Studying Across: Anthropology, Conflict Transformation and Cultural Violence in Environmental Conflict

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Abstract

Using the example of the controversial Site C dam in British Columbia, Canada, this article describes how ethnographic research that incorporated a conflict transformation perspective and included individuals from both sides of the issue highlighted both contrasting views on human-environment relations and the inequitable conditions under which they met through the Environmental Assessment process. The article argues that an anthropological approach that incorporates a conflict transformation perspective is particularly well-suited to identify, and potentially to address, the "discourses, narratives, and worldviews" (Rodriguez and Inturias 2018: 96) that operate as "cultural violence" (Galtung, 1990) in state-Indigenous environmental conflicts, legitimating structural and environmental violence.

Keywords: Conflict transformation, hydroelectric dams, structural violence, cultural violence, environmental violence, consultation.

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Estudar Transversalmente: Antropologia, Transformação de Conflitos e Violência Cultural em Conflitos Ambientais

Resumo

A partir do exemplo da polêmica barragem hidrelétrica, Site C, na Colúmbia Britânica, Canadá, este artigo descreve como a pesquisa etnográfica que incorporou uma perspectiva de transformação de conflito, e incluiu indivíduos de ambos os lados da questão, destacou visões contrastantes sobre as relações homem-meio ambiente e as condições desiguais em que se conheceram por meio do processo de Avaliação Ambiental. O artigo argumenta que uma abordagem antropológica que incorpora uma perspectiva de transformação de conflito é particularmente adequada para identificar e, potencialmente, abordar os "discursos, narrativas e visões de mundo" (Rodriguez e Inturias 2018: 96) que operam como "violência cultural" (Galtung, 1990) nos conflitos ambientais entre o Estado e os indígenas, legitimando a violência estrutural e ambiental.
Palavras-chave: Transformação de conflito, barragens hidrelétricas, violência estrutural, violência cultural, violência ambiental, consulta.

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Introduction

"Site C" is a controversial multi-billion-dollar hydroelectric dam, currently under construction by the provincial BC Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro) on the Peace River in northeastern British Columbia, Canada. If completed, it would provide 1,100 megawatts of "green" power, but the 5660 hectares of land it would flood (BC Hydro 2013a: 1, 9) is traditional Indigenous territory covered by a treaty with the West Moberly First Nations, the Saulteau First Nations and numerous other First Nations (which include Sicannie (Sikanni)[1], Slavey, Beaver (Dunne-za)[2], Cree, and Saulteau members).[3] Despite an extensive Environmental Assessment (EA) and consultation process, many of the affected First Nations believe the dam threatens their cultural survival and overall wellbeing, and the West Moberly First Nations have filed legal charges of treaty infringement (Cox, 2019).

Rodriguez and Inturias argue that transforming conflicts and overcoming such environmental violence and injustice affecting Indigenous people requires, in part, strategies for addressing the "discourses, narratives and world views" in which "power is concentrated in environmental management and territorial control" (2018: 96). Drawing on my dissertation research on the Site C conflict, I argue that combining a conflict transformation perspective with anthropological approaches as a form of "worldview analysis and translation" offers unique potential for targeting these discursive, narrative and worldview elements of state-Indigenous environmental conflicts.

Anthropology and conflict transformation are complementary, though surprisingly rarely combined. Though social conflict has long been a favourite subject of anthropological study (Davidheiser and Treitler, 2007), anthropologists have rarely directed their findings to the resolution of the conflicts they study. Conflict transformation, meanwhile, is inherently applied, and could benefit from ethnographic insights and investigative techniques. Both are concerned with seeing from the Other's point of view, and with the understanding of culture in societal context. Bringing both anthropological and conflict transformation approaches to bear on the Site C conflict, examining how the pro- and anti-Site C "sides" interacted within the EA framework, highlighted the different realities in contention, and the inequitable conditions of encounter. In so doing, it brought to the surface the cultural assumptions that supported the structural violence of Site C, a first step towards subverting them.

1 Also spelled Sekani, Seccani, Sekkanni, Sekanni, Sicanni, Tsekani (Pollon & Matheson, 2003: 266) and Tsek'ene, Tse'khene, Tsay Keh Nay, and Tse Keh Nay (Sims, 2017: 43).

2 Also spelled Dunne Za, Dunne Tsaa, and Dane-zaa (Treaty 8 First Nations (T8FNs) Community Assessment Team and the Firelight Group Research Cooperative 2012: vi).

3 Throughout this article, I refer to specific First Nations or to individuals' specific membership wherever possible. Because the First Nations in question include multiple ethno-linguistic groups, however, I use the terms First Nation(s) or Indigenous when referring to people or to First Nations collectively or when an individual's membership is unknown.

Anthropology and Environmental Conflict

Anthropologists have long studied environmental conflict from multiple angles—religion, identity, knowledge, morality, discourse, power relations. Many scholars have considered the cultural mediation of the human relationship to the environment, and the collective creation of place. Though these ethnographies often take place in the context of Indigenous-state struggles for control over land and "resources," and implicitly contrast European and Indigenous ideas (broadly speaking) of the relationship between "nature" and "society," they vary in the extent to which they explore the implications for conflict. Fienup-Riordan, for example, reports that Yup'ik people "traditionally viewed the human/animal relationship as collaborative reciprocity," and their relationship with land as "relational" rather than possessive (1990, 167). Basso explores the interaction of place and language in the construction of Western Apache identity, and the way oral narratives create bonds between Western Apache individuals and the landscape (1996). Cruikshank contrasts a European idea of glaciers as purely natural (not social), with Tlingit and Athapaskan oral traditions that portray glaciers as social spaces, even as agents, in a world made and sustained by the reciprocal actions of humans and animate nature; she suggests that the conflicting depictions have consequences for environmental conflict and Indigenous rights (2005).

Other scholars have approached environmental conflict more explicitly, underscoring the interplay of discourse, identity, knowledge, governance, and power in environmental and land conflicts. Li suggests that resource competition was the stimulus for one group of rural Indonesians to "articulate," (in Hall's (1996) sense) an Indigenous identity, while a nearby group whose land was not sought after did not claim Indigenous status (Li, 2000). Muehlmann analyzes how both neoliberal and environmentalist assumptions regarding indigeneity constrain Cucapa Indigenous rights and access to resources (2013), and McElhinny, examining the discursive construction of place in an environmental dispute in southern Ontario, discusses the possibility that environmental discourses may be socially exclusive if they erase Indigenous presence and privilege elite uses of land (2006).

Escobar points out conflicts that on the surface concern distribution of resources, "exist in the context of economies, cultures, and forms of knowledge," and that the power differentials among various "cultures and cultural practices" may contribute significantly to what he calls "cultural distribution conflicts" and their physical effects, such as desertification and deforestation (2006, 8). Further, Blaser, in line with a recent anthropological turn to greater attention to "multiple ontologies," suggests that environmental conflicts that appear to be "epistemological" in nature, that is, concerned with how "different cultural perspectives see, know, or struggle" for "what is there," may in fact be "ontological" conflicts over what is actually there. He argues for a "political ontology" capable of embracing "radical multiplicity" (2013: 21).

Several ethnographers have examined the playing out of Indigenous-state environmental conflicts in Canadian government and legal fora, scrutinizing the interplay of epistemology, ontology, and discourse. Nadasdy (2003), for example, argues that attempts to integrate traditional knowledge with Western science in Yukon wildlife management reproduce existing power relations. Daly (2005) applies Bourdieuian analysis to the courtroom in the Delgamuukw land claims case, arguing that Indigenous Gitksan/Wet'suwet'en witnesses were at a disadvantage due to their lack of effective habitus, and concluding that disregard for their epistemologies constituted symbolic violence. Through a close ethnographic reading of legal texts from the same case, Culhane (1998) highlights the Eurocentric "cultural traditions," and "cultural prescriptions" regarding "visions of nature and society," and "models of human relationship" embedded in the Crown's defence and the judge's decision against the Gitksan/Wet'suwet'en (1998: 22). In northeastern British Columbia specifically,

Ridington (1990) underlines the centrality of conflicting values, perceptions, and modes of discourse in land rights cases involving Dane-zaa and Cree people, and the ways that "attempted discourse between different cultures may create conflict, ambiguity, even oppression" (1990: 192).

Anthropologists have largely avoided intervention in conflict and conflict resolution, however, perhaps in keeping with a more general discomfort with applied or engaged anthropology. Although activism for social change has a long history within the discipline, and the "old distinction between the inherent conflicts of objectivity and ethical commitment…no longer seems relevant" to many anthropologists (Low and Merry, 2010), uneasiness may linger. Remembering bad experiences of the concept of culture being "instrumentalized and manipulated for the sake of "colonialism, nation-building, genocide, conflict resolution, and the war on terror," they may fear their research being co-opted for unintended purposes (Bräuchler, 2018a: 23; 2018b:17).

Nevertheless, a very few researchers have conducted conflict-oriented ethnography, giving equal ethnographic and analytical weight to both sides of the issue, with an eye to resolution. Satterfield, for example, explores how loggers and environmentalists in Oregon's old-growth forest conflict engaged with dominant norms regarding science and emotion and struggled to realize their "imagined ideal worlds" (Satterfield, 2002: 4). Farrell (a sociologist using ethnographic and other methods) brings to light the cultural, moral, and spiritual meanings underlying bitter conflicts in Yellowstone National Park, arguing that the "mountains of technical evidence marshaled" in these conflicts have had little effect on "disputes, that are, finally, not about the facts themselves, but about what make the facts meaningful" (2015: 4). After presenting thick and rich ethnographies, each concludes with brief comments on the policy implications of their findings. These exceptions not withstanding, the potential practical contributions of anthropological conflict research remain underdeveloped.

Conflict Transformation and Worldview Translation

"Conflict transformation," as conceived by John Paul Lederach, is an approach to social change that goes beyond the more familiar "conflict resolution" to address the root causes of social conflict (2003: 5). He argues that avoiding conflict recurrence and promoting just social relations demands that conflict transformation efforts consider not only the *content* of the conflict, but also the relational *context* in which it is embedded and the socio-historical *structure* underlying the issue (Lederach, 2003: 12). Furthermore, Lederach, among other authors, considers conflict to be a "socially constructed cultural event" (1995: 9). Conflict is "shaped by symbolic activities" (Docherty, 2001: 29); in many cases, due to differing "ideologies, values, or cognitive structures," parties may not merely disagree, but have very different "conceptualization[s] of the situation" (Druckman & Zechmeister, 1973: 450 apud Docherty, 2001: 25).

Docherty refers to these conflicts, in which the parties may even appear "to be speaking different languages and occupying different realities," as "worldview conflicts," resulting from a "clash" of symbolic, but "very real" "inner worlds" that incorporate ontological, epistemological, and ethical elements (2001: 25). In many cases reality itself must be "negotiated" before concrete issues can be dealt with, since worldviews cannot be simply altered or bargained over (Docherty, 2001: 53). Though few theoretical or practical models exist for reconciling conflicting worldviews, Docherty suggests observing language and actions of people in conflict, and exploring "stories… metaphors… institutionalized practices, [and other] carriers of… worldmaking," to arrive at a tentative and imperfect worldview analysis (2001: 72). Drawing on Latour (1993), she insists that this analysis must be based on a "symmetrical anthropology" that does not privilege dominant worldviews, but treats both (or all) worldviews in conflict as "*functionally equivalent worldmaking stories*," equally valid and equally contingent (Docherty, 2001: 72, 69). "Worldview translators" who understand or partake of conflicting worldviews could then assist in mediating between them (Docherty, 2001: 298).

Worldview translation is particularly applicable in environmental disputes, which may be sites of "profound," if "largely unrecognized" worldview conflict, because they occur "at the intersection of complex economic, social, legal, political, and ecological issues, [and] evoke deeply held values that lie at the core of many individual and group identities" (Blechman, Crocker, Docherty, & Garon, 2000:5). As discussed above, anthropological research has produced complex and in-depth accounts of many of these aspects of conflict; anthropologists, with their training in elicitive qualitative research, their experiences of cultural immersion, and their tradition of reflexivity, are ideally suited to play the roles of worldview analysts and translators.

Addressing Violence and Power

Environmental conflicts also illustrate, however, that worldviews do not interact in a power vacuum, but within socio-cultural structures that influence control over material, political, and other resources. Worldview analysis, I suggest, must therefore also account for "structural violence"—violence which does not require an individual act or intention, but which is "built into the [social] structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances," potentially causing as much harm as "direct" or "personal" violence (Galtung, 1969: 171). Structural violence is integral to extractivist resource development (Acosta, 2013), such that the term "environmental violence" has been coined to refer to extractive industry's "disproportionate and often devastating" physical health and social impacts" on Indigenous people (Konsmo and Pacheco, 2016).

Though conflict transformation has traditionally been oriented toward impartial facilitation rather than advocacy, Rubenstein suggests that systemic transformation requires greater political awareness on the part of conflict practitioners and even that in the presence of a "violence-generating system," the practitioner is "obliged to recognize" its existence and to "practice her trade in a way that reflects this recognition" through participation in political advocacy (2017: 137). Similarly, Rodriguez and Inturias assert that "conflict transformation scholars and practitioners" working specifically in environmental conflict "can and must play a role in decolonizing environmental injustices through a commitment to engage with the structural and historical forces that create marginalization and exclusion in the use of natural resources and territories" (2018: 91).

Transformation of environmental conflicts requires a more nuanced understanding of power than that required in the post-war situations conflict transformation was designed to respond to, however (Rodriguez & Inturias, 2018: 95). In addition to the visible institutional power embodied in public "decision-making bodies… and…mechanisms," and the behind-the-scenes manipulations of individuals and networks deploying "hidden power" over political decisions, domination may also operate invisibly "through discursive practices, narratives, worldviews, knowledge, behaviors and thoughts that are assimilated by society as true without public questioning" (Rodriguez & Inturias, 2018: 95). Such "aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence…[that] justify or legitimize" social injustice are what Galtung calls "cultural violence" (1990: 291). For example, "value-loaded dichotomies" that exalt the "value of Self" and debase "the value of Other," operate as cultural violence by obscuring the reality of direct and structural violence, making it "look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong" (Galtung, 1990: 298, 291). Thus, "invisible power" and "hidden power" act in concert to control the "world of ideas and…the world of decisions" respectively; to overcome environmental violence and injustice requires targeting culture as well as networks and institutions (Rodríguez and Inturias, 2018: 95, 96). Again, anthropological research, with its attention to the subtleties of practice and communication in context, is well-suited to make these cultural elements of violence visible so that invisible power may be addressed.

Worldview Analysis of the Site C Conflict

Research

I incorporated a worldview conflict transformation lens into an ethnography of the conflict over Site C. Overall, my objective was to understand what was important to both Site C supporters and opponents, what the project meant for them, and why. More specifically, in line with a conflict transformation orientation (Lederach, 2003: 12), I asked: What were the values and assumptions underlying arguments for and against the dam? What understandings of the proper relationships between humans and the non-human world motivated these arguments? Were multiple realities in competition? (Conflict Content). I also considered how people with differing affiliations interacted—were there stylistic differences in how they communicated? How did previous interactions inform the current conflict? (Conflict Context). Finally, what role did societal power dynamics play in this issue? (Conflict Structure).

To explore these questions, I lived in the city of Fort St John, the closest community to the proposed dam, from June 2013 to October 2014, when Site C received environmental approval. I participated in community life as best I could, as well as attending Site C-related events. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 opponents and 14 supporters of Site C, all Euro-Canadian. First Nations staff and elders, however, were clearly overloaded with the monumental Site C consultation process (as well as a multitude of other EA processes) and I could not justify taking their time. My perception of Indigenous perspectives was therefore based on presentations at the public hearings held as part of the EA process. I attended approximately half of the 28 hearing days between December 9, 2013, and January 23, 2014. I then read all the transcripts of these hearings, and analysed a selection, supplemented with other documents from the EA process.

Findings

I found that the combination of anthropology and conflict transformation led to conflict insights that had not been publicly articulated previously; I not only reached a greater understanding of the divergent views of human-environment[4] relations underlying the Site C conflict, but also of the ways they contributed to the structural and cultural violence of both the Site C project and the consultation process.

For proponents and supporters, Site C represented an opportunity, if not a necessity. Those I interviewed generally shared a vision of a future as perpetual "growth." They saw the dam as a source of non-combustion power to sustain this growth and allow for continuing "progress," without exacerbating climate change. If "properly" implemented, according to modern technology and subject to modern regulations and standards, they believed the dam could also avoid the worst impacts of past hydro projects: "As long as things are growing, we need more power. More gasoline for more cars, more food, more of everything, and if it's managed correctly, it can all be sustainable" as one Site C supporter put it (Interviewee 26, 10/22/2014). With increases in regulation and learning from past mistakes, as well as the presence of "activist groups," at least one interviewee was optimistic that if Site C was approved, "they're gonna do it, hopefully, right… you know, ecologically, that, it's gonna be done under a very watchful eye" (Interviewee 14, 8/26/2014). Site C also had the benefit, in their view, of being sustainable; supporters' definition of sustainability typically emphasized financial considerations—cost-effectiveness, and the ability to "pay for itself" without needing to be subsidized—and the capacity to persist indefinitely (Interviewee 24, 10/10/2014, Interviewee 26, 10/22/2014; Interviewee 12, 8/20/2014).

4 The concept of "the environment" or "nature" as distinct from "culture" and "society" has long been recognized as a Western construct (Descola, 2013). People on both sides of the Site C controversy used these terms (along with others such as "development" and "resources") as a matter of course, however, so I use them mostly uncritically throughout this article.

Furthermore, some Site C supporters I interviewed believed it was a moral obligation for those with access to resources to put them to use for the good of humanity, to increase prosperity and quality of life and to channel human energy constructively, so that scarcity and lack of purpose would not lead to disorder. The environment provides resources "so that we can…create something good for people," as one interviewee explained (Interviewee 12, 8/20/2014), and if electricity from Site C were used to power liquified natural gas production for export to Asia (as many believed it would be), the project would benefit the rest of the world as well as the local region, according to another Site C supporter (Interviewee 27, 10/23/2014). For a third Site C supporter, the availability of "so much power and so much water here in our country," created an "obligation" to make resources available to people in other parts of the world because having "a nice community" and "things to do" prevents unrest.

These Site C supporters therefore saw it as not only natural, but right for, even morally incumbent on, humans to change the environment to their benefit (as other processes and organisms do), while minimizing as much as possible the unavoidable impacts of human activity. While they did not dismiss environmental concerns entirely, they considered the ecological effects of Site C to be part of an ongoing, inexorable process of change. As some interviewees pointed out, even without human intervention, the environment is never in "a static state," but "ever-evolving," and anthropogenic change may be difficult to distinguish from "nature's way of responding and fixing itself all on its own." (Interviewee 18, 9/27/2014). In some cases, human-caused changes might even "enhance" nature; for example, the recreational potential of the Site C reservoir was preferable to that of the existing river in their view, and some even believed it would offer improved wildlife habitat. In any case, several interviewees pointed out that "everything we do has an environmental impact;" since these impacts cannot be avoided, human responsibility is only to "do the best we can to mitigate the impacts that we apply to this earth on our day-to-day living" (Interviewee 23, 10/10/2014). All in all, therefore, supporters believed that despite its impacts, Site C would be "a sacrifice…worth making," given its "huge spin-off benefits" (Interviewee 28, 10/23/2014).

Many First Nations people in the region, however, saw the dam as an act of violence against them, speaking of it in terms of "destruction," "Holocaust" and "rape" (Canada Environmental Assessment Agency and British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office (CEAA/BCEAO) 2013c: 115, 2013e: 97). The region already hosted intense resource extraction of all kinds (large-scale hydroelectricity, oil and gas, mining, forestry, agriculture and wind energy (Lee and Hanneman, 2012); which they compared to being "bombarded from outside resources who want to extract from our pristine land," to "encroach[ment]" and "depletion," and to "massive destructions." If the extensive existing development in the region constituted a "death of 1,000 cuts" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013b: 83), Site C would be the "nail on the coffin to this land base," according to Saulteau opponents of the dam (CEAA/BCEAO 2013e: 231).

By flooding one of the few remaining relatively "intact" areas in the region, opponents believed that Site C would, like the two nearby existing dams on the Peace River (Loo, 2007), compromise the meaningful exercise of their Treaty rights to fish, hunt, and trap throughout the region, and thereby to sustain themselves from the land and to transmit Indigenous knowledge to new generations. First Nations youth and elders worried that future generations would no longer be able to fish, hunt, or buy fresh local produce due to the effects of industrial development, particularly the Site C dam. A young Saulteau woman explained: "We're losing water. We're losing food. We're losing land…It's scary to know that there will be a dam in place taking away those resources…" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013e: 123). Site C would also disrupt their relationship to the land around them, including hunting and harvesting spots and sacred and culturally important places, hindering access to some, and eliminating others altogether. It would disturb connections to ancestors and cultural knowledge embedded in those places as well as to the places themselves, and some feared that without those connections they would lose their identity as Indigenous people. How can I teach my grandchildren how to make dry meat,

pick berries or teach them which is edible and medicinal plants when in the future there will be no moose, no berries, no plants to pick?" asked a Saulteau elder (CEAA/BCEAO 2013e: 100), and a young mother explained that elders tell stories while moving through the landscape; with the valley inundated, "all those mental triggers for those elders to come around that corner or to see that mountain on the top of the hill are going to be gone" and her children might not "get those teachings" embedded in the stories. Without the ability to hand down "all the traditional values that were taught to us… then it's not us as an Indian, as Native people, First Nations people" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013e: 105).

Many Indigenous opponents of Site C also feared increased physical violence, given the well-documented association of large-scale extractive industry and work camps with violence, particularly against Indigenous women and girls (Konsmo and Pacheco, 2016). For a local activist, a high population of transient workers, already makes the region "a dangerous place to live for Indigenous women," and with "the monstrosity Mega Project Site C" a possibility, she feared "for the worst" (Knott, 2018: 150). Knowing that resource development usually benefits primarily non-Indigenous people, many Indigenous people in the region felt that their rights and interests were being sacrificed to benefit urban southerners. Of the "8 billion bucks" that the provincial government proposed to "throw into this dam," a Saulteau member expected that local First Nations would receive "diddly-squat"[5] (CEAA/BCEAO 2013e: 194).

At the public hearings, these contrasting worldviews and standpoints were reflected in striking differences in communication style. First Nations and their anti-Site C allies opened with prayers, songs, and the presentation of objects, including fruit and vegetables, wooden carvings, animal pelts, and photographs of ancestors symbolizing what the valley meant to them. They used a personal, locally grounded communication style, and gave emotional and image-rich presentations, blending argument and their own observations with stories and memories that explicitly connected themselves and their families to specific Peace Valley locations. Many shared the sentiments of a speaker at West Moberly, who declared: "I've lived all my life here, just like my mother and my grandparents and my great-grandparents. This is the only place that I know. This is my home" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013d, 154). They showed pictures and referred to their ancestors, and where they grew up, and where they liked to hunt, fish, or gather. Their stories included specific and concrete details, expressing how they spent time together on the land. As the Treaty 8 Tribal Chief emphasized to the Joint Review Panel, "We are connected to the land…We are of the land… Our people have a deep connection with this land because our ancestors told the stories and legends that are connected to that valley. And, most importantly, because our ancestral remains lay in that valley…" (CEAA/BCEAO 2014: 207).

While locally resident anti-Site C speakers were explicit about their values, their connections to the valley, and their own interests in the outcome of the consultation process, BC Hydro representatives (all non-residents) appeared neutral, their inevitable human biases hidden behind flat affect and by technical discourse. In line with professional norms for institutional representatives in a public process, BC Hydro employees and consultants maintained an even, undemonstrative demeanour, and did not share personal information or perspectives. They drew credibility from abstract, deductive arguments, "objective" decision-making mechanisms and scientific analysis.

Reflecting their mandate as "the public entity responsible for keeping the lights on for our customers" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 59), they framed their case for Site C in terms of the needs of the province in general, rather than particular groups or individuals. A Vice-President's introductory presentation, for example, portrayed the contributions of past hydroelectric projects to the province's economic development, and Site C's potential benefits in general terms: "heritage assets [existing dams] deliver clean, reliable, affordable electricity to homes and businesses across the province," and Site C would offer jobs, economic benefits, and "power with very

5 Slang for "a meaningless amount," or "nothing at all."

low emissions per unit of energy [that would] support both federal and provincial greenhouse gas reduction targets" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 44) , an assessment that glossed over the very different and inequitable impacts of both past projects and Site C on displaced First Nations people, local residents, workers, businesspeople, urban southerners, and many others.

Emphasis on the use of scientific and computerized analysis, such as the "System Optimizer," a "deterministic linear optimization model" that calculated the "optimal resource expansion sequence…for a given set of input assumptions" (BC Hydro and Power Authority 2013b) to select Site C as the energy option of choice for the province, supported BC Hydro's claim to objectivity by concealing the personal and political "interpretations" that necessarily "creep" in to technical and quantitative analysis (Merry, 2016: 20). At the same time, the use of passive linguistic constructions, such as "a recommendation to advance the project, was submitted" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 48) distanced BC Hydro from the consequences of the project. Actorless, actionless, victimless, placeless phrases such as "a determination that a significant residual adverse effect is likely was made for four valued [ecological] components" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 52) did not inspire vivid visualization of what Site C would really mean—unlike anti-Site C residents' accounts of a landscape where real people's interactions with ancestors and animals were at risk.

Although BC Hydro's efforts to remain neutral were likely not calculated, but simply professional habitus, setting the "objective" technocratic viewpoint up as a disinterested judge of reality, above controversy, automatically made dissenting viewpoints and those without bureaucratic habitus appear partial and subjective. It also represented Site C as the natural, self-evident best option for the public good, thereby constructing its opponents as special interests, while deflecting individual or corporate responsibility for the decisions and choices behind it. Meanwhile, the purportedly unbiased technical and computerized analysis concealed the historical, cultural, and political presuppositions and judgements embedded within it. The analysis ignored spiritual and cultural matters, and portrayed economic growth as a universal good, although the benefits are not allocated, or even desired, equally.

Yet the scientific, objective label helped governments to justify the project. A federal Environment Minister's statement on the Site C approval, for example, stressed that the "Government is committed to making environmental assessment decisions based on the best available scientific evidence…" and that the process had "provided the scientific and technical expertise…to enable an informed decision by both governments" (Office of the Minister of the Environment, 2014), while the provincial Energy Minister defended his government's approval of the project, saying that "Site C has been studied to death" (Hunter, 2015). Though rigorous science can be important to sound public decision-making, when its limits and partial perspective are recognized and other modes of knowing are acknowledged, in this case technical science was deployed, in combination with a pseudo-neutral bureaucratic communication style, in a culturally violent way, making the proponents appear as unbiased advocates of an objectively positive project, and masking the enormity and violent reality of the project.

The framing of the issue also put Site C opponents at a disadvantage. In worldview conflicts, where reality must be negotiated, underlying the competition over incompatible interests are struggles to control stories or narratives, "the discursive structures in which conflicts are constructed and transformed" (Cobb and Rifkin, 1991: 51). The "power to 'name' a problem," for Blechman and colleagues, is the "ultimate form of power," because the naming of the problem "inevitably" affects the construction and unfolding of the process (Blechman et al., 2000: 26). Thus the first party to present their case creates a "frame narrative," that constructs "the semantic and discursive space on which all subsequent speakers must stand," while the second party must respond in terms that "logically connect with the world created by the frame narrative" (Cobb, 1993: 250 in Docherty 2001: 66; Docherty, 2001: 66).

The EA process conceptually separated ecosystems into collections of "Valued Components" so that Site C's impacts could be measured and managed. Consistent with this outlook, BC Hydro argued that Site C's effects could "largely be mitigated through careful planning [and] comprehensive mitigation programs," (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 52) that targeted individual Valued Components, such as a proposal for "relocation of suitable soil" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013a, 241) out of the inundation zone, or another to enhance or recreate wetlands elsewhere in the region to compensate for those flooded by Site C. This was the frame narrative, the terms in which the project was proposed and adjudicated; participants who opposed it were handicapped by having to present their values and arguments either in or against these default terms. Anti-Site C speakers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) nevertheless insisted on seeing the Peace Valley as a whole, a human and environmental system. Not only did they doubt the efficacy of many mitigation measures, but they refused the notion of monetary compensation for the loss of sacred, beloved places. They rejected plans that depended on the human ability to improve or even recreate ecosystems, or that they believed were designed to replicate individual ecosystem functions in isolation but missed their essence. For example, according to a West Moberly First Nations' elder, medicinal plants grown in a nursery instead of the valley would "lose their healing potency because they're not going to be growing in an environment where they were meant to grow by the Creator. Sure we can preserve those plants," he said, "but their strength will never be the same" (CEAA/BCEAO 2013d: 187).

The process, however, did not explicitly recognize that two worldviews were at play, or allow for worldview negotiation; therefore, the default narrative predominated. Site C opponents, with their relational view of the environment, could only challenge the dominant frame narrative, the functional view established by the EA framework, unsuccessfully, from a subordinate, "alternative" position. Mitigation and compensation plans, even if not terribly convincing, allowed proponents to claim that the effects of the project could be kept within tolerable limits, or neutralized with money. These schemes were the output of technical experts performing their jobs. Yet in a phenomenon Li calls "rendering technical" (2007: 7), framing the issue in terms amenable to technical solutions deflected attention from the serious conflict of interests and conflict of narratives occurring over the project. Focusing on details—which areas and species will be most affected and how these effects might be mitigated—distracted from bigger questions of who loses from Site C, and who really benefits, and by what right. Ultimately, a view of the environment as consisting of detachable, replaceable components functioned as cultural violence, supporting the idea that Site C's potential impacts could be isolated, compartmentalized, and technologically contained, downplaying their severity and making the project easier to justify. The discursive structure of the process prevented opponents from effectively combating this cultural violence.

In addition, the process was structurally and politically weighted in favour of BC Hydro. The financial, political, and procedural resources advantages enjoyed by project proponents in most Canadian EA processes were all the greater in the case of Site C, with the provincial government the initiator of the project, as well as the final decision-maker. Lack of funding—to support scientific reviews and community participation in consultations—"appears to have limited meaningful [Indigenous] engagement with Site C" (Dubrule, Patriquin, and Hood, 2018: 10). While First Nations' funding to participate in the hearings was limited to amounts provided and determined by the proponent/government (or to what they could fundraise), BC Hydro apparently had liberal, if not unlimited, access to public funds. Small teams of First Nations employees engaging in numerous EA processes simultaneously contested materials produced by BC Hydro's many full-time specialists on timelines that, as in many EAs, often did not accommodate their more limited resources, their participation in other EAs, or the cultural requirement for broad community input into decisions (Booth and Skelton, 2011: 387; Dubrule, Patriquin, and Hood, 2018).

Moreover, the federal and provincial governments deliberately excluded the question of whether Site C constituted a treaty infringement from the scope of the consultation process (Joint Review Panel, 2014). By using a "clean energy storyline" to justify the expansion of hydroelectricity (Dusyk, 2016: 77), the provincial government seemed to be actively avoiding public debate on the project (Dusyk, 2011) and appeared to have decided in favour of the dam before the EA process even began. In any case, in the avowedly pro-development political context of the time, approval was the default option for resource extraction projects, even those not initiated by governments. And Site C was, in fact, approved despite the unprecedented number of serious impacts that the EA process identified (Bakker, Christie, and Hendriks, 2016: 5).

Numerous authors have recognized the inequities of Canadian EA processes; Baker and Westman argue that in demanding participation in "emotionally draining" processes that ultimately fail to "register the dissent of those…most impacted," consultation itself constitutes an "extractive industry," (2018: 145) while Booth and Skelton describe the longstanding, unresolved failings of First Nations consultation as "institutionalized sociopathy" (2011: 395). As Galtung has observed, structural violence is present not only when the distribution of resources among social groups is uneven, but when "the power to decide over the distribution of resources" itself is "unevenly distributed" (1969: 171), as was true of the Site C EA process. As the anthropological-conflict transformation perspective revealed, cultural violence was integral to masking this imbalance and legitimating both the project and the process: appearing to consult affected people, presenting Site C as the conclusion of an impersonal, unbiased analysis, "rendering technical," and treating the interests and values of First Nations (and other Site C opponents) as minority concerns, worth sacrificing for the "common good" of "economical" and "clean" power, camouflaged the decision to discount consequences for marginalized people.

Subverting Cultural Violence

Understanding worldviews, and their interactions, then, is vital to addressing the cultural violence embedded in Environmental Assessment discourses, as a means of transforming environmental conflicts. Competing perspectives on environmental relations and conflicting ethics regarding the use of land and resources bore directly, for example, on the "why" and "how" of Site C's violence in several ways. Site C would be especially violent not only because it would compromise the ability to fulfill basic needs from the land, but also, specifically because of the affected First Nations' strong connection to the valley and its importance to their identity. The dam would disrupt the bond with place that informs their social, cultural, and spiritual lives, in ways that those who did not understand their attachment might not imagine. For supporters, on the other hand, Site C would further the goal of "progress" and be in line with a responsibility to put resources to their best use. They saw its consequences, though regrettable, as justifiable, part of a natural cycle of change.

These different worldviews not only represent differing conceptualizations of the human relationship to the environment and to environmental change but entail a moral element regarding human obligations to the environment and each other. For First Nations people opposed to Site C, the project represented an offence against right relations with the world around them, a spiritual and moral wrong. For supporters, however, failure to proceed with Site C would be a missed opportunity for the betterment of human life, and forgoing too many such opportunities might eventually erode the progress humans had made through civilization and technology. Such ideas about "how the world is, [and] how it should be" in environmental conflicts have "motivational power" (Blechman et al., 2000: 24), giving force to conflicts.

Thus, the pro-development worldview provided a footing for the culturally violent justifications of Site C. The priority supporters placed on progress and economic growth, allowed BC Hydro to present the project as rational and prudent, despite its substantial environmental and human impacts, by arguing that it was necessary for the health of the provincial economy. Supporters accepted impacts are the price of progress;

BC Hydro's responsibility was only to reduce them to the best of its ability. The belief that technological improvements and better regulation permit consumption to continue at the current rate without overstraining natural systems, combined with confidence in the human capacity to enhance or restore ecosystems, enabled BC Hydro to downplay the consequences of the project through a focus on "mitigation measures." These project justifications had purchase because they were rooted in local beliefs and values. Such ontological, axiological, and ethical worldview elements (Docherty, 2001: 51) that often underlie resource development initiatives and regulatory structures contribute to their "success," their persistence, and their resistance to change.

Worldview analysis, drawing on participant observation, discourse analysis, and other holistic, elicitive ethnographic research methods, can not only illuminate the modes by which "particular ways of knowing the world" are imposed "at the expense of oppressing others" (Rodríguez and Inturias, 2018: 92), but suggest strategies for subverting cultural violence and fostering epistemic or cognitive justice. Rodriguez and Inturias suggest "learning from, and making visible, alternative forms of knowledge. (Rodríguez and Inturias, 2018: 93). For Temper, "transformative epistemic justice" requires not "translating Indigenous concepts into terms comprehensible to liberal legal traditions," but "developing…the interpretative 'hermeneutical' resources to make sense of Indigenous experience and perspectives" (Temper, 2019: 107). Concentrating only on expanding the mainstream ability to appreciate "alternative," Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, however, may not alter their subordinate, alternative status. Such an approach risks playing into the common perception that Indigenous peoples protest dams (for example) "because of their culture," and that a better understanding of "their culture" might facilitate resolution of environmental conflicts. Worldview analysis based on "symmetrical anthropology," however, makes clear that dam proponents similarly advocate for dams for their own cultural, or worldview-based, reasons. By surfacing and revealing multiple competing worldviews *as worldviews*, on an equal footing, worldview analysis undermines the hegemony of dominant assumptions and their potential for cultural violence, making state institutions that are based on these assumptions more susceptible to challenge.

Conclusion

Considering multiple perspectives through a conflict transformation lens, using ethnographic investigative techniques allowed me to uncover insights about substantive, relational, and structural, as well as cultural, issues in the Site C conflict that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain. I discovered not only that opposing perspectives concerning human responsibilities to the environment and other humans motivated the conflict, but that notions of objectivity, progress, and technological potential operated as cultural violence, legitimizing the structural imbalance of the EA process, and, ultimately, authorizing the extractivist violence of Site C.

Violent structures such as environmental assessments are in a circular relationship with the cultural violence that motivates them: cultural violence legitimizes structural violence; structural violence reinforces the culture. Anthropologists making use of a conflict transformation approach are well placed to interrupt this cycle. Cultural relativism and political analysis are built into the discipline, elements that conflict transformation underlines. Thus, our research can uncover the cultural violence underlying unfair structures and suggest ways to address it. We can not only point out the harm that institutions do, but engage in worldview translation, helping to understand why these institutions make sense to some people and why they are invested in them, which may make it easier to reform them. We can also turn our ethnographic empathy, and our understandings of the ambiguous role of the individual in structural violence, towards the representatives of these institutions.

Treating these perspectives respectfully may be more effective in promoting reform than simply denouncing them would be. As Lederach writes, it is impossible to "ignore or talk away someone's perception," but one can try to understand "where it is rooted" (2003: 58). Balancing worldview translation with calling out structural violence can be delicate, but surfacing and challenging cultural obstacles to decolonizing state institutions is a role that feels particularly appropriate for white anthropologists. Anthropology has a mandate from Laura Nader to study "up, down or sideways"—why not across? (Nader, 1972).

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