential reduced public consultation in the future (McIntosh, 2020c; McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020g). Though overall, there was more of a focus on general public concern and less of a focus on how First Nations were responding to legislative changes in Alternative/Advocacy sources. Though a Narwhal article did highlight Indigenous opposition surrounding Bill 23, framing the lack of Indigenous consultation as an intentional tactic by the government (Syed, 2022). As well, several articles framed the Ontario government as failing to respect First Nation decision-making, noting First Nations as describing such decisions as occurring unilaterally (McIntosh, 2020d; McIntosh, 2020f; Syed, 2022).

In connection, Indigenous sovereignty was not something that was discussed at length by Alternative/Advocacy sources and was mostly limited to describing First Nations as referring to areas as, "traditional territories," (McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f) "our territory," (McIntosh, 2020d) or "our Aski/lands," (McIntosh, 2020e). Regarding framing First Nations as proactive and/or solution-oriented, one article included Fort Albany First Nation Chief Leo Metatawabin stating, "we will fight it," (McIntosh, 2020d) in reference to Bill 197, though this framing was largely restricted to noting First Nations were pursuing court cases and characterizing them as, "challenging" the government's actions (McIntosh, 2020f; McIntosh, 2021a; McIntosh, 2021b). Sources also included First Nations self-description as not anti-development (Dunne, 2023; McIntosh, 2020e). For instance, the National Observer included a quote from Fort Albany First Nation Chief Leo Metatawabin saying, "I understand economics is very important. I understand that. People depend on economics to survive. But we need the land to survive as well,"

(McIntosh, 2020d). The presence of such quotes often also involved framing First Nations as connected to and respecting the importance of the environment, for instance, by including Fort Albany's statement, "the muskeg is the foundation of our identity and culture" (McIntosh, 2020d). The inclusion of these framings contributed to framing First Nations priorities as holistic, regarding their culture, environment and economic development.

Finally, framing legislative changes within the context of the pandemic was a common occurrence in Alternative/Advocacy sources; Sometimes the author accomplished this by noting several changes made in the legislation which did not relate to COVID-19, despite being portrayed as a response to the pandemic by the government (McIntosh, 2020c, McIntosh, 2021b). In addition, the Ontario Government was sometimes framed as forcefully or strategically making legislative changes without full public consultation or consent. This was often done by describing the government as, "push[ing]," through the changes (McIntosh, 2020a; McIntosh, 2020c; McIntosh, 2020e; McIntosh, 2020f). Articles also included short quotes, such as that provided by Dr. Samantha Green referring to the removal of environmental protections as a, "disingenuous use of the COVID crisis," (McIntosh, 2020c). Several articles extended this framing to include an argument that these changes may actually be harmful during COVID-19, linking the importance of environmental protections to air quality and climate change (McIntosh, 2020a; McIntosh, 2020c). Overall, sources alluded to the concept of disaster capitalism, framing the government's actions to weaken or suspend environmental protections during the pandemic as exploitative and unjustified.

5.6.1.3 Framing by Mainstream Sources.

Mainstream Sources largely focused on Bill 197, Bill 229, Bill 71 and the Far North Act and consistently followed a format of portraying contrasting/opposing arguments about the subject of legislation and consequential action. For example, a CBC article noted Kate Kempton describing the government as inadequately consulting with First Nations by not supplying funding or legal/environmental expertise, which was then followed by a quote from a spokesperson for the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks saying, “the ministry has offered capacity to various communities in the form of technical support and is considering options on how to further support Indigenous communities,” (Kitching, 2020c). As well, a significant portion of Mainstream source’s inclusion of government narratives consisted of government representatives refuting or contesting oppositional views of legislative changes, mainly by characterizing such changes as beneficial. For instance, Global News included a quote from Premier Doug Ford regarding Bill 197, arguing, “we’re going to make sure we strengthen them [environmental assessments], but we’re going to do them quicker, smarter,” (McQuigge, 2020) contrasting the Indigenous opposition in the article that had argued the changes would indeed weaken and reverse past progress. This narrative also extended to framing legislative changes as benefiting Indigenous communities. For instance, The Globe and Mail included a quote from Ontario’s Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, claiming that changes to the Far North Act would benefit First Nations by removing, “a barrier for First Nations that are seeking to allow development on their traditional lands, or to protect them,” (McGee & Gray, 2021). Though this narrative notably seems to be restricted to First Nations who are pro-development. While other inclusions of government voices involved their statements promising a commitment to consultation and denial

of any wrong-doing and/or impact on Indigenous rights (Casey, 2021; Kitching, 2020c; Ross, 2023a).

Mainstream sources largely applied a framing of opposition towards the legislative changes, which ranged from opinion pieces in the Toronto star (Star Editorial Board, 2020), to articles highlighting Indigenous lawsuits and statements (Kitching, 2020c), as well as letters and action taken by conservation authorities (Rankin, 2020). Some articles chose to focus on the opposition and/or action of one group (Kitching, 2020c; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020), while many made note of several different groups (CBC News, 2020d; Leeson, 2023; Schlote, 2023; Turner, 2021a) alluding to a considerable amount of opposition. Sources sometime characterized it explicitly as opposition (CBC News, 2020d; Leeson, 2021; McGee & Gray, 2021), while other descriptive words included, “protest,” (CBC News, 2020d), “rejecting,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b), “reject,” (Turner, 2021a), “objecting,” (Ross, 2023a) and calls to, “repeal,” legislation (CBC News, 2020a; De Luigi, 2020). Many sources also described or included self-descriptive quotes characterizing opposition as, “concern,” (CBC News, 2020a; CBC News, 2020d; De Luigi, 2020; Schlote, 2023; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020; Turner, 2020a).

Opposition was also largely framed around concern that legislative changes would, “weaken,” environmental protections and procedures (De Luigi, 2020; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; Schlote, 2023; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). Other words included, “gut,” (CBC News, 2020d; Star Editorial Board, 2020) and, “dismantle,” (Star Editorial Board, 2020; Turner, 2020a) to describe the government’s actions towards legislation. Sources also characterized the consequences of legislative changes as a form of deprivation, framing government actions as having taken something of value, whether pertaining to rights or

protections, using words such as, “reducing,” (Schlote, 2023) “rescinded,” (McQuigge, 2020) and “eliminated,” (Kitching, 2020c). While some sources expanded on this framing to include a narrative of regression, utilizing terms like, “reversed,” (McQuigge, 2020) “deconstruction,” (McQuigge, 2020) and a, “step back,” (De Luigi, 2020; Leeson, 2023). Also common was a framing of government expansion and/or consolidation of power (McGee & Gray, 2021; McQuigge, 2020; Rankin, 2020; Schlote, 2023), for example a CBC article described former Greenbelt Council Chair, David Crombie, saying Bill 229 would, “expand ministerial authority,” (CBC News, 2020d) over environmental issues. There was also an inclusion of framing legislative changes as removing or limiting conservation authority power and enabling a circumvention of their approval (CBC News, 2020d; Rankin, 2020; Star Editorial Board, 2020). Words used to describe the governments removal of power from the conservation authorities included, “strip,” (CBC News, 2020d; Star Editorial Board, 2020), “hinder,” (Rankin, 2020), “curtail,” and, “restrict,” (CBC News, 2020d).

Several articles framed the government as failing to consult the public about legislative changes (Casey, 2021; Kitching, 2020c), with most of this framing centring around a failure to consult First Nation communities. For instance, Northern Ontario Business and Sudbury Star included excerpts of the Matawa Chiefs Council statement which clarified they were not consulted, and only informed about Bill 71 (Leeson, 2023; Ross, 2023a) on the same day it was put forward. Articles including the Matawa Chiefs statement also characterized the lack of consultation as deliberate, saying the government was, “dodging,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b) and attempting to, “skirt,” (Leeson, 2023) and, “absolve itself” of its crown obligations (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). There was also a limited framing of changes as hidden within legislation, though Northern Ontario

Business did describe the changes as being, “lumped into the government’s COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b) and the Toronto Star explicitly critiqued the use of omnibus bills for these kind of alterations by saying, “tucking legislative changes into budget bills is designed to avoid proper scrutiny, debate and public consultation,” (Star Editorial Board, 2020).

Mainstream sources also largely framed the legislative changes as government prioritization of industry, a notable example being a Toronto Star article titled, “Once again, the Ford government is putting developers ahead of Ontario’s environment,” (Star Editorial Board, 2020). Descriptive words inferring industry prioritization include the authors themselves characterizing the changes as making things, “easier,” (Schlote, 2023) in order to, “fast-track,” industry development (Casey, 2021). This was also accomplished by including quotes (Leeson, 2023; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020; Turner, 2021a), for instance, CBC and Northern Ontario Business included a quote from former Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon characterizing changes as, “bulldozer legislation,” (CBC News, 2020a) and a, “legislative bulldozer,” (Ross, 2023a). To a lesser extent, Mainstream sources also included a criminalizing frame of the government’s actions and/or the legislation changes; Several sources referred to various First Nations describing legislative changes as, “illegal,” (De Luigi, 2020) “unlawful,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020), “unconstitutional,” and that they, “violate,” their rights (Kitching, 2020c; McQuigge, 2020). As well, a CBC article was notably titled “Ontario court finds provincial government broke law on lack of public consultations,” (Casey, 2021) and was centred around a court case in which the judges found the government had failed to adhere to the Environmental Bill of Rights.

In connection, there was an inclusion of framing the legislative changes within Indigenous rights in Mainstream sources, though fairly limited. This sometimes involved including quotes from Indigenous leadership asserting their inherent rights and treaty rights. For instance, Northern Ontario Business and TbNewsWatch included a quote from Matawa Chiefs Council stating, “we have inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights over our Homelands that must be acknowledged and respected by the Crown,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). Other times, this also involved explicitly framing the legislation as violating or harming Indigenous rights. For instance, two articles, from TbNewsWatch and Timmins Press, heavily centre on statements from the Matawa Chiefs Council and the Mushkegowuk Council respectively, which include quotes that place the legislation within the context of oral Treaty 9 agreements (De Luigi, 2020; TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). Inclusion of an Indigenous sovereignty frame was rarer, with only a few articles including quotes from Indigenous leadership referring to their First Nations as, “governments,” (McQuigge, 2020) and defining land as, “our territory,” (CBC News, 2020a) or, “our traditional territories,” (TbNewsWatch.com Staff, 2020). Though there was a more subtle framing of sovereignty in several sources, for instance, Timmins Press included quotes from former Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon who, throughout the article, always referred to the Ontario government as, “your,” government and characterized the authority of the settler state as limited, which relegated the province’s supposed authority and framed First Nations as sovereign (De Luigi, 2020).

Lastly, Mainstream sources repeatedly made connections between legislative changes, the pandemic, the Ring of Fire, and colonialism. Firstly the inclusion of a narrative which drew a connection between the pandemic and the legislative changes can be observed by the author of a

Toronto Star article who framed certain changes as inappropriate during the pandemic, saying, “we’re in the middle of a pandemic that has people and businesses struggling from day to day and yet Ford’s government has still managed to find the time and energy to dismantle environmental protections.” (Star Editorial Board, 2020). Although, most of this narrative was displayed by the inclusion of quotes from Indigenous leadership. For instance, A CBC article noted that the Matawa Chiefs Council had, “repeatedly,” raised concerns that the government was making numerous legislative changes during the pandemic, as well, a Globe and Mail article similarly described several First Nations as saying, “all work and legislative changes should cease until COVID-19 passes,” (McGee & Gray, 2021). Regarding the Ring of Fire, sources largely framed the legislation as having possible ramifications for future development (Schlote, 2023) and more specifically framing the changes as enabling development (CBC News, 2020a; McGee & Gray, 2021). For instance, A Sudbury Star article included dialogue from MPP NDP Sol Mamakwa connecting changes in Bill 71 to Ring of Fire development by arguing the legislation was another method to push forward development by the government (Leeson, 2023). Lastly, when there were connections made to colonialism, they often contextualized current government behaviour by referencing past colonial government actions and framing current legislative changes and government action as a continuation of that behaviour (Leeson, 2023; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020b; Ross, 2023a). For instance, a Global News article included a quote from Chief Robert Nakogee of Fort Albany First Nation describing the government as one, “that has perpetrated colonialism,” alluding that certain legislative changes demonstrate a continuation of this behaviour (McQuigge, 2020).

5.6.2 Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire

This theme connects the Ontario government's push to develop the Ring of Fire and Indigenous action to assert their sovereignty and rights on their land. This theme incorporates some common issues observed in the Ring of Fire development, including, how the region/land was framed, how the concept of mining itself was framed, along with the framing of decision-making, both of First Nations and Ontario government (and to a lesser extent, industry). In connection to Indigenous decision-making, framing of sovereignty, rights and consultation also play a role in this theme.

5.6.2.1 Framing by Indigenous Sources.

The Ring of Fire was largely framed as a region of great monetary value and/or rich in minerals by Indigenous sources. In some instances, the framing was stated as fact directly by the author of the articles. For instance, a Windspeaker author described the area as, "rich with critical mineral deposits," (Narine, 2023b) and an APTN author stated the Ring of Fire, "is worth billions to the province," (Francis, 2023a). Though the value of the Ring of Fire was also framed as more of an opinion by outside sources, as authors also pointed to government and industry characterizations of the area by using quotes, such as APTN quoting Lt. Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell referring to the Ring of Fire as having, "unprecedented potential," (Needham, 2022). Indigenous sources also framed the Ring of Fire's value as a point of opinion by providing context as to where these ideas originated. For instance, APTN wrote, "mining companies suspect large deposits," and, "Premier Doug Ford's Ontario government calls it a once-in-a-century development opportunity," (Forester, 2022a).

Another common framing of the Ring of Fire region was its environmental importance and value, primarily its capacity to store carbon (Francis, 2023a; Forester, 2022b; Karlenzig,

2021; Narine, 2023b), which was again accomplished both directly by the authors and through quotes from Indigenous people. For instance, a Windspeaker author described the region as, “rich with peatlands, which is estimated to sequester 35 billion tonnes of carbon. The peatlands are also critical habitat for wildlife,” (Narine, 2023b). APTN also included an excerpt from Neskantaga First Nations statement of claim calling the area a, “globally significant wetland, massive carbon storehouse,” (Karlenzig, 2021). Furthermore, Indigenous sources included many quotes from First Nations framing the land as intrinsically valuable and as intricately connected with their lives. For instance, the Matawa Chiefs Council quoted Elder Ananias Spence from Webequie First Nation saying, “the wealth of our lands is not only the minerals, but it is the water, the trees, the air,” (Matawa First Nations, 2022c), and an excerpt included by APTN from a statement of claim made by several First Nations framed the land as an integral aspect of their, “Way of Life,” which, “has economic, social, cultural and spiritual characteristics and purposes,” (Francis, 2023b).

The concept of mining in the region was also something that was framed in Indigenous sources, and largely as a source of harm to the environment, climate change, wildlife and First Nations living in the area. For example, APTN sources included a letter from five First Nation Chiefs to Environment Minister Guilbeault saying, “rampant mining development could not only destroy this globally critical carbon sink,” (Forester, 2022a) but also, “release its huge store of carbon and escalate climate change further into catastrophe,” (Connors, 2022). Framing of mining as harmful to Indigenous well-being was also something portrayed by sources such as the Matawa Chiefs Council, who included a quote from Neskantaga First Nation Chief Wayne Moonias saying, “losing our land to development has great potential to be tantamount to the genocide of our People,” (Matawa First Nations, 2022a). In connection, Indigenous sovereignty

was often framed as being ignored by the government, who's decision-making and actions were overwhelmingly framed as, "unilateral," (Forester, 2022b; Francis, 2023b; Karlenzig, 2021; Narine, 2023a; Narine, 2023b). However, there was an inclusion of quotes from government representatives which focused on projecting a commitment to consult, or an argument they already had (Forester, 2022a; Forester, 2022b), as well as a commitment to, "work with," (Narine, 2023b) or, "work alongside," (Francis, 2023b) First Nations in developing the Ring of Fire, sometimes also arguing development would benefit First Nations (Connors, 2022; Francis, 2023a; Narine, 2023b). Though this framing was largely overshadowed by the colonial framing of the government's actions. For instance, several articles included quotes from First Nation Chiefs referring to the loss of decision-making power and land in the Ring of Fire as, "genocide," (Matawa First Nations, 2022a; Narine, 2023a; Narine, 2023b) and an APTN article referred to a letter from several First Nation chiefs who described Premier Doug Ford's behaviour as, "colonial," (Karlenzig, 2021), and that the Crown and non-Indigenous people have, "disproportionately benefited," (Karlenzig, 2021) from their land. In connection, the government was also framed as prioritizing industry, as many articles noted Premier Doug Ford's infamous pledge to jump on a bulldozer himself to develop the Ring of Fire (Francis, 2023b; Karlenzig, 2021; Matawa First Nations, 2023; Narine, 2023b) and described the government as attempting to, "fast-track," development (Francis, 2023a; Matawa First Nations, 2022c; Narine, 2023b). There was also an inclusion of a failure to consult, such as APTN including a quote from Aroland First Nation Chief Mark Bell saying, "we hear so much about building mines and roads and this and that, but they don't have our community's permission... There's been zero consultation on these types of projects." (Francis, 2023b), as well as noting a court ruling which declared, "Ontario's failure to properly consult Attawapiskat," (Forester, 2022b).

However, this critical framing of a unilateral government was eclipsed by the widespread narrative of sovereignty and rights throughout Indigenous sources, and the framing of Indigenous people as sovereign actors in the matter of Ring of Fire development. Sometimes this was specifically framed within treaty rights, as numerous sources provided context to the governments autonomous decisions by noting that oral agreements of Treaty 9 promised co-jurisdiction (Forester, 2022b; Francis, 2023b; Matawa First Nations, 2022a); There were also many explicit references to the Ring of Fire occupying Treaty 9 territory or existing within the traditional territory of the First Nations (Connors, 2022; Forester, 2022b; Karlenzig, 2021; Matawa First Nations, 2022b; Narine, 2023b; Needham, 2022). Sovereignty and rights were also explicitly asserted as inherent and ancestral (Forester, 2022b; Forester, 2022c; Karlenzig, 2021; Narine, 2023b). For instance, APTN included an excerpt from a letter from five First Nation chiefs to Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault saying, “we have Inherent Jurisdiction to carry out our responsibilities here. We do not need the Crown’s permission to do so... You baldly assert sovereignty here; we have it,” (Forester, 2022a). Sources also included calls and demands for the government to uphold and respect Indigenous rights to decision-making (Francis, 2023b; Matawa First Nations, 2022a; Matawa First Nations, 2022b). For example, Windspeaker included a quote from Constance Lake First Nation Chief Romona Sutherland saying, “we have a right to be at the helm with the Crown because you’re affecting our way of life, our way of being,” (Narine, 2023a). Also included were calls from First Nations to lead or co-lead the development process of the Ring of Fire (Connors, 2022; Forester, 2022b; Forester, 2022c; Matawa First Nations, 2022c) and for the government to properly consult (Narine, 2023b; Needham, 2022). As well, sources made note of legal action taken by First Nations to uphold their rights (Forester, 2022b; Karlenzig, 2021; Narine, 2023a; Narine, 2023b), notably

demonstrated by an APTN article titled, “‘We never surrendered our rights’: Treaty 9 Nations launching \$95B lawsuit against Canada, Ontario,” (Francis, 2023b).

Lastly, another notable framing present in Indigenous sources was that of the evolving situation surrounding the agreement made between the Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations and the Ontario government. This agreement came up in sources numerous times, with authors noting other First Nations were not involved in that agreement, sometime describing the groups as, “pushing back slightly,” (Forester, 2022c) or there being, “mounting pushback,” between the two groups (Connors, 2022). However, the same articles provided context to the motivation behind the agreements, quoting Marten Falls First Nation Chief Bruce Achneepineskum describing his desire to alleviate the, “widespread poverty,” within their communities (Forester, 2022c). As well, the agreement was framed as a colonial strategy by the government, with sources including quotes accusing Ontario of using, “divide and conquer,” tactics (Narine, 2023b; Needham, 2022), and the Matawa Chief Council calling on the government to, “stop the colonial backroom deals,” (Matawa First Nations, 2022c). Furthermore, rather than framing First Nations as in conflict with each other, Indigenous sources framed communities as being in solidarity. For instance, Windspeaker included Chief Ramona Sutherland saying the Matawa Nations, “are not in any way adversary... We’re here to protect the land. That’s it. That’s all,” (Narine, 2023b).

5.6.2.2 Framing by Alternative/Advocacy Sources.

One prolific framing of the Ring of Fire Region in Alternative/Advocacy sources was as a valuable mineral or economic source. Though most of this framing was not declared by the authors themselves, but by referring to various opinions voiced by government and industry

representatives (McIntosh, 2023b). For instance, a Ricochet and Corporate Knights author noted that politicians likened future returns from the Ring of Fire to those made in Alberta by proclaiming the area as the next, “oil sands,” (Schalk, 2023; Scott & Peerla, 2021). The Breach also noted that, “Greg Rickford has said the road will bring economic opportunities to northern Ontario,” (Nay, 2023). However, almost as common as this framing, was one of exaggerated value being put to the Ring of Fire, both stated by authors themselves and through quotes. For example, The National Observer author stated that the region had been, “subject to significant hype that has since died down,” (Sharp, 2020), while a Ricochet author noted there had been, “absurd declarations about the Ring of Fire’s riches,” (Schalk, 2023).

The Ring of Fire region was also framed as environmentally important, primarily for its ability to sequester carbon (McIntosh, 2021c; Schalk, 2023; Wilt, 2020), as demonstrated by an Energy Mix article which referred to the area as a, “critical carbon-sink” (Bonasia, 2021). As well, another common occurrence was of framing the region as, “sensitive,” (McIntosh, 2021c; McIntosh, 2023b; Scott, 2022; Sharp, 2020; Wilt, 2020) to disturbances, both in terms of impacting the lands’ ability to hold/release carbon and accommodate species, like caribou. Lastly, sources included a framing of the area as located on Indigenous land, however this was largely restricted to mention of the area being under Treaty 9 territory (McIntosh, 2021c; NNL Digital News Update, 2022; Scott & Peerla, 2021). Although there was a more detailed framing of the importance of the land in regard to Indigenous well-being and livelihood. For instance, MiningWatch noted the area is, “home for nearly 40,000 Indigenous people across 35 communities whose food, medicine, cultural and sacred spaces for traditional practices and ceremony are sustained by the area’s extensive river networks and wildlife habitats,” (Blaise & Reid, 2020). While The Breach and The Conversation included and referred to quotes from First

Nations expressing the importance of the area for subsistence hunting and gathering (Nay, 2023; Scott, 2023).

Conversely, the concept of mining was largely framed as harmful to the climate, environment, and First Nations in Alternative/Advocacy sources. Numerous articles made the connection between mining the Ring of Fire and possible climate impacts (Bonasia, 2021; McIntosh, 2021c; Scott, 2022; Schalk, 2023). For example, the Narwhal described the possibility of the area going from a, “carbon sink into a carbon emitter,” (Wilt, 2020), while other articles noted environmental issues that could stem from exploratory processes (Blaise & Reid, 2020), and general destruction of land (McIntosh, 2023c; Ruiter, 2023). Framing of mining as a source of harm to Indigenous peoples was mostly accomplished by including quotes from various First Nations (McIntosh, 2021c; McIntosh, 2023b). For example, Now Toronto described Fort Albany Chief Leo Metatawabin as saying road development would have, “major impacts,” (Chernos, 2020) on his First Nation. This framing additionally included establishing connections to past industry experiences held by First Nations which resulted in harm and little benefit to communities (McIntosh, 2021c; Wilt, 2020). For instance, Ricochet included a quote from Tori Cress, an Anishinaabe leader from G’Chimnissing saying, “we want to prevent the same thing that happened in the tar sands, from happening to our territories,” (Ruiter, 2023).

In connection, government decision-making was mostly framed as a prioritization of industry with the ardent objective to, “push,” forward Ring of Fire development (Ruiter, 2023; Schalk, 2023; Sharp, 2020). Two Narwhal articles included the infamous Premier Doug Ford quote that he would develop the area, “if I have to hop on a bulldozer myself” (McIntosh, 2021c; Wilt, 2020). While MiningWatch described Ontario’s actions as a, “mad dash to develop the controversial Ring of Fire,” (Blaise & Reid, 2020). Quotes by government representatives were

also largely used to convey their interest in developing the Ring of Fire and the value it would bring to Ontario and the First Nations in the region (Ruiter, 2023; Schalk, 2023;). For example, the National Observer included a quote from Premier Doug Ford saying the Ring of Fire was a, “multi-billion dollar opportunity,” (Sharp, 2020) and Now Toronto included a quote from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau saying, “mining has long been a fundamental building block of our economy...projects that lift up entire communities, including many Indigenous communities,” (Chernos, 2020). To a lesser extent, government and industry decision-making was also framed as being disingenuous (McIntosh, 2021c; Sharp, 2020). For instance, The Conversation noted, “Noront has consistently under-represented to investors, and now to corporate suitors, the legal and financial liabilities associated with Indigenous jurisdiction — and there are many,” (Stanley, 2021). As well, Ricochet included a quote from Neskantaga First Nation Chief Chris Moonias saying, “we’re always told we’ll get jobs, you will get this, you will get that, but nothing happens,” characterizing this behaviour as a longstanding pattern experienced by First Nations (Schalk, 2023). There was also a framing of government and industry decision-making and behaviour as colonial, as seen in Figure 13 (excerpts retrieved from: McIntosh, 2023c; NNL Digital News Update, 2022; Ruiter, 2023; Schalk, 2023; Stanley, 2021).

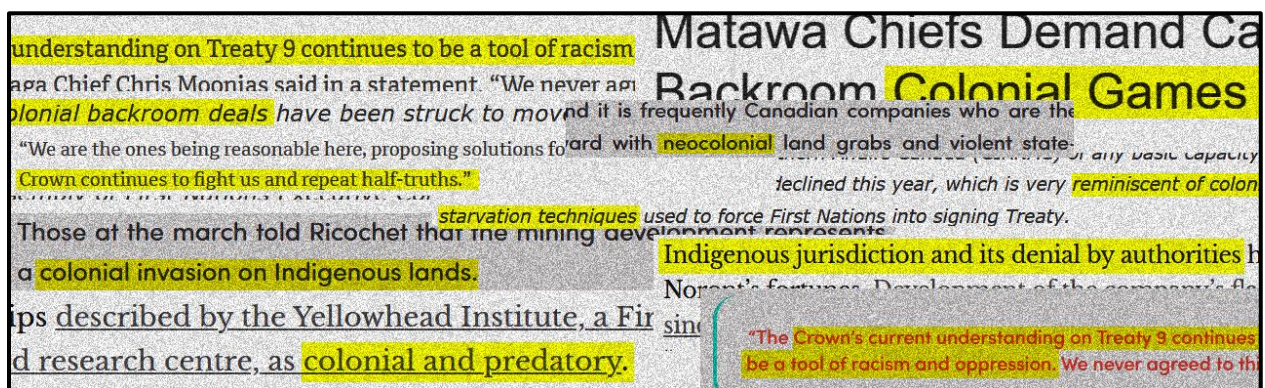


Figure 13. Excerpts from Alternative/Advocacy news sources framing government and industry as colonial

In that regard, Indigenous decision-making was largely framed as deficient by Alternative/Advocacy sources, mainly in connection to a lack of consultation and unilateral government decision-making. This was accomplished, for example, by many sources including quotes by First Nations describing a lack of consultation (Chernos, 2020; McIntosh, 2023b; NNL Digital News Update, 2022; Schalk, 2023; Wilt, 2020), such as Ricochet including a quote from Darian Baskatawang, a member of Whitesand First Nation and lawyer saying, “I have yet to see Doug Ford or any members from his government in the communities asking people directly what that community wants,” (Ruiter, 2023). First Nation decision-making was also subtly framed as a rights and sovereignty issue by sources describing the government as violating Indigenous rights and the law. Although, this was largely done by authors describing the government as breaking Treaty 9 promises (McIntosh, 2023c; Nay, 2023 Scott & Cowen, 2020) and UNDRIP (Ruiter, 2023; Schalk, 2023), and there was not much mention of inherent Indigenous rights and sovereignty. However, several sources did also provide context of how the Treaty is understood by First Nations and what rights, specifically co-jurisdictional rights, the agreement stipulated (Chernos, 2020; NNL Digital News Update, 2022; Schalk, 2023; Scott & Peerla, 2021). For instance, The Narwhal described the First Nations lawsuit draft statement as saying, “the treaty created a special legal relationship requiring both Indigenous governments and settler governments to consent to resource extraction and development,” (McIntosh, 2023c). Other framing of Indigenous sovereignty was accomplished by sources noting Indigenous sovereignty or describing assertions made by First Nations (Blaise & Reid, 2020; (McNeil et al., 2020; Scott & Cowen, 2020; Stanley, 2021), for instance Corporate Knights noted that Indigenous peoples have, “inherent governing authority,” (Scott & Peerla, 2021) over their territories. Direct quotes describing the First Nations desire and right to decision-making were also included by sources

(Bonasia, 2021; Chernos, 2020; Nay, 2023; Wilt, 2020). For instance, The Narwhal included a quote from Wayne Moonias to Doug Ford saying, “you come to our traditional territory, you get our free consent,” (McIntosh, 2023c). Several sources further framed Indigenous sovereignty and decision-making over the Ring of Fire as challenging the validity of the Ontario government’s authority to make decisions for the region. For instance, The Breach noted that, through a lawsuit, several First Nations, “are challenging the Ontario government’s sovereignty on Treaty 9 lands,” (Nay, 2023).

Lastly, Indigenous people were often framed as in crises by Alternative/Advocacy sources, largely by the authors themselves (McIntosh, 2023b; Schalk, 2023; Scott & Peerla, 2021; Sharp, 2020; Wilt, 2020). For instance, The Conversation noted the many compounding crises faced by Neskantaga First Nation, writing, “life-threatening public health crises underpinned by infrastructure failure has become painfully routine in Neskantaga,” (Scott & Cowen, 2020) and The Narwhal noted many First Nations in the Ring of Fire region were, “coping with overlapping crises with poverty, boil water advisories, soaring food prices and youth suicides,” (McIntosh, 2021c). In connection, many articles included the issue of the government’s agreement with only two First Nations, Marten Falls and Webequie and sources mostly refrained from framing it as one group against the other; Instead, the situation is largely framed as one group (Marten Falls and Webequie First Nation) who are in dire need of infrastructure and funds and see development as a means to achieve those goals, and another group who are demanding more decision-making power and consultation (McIntosh, 2021c; McIntosh, 2023b; Scott, 2022; Wilt, 2020).

5.6.2.3 Framing by Mainstream Sources.

The Ring of Fire region was largely framed by authors of Mainstream sources as a, “mineral-rich,” area (Jenish, 2021; Law, 2023b; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022c; Rajagopal, 2023; Turner 2021b; Turner, 2022a). Mainstream sources also pointed to other outside sources, for instance, Global News noted that, “politicians,” have been labelling the Ring of Fire as Canada’s, “next oil sands,” (Hessey, 2023a), and the Sudbury Star wrote, “many respected geologists feel the Ring of Fire’s nickel, copper, chromite and other battery metals have the potential to equal if not exceed the legendary Sudbury Basin,” (Sudol, 2021). The Ring of Fire, and its prospective minerals, were also connected specifically to the creation of electric vehicles (EVs), an industry which was framed as a rapidly expanding. For instance, CBC News noted that a, “mineral deposit in the James Bay lowlands has been eyed as a critical source for Ontario’s burgeoning electric vehicle battery industry for years,” (Law, 2023c) and described lithium as, “a key element needed in the production of EV batteries. It’s one of several critical minerals found in northwestern Ontario that are needed to fuel North America’s growing EV industry,” (Law, 2023a).

The value of the region was also framed within its environmental importance. Again, this was done directly by authors (CBC News, 2022; Dunne, 2022; Turner 2021b; Turner, 2022a), for example Global News wrote that the peatlands, “cool the planet by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and trapping it deep underground,” (Hessey, 2023a) and have a, “natural ability to stall further climate warming” (Hessey, 2023a). This was also accomplished by quoting or referring to outside sources (Butler, 2023; CBC News, 2022; Turner, 2022b) such as CBC quoting the conservation director of the Wildlands League saying, “these are globally-significant peatlands and watersheds, and habitat for threatened wildlife and endangered and threatened species,” (Law, 2023c). As well, Northern Ontario Business referred to several First Nations as

describing the area as a, “globally significant carbon sink,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2023b), further quoting former Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon saying, “we see them as the breathing and cooling lands for the planet,” (Baiguzhiyeva, 2021).

However, with a few exceptions (Kitching, 2022b; Mcgee & Gray, 2023; Turner, 2022b) framing of the Ring of Fire as important to First Nations was less prevalent throughout sources. There was also minimal framing of the region as on First Nation land within Mainstream sources. Several CBC News sources did note that the area is, “in Treaty 9 territory,” (Brockman, 2023; Law, 2023b; Turner, 2022b) or is on the, “traditional territory,” of First Nations (Brockman, 2023; Turner, 2022b). Although, some sources entirely neglected to frame First Nations as having sovereignty over the land, implying that it was simply somewhere they happened to live (Friedman, 2022). For instance, TVO wrote that, “the proposed mines are also near several communities from the Matawa Tribal Council (Dunne, 2022). Some sources also framed the assertions of sovereignty by First Nations as uncertain by using the word *claim* which, according to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) is, “to say that something is true or is a fact, although you cannot prove it and other people might not believe it.” For instance, the Sudbury Star noted that, “Fort Albany claims its traditional territory covers much of the surrounding area, including the Ring of Fire,” (Grech, 2020) and Northern Ontario Business noted that, “The First Nation [Neskantaga] claims its traditional lands include the Ring of Fire and the proposed roads leading into the deposits,” (Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b).

Mainstream sources framed the concept of mining fairly equally as both harmful and beneficial. Framing Mining as harmful was overwhelmingly accomplished through quotes. This was done by quoting representatives from environmental organizations (CBC News, 2022; Hessey, 2023a), legal representatives (Kitching, 2022a; White, 2021) and Indigenous people

(Mcgee & Gray, 2023; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021c; Turner, 2022b). For instance, Northern Ontario Business quoted a Mushkegowuk Council news release in which former Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon stated his concern that, “without the proper planning and appropriate consideration of the sensitive wetlands, much damage will occur downstream” (Baiguzhiyeva, 2021). Notably, quotes from non-Indigenous people tended to focus on the threat mining poses to climate regarding the potential release of carbon, whereas quotes from Indigenous people tended to focus more on concerns about local environmental damage and consequences. There was also a less prominent inclusion of framing mining as harmful to Indigenous peoples, though there were still several examples, such as CTV News and Mining.com quoting a statement from Attawapiskat, Fort Albany and Neskantaga First Nation saying they, “stand to be seriously and permanently desecrated by massive-scale mining in the Ring of Fire,” (Papineau, 2021; Mining.com Editor, 2021). Within this framing, there was also a limited inclusion of the narrative of interconnection between First Nations and the land. Such inclusions can be observed in a CBC article, which describes Neskantaga First Nation Elder Maggie Sakanee warning that Ring of Fire development would, “exacerbate the Neskantaga’s crises by disturbing their ancestors’ graves, pollute the river systems, and destroy the lands that bring life and healing,” (Turner, 2022b).

As noted, mining was also framed as beneficial, mainly in regard to aiding in Canada’s green transition and to improving the well-being of the local First Nations. As for the former, this can be observed by sources referring to industry opinions on the subject, such as CBC writing, “the Ring of Fire is set to play an important role in decarbonization, said Luca Giacobazzi, chief executive officer of Wyloo Metals,” (Turner, 2022b). Sources also used direct quotes, such as CTV News quoting the Ring of Fire Metals CEO saying, “Canada has a once-in-a-generation

opportunity to develop the critical minerals the world needs to decarbonize,” (Papineau, 2022). Less common were authors directly stating the benefits, however several exceptions were opinion pieces from the Sudbury Star, as one author wrote, “the Ring of Fire Road is a green national infrastructure priority due to the climate change emergency,” (Sudol, 2022b). The same author was also a vocal proponent of framing mining as beneficial to First Nations, writing, for example, that, “nothing screams louder than economic reconciliation for Indigenous communities when mining companies provide middle-class jobs, allowing parents to give decent housing and a high quality of life for their children,” (Sudol, 2021). Most of this framing though, was achieved by including quotes from government and industry representatives (Brockman, 2023; CBC News, 2022; Crawley, 2021; Jenish, 202; Papineau, 2021), as well as Marten Falls First Nation Chief Bruce Achneepineskum and Webequie First Nation Chief Cornelius Wabasse (Kitching, 2020b; Office of the Premier, 2020; Papineau, 2022; Sudol, 2021).

In connection, framing the Ring of Fire as beneficial to Indigenous peoples was also intertwined with the framing of Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations decision to enter an agreement with Ontario to build several roads connecting their communities and the Ring of Fire to Southern Ontario. This situation was often framed as an expression of Indigenous self-determination by two, “impoverished First Nations,” (Jenish, 2021; Sudol, 2022b) attempting to improve the quality of life for their people. For example, Sudbury Star included a quote from Chief Achneepineskum saying, “without this project, our people will continue to live in the same underdeveloped conditions, lacking access to drinking water, housing, clothing, jobs, health care and education,” (Sudol, 2021) and CTV News quoted Chief Cornelius Wabasse saying, “we are exercising our sovereignty and the right to pursue economic sustenance in a manner that respects the land and brings opportunity for our young people,” (Papineau, 2022). Furthermore, mining as

beneficial to First Nations was also woven into the framing of government decision-making as beneficial to First Nations. For instance, Northern Ontario Business quoted Premier Doug Ford saying the Ring of Fire is, “going to benefit First Nations community...But this isn’t just going to bring opportunity and employment to First Nations community. It’s going to bring proper health care to the community, it’s going to bring fresh food to the community,” (Ross, 2023b).

Furthermore, there was also an inclusion of a narrative contesting those which framed mining as harmful; Notably, observed in the Sudbury Star, whose author criticised environmentalists as exaggerating the impacts of mining (Sudol, 2020; Sudol, 2022b) while noting the Canadian, “mining sector is well known throughout the world for its sustainable practices, restoration activities and consultations with First Nations,” (Sudol, 2021; Sudol, 2022a). However, this framing was most often applied within the narrative of conflict between the two First Nations who entered into an agreement with the Ontario government, and those who have not. For instance, it was frequently noted by sources that First Nations not in the agreement were further away from the Ring of Fire, and therefore had no need to worry about possible impacts and had less of a right to decision-making (Ross, 2023b). This was done by including quotes, for example, CBC noted that a lawyer for the Ontario government had said, “the government stands by its initial assessment that this activity will have very little impact on the people of Attawapiskat...The area in question is much closer to Webequie First Nation,” (White, 2021). As well, this was directly stated by authors, for instance the Canadian Mining Journal noted that several First Nations are opposed to Ring of Fire development, but that they are, “located hundreds of kilometres east of the Ring on the James Bay coast,” (Jenish, 2021) and the Sudbury Star claimed that, “Neskantaga, Attawapiskat, Fort Albany...have no legitimate claims on the traditional territories in the region,” (Sudol, 2021). As discussed, this frame played

into the narrative of conflict between First Nations which was very prevalent across Mainstream sources. Sometimes it was simply noted that two First Nations were project proponents (or favour development), and others were opposed (Brockman, 2023; Butler, 2023; McGee & Gray, 2023). Other times the conflict was more contextualized by framing the two First Nations as wanting to bring economic opportunities to their communities and other First Nations as demanding more/better consultation and/or decision-making (Hessey, 2023a; Kitching, 2020b; Mining.com Editor, 2021; Raymer, 2020; Turner, 2022b). However, there was little framing of First Nation unity or solidarity and only slight framing of the government as the instigator of the conflict (Grech, 2020; Rajagopal, 2023).

Concerning the framing of government decision-making, as noted previously, the voices of government representatives largely framed themselves as acting beneficially towards First Nations. In addition, quotes utilized by sources also conveyed a commitment to work with and/or consult First Nations (Barrera, 2020; Casey, 2023; CBC News, 2022; Crawley, 2021; Fiddler, 2023; Law, 2023b; Office of Premier, 2020; Ross, 2023b; Turner, 2021b). For example, CBC included a quote from a spokesperson for the Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister saying, “our government remains steadfast in its commitment to work alongside First Nations, to advance their vision for self-determination,” (Brockman, 2023). However, there was a significant framing of the government decision-making as harmful towards First Nations, both by authors themselves and quotes from First Nations or references to released statements. More specifically, government decisions or actions were sometimes framed as disingenuous (Diaczuk, 2021; Grech, 2020; Hessey, 2023a; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b; Papineau, 2021). For example, Mining.com included an excerpt of the First Nations declaration of Moratorium saying the Federal government was, “acting with duplicity behind our backs in collaboration with Ontario”

in designing the Regional Assessment (Mining.com Editor, 2021). The government was also framed as dismissive and neglectful (Casey, 2023; Kitching, 2022a; Law, 2023c; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021c; Turner, 2022a). However, less often was government decision-making framed as violating Indigenous rights and/or law, though there were exceptions. For example, several articles provided excerpts of the First Nations Moratorium which stated the government was in violation of several Indigenous and state laws (Jenish, 2021 Mining.com Editor, 2021). Also uncommon was the framing of government decision-making as colonial, though again there were exceptions (Hessey, 2023a; Law, 2023b; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021c).

Quotes from government representatives also often conveyed a promotion and/or a commitment to Ring of Fire development. For instance, Northern Ontario Business quoted Ford saying, “we’re building that Ring of Fire as sure as I’m talking to you,” (Ross, 2023b). Though most commonly, quotes connected Ring of Fire development to the creation of EVs and/or Canada’s green transition (Butler, 2023; CBC News, 2022; Crawley, 2021; Law, 2023c; Ross, 2020). Sources also included quotes which voiced a promotion of the monetary value of the Ring of Fire (Gray, 2020; Papineau, 2021; Turner, 2023), such as the Law Times who quoted Premier Doug Ford saying, “we are unlocking a multimillion-dollar opportunity,” (Raymer, 2020). As well, framing of the government’s fervent interest, if not prioritization of developing the Ring of Fire was also directly stated by authors (CBC News, 2022; Crawley, 2021; Dunne, 2022; Mcgee, 2023; Mcgee & Gray, 2023; Turner, 2021b; Turner, 2022a; Turner, 2022b). For instance, The Globe and Mail wrote, “both Mr. Ford’s Progressive Conservatives and the previous Liberal government at Queen’s Park have trumpeted the Ring of Fire’s massive chromite deposit as a boon for years,” (Gray, 2020).

Concerning Indigenous decision-making, there was a deficit of framing Indigenous peoples as sovereign nations; While there was an abundance of references to action taken by Indigenous peoples (Brockman, 2023; Casey, 2023; Crawley, 2021; Fiddler, 2023; Friedman, 2022; Law, 2023a; McGee, 2023; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021c; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2023b; Rajagopal, 2023; Turner, 2021b), contextualizing the action as an expression of sovereignty was overall absent. Consequently, demands from First Nations for more decision-making, while present in many sources, generally lacked the context of their rights to that decision-making (Dunne, 2022; Kitching, 2022b; Law, 2023c; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022a). In connection, the power and ability of Indigenous peoples to make decisions was framed as deficient (Dunne, 2022; Friedman, 2022; Hessey, 2023a; Kitching, 2020b; Kitching, 2022b; Mining.com Editor, 2021; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021a; Papineau, 2021; Ross, 2023c; Turner, 2021b; Turner, 2022a; Turner, 2022b). For example, Timmins Press describes Wayne Moonias as saying his First Nations voices are being, “marginalized,” (Diaczuk, 2021) and, “the community’s decision-making is being undermined by the province during a pandemic,” (Diaczuk, 2021). In connection, First Nations were also commonly framed as experiencing crises, of which the pandemic was often considered, and consequently unable to conduct adequate consultation activities and enact decision-making (Friedman, 2022; Kitching, 2020a; Law, 2023c; McGee, 2023; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2020a; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021a; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b; Porter, 2020c; Ross, 2023b; Sudol, 2021; Turner, 2020c; Turner, 2021b; Turner, 2022b). For example, CBC included a quote from Chris Moonias saying

Out of basic human decency, we must ask that you pause the ‘consultation’, the ‘engagement’, and the notices. It is simply too much for us to bear at this moment.

Documents are not received, deliberations are not being held, protocols cannot be followed, decisions simply cannot be made...we're in the middle of evacuation due to a water crisis, a public health emergency, and we are right in the middle of a pandemic. We're not able to fully inform the community members on what is going on. (Turner, 2020b)

As implied in this quote, the framing of First Nations as in crisis was often simultaneously framing government decision-making as careless, both in the case of proceeding during the pandemic with development and of the rights and priorities of First Nations.

However, there were quotes included by First Nations which did sometimes allude to their rights, for example CBC quoted Wayne Moonias stating, “rightfully the First Nations people of Neskantaga should be the ones to determine how those things are going to be carried out,” (Crawley, 2021) and, “our people will have a say in what goes on in our traditional lands and our river system,” (Turner, 2022b). Sources also described First Nations as demanding decision-making and processes to be First Nation-led, which more subtly implied the rights of those First Nations, for example Northern Ontario Business wrote, “in the letter, the chiefs said there needs to be an Indigenous-led investigation and decision-making process regarding the Breathing Lands,” (Baiguzhiyeva, 2022). There was also an inclusion of direct assertions from First Nations of their rights and sovereignty. As noted previously, this was utilized sometimes to frame the two First Nations, Webequie and Marten Falls, as having foremost decision-making power over the region (Office of Premier, 2020; Sudol, 2021; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2022c). However, this also extended to assertions from other First Nation leadership (Casey, 2023; Friedman, 2022; Mining.com Editor, 2021; Northern Ontario Business Staff, 2021b; Turner, 2023), such as CBC News quoting Chief Solomon Atlookan of Eabametoong First

Nation saying, “Treaty 9 First Nations agreed to share with the Crown. We retained jurisdiction,” (Brockman, 2023). Assertions were also made by non-Indigenous advisors to the First Nations (Crawley, 2021; Turner, 2021b; Turner, 2022b), such as CBC News quoting Professor Dayna Scott saying First Nations, “hold the inherent jurisdiction to be the decision-makers for those lands. They also hold a right of free, prior and informed consent, which comes from international law,” (Butler, 2023).

5.7 Discussion

First of all, a circumstance of this media analysis was an inequitable amount of source material available from Indigenous, Alternative/Advocacy and Mainstream sources. There was considerably less material available from Indigenous sources, which is understandable, considering there are considerably less Indigenous news outlets. Journalism remains to be a white dominated occupation, demonstrated by a 2023 survey completed by the Canadian Association of Journalists which found that 75.5% of journalists identify as white, and only 5.2% identify as Indigenous, concluding that, “the vast majority of Canadian newsrooms are not representative of the communities they serve,” (The Canadian Association of Journalists, 2023). This inequity consequently impacted this media analysis in regard to the methods used to measure the prevalence of frames. Therefore, how an issue was framed was not gauged by the number of times certain framings came up per source necessarily, more so how many times it came up within that source. A hypothetical example being that a sovereignty frame occurred in 5 articles within Indigenous sources and Mainstream sources, but the total number of Indigenous sources was 10 and total number of Mainstream sources was 30. The overall inclusion of the sovereignty frame would not have been considered to be equally present in both sources and would have been understood as more prevalent in Indigenous sources.

Furthermore, this media analysis demonstrated that a consequence of the under representation of Indigenous journalists and sources, resulted in an under representation of Indigenous experiences, perspectives and context. A common occurrence throughout themes was the failure of Mainstream sources to provide historical, colonial, and Indigenous sovereignty context. Though there were exceptions to this, notably the Winnipeg Free Press article written by Niigaan Sinclair which contextualized the Keeyask Lockdown within the government's historical disregard towards Indigenous rights, criticized the criminalization of Indigenous action, while also conversely framing the Lockdown as an assertion of Indigenous rights and community protection (Sinclair, 2020). However, the majority of Mainstream sources framed the circumstances as isolated events, rather than an extension of colonialism, thereby aiding in the normalization of continued government and industry control over Indigenous land. This was observed in the Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro legacy persists through pandemic*, as Mainstream sources largely failed to provide historical context about Manitoba Hydro and the Keeyask partnership, which consequentially framed the blockade as a result of COVID-19 concerns. These community concerns were indeed a very important aspect of the Lockdown; However, this limited framing does not acknowledge how the legacy of Manitoba Hydro and its failure to act as an equal partner had contributed to the First Nations decision-making. Furthermore, a failure to include narratives of Manitoba Hydro's legacy and industry prioritization consequentially neglected to inspire the audience to question why Manitoba Hydro was bent on increasing workers for Keeyask in the first place. In connection, Indigenous sovereignty was similarly omitted, notably by Ring of Fire Mainstream sources which framed those First Nations who demanded more decision-making as stakeholders rather than sovereign nations, consequentially diminishing and undermining those demands.

Furthermore, in lieu of including a sovereignty frame, Indigenous decision-making was commonly criminalized, as was included in many Mainstream articles regarding the Keeyask Lockdown in *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*. Indigenous decision-making was also framed as harmful, though more subtly, regarding the Ring of Fire *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*; Mainstream sources largely failed to include a sovereignty frame and heavily included a narrative which portrayed the deposits as of great value, therefore framing Indigenous opposition as a threat to a benevolent province striving to provide jobs to its people and decarbonize its transportation sector. This framing was largely a consequence of the practice by Mainstream sources to foster *objectivity* in their articles by providing voices from both sides of the argument; A practice perhaps most clearly observed in this analysis by the variety of voices presented in Mainstream articles, as quotes were overall equally sourced from both First Nations (largely from chiefs) and from government and industry representatives to provide contrasting perspectives. Iggers (1999) connects this practice to scientific ideals of objectivity, which American journalists borrowed from in the early 1900s in an effort to present their work as credible. Objectivity, specifically procedural objectivity, is usually performed by authors presenting only outside opinions of those involved in the situation, while also striving to avoid the injection of their own opinion in order to avoid critiques of bias (Iggers, 1999). As Rosen (2010) describes it, a journalist's proof of credibility relies on the rationale of, "I don't have a horse in this race. I don't have a view of the world that I'm defending. I'm just telling you the way it is, and you should accept it because I've done the work and I don't have a stake in the outcome." However, this idea of writing from a, "view from nowhere," (Rosen, 2010) has seen a lot of push-back over the decades (Callison & Young, 2020; Clark, 2022). Akin to the obstacles of objectivity in academia, Iggers (1999) argued that practical

objectivity is impossible due to, “unconscious ideological biases that may permeate the newsroom and the larger society,” (p. 101), which results not in a production of absolute facts but instead, “shared interpretations of reality,” (p. 104); Whereas a shared reality in our society is undoubtably shaped by settler colonialism, an ideology which has, among other things, normalized discriminatory and stereotypical perceptions of Indigenous peoples (Glenn, 2015). Iggers further noted that, not only are views of journalists subjective to bias, but so are the supposed experts that are engaged by journalists to provide the commentary for the situation (Iggers, 1999). Furthermore, Rosen (2022) argues, that this practice of comparing one expert’s opinion to the other, as if they are on equal standing, can become particularly problematic when one of those opinions is a blatant lie. This can be observed in numerous instances by Mainstream sources in this media analysis, such as within the Ring of Fire *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*; Government and industry quotes frequently touted the enormous value of the deposits, quotes which were then contrasted against admonishments and opposition from First Nations, who were not framed as sovereign. Not only did sources therefore fail to frame the situation as one between governments, but audiences were also likely to take for granted that the government was telling the truth about the Ring of Fire’s worth; A ‘truth’ which was conversely framed as significantly contested in Alternative/Advocacy sources, not to mention by a York University report stating past government, “estimates are now widely acknowledged to have been wildly optimistic,” (Scott, 2023, p. 72). Moreover, journalistic objectivity becomes problematic when a failure to look reflexively at past actions of the media, which played a significant role in compromising Indigenous rights, then results in the continuation of those same colonial narratives (Callison & Young, 2020). Throughout the Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*, Mainstream

sources failed to frame the Lockdown and the Keeyask construction as occurring on Indigenous land, weakening and delegitimizing the Lockdown to a protest by ‘concerned’ community members, further contributing to the erasure of Indigenous land rights. This theme also involved Mainstream sources including a criminalizing frame towards the First Nations by including the voices of provincial and federal government, Manitoba Hydro, and the Provincial Health Officer all describing the Lockdown as unnecessary and unlawful. This maintained both criminal stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, as well as colonial paternalistic narratives insinuating that First Nations do not know what is best for their communities.

Indigenous [Tahltan] journalist and scholar Candis Callison calls for a rethinking of objectivity, shifting away from a view from nowhere, to a view from *somewhere*: a self-location that brings awareness to what questions should be asked and, “whose voices need to be heard more than others,” (Linnitt, 2020). Callison goes on to discuss the importance of placing events within historical context, saying, “journalists need to think beyond just reporting on events as one-offs and think about how histories and structured systems are a part of what events can reveal. Events are often intersections of many things colliding,” (Linnitt, 2020). Indigenous-led news organizations, including the many which were not utilized for this media analysis, are challenging traditional news practices. For instance, Indigenous [Syilx] reporter for IndigiNews, Kelsie Kilawna has written about how, “Mainstream media has often listened to the voice of our colonizer and the narratives twisted about us because they simply didn’t include us,” (Kilawna, 2020). Indigenous sources in this media analysis notably included a greater proportion of quotes from Indigenous people, therefore resulting in those voices, which have direct, place-based experience of the past and ongoing circumstances, shaping the narrative. Kilawna further described how IndigiNews has created space for Indigenous storytellers to share experiences

which focused on culture and healing; Kilawna described the outlet as receiving very positive feedback from their audience who expressed, “that they felt seen for the first time, that they felt celebrated and that our outlet was one of the few doing all of the work,” (Kilawna, 2020).

While Indigenous sources have been guiding the way in providing more holistic reporting, Alternative/Advocacy sources are also playing a role in this reimagining of journalism. Overall, these sources did resemble Mainstream sources in their practice of framing the issue from ‘both sides’; Though many articles did heavily favour Indigenous voices and they also, more often than not, included historical and colonial context to the events unfolding, as well as framed Indigenous actions as those of sovereign nations. This was notably accomplished by articles in the Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*, as authors were outspoken in their support of the First Nations expression of their rights. An awareness and avoidance of perpetrating colonial narratives was also observed in the Ring of Fire *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*, as sources avoided framing First Nations involved in the Ring of Fire development as in conflict, and instead as communities working to protect and advance the well-being of their members. As well, several Alternative/Advocacy sources, such as The Narwhal and The Conversation, notably offer substantially longer content than that of Mainstream sources. This consequently allowed for more holistic accounts, like those seen by The Narwhal in Ring of Fire *Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19*, which described the history of Premier Doug Ford’s legislative decision-making leading up to the pandemic.

Indigenous sources, however, uniquely contextualized the events in their articles by consistently noting necessary elements of sovereignty, colonialism, and inequity. This seemed very strategic, as connecting past injustices to current events helps to remind audiences that these

circumstances are a result of the structures of colonialism ingrained within our society and not unique or fluke predicaments which Indigenous peoples are irrationally responding to. Moreover, Indigenous sources acted as a counternarrative to those in Mainstream sources by highlighting government actions as colonial, such as those included in Ring of Fire *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*, which framed the division between First Nations as a result of government divide and conquer tactics. Indigenous sources also framed the government as deliberately ignoring their legal duties to First Nations and prioritizing industry development, as observed in Ring of Fire *Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19*, which included First Nation voices framing legislative changes as acts of disaster capitalism. Though it is worth noting that this framing was also witnessed in many Alternative/Advocacy sources, such as those in Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro legacy persists through pandemic*, which included articles critiquing the labelling of Keeyask construction as essential. As well, the Ring of Fire *Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19* included framing of the government's legislative changes as a prioritization of industry and as expanding governmental powers. However, Indigenous source's contextual inclusion of sovereignty, which was often accompanied by treaty rights and constitutional rights, within narratives of Indigenous action was particularly conducive in framing that action as one with legal and ethical support. Indigenous sources which noted relevant agreements and treaties alongside mention of the government's ubiquitous failure to consult also provided context to audiences who may not have been aware of why that consultation was required in the first place. In addition, throughout the themes of this media analysis, Indigenous sources commonly framed First Nations as in solidarity, usually with the purpose of protecting their communities from government action. In the case of the Keeyask

Lockdown, this was accomplished by framing the four First Nations as coming together in unity to protect their communities from Manitoba Hydro's decision to continue construction; In the case of the Ring of Fire, this was done by framing the many Matawa First Nations as united in their goals to make decisions over and protect their homeland from Ring of Fire development.

In connection, Indigenous sources also framed First Nations as assertive, for instance in Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*, First Nations were often framed as taking action to protect their communities from COVID-19, and in Ring of Fire *Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19*, First Nations were framed as challenging and fighting back against the government's legislative changes. This stands in contrast to Mainstream sources which, while including narratives of Indigenous action, also heavily framed Indigenous peoples as vulnerable. This was sometimes done in direct reference to the First Nations ability to manage COVID-19, as displayed in Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*, though it was predominantly seen in Ring of Fire *Theme 2: Indigenous decision-making guides the future of Ring of Fire*, in which Mainstream articles continuously made note of crises, such as a lack of infrastructure and economic development, which were being managed by First Nations. Haalboom and Natcher (2012) have argued a need to be very mindful when framing people as vulnerable, as this impacts how outsiders view them and may consequently lead to, "ill-informed and misguided policy interventions that do not reflect the priorities of the communities themselves," (p. 324). In the case of the Ring of Fire, Mainstream articles which framed First Nations as vulnerable, while also including the narrative by government and industry that the Ring of Fire would benefit First Nations, may encourage audiences to believe development is the answer to the community's issues. Additionally, framing First Nations as vulnerable may also, "undermine indigenous

agency and efforts to achieve greater autonomy,” (Haalboom & Natcher, 2012, p. 325), which was heightened by the lack of sovereignty framing in Mainstream sources. Moreover, Munari et al. (2021) argued that, “the use of deficit terms like vulnerable can too easily conceal the wider structural causes that lead to health inequities and obscure accountability of those responsible for generating or perseverating these causes and structural power imbalances,” (p. 197). Again, this was highlighted in Mainstream sources which largely omitted historical and colonial context; There was little mention of the root causes of those crises noted in Mainstream articles covering the Ring of Fire, including the role government and industry have had in producing and maintaining them, instead allowing those voices to paint themselves as saviours bringing prosperity to First Nations who could not manage it themselves.

It is also important to note that there were instances of Indigenous sources including quotes by First Nations themselves referring to communities as vulnerable. For instance, Indigenous sources within Keeyask Lockdown *Theme 2: Indigenous action an expression of sovereignty*, contained quotes from Indigenous leadership who stressed concern regarding the First Nations lack of infrastructure and capacity to manage a COVID-19 outbreak. This was likely a necessary and strategic point to make, as Haalboom and Natcher state, self-describing as vulnerable is a strategy that, “has aided indigenous peoples in their efforts to generate support for their valued way of life, their traditional knowledge, and the environments in which they live,” (2012, p. 323). Facing a history of disproportionate impacts from health emergencies, notably the recent 2009 H1N1 outbreak, Indigenous leadership and organizations in Manitoba actively worked to develop a pandemic plan for First Nations that would accommodate current obstacles (such as poverty, overcrowding and lack of infrastructure) to healthcare in communities (Nickel et al., 2024; Olynick, 2020). Reminding the public, not to mention government and industry, of

these obstacles may have worked as a productive strategy to gain appropriate support. Therefore, it is not for myself, an outsider, to judge the use of a vulnerable characterization by First Nations themselves, though I believe monitoring deficit-based language utilized by media sources or other outsiders, remains important.

Lastly, a notable observation made of Indigenous sources was their framing of Indigenous peoples as by no means anti-development, but as opposed to irresponsible development without their consent. The inclusion of this framing displayed the integral role of Indigenous sources in countering the common stereotype or narrative of Indigenous people (and their way of life) as antithesis to settler modernity (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012), as opposed to all development. As Veracini (2010) argues, a settler colonial ideology often paints Indigenous peoples, their way of being and relationship to land as backwards, while settler capitalistic use and development of the land is viewed as proper, as well as necessary to ‘modernize’ Indigenous peoples. Spice (2022b) similarly notes that, “the discursive positioning of infrastructure as a gateway to a modern future has been used in state-building projects around the world for some time now,” (p.44); Further discussing the increase in discourse and legislation which has been positioning infrastructure, such as resource development, as intimately connected to notions of national security. Consequentially, groups who are opposed to development may then be framed as both opposed to progress and as a threat to national security. This framing was witnessed in Mainstream articles where First Nation opposition was portrayed as a barrier to sustainability in light of the greenwashing of mining and electric vehicles in Ontario, and similarly by the justified criminalization of First Nations involved in the Lockdown due to the essentialized Keeyask project in Manitoba. However, within *Ring of Fire Theme 1: Colonial powers expanded through legislation during COVID-19*, Indigenous sources challenged that

framing by complicating their position to that of Nations striving to protect and preserve their way of life, while also finding balance between development and environmental protection. Moreover, challenging the anti-development stereotype also challenged dominant settler solutions to the climate crisis which have continuously ignored and dismissed Indigenous peoples (McGregor et al., 2020). Indigenous sources instead offered quotes from First Nations calling for sustainable, culturally appropriate solutions made in true partnership; In a way, the inclusion of such quotes put forward an Indigenous environmental justice framework (McGregor et al., 2020) which asserted the rightful and necessary role of Indigenous voices and knowledge within future development planning.

5.8 Conclusion

There is no question that journalism and the way we receive and engage with news media has been increasingly shifting over the years. There has been a gradual decrease in the size and reach of Mainstream news organizations, which, as Callsion argues, has made room for more holistic and inclusive media organisations (Linnitt, 2020). Alternative media organizations such as The Narwhal, The Breach, The Conversation, and many more are diverging from the increasingly fast news cycle to create in-depth articles and practice, what The Discourse refers to as, “slow journalism,” (The Discourse, n.d.). There has also been a growing awareness about media bias, and the harm it exudes, resulting in journalists speaking out about such practices, demonstrated in articles such as The Conversation’s, “Journalists covering Indigenous Peoples in renewable energy should focus on context and truth, not click-bait,” (Walker, 2020) and The Tyee’s, “Story by Story, Canada’s News Media Built Indigenous Oppression,” (Lafferty, 2021). Moreover, Indigenous news organizations such as APTN, Windspeaker, Anishinabek News, Wawatay News, Turtle Island News, and many more are also claiming more space within media

and challenging traditional ideas of reporting. For instance, IndigiNews, established in 2020, describes themselves as, “passionate about decolonizing the media,” (IndigiNews Staff, 2022) and reject the idea of objectivity, instead embracing personalized storytelling, stating, “at IndigiNews, we want to share with you the wisdom of our grandmothers, and the successes of our kin across these lands,” (IndigiNews Staff, 2022).

However, while there has been an increase of Indigenous and Alternative sources, as demonstrated by this media analysis, Mainstream media remains a considerable supplier of news to the public, consequently maintaining a problematic status quo; As this media analysis also demonstrated that Mainstream sources consistently omitted settler colonial and Indigenous sovereignty context, as well as incorporated stereotypical and harmful portrayals of Indigenous peoples within both the Keeyask Lockdown and Ring of Fire circumstances. In connection, there have been recent approaches to media and media bias that, rather than embrace the notion of a view from somewhere, maintain the elusive goal of objectivity. For example, in recognizing that, “many media outlets and other social outlets present unbalanced and unfair portrayals,” (The Daily Scrum News, n.d.) The Daily Scrum News describes itself as, “the first news agency in North America that uses Digital Synthetic Human Polyglots as our main news anchors to report the daily news,” (The Daily Scrum News, n.d.). This news organization’s solution to human bias was to effectively remove the human part of the equation, stating that their, “AI Technology Ensures Unbiased Reporting,” (The Daily Scrum News, n.d.). According to a report from Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism, the possible impacts of artificial intelligence on news media, “remain poorly understood,” (Simon, 2024) and is far outside the scope of this research. However, AI’s continued evolution will surely have a role in shaping the future of news media, not to mention the arguments surrounding journalist objectivity.

Regardless of the developments which lay ahead for journalism, its role in relaying information and instilling meaning in that information will remain. This media analysis has demonstrated Mainstream media's many shortfalls when reporting on issues which concern and affect Indigenous peoples, such as industry-related developments like Keeyask and the Ring of Fire. While Mainstream media has been gradually including more Indigenous voices in its content, its continued failure to frame First Nations as sovereign nonetheless results in those voices being placed in an inequitable position when contrasted against government and industry representatives. Furthermore, this failure can be viewed as an expression of a settler colonial ideology; By continuing to ignore and erase Indigenous sovereignty, the decision-making of settler governments is further legitimized in the public eye and reinforced within our shared understanding of reality. As well, omitting colonial history obscures the role of government and industry in facilitating harm, not to mention their necessary responsibility to aid in addressing that harm. However, this media analysis has also demonstrated the potential promise of Alternative/Advocacy sources when it comes to producing more holistic reporting which is more mindful of the context in which their reporting is taking place. Perhaps a growing awareness of the problematic nature of journalistic objectivity, as well as Mainstream media's adherence to fast and attention-grabbing news articles, will continue to shift the public's attention to such sources. Or perhaps Mainstream media will observe the growth of Alternative sources and become more reflexive about their methods and adjust their way of journalism. Notwithstanding these recent and possible future developments, this media analysis demonstrated the unique contribution of Indigenous sources in framing issues about Indigenous people. Within a profession that is still dominated by white journalists, Indigenous reporters and Indigenous-led media are sharing stories from and for Indigenous people. The value of Indigenous sources, in

both creating content that reflects the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, as well as challenges the dominant colonial narratives maintained by Mainstream media, will continue to be a vital force for decolonization and the advancement of Indigenous rights and justice.

6 Community Experiences

6.1 Summary

This chapter contains the experiences of eight community members from three of the First Nations involved in the May 2020 Keeyask Lockdown. These stories were explored through the use of a Thematic Web which illustrates the complex and cyclical nature of community experiences and relationships regarding the settler colonial legacy of Manitoba Hydro. In writing this chapter, I endeavoured to preserve the nuances of individual voices and be self-reflective about my own biases, learning from and adapting Indigenous methodologies and theory, notably Indigenous resurgence and storytelling. Moreover, this chapter explores the interconnected nature of trauma and healing, as well as the role of the Lockdown as a space for fostering and renewing solidarity, well-being, Indigenous Environmental Justice and resurgence; Not only do these stories challenge settler narratives which often marginalize, confine, and misrepresent Indigenous peoples, these stories convey integral teachings regarding direct action and how communities are moving forward in a good way.

6.2 Introduction

As this project involves and reflects upon Indigenous peoples and numerous ongoing rights and environmental developments, this project therefore has a responsibility to create space for Indigenous experiences. The previous Case Studies chapter discussed two specific instances

of disaster capitalism during the pandemic in connection to surrounding First Nations actions of resistance and history of government industry prioritization; Whereas the Media Analysis chapter examined how different media sources were portraying those two stories to the public. This chapter will now explore the unique experiences of community members involved in one of the case studies: the Keeyask Lockdown. As detailed in previous chapters, the Keeyask Generating Station is Manitoba Hydro's most recent development on the Nelson River in Northern Manitoba and was justified by the industry as a much-needed form of clean energy for the province (Braun, 2022). Situated within Treaty 5 territory, the project was conducted in 'partnership' with four Northern Cree First Nations: Tataskweyak, Fox Lake, York Factory and War Lake First Nation (Braun, 2022; Manitoba Hydro, n.d.a). The Joint Keeyask Development Agreement was first signed by the four First Nations and Manitoba Hydro in 2009 (Braun, 2022) and the project was completed in May 2022 (Manitoba, n.d.a). However, despite the industry's narrative of partnership, the project failed to appropriately make room for and recognize Cree worldviews, knowledge and sovereignty (Robson, 2022). As well, over the course of development, numerous issues faced by First Nations, which were characteristic of past hydro projects, such as discrimination, abuse and violence, were rampant within and around the project site (Troian, 2019). The problematic relationship between Manitoba Hydro and the four First Nations was further stained in the spring of 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread to Manitoba and the industry chose to ignore the First Nations wishes to scale down project construction and instead attempted to proceed with a worker rotation (Robertson, 2020a). In response, the four First Nations asserted their right to control their territory and protect their communities by enacting a Lockdown and placing blockades on PR 280, restricting access to the Keeyask project

site for ten days until an agreement was finally made with Manitoba Hydro (Hobson, 2020a; Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b).

This chapter presents the experiences of eight community members from the Northern First Nations, who detail stories of the Lockdown, as well as their thoughts and history with Manitoba Hydro and its legacy. The value of lived experiences or storytelling is well recognized within Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021) and is also found within western interpretive phenomenology research which values the study of social phenomenon through individual perceptions, believing that, “truth lies within the human experience and is therefore multiple and bound by time, space, and context,” (Chilisa, 2020, p. 39). The inclusion and focus on these stories, of community member’s lived experiences, is also an incredibly important aspect and addition to the narrative surrounding the Lockdown, and more widely, Indigenous direct action and the ongoing relationship between First Nations and Manitoba Hydro; While there has been an increase in Indigenous-led media, there remains a need to continue to make space for individual experiences which simultaneously challenge colonial stereotypes prevalent within mainstream media, and also work to inject place-based context, truth and meaning into the narrative (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Michelin, 2021). Furthermore, Indigenous lived experiences, personal perspectives such as those within this chapter, also act to counter the homogenized or pan-Indigenous representations that take up so much space in mainstream media and academic research (Hunt, 2016). Indigenous [Cree] professor and writer, Dallas Hunt (2016) describes, “the need to pluralize this ‘Indigenous voice’ --that is, to recognize the diversity and complexity of Indigenous voices in Canada,” (para. 1). This chapter offers a small, but unique and valuable compilation of community experiences; Gifts to which I have a responsibility to respectfully organize, represent and explore (Kovack, 2021). In striving to do that, I have employed a two-

eyed seeing approach and organized this chapter by borrowing from reflexive thematic analysis and Indigenous storytelling. Furthermore, I will be exploring these community experiences through the lens' of settler colonialism, Indigenous environmental justice and resurgence. The complexity and nuance of community experiences is reflected in four themes and four subthemes, diverging and converging, demonstrating the existence of multiple viewpoints that expand past the scope of this chapter. Moreover, this exploration finds that, while the colonial legacy of Manitoba Hydro continues to structure inequity in the North, First Nations have and will enact justice and resurgence, asserting their right to self-determination and way of being.

6.3 Methodology

As noted by Indigenous [Māori] professor and writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism,” (2021, p. 1) as research has historically (and presently) been conducted *on*, rather than *with* Indigenous peoples, resulting in exploitation and harm. Indigenous [Cree and Saulteaux] professor and writer Margaret Kovach further asserts that contextualized, “holistic, spiritually imbued Indigenous thought was, and continues to be, considered by Western Eurocentrism as a belief system but not science in terms of what Western culture views science to be,” (2021, p. 65); A Western view being one which decontextualizes research and emphasizes, “external evidence, objectivity, neutrality, testing, and universal laws of generalizability,” (Kovach, 2021, p. 66). In recognizing the past and current harmful relationships between research and Indigenous peoples, this chapter strived to adopt a two-eyed seeing approach regarding the organization and interpretation of data. Two-eyed seeing is a concept which was first introduced in 2004 by Mi'kmaw Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall in collaboration with researcher Cheryl Bartlett in an effort to foster transcultural research (Bartlett et al., 2015). As described by Elder Albert Marshall, two-eyed

seeing may be understood as, “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all,” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). This concept recognizes Indigenous knowledge as, “a distinct and whole knowledge system,” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335) equal to that of Western knowledge, as well as enables researchers to, “weave back and forth,” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335) between one way of knowing and the other, depending on the circumstances of the research. Furthermore, two-eyed seeing is mindful of Western academia’s emphasis on objectivity and asserts that Indigenous ways of knowing can widen this perspective, fostering a more holistic way of doing research; Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall state, “we recognize that Western Science privileges objectivity and de-emphasizes the human element, yet we depend heavily upon it and its technologies in our modern lives. Nevertheless, for the benefit of all humans, our times need to learn to factor the human element into science and to rediscover our humility as but one species on the planet,” (Bartlett et al., 2015, p. 299).

In connection, the organization of this chapter strived to learn from and intertwine Indigenous methodologies which highlight the importance of storytelling, along with Braun and Clarke’s (2023) theory of thematic analysis. The role and importance of storytelling has been discussed by numerous Indigenous writers. For instance, Bartlett et al. (2015) reference Indigenous writers such as Jo-ann Archibald and Thomas King while stressing the value of the storytelling form in recognizing and understanding patterns, an endeavour they connect to both Indigenous and Western science. Kovach (2021) also discusses the role of storytelling and personal experience in providing insight into events, further noting storytelling’s suitability to research, saying, “if research is about learning and discovery, so as to enhance the well-being of

the earth's inhabitants, then story is research. Story provides insight from observations, experience, interactions, and intuitions that assist in developing a theory about a phenomenon,” (Kovach, 2021, p. 161). Another study by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, guided by two-eyed seeing, conducted a review of storytelling methods within Indigenous health research (Rieger et al., 2023). The study began with a teaching from Elder Mabel Horton and Elder Sherry Copenace detailing that,

Stories connect the past, present, and future, it is all intertwined – you can still learn from what happened 100 years ago and apply it to the future, it is not static. The English language is so limited. You would understand the spirit, heart, mind, and body of stories if you heard them in my language. Stories illustrate beliefs and values and how we see our worlds. There is always a moral to the story but often no conclusion, so stories welcome your interpretation. Stories are medicine – stories are sacred. (Rieger et al., 2023, p. 2)

The study found that, when done in a good way, storytelling methods, “opened spaces for Indigenous voices, they transformed and decolonized the research process to reclaim and illuminate Indigenous stories,” (Rieger et al., 2023, p. 9). However, the researchers also note that use of storytelling among settler researchers has its challenges, such as those that arise from being an outsider with disparate cultural understandings. As a settler outsider, it is my responsibility to prevent exploitation or appropriation (Kovach, 2021) of the stories shared with me. I intend to apply Indigenous storytelling methods which prioritize community members' voices (Kovach, 2021; (Rieger et al., 2023) while being mindful of recognizing and maintaining the meaning and relationships between and among stories to the best of my ability. This goal will be aided by Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, which I believe pairs well with storytelling.

Reflexive thematic analysis was introduced by Braun and Clarke in 2006, and the researchers intended this approach to reflect their view of, “qualitative research as creative, reflexive and subjective...qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling ‘stories’, about interpreting, and creating,” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 591). They argue that themes or patterns of shared meaning within data is not something that is discovered, but is created through a subjective and reflexive process by the researcher. I believe this distinction is important, as my understanding of the data is by no means absolute or whole and may be interpreted differently by those with a different relationship with the data.

Furthermore, this chapter was constructed through a settler colonial and Indigenous resurgence and environmental justice lens. Wolfe (2006) has famously contended that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure rather than an event, an important distinction for recognizing current and future ramifications. Wolfe’s account also notes the importance of land regarding the settler project of domination, arguing, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element,” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388) which is predicated on and results in Indigenous dispossession of land. In connection, a study released by the Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous-led research and education center, noted that the, “land tenure regime in Canada is structured upon the denial of Indigenous jurisdiction through the creation and enforcement of legal fictions,” (King et al., 2019, p. 9) which legitimize settler decision-making. The ability to decide what happens over land is an integral aspect of the settler/Indigenous relationship (Greaves, 2022) and the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the settler state inherently relies on the dismissal of the jurisdiction and sovereignty of Indigenous Nations. Ongoing expansion of settler jurisdiction is also notably discussed by Indigenous [Tlingit] researcher Anne Spice, who describes industry

projects which have been deemed critical infrastructure, such as oil and gas, as invasive infrastructure which enables the reach of settler authority into Indigenous territory, “reproducing and encouraging new forms of white land ownership, and cementing settler ontologies that naturalize the existence and domination of the nation-state,” (Spice, 2022b, p. 47). Along with delegitimizing Indigenous sovereignty, such infrastructure continues the practice of Indigenous dispossession of land (Spice, 2022b) and as Indigenous peoples inherently and actively threaten settler sovereignty, settler colonial projects of Indigenous erasure have continued through the guise of economic development and national security (Spice, 2022b). Indigenous

[Haudenosaunee] Professor Allard-Tremblay and non-Indigenous scholar, Elaine Coburn (2023) also describe settler claim to sovereignty as linked to a *productionist* ideology (a concept also discussed by Wolfe (2006) and Veracini (2010) among others), which dismisses Indigenous reciprocal relationships with land as uncivilized in favour of a settler relationship based on extraction and exploitation. Settlers’ belief that Indigenous peoples were not making productive use of the land also informed the concept of *terra nullius*, a justification for settler sovereignty (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023); A justification that, while disproven, continues to enable settler authority and denial of Indigenous sovereignty (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023).

Moreover, inspired by the Wendat and Wyandot story, Allard-Tremblay and Coburn contend, “ideologies that naturalize and normatively sanction colonial relationships of oppression and domination,” (2023, p.360) are ingrained within settler societies. The authors compare disproven yet persistent colonial myths, such as *terra nullius* and the ‘Vanishing Race’, to the Flying Heads in the story, which, while cut off the shoulders of giants, continue to scream and follow the Wyandots wherever they go (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023).

However, in conjunction with settler colonial structures, so too has there been Indigenous resistance and, “resurgence of Indigenous political and legal orders and the ongoing protection of land, waters, and peoples that has persisted through centuries of land alienation and dispossession,” (King et al., 2019, p. 10). Allard-Tremblay and Coburn (2023) also assert the importance of Indigenous resurgence in combating Flying Heads, saying, “this demands critical engagement with the best of traditional knowledges and practices, renewing Indigenous languages, practicing ceremony, relating to lands and revisiting diplomatic practices between Indigenous nations with an aim of renewing Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing,” (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023, p. 372). Indigenous [Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg] scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes storytelling as a vehicle for resurgence in her book *Dancing on our turtle’s back : stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence and a new emergence*, saying, “storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice,” (2011, p. 20). Utilizing numerous traditional stories to chronicle Nishnaabeg resurgence, Simpson (2011) explains that there is not one singular version of Indigenous resurgence, but that it may begin with a dream, it may start small as individual everyday action, and then eventually ripple out into intentional collective action. It is in this way that resurgence discourse lends well into environmental justice discourse, as they both involve a reimagining of relationships and social transformation. Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Deborah McGregor has discussed the concept of Indigenous environmental justice in concert with *Mino-mnaamodzawin* which, “can be understood as ‘living a good life’ or ‘living well’ and is considered the overriding goal of the Anishinabek,” (2022, p. 20). Environmental justice is largely understood as a group’s ability to engage in decision-

making which results in an equitable share of harm and benefit (Westra, 1999). Indigenous [Potawatomi] scholar Kyle Whyte notes that settler colonialism may be understood as environmental injustices towards Indigenous peoples as settler projects directly aim, “to undermine the ecological conditions required for Indigenous peoples to exercise their cultures, economies, and political self-determination,” (2019, p. 232). Thompson (2015) argues an important aspect of Indigenous environmental justice is the recognition and respect of Indigenous sovereignty and decision-making, saying, “sovereignty claims focus on the autonomy for Indigenous people to choose the development in their ancestral territory, rather than having to choose between ‘preservation’ and ‘development’,” (p. 224). In response to Indigenous peoples unique relationship to land and place, not to mention role as sovereign nations, McGregor argues the need for an Indigenous environmental justice (McGregor et al., 2020) framework which reflects Indigenous worldviews and is holistic, asserting that environmental justice is, “a question of balance and harmony, of reciprocity and respect, among all beings in Creation—not just between humans but among all ‘relatives’,” (McGregor, 2022, p, 15).

6.4 Methods

Interviews were conducted with 8 community members from three of the four First Nations: Tataskweyak, York Factory and Fox Lake First Nation. I reached out to several community members from War Lake First Nation, but did not receive a response. Interviews took place in-person, over zoom or over the phone, depending on the preference of each community member. Community members were identified initially by following the advice of Tataskweyak community member and graduate committee advisor, Nathan Neckoway, as well as following subsequent advice from interviewed community members and community advisor for York Factory First Nation. This method, akin to snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001),

was used with the intention to foster trust and better identify community members who were more likely to be interested and willing to share their experiences. Informed consent was sought from all involved community members with the understanding they could withdraw at any time. A set of questions was created and updated throughout the interview process, as I continued to learn and reflect on the issues relevant to community members and to this project (Nakamura, 2010). These questions were semi-structured and open-ended with the intention to guide the conversation throughout the interview while still providing room for community members to make any detours they felt appropriate (Nakamura, 2010). This flexibility responds to the historically exploitative and inequal relationship between the colonizer and colonized, the researcher and the researched, by recognizing those power relations and fostering a space respectful of multiple ways of knowing and the interviewee's valuable expertise (Chilisa, 2020). The final questions consisted of:

- Can you describe your experience living in your community and how Manitoba Hydro has played a role?
- What do you remember about the Keeyask Lockdown in May 2020?
- Reflecting on the Lockdown, what kind of impacts do you think it had?
- Looking forward, can you describe the future you picture for your community?

Interviews were then transcribed and resulting quotes shown in this chapter are verbatim, however in an effort to portray community voices respectfully, filler words such as 'um' and 'like' were largely omitted, as well as words that were repeated. As well, the names of community members who have contributed their experiences have been kept anonymous to

protect their privacy and have been given identifiers of CM (community member) 1-8 as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Community member identification and corresponding First Nation.

Community Member	Name of Community
CM1	Fox Lake First Nation
CM2	York Factory First Nation
CM3	Fox Lake First Nation
CM4	York Factory First Nation
CM5	York Factory First Nation
CM6	Fox Lake First Nation
CM7	York Factory First Nation
CM8	Tataskweyak First Nation

Over the course of multiple reviews, and keeping the aforementioned guiding concepts of settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence and environmental justice in mind, the interviews were coded, and two themes and corresponding sub themes were created which reflect patterns of colonialism, healing and resurgence:

- Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro's legacy persistent but not immutable
 - Theme 1a: A history of harm and an inequitable relationship of distrust
 - Theme 1b: Communities are healing and moving forward in a good way
- Theme 2: First Nations will continue to protect their communities and challenge the assumed power of Manitoba Hydro
 - Theme 2a: First Nations enacted the Lockdown to protect their communities in light of Manitoba Hydro's inadequate responses and dismissal of First Nation decision-making

- Theme 2b: The Lockdown was an opportunity to come together during a time of isolation

Theme 1 largely observes community overall experiences connected to the industry of Manitoba Hydro. While Theme 2 observes community experiences more directly tied to the Lockdown. However, it became clear that the themes were not separate or independent of each other. Subthemes a and b were interconnected: the relationship between Subtheme 1a and 2a share aspects of colonial decision-making and harm exuded by Manitoba Hydro along with aspects of First Nation resurgence; While the relationship between Subtheme 1b and 2b share aspects of healing, solidarity and ways of moving forward expressed by community members. Therefore, an interpretation of themes could also be:

- Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro's legacy persistent but not immutable OR Theme 4: First Nations practice resurgence amid Manitoba Hydro's harmful colonial decision-making
 - Theme a: A history of harm and an inequitable relationship of distrust
 - Theme c: First Nations enacted the Lockdown to protect their communities in light of Manitoba Hydro's inadequate and dismissive decision-making
- Theme 2: First Nations have and will protect their communities and challenge the assumed power of Manitoba Hydro OR Theme 3: First Nations are actively managing and cultivating their future
 - Theme d: The Lockdown was an opportunity to come together during a time of isolation
 - Theme b: Communities are healing and moving forward in a good way

Furthermore, Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4 can be understood as connecting cyclically; In the wake of Manitoba Hydro's persistent legacy, First Nations have and continue to protect themselves and challenge the industry, actively fostering a better future and practicing resurgence. The cyclical, or even spiralling nature, acknowledges the continuation of Manitoba Hydro's legacy, that past harm and trauma must be addressed but not forgotten as communities (not to mention settlers) move forward in a good way. This concept is visualized below by Figure 14: Thematic Web.

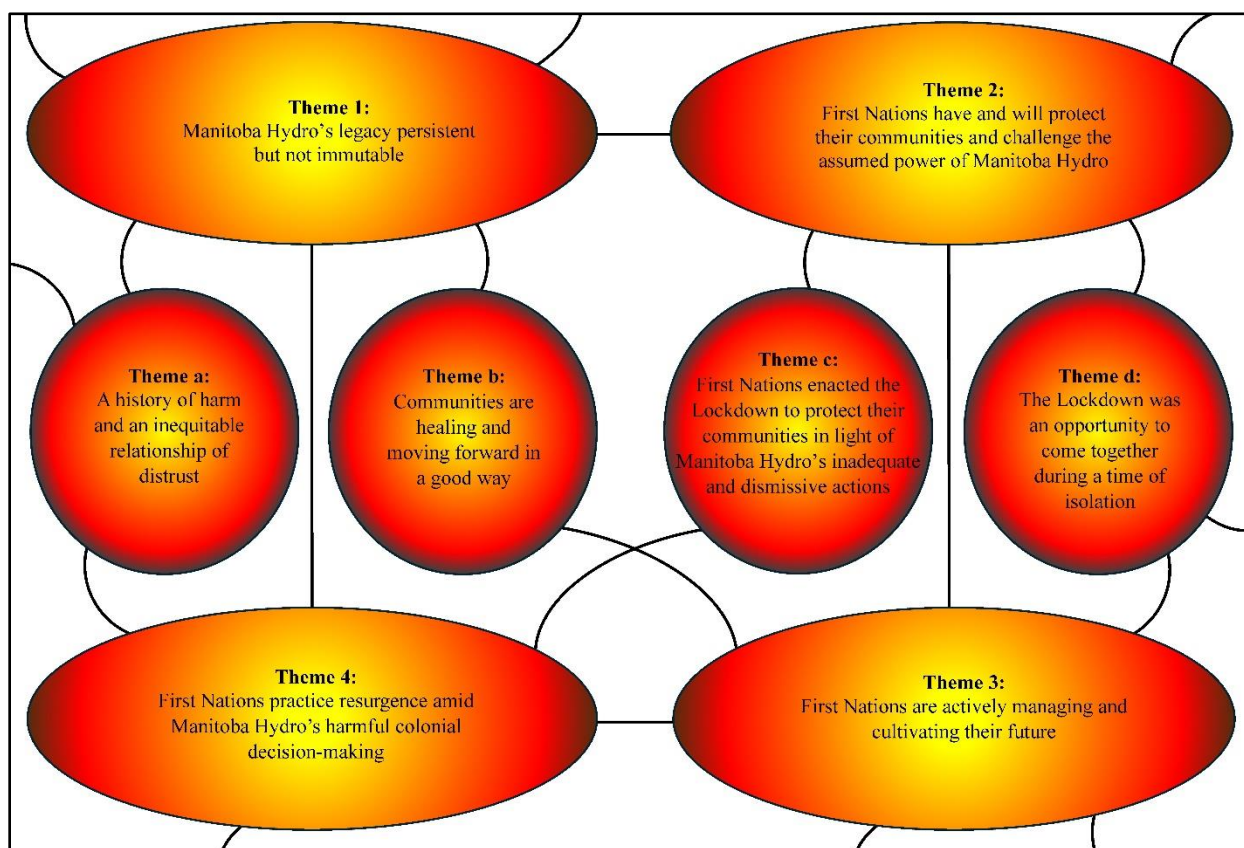


Figure 14. Thematic Web depicting alternative themes which reflect the variety and complexity of community experiences, which are personal and subjective.

While reflecting on Kovach's (2021) use of metaphor in Indigenous storytelling and her view of data as, "living connections animated through the exchange of story," (p. 156) I began to view my depiction of themes as a smaller part of a much larger web of viewing and understanding

these community members' stories. Within this web, themes and connections may be constantly forming, strings or connections may break, and we may only see a part of the web at a time, while much remains concealed (illustrated by the strings stretching outwards, past the border of the figure). As for the themes I created, my understanding is limited by my position as a settler outsider, there are likely far more connecting strings to be perceived by those with different lived experience and relationship to community and place. This concept also connects to Elder Albert Marshalls expansion of two-eyed seeing, in which he asserts, "no one person ever has more than one small piece of the knowledge," (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336) and in truth there are numerous, perhaps endless ways of seeing. I will attempt to interpret and discuss these themes with the understanding that my view is subjective and may only provide a glimpse into certain aspects of a larger web of experiences.

6.5 Findings

6.5.1 Theme 1: Manitoba Hydro's legacy persistent but not immutable OR Theme 4: First Nations practice resurgence amid Manitoba Hydro's harmful colonial decision-making

6.5.1.1 Theme a: A history of harm and an inequitable relationship of distrust

When asked about their experience with Manitoba Hydro, a community member remarked that they could go on for hours about the legacy of the industry within their community, saying, "we have a very long history with Manitoba Hydro, and we have very bad memories" (CM1). Manitoba Hydro's relationship with the North and the Indigenous peoples whose land and waters they require, began in the mid-1900s (Kulchyski, 2004). Keeyask is only the most recent in a long line of dams that have drastically impacted those lands, waters and peoples, the consequences of which continue today (Craft & Blakley, 2022). The history of

injustice and harm stemming from Manitoba Hydro throughout generations was an issue commented on by several community members. One community member reflected on a story passed to him from his father who had worked for Manitoba Hydro in the 1960s.

There's also stories of, like I said, our band members being bulldozed, their house being bulldozed. And the one story that my dad talked about for the rest of his life and I think it haunted him till the day he died, was when they were building the trailer court in Gillam. Again, it hit an Elder's house...where again, about 3 feet of her house hit the surveying line, and again he went to ask if we could move the line over two, three feet, just so they wouldn't hit that house. And he says, 'no, give that lady 5 minutes to gather her stuff and move, cuz we got to keep on with the schedule.' And my dad, being hazel eyed, red haired, fair skinned, could pass for a white person, spoke Cree, so he was a middleman for a lot of these conversations. And he basically went there and talked to the lady and basically said in Cree, 'I'm sorry, but you know you have to move your house and we, we'll give you five minutes to move your stuff and gather your belongings.' And basically the lady...she laid a blanket on the ground and she put as much stuff she could put in there that was of value, she tied, put the four corners, tied them up into one knot, flipped it over her shoulder and walked away far enough to get out of the bulldozers way. And she watched the bulldozer destroy her home. And I don't think that woman was ever compensated for that. (CM1)

These types of stories which relay the visceral damage stemming from hydro development were not only passed down families, but also throughout community; Another community member shared that, through their work in community, Elders would describe, "how beautiful the land was before hydro came along," (CM3) noting a removal of trees which contrasts the 'green'

image of hydro development portrayed by the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro (Government of Manitoba, n.d.; Manitoba Hydro, 2023). Moreover, a removal from land was repeatedly noted by community members: “It’s always been the government of Canada, the province of Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro are the ones trying to displace us,” (CM3); “[Manitoba Hydro] basically came in here, took over our town and classified us squatters,” (CM1); “We were considered what they call the Indian problem and my understanding of the Indian problem was, there’s Indians here and they’re a problem because they’re in the way,” (CM1). These comments frame the government and Manitoba Hydro as having a settler colonial view of Indigenous peoples as a barrier to resource development, which ultimately resulted in the removal and alienation of Indigenous peoples from their land. However, as Manitoba Hydro’s presence in the North persisted through generations, altering their methods in response to demands from and agreements with Northern First Nations (Thompson, 2015), so too did community members’ perspective of Manitoba Hydro adjust, as well as vary. A young adult community member described how their perspective of Manitoba Hydro shifted as they grew up, noting that their father had done well for themselves working for Manitoba Hydro.

I had a really different experience with Manitoba Hydro growing up because I lived in Manitoba Hydro corporate housing, you know we had access to all the benefits. And as a young person who didn’t know much about the world in my little corner of the world in Gillam, you know Manitoba Hydro seemed like an incredible corporation that really supported its employees. And then when I started leaning into my Cree ways of life and understanding the history of the Fox Lake Cree Nation people, my people you know, I was really thrown for a, thrown for a loop. I learned about pretty much the human price

that Fox Lake Cree Nation paid for those Hydro dams, those bipoles, those converter stations. (CM6)

This experience was contrasted by an older community member who recalls his childhood as taking place in a community of division and discrimination.

When I was growing up in Gillam, I didn't go on the other side of town because we didn't belong there. I remember playing in a park on the hydro side of town and I remember playing in that park twice in my whole childhood and I don't remember those kids coming to our side of town to come play with us after school. The only time we got together was during school and during hockey, other than that, we were separated and we were told not to go to certain places because of how we would be treated. And you know racism here was a very thick barrier that we had to get out and it was blatant, it was right in your face. And they told you right to your face that you were no damn good, that you were an Indian and you don't belong here. (CM1)

These two stories demonstrate a spectrum of hydro related experience amongst community members, complicating the image of hydro as neither entirely good nor bad. In connection, and unlike prominent depictions of First Nations as either adamantly for or against development, community members relayed views of both the harm and the benefits they have seen stem from Manitoba Hydro. The benefits were largely described as economic; For instance, a community member described the opportunity to attain Direct Negotiated Contracts (DNCs) and consequently create numerous jobs for those in community.

We had opportunity to hire our residents, our people, men and women to work in these companies that we'd basically, you know develop, because we've got to hire a north

company. There's a lot of construction areas of, you know, projects like that, we can build roads, we can do ditches because we have a company that we developed. But also we had an opportunity to get members working within IWESCO, and that basically is like a janitorial cleaning duty for the camp, where they did a lot of cooking and everything and laundry, cleaning, janitorial duties, maintenance, and we had a maintenance contract. (CM8)

While another community member noted the benefits of working for Manitoba Hydro in the form of subsidized living expenses.

When somebody works for Hydro, they get subsidized Hydro, they get two meters on their house. It's a corporate house and they basically pay for their lights, which is probably about \$60, \$70 a month, that's their hydro bill and then they get rent which is probably about \$140 a month, so that's subsidized as well. So, we see there's a good opportunity for our people to go work over there.... And the good thing too is we have a lot of our people that are being hired not only in Fox Lake, but in the other communities that are living here. (CM1)

However, in addition to hydro related benefits in the form of job and skill development, overall, there was a heavier inclusion and association of Manitoba Hydro with negative impacts from community members. Sometimes these impacts were framed as a consequence of the compounding strain of having so many dams in the North. As one community member described, Manitoba Hydro's management of the dams demonstrates a prioritization of power to the South, with little consideration for how the drastic changes in water levels impact Northern First Nations in regard to maintaining traditional hunting activities.

On the weekends, when the big industries are closed down for the weekends in Winnipeg, they let that water rise and they get it to the maximum amount that they're allowed under the permit. It happens there because we have four dams holding back all that water and they all have four bays. Downstream of Limestone we're left with a trickle. Nelson River at the Conawapa boat launch... When they shut that off on Sunday afternoon, like this past summer and the two summers ago, my Chief was able to walk across the river, 75% of that River to the trickle every day because they were holding back water, there's no water. And when our Elders and our resourcers usually try to go hunting down river on a weekend, we can't because there's no water, we can't move around, so we have to hunt during the week. And when they release the water on Monday morning it doesn't get to Conawapa for about two and a half - three hours later... By that time it's probably about three o'clock in the afternoon. Any First Nation person, any hunter, anybody that lives off the land or is a resource user knows you should be out there at the crack of dawn or prior to that to get ready to set up and do what you need to do, but we can't do that till midafternoon. (CM1)

Another community member connected Manitoba Hydro's manipulation of water levels to shoreline erosion which has resulted in a degradation of local water quality.

We've been noticing too, the sediments of the riverbeds that down on the surface, like our sandbars, you know are not acting as it's supposed to be. Like mother nature, like a sandbar you know has a purpose in a river, in the lake, it cleanses the water, but right now with the hydro projects, it affected how the sediment and how all the sandbars are affected, like in regards to keeping the water clean. Because right now we tell it right from Kelsey, all the way past Long Spruce, the water is discolored, it's brown, you can't

even see the bottom because it's so discolored. And that's affected from all the impacts of these dams, and it's really, the water is not actually healthy, and it's quite sad to see how, you know, this water is becoming more and more contaminated. (CM8)

Both comments describe the continued control, not to mention presumed authority, that Manitoba Hydro exerts over the water, as well as the burden of harm experienced by community members, both in terms of water quality and quantity. As a community member reiterates, this artificial manipulation of water levels has harmed their health and obstructed their ability to practice traditional activities.

We're under boil water since 2017 when a big flood occurred. And now, like right now today, we're still under boil water, like it's 2022. And then we're five years into the boil water, where again, we cannot drink the water, we cannot swim in the water, and we can't access, you know or harvest our fish out of the water, because the river is filled with so much different types of bacterial chemicals. And this is something that's really hurt the health of our people and interfering with the way we traditionally use rivers and lands in regards to the traditional life of Indigenous people in our territory. (CM8)

Like other provinces, Manitoba has interpreted its various Treaty agreements as proof that First Nations ceded jurisdiction over their land and waters, regardless that First Nations have asserted these written 'agreements' differed vastly than their oral understanding of sharing or maintaining jurisdiction (Thompson, 2015). Moreover, as reiterated by community members, not only has Manitoba Hydro practiced illegitimate control over First Nation waters, it has also done so without regard for community wellbeing. Demonstrating a priority towards the southern population of Manitoba rather than assuring the ability of First Nations to continue their

subsistence and traditional economies. As a community member observes, while these dams exist within Indigenous territory, they are not for Indigenous communities, “these are projects that benefit the power and the resources of areas outside our community and region of Northern Manitoba,” (CM8).

In addition to cumulative impacts, many community members also described impacts directly resulting from the newest Keeyask development. One community member reflected on the racism and verbal and physical abuse occurring on site, saying, “it affects lives of our men and women that have to work there. They come home and they’re feeling sad and threatened that they’re put through a situation of a racist discrimination. (CM8). As described by another community member, this abuse would inevitably impact the individual’s mental health and sometimes trigger the use of alcohol and/or drugs, resulting in harm that would spread out into the community.

All the addiction that came out of Keeyask, well our members came back to the community and if they didn’t have their drug or whatever they were addicted to, they were out in the community causing you know safety concerns. And then we found that there’s, well I noticed that there was a lot of theft or people selling their you know personal belongings. (CM4)

The social impacts of the newest dam were described by community members as being an extension of the long history of Manitoba Hydro’s presence in the North. In recent years, more and more First Nations are coming forth, detailing the level of harm in regard to racism and violence stemming from resource developments like hydro (APTN National News, 2019; Manitoba Clean Environment Commission, 2018). However, harm to First Nations has gone

largely unaddressed by Manitoba Hydro as community members describe systemic issues of discrimination and abuse which have continued to shape relationships and cause harm throughout each new dam development.

We also had a lot of social impacts that played a role on what happened to us here. You know, examples of that were during Kettle, Long Spruce and Limestone days and even in Keeyask, that we had outside contractors coming in here and basically sexually abusing, sexually harassing, mentally harassing, mentally abusing you know men, women and children in this community for 60 years and we've took a toll, that's taken a toll on us.

(CM1)

It's a constant battle and it has been for many years, to try to be considered even equal to somebody who works for hydro, like it's something that's right integrated into the town...And to be treated less than a second class citizen is, it's kind of rough when you're growing up in that and it had a similar feeling when I was working in Keeyask.

(CM3)

A consequence of decades of discrimination, community members reflected on the intergenerational nature of trauma, noting its pervasiveness throughout the community. One community member described the sense of division they felt when first coming to live in the community years ago, saying, "you could literally feel the difference when you cross over from where all the hydro houses are and to the trailer park," (CM3). Of their own experiences, they relayed, "it was hard not to pass that down," (CM3), going on to recount an incident of discrimination her granddaughter had already endured in her grade one class. Their experience demonstrates the difficulty of simultaneously addressing their own mental health, while also being mindful of how that trauma is affecting their children and persisting into subsequent

generations. Another community member described a similar situation of navigating family trauma and striving to spare their children from the harm they and their parents had experienced growing up.

My mother, I'll use an example, you know she was a teenager when hydro came and she didn't live the full life she was expected or supposed to live, you know she had a lot of trauma. As a result of that, you know we faced a lot of issues in our family, with alcoholism and things like that, having a dysfunctional family because our parents weren't well enough to look after us in terms of being the parents they were supposed to be. My mom is a residential school survivor, my father is a day school survivor and those schools played a role on how they parented us as kids and you know, it took my family, you know, years to, you know, get over some of the issues that we had to deal with in the past. And I guess the good thing that came out of that, is we learned from the past and we didn't pass that down to our kids. Like my daughter, I protected my daughter as much as I can in terms of, you know what happened in Fox Lake and Gillam because I didn't want her to worry about, you know what happened to us. (CM1)

Intergenerational trauma has been compounded by numerous colonial projects over the decades and maintained by the newest Keeyask project, as described by one community member, "being in that environment triggered them. Brought back trauma. Not to mention all the trauma that happens in there," (CM4). The connection made between trauma and these colonial factors is both necessary for identifying root causes (and therefore solutions) and also in countering the stereotypical painting of Indigenous peoples as inherently deficient (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Methot, 2019). However, and importantly, not only is trauma linked directly to past and current

colonial practices, but trauma is also described as being actively managed by community members desiring to break the cycle and protect their children.

Furthermore, in addition to a relationship shaped by discrimination and trauma, community members also framed their relationship to Manitoba Hydro as one lacking in trust, transparency and accountability. As one community member reiterated, during the pandemic, this also extended to the government who insisted on trust from the First Nations, yet were restricting access to information which impacted the community's ability to plan and enact safety protocols. The community member recalls, "there wasn't a lot of transparency with government and the people that we had to deal with in terms of the healthcare system, the ones that were making decisions for our community...we found we weren't getting a lot of answers, we weren't getting a lot of openness from government," (CM7). Another instance which depicted both a lack of trust and transparency was a story told by a community member recounting Manitoba Hydro's failure to lift the injunction they had placed against Tataskweyak First Nation during the Lockdown. This was a promise made during the agreement between the four First Nations and Manitoba Hydro that involved the removal of blockades and better collaboration on pandemic planning (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b). However, the community member learned the injunction had not been rescinded and had instead evolved into a Statement of Claim of \$11 million, saying, "they never pulled that court injunction, all they did was move it ahead and they done that for basically three or four years," (CM1). They were then left to question Manitoba Hydro's motives, wondering, "why did they keep pushing it back, do they not trust us?" (CM1). The community member theorized that this was perhaps a ploy to cheat Tataskweyak First Nation out of buying its shares in Keeyask.

Lo and behold, that's about the same amount of money you have to invest in Keeyask to get the preferred shares where all the big money is. So, what if they won that court case? Where would you get your investment of \$12 million? Cuz you had to pay 11 over there, so was that their plan? We'll never know. (CM1)

The community member also framed this kind of decision-making as demonstrative of Manitoba Hydro's continued colonial view of First Nations, recounting a conversation with Manitoba Hydro representatives, in which they asked them,

Are you guys treating us like the Indians you truly think we are? And I use that word Indians because that's in the treaty, that's what gave you permission to come here and build these dams, treaty. Being a good Indian. Are we supposed to be a good Indian and then you would pull that \$11 million lawsuit away from TCN? Is that what you guys want? You guys want to treat us like little kids? (CM1)

As noted, Treaties are used to legitimize Manitoba Hydro's authority. Treaty 5 uses such language as, "Her [Majesty's] Indian subjects," (1875) to describe the First Nations, while other legislation, for example the Indian Act, treats First Nations as "children of the state," (Comack, 2018). This paternalistic view of Indigenous peoples has been reinforced over the decades by unilateral decision-making by the government which has continuously insinuated First Nations cannot and should not be making decisions for themselves. In response, First Nations have challenged this colonial behaviour, asserting their rights to self-determination. The Keeyask Lockdown can be viewed as such an action. Consequently, the lawsuit sanctioned by Manitoba Hydro may be interpreted as retribution or punishment toward a First Nation daring to assert their sovereignty against a crown corporation whose existence is premised on the myth that said

sovereignty does not exist. The community member went on to relay his role in rectifying this particular issue. However, holding Manitoba Hydro accountable to inequitable or harmful behaviour is perceived as an ongoing struggle by community members. One community member observed that, “Hydro always made it seem like they were above the law,” (CM3), further commenting on stories they had heard from numerous Elders who had reiterated instances of sexual abuse during the building of hydro dams, saying, “nothing ever happened and all these years nothing ever happened to hydro,” (CM3). Another community member similarly described that the industry’s reputation for continuously failing to address claims of discrimination is well-known among workers, consequentially discouraging them from coming forward about harm.

It was very frustrating trying to, you know, deal with day-to-day things, you know whether there was supervisors being mean to some First Nations people, you know outright, you know calling them dirty Indians. That happened at the workplace over there and when we haul these people into the unions, it was he said-she said or their word against theirs and 100% of the time they never sided with First Nations people and it never got concluded. And it got to the point where people stopped coming to file a claim because they knew it wouldn’t go anywhere, so it was a useless exercise. (CM1)

Manitoba Hydro’s failure to be accountable to its First Nation partners throughout the years was also connected by community members to the exploitative nature of the industry and the extensive environmental harm which stems from dams; As one community member observed, “one thing they can’t admit, it’s how their projects or their industry affects the land and waters. They will never admit that, because right now Manitoba Hydro has never admitted that to us,” (CM8). While another facet of settler colonialism’s paternalism towards First Nations, which also lends justification towards settler’s unilateral authority, is the belief in the

need to use or exploit resources (Greaves, 2022). This ideology blends well with the exploitative nature of capitalist infrastructure which often results in environmental injustices unequally distributed on populations which are racialized and/or marginalized (Yazzie, 2022). Community members described this inequity as ongoing and continuing throughout Keeyask development. For instance, while recounting an early meeting in 2000 between the four First Nations and Manitoba Hydro, a community member described that inequity was indeed rooted within the project's initial organization of power. This was in large part due to Manitoba Hydro's role as Project Manager, holding the majority of votes for decision-making which consequentially put First Nations in the backseat. The community member recalled challenging Manitoba Hydro about this issue at the meeting, saying to them,

‘You guys can out vote us every time. We’re basically going on your coat tails the way it’s written,’ and they basically said, ‘no, we’re going to ensure that it’s done on consensus.’ I said, ‘well why don’t you put that in writing? If it’s consensus, put it in consensus. But what you have is a majority vote and you guys hold that.’ I said, ‘I’m going to make a prediction,’ I said, ‘you’re going to hold that against us somewhere down the line.’ And it came true with the blockade, cuz they outvoted us. (CM1)

However, unequal decision-making power did not only result in the Lockdown, community members spoke of instances during the entire duration of the project as being marred by inadequate management. A notable example made by a community member being that, “at the end of the day, we were basically \$2 billion over budget,” (CM1). The community member also connected Manitoba Hydro's irresponsible spending to the industry's failure to set aside funding for First Nation training, saying, “they ate that money up too and there was no money to be spent. So, a lot of our people never got trained. We probably got a fraction of what we thought

we were going to get. (CM1). Another community member noted that, due to the industry's failure to address issues of discrimination, the management of social impacts (mental health issues, addiction, etc.) is now, "up to the communities and the leadership and the health programs to deal with that," (CM5). The community member further describes Manitoba Hydro's cultural program, which did attempt to address some of the issues, however was nevertheless grossly inadequate.

Like with that cultural program, I think it did do some good eventually. But what Hydro did was, like we have a lot of teachings and what Hydro did was put up posters with respect on it. That's not how our respect works, it has to be earned. You just can't put a poster up saying, you know with respect on it and expect people to learn from that, no. So, they did just do the minimum of what was required. (CM5)

The preceding quote brought to mind a segment of a book, *Becoming kin: an Indigenous call to unforgetting the past and reimagining our future*, by Indigenous [Anishinaabe] writer Patty Krawec. In the final chapter she discusses the concept of apology, comparing settler's apologies to that of children who have superficially declared: "We said we're sorry; you have to forgive us," (2022, p. 175) all the while continuing with harmful, colonial behaviour. Similarly, and rightfully, First Nations notions of respect are evidently very different than that of Manitoba Hydro's. True respect is more than paying the price of a poster, it is doing the work to act respectfully (listening, learning, reflecting), it is doing more than, "the minimum that's required of them," (CM4) which community members are receiving. Furthermore, a failure to live up to agreements and promises is not new behaviour for Manitoba Hydro. A notable example being the 1970s Northern Flood Agreement which was initiated by five First Nations in the hopes of mitigating damage, however Manitoba Hydro ignored (Kulchyski, 2004; Thompson, 2015) and

eventually entirely dismissed the agreement in favour of individual Master Implementation Agreements (Hoffman, 2011). First Nations have been fighting for the industry to be accountable to its damage for decades and while the Keeyask partnership offered an opportunity for equal decision-making, that agreement has also seemed to fall short of what was promised. However, in light of the many issues still to be addressed by Manitoba Hydro, community members did reflect on a general improvement in the industry's behaviour. A notable example made by one community member was the partnership of the four First Nations with the Keeyask project.

The newest development, Keeyask is just 50 kilometers down river of us in Split Lake and that Keeyask is a project that involves, again like I said with the four Nations of future ownership, so that's a First Nation that's...the first dam in our territory that we have First Nation involvement. (CM8)

Other community members observed that division in the community was lessening.

We're not as segregated as we are before. Like I said, I can go to the other side of town and not feel guilty anymore or feel bad or feel out of place, because that's where my friends live so those are good things. (CM1)

Moreover, a community member reflected on the slow and gradual improvement of Manitoba Hydro's leadership over the years, noting that community push-back was very much a factor in this progression.

As every new person starts being in charge of the North, every new person that comes in, it's been my experience that they've done extra homework to try to understand what it's like to live in the North. They're not just some southerner coming to live in a big house

up here, not do much, be one of the boys kind of thing and let life just happen. They want to be included in things and they enjoy being included in things and that's been a different, that's different than what I grew up with. So it's not that big of a change but I still do see change and as long as I see change happening then I have hope and I have faith that eventually it will get to be where we like it to be. And we're no longer the people we were in the 60s, if we see somebody backpedaling then we're going to say it.

(CM3)

Manitoba Hydro has made some improvements over the years in how it conducts itself within Indigenous territory, the Keeyask partnership acting as a significant milestone for communities that have, historically, had no say in when or where a dam will be built. However, as discussed by community members, there is still so much work to be done in terms of Manitoba Hydro's accountability to communities for historical and ongoing injustices and harm, as well as the need for the industry to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and engage with First Nations like true equal partners in future decision-making.

6.5.1.2 Theme c: First Nations enacted the Lockdown to protect their communities in light of Manitoba Hydro's inadequate and dismissive decision-making

Several community members expressed their fear regarding COVID-19 entering their communities prior to initiating the Lockdown in May, 2020. For some context, it was only two months earlier, in March, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (The Canadian Free Press, 2020c). Within the same month, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Manitoba all declared State of Emergencies and the U.S-Canada border closed to non-essential travel (The Canadian Free Press, 2020c). In Manitoba, the

first COVID-19 related death occurred on March 27, 2020 (CTVNewsWinnipeg.ca Staff, 2022). On May 5, 2020, six days after Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister announced the lifting of some restrictions and nine days before Tataskweyak Cree Nation blockaded Provincial Road 280, the seventh COVID-19 related death occurred in Manitoba (CTVNewsWinnipeg.ca Staff, 2022). As of May 12, 2020, there had been more than 5,000 COVID-19 related deaths in Canada (The Canadian Free Press, 2020c). The COVID-19 vaccine was still a distant solution which would not be released until December 2020 (Government of Canada, 2024a). This was a time riddled with conspiracy theories and misinformation. Confusion was heightened by those in power, including Premier Pallister who was criticized for not taking COVID-19 seriously, though more famously by leaders like President Trump who overtly minimized the threat of COVID-19 and pushed for businesses and economies to reopen in the United States despite the country being labelled a, “global hot-spot,” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023) for the virus in April 2020. While COVID-19 cases were on the rise among First Nations in other provinces, there had yet to be a case within a Manitoba First Nation (Deer, 2020), though community members recount a growing concern about the safety of loved ones, should the virus enter the community. One community member remembered meeting with chief and council and discussing the relatively close arrival of the virus in Winnipeg.

Then Winnipeg got it and then we really had to get to know what it was, because we weren't sure, we knew it was a virus and we knew how it was affecting people and killing people, we're hearing people were dying...it was kind of like a threat, we were kind of very scared in other words because of this virus. So watching the news, hearing the news about this virus and how they were starting to shut down here and there, they were

starting to lock down communities because they didn't want to spread it and that became part of our daily life. (CM8)

As the virus got closer to home, more community members received word about friends and family falling ill, driving home the threat of COVID-19.

By that time it was getting really heated, some of our people were getting sick. I know one of my, two, a cousin on my dad's side and a cousin on my mom's side probably around the same time ended up in ICU with a tube down their throat. And we've been hearing stories like that from people and we were concerned about our loved ones so you know obviously we got a little bit emotional about this and we had to make a decision. (CM1)

Information, both stemming from the news and from friends and family created concern in communities that had, so far, remained COVID-free. However, while the majority of the public was concerned about the virus, First Nations concerns were additionally heightened due to a lack of infrastructure needed to address a local outbreak, as one community member notes

This virus, if it gets into our community could like wipe us out... So, those stories were starting to come out, like people are dying in ICU's and you know, that's all we're hearing. Of course that's going to scare the shit out of anybody. (CM6)

However, while there was plenty of (mis)information circling, as described by a community member, a lack of information made available from the government was simultaneously an issue. The sporadic and incomplete information that was passed on lacked the adequate answers First Nations needed in order to enact appropriate measures that would meet

community needs, as a community member recalls, “this information, we felt like it was fear based and for us on the ground, we didn’t have everything to be able to make holistic decisions for the community so we were just responding to what little info we were getting,” (CM7).

Though, despite these barriers, communities continued to organize and initiate safety measures, their concern translating into a priority to continue to keep their community and loved ones safe. However, several community members commented that this priority seemed to conflict with the priorities of Manitoba Hydro. One community member connected Manitoba Hydro’s poor management of the project to the industry’s motivation to push through construction during the pandemic saying, “that motivation was there to keep people at site and keep them working, because you know the point of no return, escalation of commitment, we were almost 3 billion over budget about 18 months behind schedule and then COVID hit,” (CM2). Another community member similarly recounted Manitoba Hydro’s unilateral decision-making and superior attitude towards First Nations demands to scale down the project.

It was a sense of like the management level is above me type of thing but it really came across as them saying, ‘no we got to get this done, we’re already behind we’re already a million dollars in the hole, we’re not going to let this stop us.’ And so they kept going.
(CM3)

As one community member remarked, “we were at a standstill,” (CM1) with Manitoba Hydro. As the situation progressed, Manitoba Hydro’s priority of Keeyask construction continued to trump the concerns and decision-making of the First Nations. One community member connected this kind of unilateral decision-making by the industry to their overall relationship with Manitoba Hydro saying, “our relationship with hydro is that they try to lead everything and they kind of just drag us along and COVID was an extension of that relationship,” (CM2). While

other community members described the dismissive and superior behaviour of the industry noting that, they refused to, “recognize the state of emergency,” (CM8) and, “just decided to carry on, even though we were concerned for the communities in Keeyask,” (CM5). Community members also observed the special treatment Manitoba Hydro was receiving, such as being allowed to circumvent travel restrictions.

We had people working there [Keeyask], my nephew was in there along with a few other people and so I was worried that they were going to get sick because they were letting these people come in from all over Canada. It’s like they even found a way to get around all the conditions to keep Keeyask going...What makes them so freaking special they could keep Keeyask going and being built and not give a shit about any of us again is how it felt. (CM3)

In addition, concerns regarding the influx of outside workers were compounded within community members who had family or loved ones working at Keeyask who had to stay on-site for weeks or months at a time until they could be rotated out. As a community member describes, the situation posed too many unnecessary risks which Manitoba Hydro was choosing to ignore.

I was like, well there’s a bunch of things, moving pieces here, it’s like a threat to the folks in the communities because they were all traveling...So there was just so much room for potential danger and hydro just could not see it in this perspective. And all like, no one knows how to behave, act, think when there’s a novel virus that’s affecting the entire world. Like no one knows how to behave, but we have an innate sense of how to

protect ourselves and how to protect one another and for Manitoba Hydro to act opposed to that, I really couldn't understand why. (CM6)

As noted by the community member, Manitoba Hydro's decision to continue Keeyask development is demonstrative of a different perspective or worldview than that of First Nations.

We see our Northern Communities really struggling. People are dying, people that we know are dying, our loved ones, our extended family, our you know sister and brother Nations. People are dying and like, they're still just going as business as usual, like again, just cannot wrap my head around it. (CM6)

Manitoba Hydro's perspective is influenced by its location in both a colonial and capitalist society (Comack, 2018). The industry's assumed unilateral decision to prioritize development seems to both be informed by a paternalistic view of knowing what's best, as well as a logic of capital accumulation. As a community member noted, Manitoba Hydro was already over budget with Keeyask and putting the project on hold would only increase that debt. Moreover, the colonial capitalist view, one that has come to be normalized, is extractive and divisive, it understands people and nature as resources and commodities (Gómez-Barris, 2017). In a settler state, this is achievable only while also obscuring and erasing Indigenous peoples and their nuanced relationships with each other and with nature (Gómez-Barris, 2017; Whyte, 2022). Conversely, McGregor has described an Indigenous worldview as, "based on regarding the Earth as alive and imbued with spirit," (McGregor et al., 2020, p. 35); Rather than centering individuality or ownership, Indigenous [Cree] scholar Shawn Wilson describes Indigenous philosophy as fluidly interconnected, highlighting that, "relationships are reality, and reality is relationships...As Indigenous people, we 'are' our relationships with other people," (Wilson,

2013, p. 313). While Yazzie similarly discusses the value of relationality as, “the responsibility of being a good relative to all of one’s relatives,” (Yazzie, 2022, p. 36). As noted by a community member, First Nations had an, “innate sense,” (CM6) to protect one another against the very real threat of COVID-19. This idea was reiterated by another community member who recounted telling Manitoba Hydro that, “the lives of our members, the lives of our people within the Northern mantle are more valuable than basically getting a project put together,” (CM8). However, the strength and value within those familial and community relationships is not something that could be understood by a colonial perspective which inherently disregards such connections, a fault that contributed to the continued dismissal of First Nations decision-making. In connection, First Nations concerns were further heightened by the industry’s COVID-19 safety protocols. One community member did note that they had received positive feedback from workers saying, “they said nobody got sick, nobody got COVID because nothing was getting in and out,” (CM2). However, several community members described the industry’s protocols as inadequate, if not wholly unrealistic, as one community member states, “I worked in Keeyask, I’ve seen how it was put together, everything was all under one roof, everything was carpeted. You can’t tell me that they were able to sanitize that place and so it scared me,” (CM3). Furthermore, another community member described their chief being ignored by the industry when they questioned if Manitoba Hydro did indeed have any pandemic plan to follow, leading the community member to assume the industry had negligently failed to create one.

See again they were just more focused on continuing day-to-day operations and construction, where they did not even prepare or develop a pandemic plan in case a case came into the camp and which would’ve affected you know all the people that are there. So that’s basically you know the impact by hydro and their ignorance. (CM8)

While one community member observed that, even protocols that were eventually put in place, such as required isolation and temperature checks before workers get on the plane, were not being followed. Further saying that these concerns were also dismissed by Manitoba Hydro, “they were breaking all these rules and we were telling them that and they’re saying, ‘no no no,’ and we had to basically prove it to them that was going on,” (CM1). Manitoba Hydro’s (in)action consequently led the communities to take their protection into their own hands, as one community member notes, “we needed to do something and step up to protect the North. So, we decided, as council, that we need to basically send a message because the government wasn’t listening,” (CM8). A feeling of resolve and responsibility to take action was voiced by several community members.

We had our communities together, we started meeting and we came up with you know, a similar agreement where let’s try to lock it down, and if we have to shut it down, let’s shut it down to protect our community. (CM1)

I just had the sense of like, my people need me and even if people are opposing, like I don’t, I do this because I strongly believe that the, I strongly believed that my people needed the support who are at the blockade. And that my people who were at home, who are making the decision to stay home and not participate for you know very very valid reasons, they also needed somebody to show up for them. So, and not making me some martyr, but like I just had this sense of like I have a responsibility to my people and to my Nation, so I’m going to act on that, so I went to the blockade. (CM6)

Again, community members reiterated the priority of community safety; No matter the opposition they knew they would face, a responsibility to those relationships drove the

communities to act. As well, along with the motivation of protecting their loved ones, the Lockdown was also framed as a way to challenge and refuse Manitoba Hydro's decision-making. The first blockade was initiated by Tataskweyak First Nation.

So, one day we're sitting there with the chief and the council...I said, 'you know you guys, you want to do it, let's do it... we're gonna put up a lockdown on the highway, we're closing it.' And they're like, 'really?' 'Yeah, we're gonna do it because we have to do it, the government doesn't listen, Manitoba Hydro doesn't listen and more or less you know, we want to prevent anything. So we gathered at the band hall with members, program staff, managers and we more or less, we developed a pandemic plan that we were doing, plus we planned and I kind of made signs for our lockdown. I remember we were heading there the next day, I was with the other council members, I remember I got that pylon, I went and put it on the road, 'okay we're all locked down,' so the guys pushed that big culvert and they put up stuff and we actually blocked the road. (CM8)

A Fox Lake member described a subsequent community meeting where it was discovered that, upon learning that Tataskweyak had initiated a blockade, Manitoba Hydro was still planning on using the Gillam airport. In response to Manitoba Hydro's dismissal and attempt to circumvent Tataskweyak First Nations direct action, the community member recounted that those at the meeting concluded, "we just thought, F-you, you're not going to utilize Thompson or Gillam, we're going to block both routes," (CM3). Shortly after, Fox Lake First Nation blocked the southern access road, committed to sending Manitoba Hydro a message they could not ignore, as a community member reflected, "we put up the blockades and we were very adamant, like no you're not doing this," (CM6).

The Lockdown was both a challenge to the colonial capitalist-centered decision-making of Manitoba Hydro, as well as an assertion of alternate decision-making centered on well-being and community. A similar framing was also present in a story referred to previously in which a Fox Lake community member described a meeting where they challenged Manitoba Hydro representatives about the Statement of Claim held against Tataskweyak First Nation. The community member recounts standing up in the meeting and declaring to Manitoba Hydro,

‘I got something to talk about here before we move on to this.’ I said, ‘we need to talk about the elephant in the room. The elephant in the room is that lawsuit against TCN, it’s worth \$11 million...what I’m prepared to do right now is I’m going to walk out of this meeting, and I refuse to come back until they pull that statement of claim. Because I cannot negotiate under duress, and I hope you other community members and leaders follow me. (CM1)

The community member then described, fairly anxiously, awaiting news in their vehicle outside the building. Finally, they received a call from their chief and learned that, in unison, the Elders and community members walked out of the meeting. A few days later, the community member heard from a friend in Tataskweyak First Nation that the First Nations demonstration of authority and solidarity was successful, Manitoba Hydro had lifted the Statement of Claim.

So, we basically got that out of the way and we, I bluffed them. I didn’t know anybody was going to follow me, but it turned out that I knew I was right and I knew they couldn’t proceed without us and they actually huddled together and they came to the same conclusion, that they couldn’t come up with, they couldn’t close that deal, it would be

hanging there forever and ever and we would tell the media why. So, we basically had them by the nuts yeah and they conceded. (CM1)

Action such as this is not new, First Nations in the North have been actively collaborating and challenging Manitoba Hydro's decision-making for decades. As noted, an early example in the 1970s was the creation of the Northern Flood Committee by five First Nations who convinced the province and Manitoba Hydro to participate in the Northern Flood Agreement (Dipple, 2022). The Keeyask Lockdown is a more recent example of direct action, while the previous community member describes a more understated form of resistance. However, legal agreements, direct action, political manoeuvring, while diverse tactics, all demonstrate a refusal of the colonial ideology and an assertion of Indigenous decision-making and ways of knowing and being. Furthermore, community action demonstrates an assertion of sovereignty, as well as inherent and treaty rights, which several community members commented on.

We have every right to protect our communities, our lands, our territories. And I feel like a lot of people forget that Section 35 of the Charter, I think it's the Charter, you know gives us, you know grants us sovereignty. And we're often looked at like we're being a nuisance, or we're acting in a disobedient way, but people need to remember Section 35 grants us sovereignty. If we want to protect our lands, our territory, people, in that way, we have every right to do so in our traditional territory. (CM6)

As noted by the community member, the Canadian Constitution, indeed asserts that, "existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed," (Canadian Charter, 1982, s 35(1)). As well, more recently in 2021, the Canadian Government passed Bill C-15, whose summary, "provides that the Government of Canada must

take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and must prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives of the Declaration.” UNDRIP affirms numerous Indigenous rights, notably including Indigenous peoples, “right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired,” (2007, Article 26).

However, as these rights have indeed been affirmed before in such articles like the constitution and numerous treaties, it is uncertain how much change will stem from yet another introduction of law, especially when settler laws and courts have historically been weaponized against Indigenous peoples. Such action was demonstrated by Manitoba Hydro during the pandemic, as rather than recognize First Nations right to control their territory, the industry and the provincial courts criminalized the Lockdown; A community member describes the use of the aforementioned injunction against the First Nations.

Because the Tataskweyak was blocking, they were blocking the Highway 280, the RCMP, a judge, had granted the injunction and the RCMP were going to serve it to the Chief of Tataskweyak Cree Nation...The, you know, the injunction would give the RCMP the right to use force to not, I shouldn't say the right, but the legal ability to use force to dismantle the blockade. (CM6).

The community member makes an important distinction in framing the injunction as offering the RCMP the ‘legal ability’ rather than the right to remove the blockade. This framing challenges the settler states’ assumed authority over the sovereignty of First Nations by distinguishing between the colonial ideology of settler law and the inherent nature of Indigenous rights. Additionally, and as noted, Indigenous rights have been affirmed into Canadian law (though UNDRIP had not received royal assent in Canada at the time) as well as within treaty, which

consequentially brings even the settler legality of the injunction into question. However, this dismissal of law and treaty when it comes to upholding Indigenous rights is a timeworn pattern of behaviour for settler governments. As Indigenous [Anishinaabe-Métis] researcher Aimée Craft notes, when it comes to living up to enshrined obligations, settler law, “as applied by Canadian courts and governments, has erroneously been used to allow for the infringement and erosion of Treaties,” (2022a, p. 266). In response to the criminalization of the blockade, community members reiterated that Tataskweyak First Nation Chief Doreen Spence promptly tore up the injunction, consequentially asserting that inherent Indigenous sovereignty and rights, while affirmed by settler law, do not require its recognition and will not bend to its authority (Coulthard, 2007; Latulippe & McGregor, 2022). Tearing up that injunction was a refusal and challenge to the assumed settler authority on First Nation land.

Indigenous direct action can be understood as a response to the no-win situation created by the colonial legal system, and it is often utilized to enforce Indigenous sovereignty, as observed by the fact that the Lockdown was not the first time PR 280 was blockaded. A Tataskweyak community member recounted the creation of a past blockade saying, “we put another barricade on PR 280 at our right, at our junction, like that’s our treaty land, 280 runs through our treaty land,” (CM8). The 2014 action was taken in response to the deterioration of PR 280, the road connecting the community to the highway, which was damaged due to heavy machinery involved in early Keeyask construction (Brake, 2018). The community was demanding a quick refurbishment of the road, along with a resolution from Manitoba Hydro to address other damages and unfulfilled agreements made in the Keeyask partnership (Graham, 2014). In noting this past action, the community member’s statement implies a perpetual commitment to uphold their rights in the face of harm and inequity; The Lockdown was only the

most recent demonstration of First Nation resistance and sovereignty, as past community action has demonstrated, First Nations have and will continue to enact resistance and assert their sovereignty over their land.

6.5.2 Theme 2: First Nations have and will protect their communities and challenge the assumed power of Manitoba Hydro OR Theme 3: First Nations are actively managing and cultivating their future

6.5.2.1 Theme d: The Lockdown was an opportunity to come together during a time of isolation

While the Lockdown may be viewed as a challenge to the assumed authority of Manitoba Hydro, motivated by communities need to protect their loved ones, yet another element of motivation behind the Lockdown voiced by community members was direct action as something of a family tradition. One community reflected on the activism conducted by both of their parents, which they witnessed time and again while growing up. Now, well-versed in activism themselves, they came to understand that taking action, “it’s in my blood,” (CM1). This concept was reiterated by several community members.

I did take my daughter, my niece and my granddaughter [to the Lockdown] because Mom and Dad were always kind of activists too when it came to things like blockades and whatnot. They had always taught us, that if you’re going to fight for what you know is right, to do what is right, then you better fight. (CM3)

There were some folks there who are there every day, every second camping out and very dedicated. And my heart and my respect and my like everything goes out to them and

because they were very very dedicated. I was there in like tidbits, in episodes I guess you could say, I did spend, I think I spent like two nights out there and it was just like a really beautiful time. But the experience that I had, the one experience that's very significant for me, is my late grandmother Sarah Peter, her and my late grandfather went out to the blockade. And sitting with them around fire was such, it just, it's like a full circle moment. Because, like you know, mentioning what I mentioned previously, the history of Fox Lake Cree Nation people and their experiences with Manitoba Hydro were not pleasant. And my grandfather, you know who's also a residential school survivor, you know they faced a lot of adversity in a community where being an Indian was, you know, not a positive thing at the time. And they endured quite a bit and they had to stand up, they had to use their voice, they had to, you know, be accomplices. At times, they had to fight for their people and fight for their right to live. (CM6)

A family history of action was reaffirmed by the intergenerational nature of the Lockdown, with several community members expressing their gratitude at being able to participate in meaningful action with their loved ones.

So, sitting with them was just like a full circle moment and I was like, yeah this feels really right, I'm glad that I made this decision, because I'm sitting with like two of the most incredible people in my view. In my world view, these two are like one of the most incredible people that I've had the honour to call my grandparents and grow up with them as my grandparents, so like this is really good, I love this. (CM6)

The Lockdown created an opportunity for connection, a space for people within and across First Nations to come together, as one community member recalled, much of the time they were,

“sitting around, drinking tea, telling stories, you know having a good time, getting to know each other,” (CM1). This opportunity for connection, stories being told among the young and old, also allowed for the transfer of knowledge, as one community member recounted.

We all went, and there’s this one woman from town here, all her kids are Fox Lake, she’s not Indigenous. She took this really cute picture of my daughter with her fist in the air, my granddaughter with her fist in the air, wearing her little ribbon skirt. And she was like three at the time or two, something like that. And to see some of these Elders, especially the ones that are no longer here, talking with my granddaughter and whatnot, that’s knowledge being passed down through generations right by sight there. (CM3)

The intergenerational nature of action described by community members attests to the relationality of Indigenous environmental justice. Indigenous [Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei] scholar Krushil Watene notes that, for many Indigenous peoples, “well-being and justice begins at the intersections of widely inclusive relationships – not least where our relationships with each other and the natural environment meet,” (2024, p. 19). The Lockdown, while a space of Indigenous action and resistance to colonial decision-making, was also a space where longstanding ideas about how to enact justice and protect community were shared and passed on; It was a space where past, present and future challenges and solutions intermingled, and where intergenerational learning and reimagining took place (Watene, 2024). In addition to the value that was placed on being able to meet, share stories, and even pass on the tradition of direct action, also expressed were feelings of solidarity between the First Nations. One community member recalled the importance of this solidarity in regard to presenting a united front saying, “we had to stand together, which we did,” (CM8). While another community member recalled feelings of well-being which resulted from the community collaboration.

Tataskweyak had called for allies...they had called for solidarity and Fox Lake, you know, we answered of course, that's our, you know, the Tataskweyak, that's our sibling. So, we went and there's this picture that came out of that time when Fox Lake and Tataskweyak stood together and, you know, there's two pictures actually where Chief Doreen, at the time was Chief Doreen, ripped up the injunction in front of the RCMP officer. And then there's this other picture where Fox Lake Cree Nation and Tataskweyak women, all in their ribbon skirts, were standing on the highway with their fists up and that, like those are very, like that was very powerful. And again, it just, it restored that sense of safety, that sanity, that well-being that you can only find in community. And that blockade, even though it had its specific purpose it did a lot more for folks than we thought it was going to do. It reminded us that we're not weak people... We're resourceful, we're tactful, we are resilient, even though I don't like, you know, jumping on the resilience train too much [laughing] I shouldn't have to be so resilient. But it just, and it gave us this sense of security of, like we're going to be okay, we're going to have to have a tough time, but we are going to be okay. (CM6)

Other community members, while commenting on the solidarity that occurred between First Nations, also reflected on how this solidarity contrasted to the division which was often characteristic of the communities. They also notably, connected that division to the settler government actions.

Yeah, you know what, we do have our differences, but we put those aside because we agreed with one issue here, that we all had to be unified on it and that's basically what happened. And we are a lot closer with each other, but we were always close and I think it was governments that separated us and had us fighting over land and reserve and

resource management areas and things like that right. Like they throw a bone in the middle of us and they expected us to fight over it and we done that sometimes. But this time we were in the right, we were protecting our Elders, our autoimmune people that weren't able to fight COVID the way a regular person would. So we did the right thing and I got no regrets and I would do it again tomorrow if I had to. (CM1)

There was no anxiety, there was no animosity. People were getting along, even the different reserves kind of thing and we're kind of known for not getting along, the five reserves. So one of the coolest things that happened during that blockade over at Split Lake, was you had all five of the bands that York Factory split up into, actually standing together for the first time in 60 years since the government split us up...so we knew it was something, like it didn't feel like it was anything bad, it felt good, it felt empowering, it felt like we were doing right. (CM3)

Divide and conquer is a strategy of settler colonialism and utilized adeptly by Manitoba Hydro, particularly in agreements between the industry and First Nations which, “have often deepened rather than narrowed divisions within and among northern communities, (Hoffman, 2011, p. 122). A notable example would be to again look to the Northern Flood Agreement. While five communities initially made up the Northern Flood Committee, after years of Manitoba Hydro failing to adhere to the agreement, the industry strategically met with individual communities, undermining the power of their collective action, to negotiate what were, “effectively one-time buyouts of the promises,” (Dipple, 2022, p. 277) made in the Northern Flood Agreement, succeeding with all but one First Nation. More widely, we can look to the 1870 Manitoba Act and the 1876 Indian Act which similarly and actively divided communities and fostered, “competition over rights, lands, and resources,” (Legault, 2022, p. 45). Yet despite a history of

government and industry disruption of First Nation solidarity, the Lockdown demonstrates a willingness and desire by community members to reaffirm relationships within and across First Nations. A few community members even pointed to outside support, for instance one community spoke of an interaction they had with members of the RCMP.

Even the RCMP, you know, like when you see an RCMP, you figure that well, they're there to basically control all the justice system, keep everything in line. But when they came to our Lockdown site area, at our junction, they came and a few of those officers, they said... 'We support you, because we live in the North,' that's what he said, 'like, even though we hold that title as an RCMP, we're still, we still got a life and I've got my wife, she's a nurse, she works in a hospital. I got my kids and the concern I got is this COVID and what you guys are doing is preventing that COVID from coming in, and that's a good thing.' And I said, 'that's why we're doing this.' (CM8)

Another community member commented on the support which they and the Lockdown were receiving from those in Winnipeg, mentioning the direct action that was occurring at the Legislative Building.

It's very important that solidarity is there in that because I believe that blockades and everything, that those are great spaces for education. And another really cool thing that I enjoyed was, you know, I was sharing this experience with a good friend of mine who lived in the South and then a medicine camp was erected at the, on the grounds of the Legislative Building in Winnipeg. And to see how folks in the South were also standing in support for us, that was really cool to see as well. So, this like journey of advocacy and demonstration and fight, I guess, you know, we have, it's nice to see that we have support

from other nations, other people. So I feel it just, it just makes me very proud, makes me very proud to be a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation, to be Cree and to have the opportunity to continually stand and try and make my people proud. (CM6)

While there was limited news coverage of the medicine camp erected in Winnipeg, according to CTV News, over a hundred people were present on the legislative grounds to support the First Nations Lockdown (Izri, 2020) and a CityNews video showed signs declaring “Land Back!” and, “Northern Lives Before Hydro Profit,” (CityNews2020). Coulthard and Simpson have discussed the importance of countering and resisting settler colonial violence with solidarity, with Indigenous peoples, “engaged as related comrades joined in critical co-resistance against the convergence of forces that divide and conquer us and the Earth on which we depend,” (2016, p. 250). Furthermore, from a Nishnaabeg perspective, Simpson writes that, “blockades are both a refusal and an affirmation...An affirmation of life,” (2021, p. 56). This sentiment can be literally applied to the Lockdown, as it was a space dedicated to the protection and preservation of Indigenous life during COVID-19, as was it also a refusal of the notion that money, jobs, anything could supersede that responsibility.

6.5.2.2 Theme b: Communities are healing and moving forward in a good way

While several community members noted gradual improvements in Manitoba Hydro’s behaviour, and despite the newfound ‘partnership’ between the industry and the four First Nations, the harm experienced during the recent development of Keeyask is described as outweighing whatever benefits that may yet arise. Moreover, with respect to the impacts of Keeyask development, some community members remarked that they did not believe their community would be quick to accept further development in their territory. As one community

member stated, “I think the majority of the people would vote no for the simple fact that they’ve seen what happened,” (CM1). Manitoba Hydro’s legacy of harm, as well as their failure to live up to their promises, is freshly imprinted within the memories of Northern First Nations after the most recent hydro development.

Hydro in my opinion has got a long, long way to go before they can even be believed that they’re changing for the better. Sure, they’re talking all this stuff now, but Keeyask is done, Keewatinook is done. Wait until they decide they want another dam, then they’re going to come sweet talking everybody again. But they’re gonna have to wait, probably until my great grandchildren, because I know nobody my age or my daughter’s age would ever say yes to another big build like that. (CM3)

In the past, Northern First Nations were given no consultation and no choice about hydro development (Dipple, 2022; Kulchyski, 2004). The Keeyask partnership, though limited, was a significant shift to the unbalanced power in the North, as one community member expressed, “Keeyask is one project that we’ve been given an opportunity to again touch the wheel and actually drive the car once in a while, which I think was good. But there were a lot of underlying issues that were out of our control that prevented us from taking advantage of it as much as we could,” (CM1). Promises made of partnership, employment and revenue were less than realized as Keeyask development came to an end, leaving feelings of mistrust with community members. Though there was also an expression of the importance of learning how to better co-exist with Manitoba Hydro. One community member remarked that doing so is the pragmatic way forward, considering how ingrained the industry already is in the area. Noting the value of continuing to meet and discuss how to address ongoing issues, they commented, “we’re not going anywhere, they’re not going anywhere and we’re learning to work together” (CM1). The value of

maintaining a productive dialogue was also mentioned by another community member saying the relationship is, “always needing to be reviewed and I don’t think that should stop, like there always should be that constant discussion happening,” (CM6). However, a comparison was also made to the ongoing relationship as akin to an abusive spousal situation. The community member described a conversation with Manitoba Hydro representatives in which they explained their personal familiarity with an abusive relationship.

Basically, I said, ‘you know what, we’re in an abusive marriage and we can’t even get a divorce with you guys. You guys are abusing us.’ I said, ‘I seen that with my mom and dad. I seen what my dad did to my mom when he was an abusive husband’. I said, ‘but he sobered up, he went for healing and he got help and they got back together and they lived a good life. But I don’t think you guys are going to do that. We’re going to be stuck in this abusive relationship because we can’t get divorced. So we’re going to have to go along with your coat tails, cuz you’re the majority owner, you own everything, you own the house, you own the car, you own everything and we have to go by whatever you say’. If we try to fight they’ll kick us out. (CM1)

This comparison of Manitoba Hydro to an abusive husband and First Nations as the abused wife, brought to mind the social dynamics of the mid 1900s in North America. Many of women’s rights were not recognized and much of their lives were decided by their husbands, a situation which was of course further compounded for women of colour. Throughout the decades, women have fought for many of the rights we have today, as Indigenous peoples have fought, as the community member noted, “we were an abused wife or abused partner for these many years, but the laws and the rights that we have are being known, so we’re not abused as much as we were before,” (CM1). The community members’ connection made to the abusive relationship they

witnessed with their parents may also be additionally telling of social impacts among First Nations resulting from their relationship with Manitoba Hydro, as it is commonly understood that, “hurt people hurt people,” (Krawec, 2022, p. 176). Moreover, Krawec (2022) observes that, when it comes to reconciliation, it requires the responsibility and participation of both parties; While First Nations are doing the work to heal, as the community members father worked to repair his relationships, Manitoba Hydro has yet to demonstrate a true commitment to change and evidently still has much work to do.

Yet, among Manitoba Hydro’s failings, First Nations have both continued to fight for their rights to be upheld, as well foster healing within their communities. Many community members indeed reflected on the importance of healing and the assertion of rights as two ambitions which are often intertwined.

Through our table with Canada, we do have a Treaty Land Entitlement table, we do also have a RIRSD table, which is basically the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination. And we’re looking at you know, healing obviously because you know a lot of us need to heal, and that’s heavy on our RIRSD file where you know we can set up all the economic development opportunities and such things like that. But if we’re not healthy, who’s going to work you know, we can’t put you know the quickest horse before the slowest horse. So we need to make sure we don’t lose people, which means we have to allow our people to heal if they want to heal and to move forward in a good way and not a negative way. (CM1)

Another community member discussed the aforementioned cultural training within the Keeyask project. As outside workers arrived and racism and discrimination became prevalent within the

newest project, First Nations pressured Manitoba Hydro to implement the cultural awareness program, asserting their sovereignty and protecting the well-being of their community members.

These people have to understand who we are...and basically respect the fact that you know this is our land, our area and our culture and we don't need that discrimination to occur you know. And us being stereotyped by you know against you know because we're indigenous, aboriginal, because it's the common thing that occurs, you know not only in our region, our province, our country, it's everywhere. So we had to address that and make sure it's [cultural training program] implemented that you know people had to abide by respecting everybody. (CM8)

Other community initiatives that were shared involved the ongoing land use planning and development, which a community member recalled had a substantial impact on Elders, saying, "they really had no faith in us to even be able to plant a tree. So, the first time we got the trees plant, you could see that the smiles and the tears of happiness in some of those eyes, that was pretty strong," (CM3). Also noted was the use of traditional medicines during the pandemic, as a community member notes, "there's a lot more community members that have turned towards more traditional medicines," (CM4). This was, in part, due to a community initiative to encourage and provide traditional medicines during the pandemic

I haven't gotten Covid, but during the two years, I took our own traditional medicine, you know, to build up my immune system, because you know, I'm not young and I do have some underlying, you know health issues. And so, yeah you know, I just made a conscious effort to help myself, to rely on, just for general health purposes you know, our own traditional medicine. So, that's what came out of it for me, so I'm more conscious

now you know using our own medicines now going forward, that's their long-term impact or change for me, yeah because it helped me through the pandemic, I really believe that... We, you know made sure the health team provided it, I mean had it available to community members if they wanted it, you know to have that extra support right. Yeah, so that's one of the positive changes that came out of that. (CM7)

On May 4, 2023, the World Health Organization downgraded COVID-19 from a global emergency to, “an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern,” (2023) encouraging nations to transition to, “long-term management of COVID-19,” (2023). The Lockdown, an incredible expression of Indigenous sovereignty, justice and resurgence, not to mention, “the longest running blockade, outside of Tataskweyak,” (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, 2020b) also came to an end ten days after its inception on May 23, 2020. While yet another agreement was made between the industry and the First Nations to remove the blockades, many promises, such as lifting the injunction and recognizing First Nations decision-making during the pandemic, were again left unfulfilled by Manitoba Hydro. However, as the legacy of Manitoba Hydro and the unbalanced relationship between the industry and First Nations continues, so too does First Nations visions of justice and resurgence, whether that be through negotiation with industry and government, land use development or the continuation of traditional practices, Northern First Nations are asserting their rights and ways of being on the land. Within the framework of Indigenous environmental justice, McGregor (2022) has discussed the, “Anishinaabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin* (well-being) as a life goal common to many Indigenous peoples,” (p. 12). The Whapmagoostui Cree have similarly described the concept of *miyupimaatisiun* (being alive well), which may involve a myriad of practices but generally includes a focus on wellness and

the continuation of a Cree way of life (Adelson, 2015). Stories shared by community members at the Lockdown, of feelings of kinship, rightness, and empowerment present a portrait of wellness, a pocket of optimism that was actively fostered within the chaos and fear of the pandemic. Even as Manitoba Hydro drags its feet into partnership with Northern First Nations, community members have described and demonstrated their continued dedication to proactively address the harm that has been done and cultivate a better future.

6.6 Discussion

This chapter was created from a small number of interviews which, rather than painting generalizations, allowed for a deeper exploration of community experiences and more space for individual voices to express their stories. Each community member holds a unique experience of the Lockdown, shaped by their previous experiences of living in their community and alongside Manitoba Hydro. Within those unique experiences, similarities surfaced: a relationship with Manitoba Hydro characterized by inequity, harm, and feelings of mistrust and dismissal, as well as a sense of well-being and solidarity that emerged from direct action. The latter being especially notable considering the media's common portrayal of Indigenous peoples as victims or criminals, and academia's historic focus on damage-centered research (Tuck, 2009). Following Indigenous [Unangax̂] scholar, Eve Tucks' concept of desire-based research, which is, "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives," (2009, p. 416) this chapter strived to holistically explore the experiences of community members, making room for both the harm of settler colonial legacies, and the healing of community resurgence.

Indigenous [Dene] scholar, Glen Coulthard describes, “settler colonialism as a structure of domination that is partly predicated on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands and the forms of political authority and jurisdiction that govern our relationship to these lands,” (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016). Settler colonialism and its many projects have produced immeasurable harm on Indigenous peoples. Manitoba Hydro is one such project, founded and justified by the myth of terra nullius and responsible for past and ongoing destruction and dispossession of land from Northern First Nations. Within Themes 1 and 4, community members discussed Manitoba Hydro’s legacy, pointing to inequitable relationships, harm and a lack of accountability. However, they also expressed a desire and need to move forward, noting that small, but significant, changes have been witnessed in the industry and within community.

Indigenous [Anishinaabe] activist and writer Winona LaDuke has described the concepts of colonialism and capitalism, and its modes of extraction and exploitation, within the framework of the Anishinaabe story of Wiindigo (LaDuke & Cowen, 2020). Describing the insatiable greed and consumption of the Wiindigo, LaDuke and Cowen explain the value of framing the settler economy and infrastructure within this story because, “despite its ferocity, the Wiindigo can still be killed,” (2020, p. 264). When discussing concepts of settler colonialism, or scary stories like the Wiindigo, it is easy for these monsters to seem larger, more indestructible than they are.

LaDuke and Cowen remind us that there is a hero (in Wiindigo’s case, a young nishnaabekwe) for every monster, and an alternative to the settler colonial future which is instead centered on life and living well (LaDuke & Cowen, 2020). This concept is intimately connected to that of Indigenous resurgence which Simpson (2011), through Nishnaabeg storytelling, describes as a reimagining and recreation of Indigenous life. Moreover, a reimagining of Indigenous life involves, if not centers on the ability for First Nations to practice sovereignty and self-

determination, concepts which are unique to frameworks of Indigenous environmental justice (McGregor, 2022). Community members recounted the injustice and inequity they and past generations had endured, along with ongoing trauma, discrimination, abuse, water pollution and inability to continue traditional activities that has been compounded by Manitoba Hydro's continued development and manipulation of water. The Lockdown occurred within the context of this historical and ongoing legacy of harm, and viewed through the lens of Indigenous environmental justice, the Lockdown was an assertion of First Nation sovereignty. McGregor describes Indigenous, "worldviews, philosophies, and knowledges of Indigenous peoples as central tenets in defining Indigenous environmental justice concepts," (2022, p. 10). Community members described numerous times their priority of community protection, their need and responsibility to safeguard children, Elders, and those suffering from autoimmune disease, from the threat of COVID-19. This worldview was expressed through the physical representation of a blockade, an assertion of decision-making and justice.

Furthermore, Indigenous spaces of action, like blockades, are complex; They can serve as centers of justice, challenges to settler colonial ideologies, as well as simultaneously act as modes of solidarity, and melting pots of sharing and healing as seen in Themes 2 and 3. This complexity reflects the many fronts of colonialism Indigenous resurgence addresses at once, as Indigenous [Cherokee] scholar Jeff Corntassel writes, "processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle," (2012, p. 88). McGregor similarly describes Indigenous environmental justice as an interconnected and holistic pathway to living well saying, "some of the seemingly differing goals of Indigenous peoples (e.g., reconciliation, self-government, self-determination, and sovereignty) are seen as pathways to achieving *mino-mnaamodzawin*," (2022, p. 12). Outwardly, the

Lockdown could be seen as a simple blockade to keep people and COVID-19 out, though in reality, the action was addressing numerous community struggles simultaneously. Observed within the colonial history of Manitoba Hydro, and as reiterated by community members, the Lockdown was an expression of justice and indigenous self-determination towards an industry that, for decades, has practiced unilateral decision-making at the cost of First Nation well-being. The Lockdown was also an expression and reassertion of community relationships and well-being despite years of government and industry actions which created division and instilled harm in communities. Indigenous resurgence is many things, often at once; As Simpson describes, resurgence within an oppressive society often emerges as a refusal which, “is always generative; that is, it is always the living alternative,” (2017, p. 33). The Lockdown was a refusal of the colonial capitalistic informed priorities of Manitoba Hydro and an embodiment of Indigenous reciprocal relationships which prioritize community well-being; Community members’ time and bodies were offered to defend those in need, while stories and generational knowledge were shared and received, inspiring feelings of security and pride. Moreover, within the context of mino-bimaadiziwin, Indigenous [Biigtigong Anishinabe] scholar Chantelle Richmond discusses the importance of gathering. That the ability to do so creates an opportunity to be accountable, “to the wider set of relationships that make us whole and well. These gatherings offered a place for Nishnaabeg to practice and share our knowledge, stories, and teachings about how to live well in this world: how to greet the day, how to respect others, how to maintain caring relations, and how to ask for help when needed,” (2024, para. 4). Within the concept of wellness, the Lockdown can be seen as such a gathering, an active creation of space that fosters healing and belonging (Richmond, 2024). During a time when many people were feeling isolated and scared, the Lockdown demonstrated First Nations priority of community, an idea that, “the well-being of

individuals is directly linked to the well-being of collectives,” (Simpson, 2016, p. 23); A way of being which resonated and rippled outwards, inspiring solidarity throughout Manitoba’s North and South. Coulthard and Simpson address Indigenous solidarity, noting that it is a difficult and sometimes elusive ambition in the face of colonial structures, describing potential factors prohibiting collaboration as, “difficulties in working with and across particular identity-related differences, working across geographic separation and coerced segregation, and contending with structures of power that function to divide us both materially and ideologically,” (2016, p. 250). Community members described the division that occurred across First Nations due to the actions of the government and Manitoba Hydro. They also noted that when it came to the responsibility of protecting their community members, that division fell away, demonstrating that the relationships between communities is far stronger than any dividing force. While settler colonial projects, such as Manitoba Hydro, continue to attack and divide Indigenous relationships (to land and to each other) Indigenous resurgence and solidarity efforts, such as the Lockdown, steadfastly reinforce and regenerate those relationships (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016).

6.7 Conclusion

Simpson teaches that, “storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives.” (2011, p. 21). The experiences shared by community members about Manitoba Hydro and the Lockdown were rightfully complicated; Many community members themselves, or family members have worked with the industry at one time or another, or have acted as an intermediary or continue to interact with the industry on some level. Manitoba Hydro was both seen as a producer of economic development and of environmental and social harm. The relationship was viewed as very problematic and unbalanced, but also improved. Community

members described past and ongoing acts of colonialism and harm, but also aspirations of healing and moving forward with Manitoba Hydro in a good way. Moreover, trauma, inequity, action, resurgence, were described as intergenerational. The Lockdown did not occur in a vacuum, it came to being within this lengthy and complicated history, consequentially it was similarly experienced and understood as many things: a reaction to a frightening virus, an assertion of decision-making and protection, a challenge to Manitoba Hydro's authority, and an opportunity for family and community to come together.

In utilizing a two-eyed seeing approach in this chapter, attempting to learn from and merge reflexive thematic analysis with Indigenous storytelling, I was able to explore and connect these individual experiences, demonstrating overarching themes of settler colonialism, Indigenous environmental justice, and resurgence while also maintaining the nuance of individual voices. In examining these stories holistically, the 2020 Lockdown was discussed, not as an anomaly, or an overreaction, or an act of disobedience. Placing the Lockdown within the legacy of Manitoba Hydro, within decades of injustice, the First Nations action emerged as something much more than a simple blockade. Community members' descriptions of empowerment and belonging, their experiences of sharing and healing at the Lockdown complicated and challenged colonial framings of blockades as harmful and violent spaces. The action was one of justice and resurgence, a demonstration of solidarity and of a resolve to refuse settler colonial decision-making and affirm Indigenous life and an alternative way of being.

While I strived to be accountable to the stories which were shared with me, and to be reflective of my bias, this chapter is merely my interpretation, one (albeit complex) side of the story. There are many other ways the Lockdown could be explored, for example a gendered analysis of women's roles in the direct action or a deeper analysis of community members'

worldviews and knowledge systems which inform and shape ideas of justice and action (McGregor, 2022). The important thing is that those stories, those ways of understanding, those reimagining's of the world, are told. While western notions of research continue to uphold ideas of objectivity, Indigenous knowledge and storytelling embrace experience and relationship, encouraging interconnectedness (Charles, 2022). As Indigenous [Cree] educator Blake Charles writes, consequently, "Knowledge becomes more meaningful and significant because there is a direct relationship resonating from each experience," (2022. p. 28). By sharing their experiences, community members shared valuable and meaningful knowledge about settler colonial legacies, environmental justice and resurgence, made all the more meaningful by being subjective and place-based. Furthermore, as Manitoba Hydro's most recent narrative of reconciliation, combined with the greenwashing of hydro, attempts to further obscure past and current harm, Indigenous storytelling (along with direct action) maintains an integral role in countering those colonial narratives. This is largely due to the unique power of storytelling which enables ideas and emotions to travel great distances, inspiring empathy and understanding among those with different lived experience. In addition, this makes the storyteller (not to mention the capacity to tell/share that story) very important and is particularly relevant in a circumstance where the main form of connection between Southern settlers and Northern First Nations are the stories and narratives which are shared. This chapter, and the experiences of these community members, indeed offer a story quite different from that of Manitoba Hydro, and more complicated and holistic than that presented by much of the mainstream media. These experiences convey both a moment in time (of the pandemic and of the Lockdown), as well as the cumulation of generations of knowledge (of Manitoba Hydro's legacy and of Indigenous resurgence). Each story, imbued with meaning by a community member, is a truth which defies and challenges the

myths maintained by the colonial structures ingrained within our society and within Manitoba Hydro. As Kovach (2021) explains, “stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices,” (p. 95); Sharing stories and experiences is an integral way of passing on knowledge (Charles, 2022; Michell, 2015). Perhaps this chapter and its collection of experiences will, in some small way, aid in the safekeeping and passing on of knowledge, of those memories of harm and trauma and teachings of healing and action. Nonetheless, I am extremely grateful to have been trusted with these stories and to have the opportunity to now share them with you.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The Emergence of a Project (And a Few Caveats)

This project has adjusted and adapted in many ways over the last few years, at least partially due to my initial inclination to bite off more than I should chew. I began with the goal to complete three case studies (Keeyask Lockdown, Manitoba: A Prioritization of Industry; Ring of Fire, Ontario: Pushing Through a Controversial Project; Bill 1, Alberta: A piece of Neoliberal Legislation), along with an accompanying media analysis. However, three case studies became two when I finally conceded that, if I indeed wanted to create a holistic account of each case (and avoid writing a 500-page novel), two was much more manageable. As well, I believe including two case studies was still very beneficial in portraying the pervasive, yet distinct to place nature of disaster capitalism during COVID-19.

I also initially planned to include a chapter containing community experiences from two of those case studies (Keeyask and Ring of Fire) as those were two situations which significantly involved First Nations. However, two community experience sections eventually became one. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been connected with Nathan early on in this project,

and for that relationship to then lead to other connections with community members in northern Manitoba. Conversely, that initial, critical connection was something I was missing with the First Nations involved in the Ring of Fire case study. I attempted to reach out, finally meeting with a project manager who works alongside Professor Dayna Scott, a researcher who collaborates and advises several Ontario First Nations, including Neskantaga. We concluded that my project was, and rightly so, not something which the community could afford to prioritize, as they were not only managing longstanding issues relating to health and infrastructure, but also under increasing pressure to review the relentless influx of mining claims being staked on their land. As a result, my community experience chapter was narrowed to those of the First Nations involved in the Keeyask case study. Nevertheless, I opted to view this adjustment as an opportunity to now delve deeper into the experiences of community members I had already met, and to provide more room for the stories they had so graciously shared with me.

In addition to the more structural changes within my project, as a non-Indigenous researcher, I was also consistently trying to learn from decolonial and Indigenous methodologies, continuously (re)considering what my project was, what it should be, and how to approach it in a good way. This reflexivity involved the coming to terms with several aspects of my project that, if I had known what I know now, could have been undertaken in a better way. One notable aspect relates to the importance of community involvement during the entirety of the project, including (perhaps most importantly) the creation and design of the project which numerous Indigenous scholars, as well as frameworks created for working with Indigenous communities have reiterated (Asselin & Basile, 2018; Carlson, 2017; Ferland et al., 2021; Hayward et al., 2021; Latulippe & McGregor, 2022). However, this was not the case in my project, as I, along with my advisor, devised my statement of intent before I had even met with Nathan. As a result,

this project was largely constructed around my own curiosities (though informed/guided by decolonial and Indigenous methodologies) rather than created out of community needs/concerns. So, in retrospect, my methods, and my intention to do research in a good way, could have been better, and if done again, I would strive to create a project more centred in community and founded on reciprocal relationships. However, in the end, while not perfect, nor exactly what I initially had in mind or what, with the benefit of hindsight, I would wish it to be, I believe this project still has value; Perhaps most especially as a platform and record of community voices, but also as an exploration of how timeworn relationships came to be expressed during the COVID-19 era.

7.2 Findings

This project began with the objective to tell a story about the impacts of settler colonialism and disaster capitalism on Indigenous peoples. However, as Indigenous [Kanien'kehà:ka] writer Taiaiake Alfred and [Cherokee] scholar Jeff Corntassel (2005) note, “there is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives,” (p. 601) as a narrative which centers settler power, may also obscure Indigenous resistance and ways of being, not to mention paint Indigenous peoples as passive or victims. Therefore, the intent of this project became to explore the relationships between settler colonialism, disaster capitalism and Indigenous people; Recognizing that these relationships are not static or one-dimensional but may be observed and studied in a myriad of ways. In that regard, through this project, I came to understand that settler colonialism and disaster capitalism operate, in part, by spurring each other ever onwards. The individual ideologies interact as both motivator and enabler; While settler colonialism perceives industry development as necessary in terms of furthering productive use/commodification of land and securing a settler future, the actions of disaster capitalism are

motivated by the perceived virtue of continuously expanding economic development and capital accumulation. In effect, both ideologies prioritize economic expansion. Furthermore, settler colonialism works to enable disaster capitalism through the dismissal of Indigenous sovereignty and rights (which paves the way for development, of which a settler future is dependent on), and disaster capitalism enables the continued ideology of settler colonialism by then damaging and erasing Indigenous peoples and ways of being through settler/capitalist developments and infrastructure. However, while this mutually symbiotic relationship intensified during the pandemic to the detriment of Indigenous peoples, First Nations conversely enacted and asserted their own relationships to place and to each other; This responsibility to relationships was demonstrated through pandemic safety protocols, lockdowns, blockades, traditional medicines, moratoriums, and solidarity. These actions simultaneously challenged extractive and exploitive settler colonial/capitalist decision-making, as well as bolstered and renewed Indigenous ways of being.

In connection to this exploration of relationships this project displays, my interest in story, and discovering the ways it can be utilized in research has especially increased. What specifically stood out to me was Indigenous [Cree and Saulteaux] scholar Margaret Kovach's (2021) conception of story as research, in which she reasons, "if research is about learning and discovery, so as to enhance the well-being of the earth's inhabitants, then story is research. Story provides insight from observations, experience, interactions, and intuitions that assist in developing a theory about a phenomenon," (p. 161); Further highlighting that, "within Indigenous societies, story and knowing have been tightly bound together as a legitimate form of understanding since time immemorial," (p. 157). In regard to story (data) as Indigenous research method and reinforcing both the subjective and fluid nature of research, Kovach (2021) further

describes that, “data are more than things; they are living connections animated through the exchange of story,” (p. 156). This approach to research, certainly influenced the way in which I decided to write and organize this project, striving to approach those relationships from various perspectives and demonstrate the various ways this story could and is being told. To illustrate, while the Case Studies chapter exists as a demonstration of my interpretation of the relationships, a critical analysis which borrows from literature and media sources, the Media Analysis chapter serves as an examination of how some of the most influential storytellers (the media) are choosing to maintain harmful ideologies or, in some cases, making efforts to decolonize their platform. Lastly, the Community Experience chapter showcases individual perceptions and ways of knowing, “personal narratives of place, happenings, and experiences,” (Kovach, 2021, p 157). It was in this chapter, above all, which I endeavoured to learn from Indigenous storytelling methodologies and present the stories shared with me respectfully, and to moreover be mindful of the complexity and *diversities of truth* within each community members experience (Smith, 2021).

7.3 Moving Forward

While the topics I have explored in this project are not new, they nevertheless will only require further attention in the future. As described by Alfred and Corntassel (2005), we live in a time of, “shape-shifting colonial powers; the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place,” (p. 601). While settler colonialism has largely utilized quick and violent practices to achieve their means in the past (e.g. forced relocation, incarceration), persistent action and resurgence by Indigenous peoples, which has led to industry/economic uncertainty, has prompted settler institutions to adapt (King et al., 2019), in part through the development of what Indigenous [Dene] scholar Glen Coulthard

describes as the *politics of recognition* (Coulthard, 2007). This involves “strategies to address Indigenous demands in ways that maintain the status quo for Canadians,” (King et al., 2019, p. 36), whereas Indigenous sovereignty and rights are recognized, managed, and limited by the settler state only to the extent where those rights align with the interests of the state (Coulthard, 2007; Coulthard, 2014). In connection, K. Wayne Yang and Indigenous [Unangax̂] scholar Eve Tuck have similarly discussed the domestication of decolonization, where the majority of (in)action has been largely limited to symbolic gestures which only serve to alleviate settler guilt (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Moreover, Indigenous [Tlingit] researcher Anne Spice (2022a) has further observed the way, “timeless colonial techniques fold in new tactics to pacify us,” (note 3) describing how aspirations of reconciliation, if not rendered ineffective, are often appropriated by settler ideologies and priorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic exemplified what could become commonplace in a future which will likely be riddled with numerous, increasing and overlapping crises: the exploitation of disasters by powerful actors as further opportunities to overrule and undermine Indigenous sovereignty and well-being in the name of settler/capitalist interests; Promises of environmental, economic and even Indigenous well-being through neoliberal development and market solutions. Through patronizing narratives of the common good, and juxtaposed against impending crisis, the loss of Indigenous lands, culture, and way of life will continue to be deemed an acceptable sacrifice. Furthermore, and as it has been in the distant, as well as more recent past, this narrative will be voiced and maintained by settler government, industry and media. Therefore, Indigenous counternarratives, and support of those counternarratives, will be all the more integral moving forward. These will be stories offered by Indigenous-led media and researchers, activists and

artists, as well as institutions and platforms which ally with and highlight Indigenous voices and experiences.

As Kovach (2021) reasons, stories provide a powerful means to challenge the normative settler narrative by contextualizing experiences within time and place, enabling insight and empathy. Indigenous [Cree] scholar Herman Michell (2015) similarly describes the vast potential of storytelling, as well as the accompanying responsibility of the storyteller, saying

Words are known to soothe, instruct, and bring happiness. Words can be used to heal the wounded. Sharing stories and experiences gives voice to the lost and silent. Stories create a community of learners who respect each other's voice. On the contrary, words can also destroy and bring harm if used inappropriately. The use of words through stories must be learned and applied with great respect. (p. 174)

Settler colonial/captalist narratives frequently erase the past, refusing to acknowledge the harm and violence which has enabled settler privilege (Aldred et al., 2021) and is required for the continuation of the settler state (Preston, 2017). These narratives refuse to look or learn from the past and therefore have no business dictating how we should envision and prepare for the future. Conversely, Kovach (2021) describes the relational and interconnected nature of Indigenous storytelling, saying, "oral stories are born of connections within the world and are recounted relationally, stories braid the past, present, and future generations together," (Kovach, 2021, p. 158). While Indigenous [Māori] professor and writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith has described the diversity and breadth of Indigenous storytelling, saying

Many Indigenous stories speak from and to a deep understanding and philosophy about humans and their relations, other entities with whom humans have relationships and

responsibilities. Many stories speak from and to places of trauma and injustice. Other stories are more disruptive and show alternative understandings that can guide humans to be better humans. (2019, p. xi)

In connection, Indigenous [Anishinaabe] Professor Deborah McGregor has discussed the role Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ) has in addressing environmental issues (like the climate crisis) which settler colonial/capitalist ideologies and systems have created/maintained and are therefore incapable of addressing (McGregor 2021; McGregor, 2022; McGregor et al., 2020); Notably stating that, “a just path to a sustainable future must consider *all relations*, an approach best expressed through Indigenous knowledge systems, legal orders, governance and conceptions of justice,” (McGregor et al., 2020, p. 36). Storytelling offers a unique vehicle to share, spread and embed Indigenous experiences and ways of knowing, to teach relational and reciprocal ways of being which are integral for a just and sustainable future. I believe settler researchers have a role to play in this, though to utilize our privileged position for good, we must continue to be self-reflexive and mindful about how to be co-researchers with Indigenous peoples, how to honour those relationships and support, move over and make space for Indigenous stories. This endeavour must also be supported by settler universities, perhaps, in part, by enabling more flexible (under)graduate programs which recognize the additional time needed for practicing research with communities in a good way, and by instituting more opportunities for settler and Indigenous students to study and experience Indigenous methodologies. Nevertheless, I am very grateful for the opportunities I have had along this project to learn from community members, and to explore Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing; Though I realize there is so much more to discover, hopefully a lifetime’s worth.

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