

INDIGENOUS/NON-INDIGENOUS ALLIANCES  
CONFRONTING FOSSIL FUEL MEGAPROJECTS:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE LUMMI TOTEM POLE JOURNEY

by

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## ABSTRACT

Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances confronting fossil fuel megaprojects: A case study of the Lummi Totem Pole Journey

Matt Fuller

The Lummi Totem Pole Journey is an annual trip conducted by the Lummi Nation Sovereignty and Treaty Protection Office (STPO) and the House of Tears carvers. The last few years this several week long journey has traveled thousands of miles doing daily blessings and ceremonies in communities affected by fossil fuel megaprojects or transport and donated the totem pole to frontline communities contesting these industries at the points of extraction. The STPO has partnered in alliance with settler allies including local and regional eNGO's and inter-faith organizers for the Totem Pole Journey. At a larger scale, this thesis recognizes that, over the last 3-5 years, there has been an increased usage of the rhetoric of climate justice and Indigenous sovereignty, including a recognition of settler colonial legacies and historical trauma, by many of the larger eNGO's and other settler organizations focused on environmental issues.

Using the Lummi Totem Pole Journey as a case study and employing postcolonial lenses and decolonial methodologies, this research examines the alliance formed by the Lummi STPO with the local eNGO's and inter-faith communities in order discover whether the dynamics of the alliance are altered by settler allies who assert developing understandings related to climate justice and the challenges facing frontline and Indigenous communities. Specifically, I ask to what extent are new settler understandings or knowledges of Indigenous sovereignty, settler colonial legacies and historical trauma playing a meaningful role in the fostering or strengthening of the alliances between the Lummi STPO and the settler allies they have collaborated with? This research reveals that increased settler understandings do exist but are not consequential to the Lummi allies in forming this alliance. The existential threats of climate change and the impact of these fossil fuel industries are seen to be more determinant. Separately, though, it is discovered that these new knowledges do positively affect the internal relationship dynamics of the alliance, through changed settler behaviors, as well as the external production of this alliance in achieving shared goals.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
a. Research setting and question	2
b. Positionality and background	7
c. Research question and thesis	10
d. Xwe'chi'eXen and the Lummi Totem Pole Journey	14
<b>2. Literature review</b>	<b>17</b>
a. Climate justice, indigeneity & alliance building	18
b. Examining the role and impact of extractive industries	21
c. Indigenous oppositions and alliances	29
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>40</b>
a. Sampling and scope	40
b. Positionality, interview participants & participant observation	47
c. Historical (in)accuracy	52
<b>4. Results</b>	<b>52</b>
a. The Intermediators/Renegades	54
b. Existential forces	60
c. The Significance of the Totem Pole Journey	64
d. Unassailability and synergism	71
e. Lummi leads	77
f. Building trust	84
g. Mindfulness and intentionality	90
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>100</b>
a. Decolonizing Climate Justice Alliance Research	107
b. Limitations and Future Directions	109

## List of Figures

## List of Tables

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Lux Etern.



## **1. Introduction.**

The Pacific Northwest and British Columbia have seen a dramatic uptick in the amount of proposals for fossil fuel industry projects related to the transport, storage and export of these fuels in the region. From coal trains and ports that would bring Powder River Basin coal to local shorelines for export to oil trains bringing Bakken crude and Alberta tar sands to newly-expanded refinery operations, Washington State is paralleling the growth in fossil fuel infrastructure proposals in British Columbia along a stretch of the continent that some, for these very reasons, are calling the “Thin Green Line” (Roberts, 2015). With the recent demise of the Keystone XL project, analysts are predicting even more industry attention being placed on this region and these ports over the next decade, as fossil fuel companies search for ways to get their products to the export market (De Place, 2015).

With these proposals, though, has also come a dramatic increase in the opposition to the plans on the part of community groups, environmental organizations, municipal institutions and Indigenous communities. The rise of these regional oppositions has been strong enough in the Northwest to kill and delay several fossil fuel megaprojects already, the latest of them the proposed Cherry Point coal terminal outside of Bellingham, Washington. The role played by the emergence of new or renewed environmental coalitions has been notable, including the relationships that have grown between Indigenous stakeholders and non-indigenous organizations. This research will examine one alliance in

particular, that of Indigenous organizers at the Lummi Nation in Whatcom County, Washington and their non-indigenous allies in the the local and regional faith-based community and environmental non-profit community. It was there at Cherry Point, or Xwe'chi'eXen, home to the ancestral burying grounds of the Lummi Nation and the oldest archeological site in Washington State, where industry forces planned to construct North America's largest coal export terminal and facility. These forces were confronted by a variety of local and regional resistance and organizing, from traditional tactics like packing public hearings and letter writing drives at state agencies to more non-traditional ways with place-specific public relations stunts and alliance-building campaigns like the Lummi Totem Pole Journey. It is the alliances that have emerged around the Totem Pole Journey, an annual cross-country trek entailing blessing ceremonies in towns along fossil fuel transport corridors and the gifting of a Lummi totem to frontline communities dealing with fossil fuel extraction, that are the central focus of this thesis, as this work seeks to explore the dynamics of the alliances that emerged from this coal terminal proposal.

### **Research setting and question.**

Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances and coalitions do not exist in a vacuum (Davis, 2010) and one cannot examine the dynamics and effectiveness of their manifestations without acknowledging a host of issues related to the settler colonial histories and the historical trauma faced by Indigenous populations in the region (IPSG, 2010). Such alliances are in no way new and they have operated with varying degrees of success and cohesion in the past but both the history of

collaborations and a broad consideration of Indigenous/non-indigenous relations is necessary to examine when trying to situate the context for current alliance building (Coomes, 2012; Gilio-Whitaker 2015). In an effort to work more collaboratively across these Indigenous/non-indigenous lines, it has been noted that some environmental groups, non-tribal community organizations and nonprofits have worked towards new understandings of their Indigenous allies (Pye, 2010; Barker 2014; Bardsley and Wiseman, 2015; O’Faircheallaigh, 2013) . Taking from my personal experience at the People’s Climate March and along the 2015 Totem Pole Journey, new understandings and emergent themes do seem to be present in these relations that are worth exploring. Considering the shared value placed on the fostering and maintaining of alliances like these by participating individuals and organizations, such examinations may be valuable to these communities as well as to the research communities focused on social and environmental movements, Indigenous studies and climate justice.

I use a reflexive writing style in this thesis, incorporating my positionality as the author and researcher, drawing on both my participation in the Totem Pole Journey as a journalist and community organizer, and also as a participant observer in my analysis of key findings. The research question explored here itself came out of my close proximity for several months to these collaborations at Cherry Point and the broader anti-coal movement that was confronting the fossil fuel industries that sought to turn the region into a new epicenter for fossil fuel megaprojects. The issue and public debate surrounding several proposed coal export terminals was ever present in the headlines, the evening news and in

concerned community groups around the Pacific Northwest for several years from 2011-2016 and I encountered it frequently in my own work and organizing. It was a focus during my eight-month internship in the bureaucracy laden Environmental Justice Office at the Washington State Department of Ecology in 2013, where measuring and promoting public participation in the environmental permit decision-making process was of keen importance in regards to the proposed coal terminals. It was the primary focus of the Clean Energy Office at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities when I was interning there for the summer in 2015. Out of the latter experience came my own participation in the 2015 Totem Pole Journey, where the Xwe'chi'eXen site and proposal was a primary talking point as I traveled along with members of the Lummi Nation Sovereignty and Treaty Protection Office (STPO), including Elder Jewell James and Dr. Kurt Russo, and the totem pole Elder James made for the Northern Cheyenne at Tongue River.

My closeness to varying actors and several of the pivotal moments in the coal port debate over transporting and exporting coal compelled me to critically examine the emerging alliances and collaborations between those organizing to oppose these fossil fuel megaprojects, especially in regards to the lenses these organizations were using to speak of their struggles and campaigns. The research here recognizes the emergence of both a legitimate, intersectional climate justice movement and the presence of intersectional climate justice dialogue, rhetoric and values in many contemporary environmental campaigns and organizations. What is also acknowledged, though, is that speaking to one's values and beliefs is one thing but action that follows through with those expressed values is another. This

research also recognizes that the settler allies helping to support the Lummi Totem Pole Journey speak to a deepening of their understanding concerning Indigenous sovereignty, settler colonial legacies and historical trauma. This research asks to what extent do new settler understandings of these Indigenous knowledges play a meaningful role in the fostering or strengthening of the alliance between the Lummi Nation STPO and the settler allies they have collaborated with for the annual Totem Pole Journey?

Worth discussing briefly here is the need for a critical toolbox with which to examine these Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances. Examinations like these, while often siloed in academia, should hopefully offer some prescriptions and suggestions for these very real, very personal exercises in relationship building and cross-community collaborations. In communities battling industrial fossil fuel powers, we are seeing a resurgence in the creation and fostering of these sorts of collaborations and bearing witness to the very real power that they can have in holding both industry and regulatory bodies to account in regards to proposed fossil fuel megaprojects. This thesis explores in depth the dynamics and make-up of one alliance in particular, an ongoing alliance that seems to be successful in both its tactical goals and in the developing of enduring relationships across this indigene hyphen (Jones and Jenkins, 2008), but embedded in the research is a hope that what is found can have meaning for other Indigenous organizers and settler allies looking to forge successful and respectful alliances.

In the following sections, I provide some background information about how I found myself exploring these topics and introducing the major sub-

questions and hypotheses prompted by this examination. Also discussed is a brief timeline of events and major players surrounding the Totem Pole Journeys and the Xwe'chi'eXen port proposal. This is followed by a review of the pertinent literature drawing from key theoretical frameworks in the fields of critical geography and political ecology, as they have approached the topics of fossil fuel development projects, indigeneity and climate change, alliance building and social movements. Following the literature review, the method section outlines my research methods and further issues related to positionality, decolonizing research methodologies and the details of the case study. From there the thesis turns to the major section of the results and analysis of qualitative data, exploring seven themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes are the role of intermediators, Indigenous-led action, building trust, confronting existential forces, an enduring collaboration, the synergistic appeal of these particular forces and the intrinsic power of the Totem Pole Journey are presented and their meaning and relevance investigated extensively.

Following the themes, I conclude with a discussion of how this research reveals that, while the settler allies in these alliances carried with them improved understandings of Indigenous sovereignty and the legacy of settler colonialism and historical trauma, a more determinant factor for how strong these alliances were came from the perceived existential threats of the fossil fuel industries and the immediacy of global climate disruption. The improved settler understandings of these issues did, though, help those interviewed guide and regulate their own behaviors in building the relationships with their Indigenous counterparts and also

partially inform how both parties used such concepts of Lummi rights and Indigenous values to create a powerful public narrative and moral case during the Totem Pole Journey. Finally, this work finishes with a conclusion section that discusses the implications and significance of the findings, the limitations of the data and methodologies and provides suggestions for future research. The conclusion discusses how this case study in particular offers findings and relevant contributions for the existing literature and how the themes themselves have tangible applicability for the ongoing relationships and collaborators that are the focus.

### **Positionality and background.**

The research for this thesis is partially informed by a trip I took to New York City for the People's Climate March in September 2014. This grassroots mobilization, coordinated and organized by some of the larger environmental non-governmental organizations (eNGO's) in the country, saw several hundred thousand people take to the streets of New York City to demand that our leaders chart a new course when it came to climate and environmental policy. The event had a profound impact on a lot of people, myself included. Considering myself a veteran observer and participant in the anti-globalization and anti-war movements we had seen in the 20 years prior, I was struck by two things I noticed. The first was just how strong of an indictment was articulated of neo-liberal economic policies and free-market capitalism, which permeated much of the messaging. "System change, not climate change" was a constant refrain and I hadn't personally heard those sentiments expressed so strongly in major protests since

the anti-globalization movement. Secondly, and equally surprising, was just how intersectional the event was. There were hundreds, possibly thousands, of diverse groups and organizers there from across the country and across the globe who were working to connect the dots between environmental degradation and climate change to their own variety of social movements that were fighting for justice and the rights of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

What was most surprising, though, was not the presence of these groups intersecting in the streets and at a related conference that week of workshops and speeches called the Global Climate Convergence, but the seeming full embrace of these grassroots groups and frontline communities by the large organizing eNGO's of the march. This seemed to be a moment of awakening for a lot of people, a turning point, which included gestures such as organizations like 350.org working to prioritize the ideas and campaigns of frontline communities in the orchestration of the march. Many can recall the iconic pictures from the day, which had signs such as "frontlines of crisis, forefronts of change" and climate justice permeating through the visuals and the messaging of the march, while thousands of people of color, Indigenous communities, women and youth led chants and sections of the masses as the march snaked through the streets of New York City.

Though this was a special moment for a resurgent environmental movement, it is not one that should be above critique. I found myself overwhelmed with press releases and journalistic articles that saw the large national eNGO's who participated using the rhetoric and language of climate



justice, environmental justice and other social movements at the grassroots level that had been fighting in the trenches for equity and the rights of marginalized populations for sometime. I was curious to know what many of these community groups thought of these larger environmental groups putting their values and their struggles on full display. I wondered if some of these organizers considered these larger organizations to be tokenizing or co-opting their grassroots work.

Considering that these eNGO's have been accused of notoriously being tone deaf or purposefully ignoring many of these grassroots movements and struggles for justice (Alcock, 2008; Ramos 2015), it seemed important to ask these questions.

I was also curious to know how these eNGO's were doing in living up to these newly-espoused values with their own campaigns and the behaviors of their larger, bureaucratic organizations. As someone who has spent over 20 years working in the nonprofit sector, it is not hard for me to admit that there are many powerful critiques of NGO's and nonprofits, some of which use the label the "nonprofit industrial complex," and the ways that they can work to water-down or even silence the more productive and powerful aspects of community organizing and social movements (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2009). I wanted to know if these eNGO's were simply hijacking the rhetoric of the struggles and work of these smaller organizations in order to further their own agendas and fundraising. It seemed important to discover if they were putting these values and these principles into practice in the operation of their own campaigns and in their own organizational cultures at the administrative level.

I knew that these were not new questions, that skepticism of the intentions and practices of the big eNGO's was long-held in the environmental justice movement and one of the catalysts for and main indictments of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC in 1991 (Vasey, 2014). The People's Climate March itself seemed like a potential hotbed for future research on these matters (Rugh, 2014) but I brought these concerns home with me to a realization that the rhetoric and the language of climate justice and the intersectionality of our social movements, was emerging all around me, even at home, at many scales of environmental organizing (Anonymous, 2009). With my proximity to the Lummi Nation fight to prevent North America's largest coal terminal from being created on their sacred ancestral grounds and with my participation in the Lummi Totem Pole Journey, I saw an opening to examine how these values and themes were playing out at a local level, between indigenous organizers working to stop the environmental degradation a coal terminal would bring and their settler allies, who also had a vested interest in preventing the coal terminal from being built in their communities.

### **Research questions and thesis.**

This research asks, to what extent are new settler understandings or knowledges of Indigenous sovereignty, settler colonial legacies and historical trauma playing a meaningful role in the fostering or strengthening of the alliances between the Lummi Nation Sovereignty and Treaty Protection Office and the settler allies they have collaborated with for the annual Totem Pole Journey? Connected to this research question are a set of sub-questions and hypotheses, as

well. If it is the case that discourse around Indigenous sovereignty, settler colonial histories and climate justice as it pertains to frontline communities is making its way into the rhetoric and values of settler colonial organizations working on these issues, then it would seem important to ask if these settler allies do, in fact, carry with them new understandings of these concepts. Secondly, this thesis also explores to what degree Indigenous allies recognize these discourses being used and whether or not these understandings are valued or appreciated by the Indigenous allies in regards to the collaborations. Thirdly, this research explores whether these understandings have a meaningful impact on the relationships and the dynamics *internal* to these alliances. Beyond how these knowledges have affected the internal dynamics of the shared work, this research also explores whether the *external* functionality of these alliances have been affected. That is to say, have they affected the ability of these alliances to do what they set out to do. Lastly, this research looks into the question of “why now?” Why is it that any new understandings and their impact on these collaborations are happening now, during this particular regional struggle against a proposed coal terminal and during these moments of environmental organizing in the United States?

These research questions come out of my closeness to the Totem Pole Journey and recognizing early on that many of the individuals involved in the Totem Pole Journey collaborations seem to have a very positive outlook on these relationships. Through this research, I discovered that, yes, these non-indigenous allies do, in fact, have new understandings that are informing their alliances with the STPO and also that the STPO is aware of these new understandings. It was

also discovered that these new understandings are having a positive effect internally on the functioning and strength of these relationships in the collaboration. Furthermore, these changed relationships are having a positive impact on the external productivity of the alliance and the campaign of the Totem Pole Journeys.

Finally, this research reveals and will explain that the reasons these new understandings are emerging and having an impact on these alliances right now has a lot more to do with external factors that inspire common fears or a shared collective defensiveness, such as global climate disruption and the widespread environmental damage caused by industrial powers, than it has to do with settler populations simply seeking out better practices for living with respect and deference to their Indigenous neighbors. Said another way, despite the presence of historical trauma and persistent social and economic inequities and despite incongruous values and divergent cultural norms, the shared sense of urgency when it comes to the valuation of what is at stake with these projects, pertaining to “way of life,” sustainable communities, climate change and climate justice, propels the presence of these collaborations regardless of how harmful or chaotic they have been in the past or continue to be. Key to this analysis and these conclusions are the attempts to discover to what degree knowledge, risks and understanding are shared. Also valuable are considerations of how each side perceives the collaboration to be going and if the alliance has felt effective and fruitful enough to meet needs and to continue on in them. Thirdly, this research

and analysis explores whether parties have felt understood, respected and valued by others.

This research is important because it examines closely an emerging dynamic between Indigenous and non-indigenous organizing and alliance building at a critical time in the Pacific Northwest and for these communities. This time is critical because the region is a choke point (De Place, 2015) for fossil export plans and has been inundated with a continuous onslaught of proposals for fossil fuel megaprojects that communities have been kept busy responding to. It acknowledges a long history of such alliances but also that we are in a new era of mutual understanding and possible trust between these two types of stakeholders. While specific relationships of Indigenous and non-indigenous allies collaborating to confront undesired fossil fuel megaprojects are currently being studied in other parts of the world, such as in Canada (Veltmeyer and Bowles, 2014), there appears to be a gap in the knowledge of such fossil fuel alliances in the United States, where Indigenous/non-indigenous alliance building has focused on other shared concerns in these communities (Grossman, 2002; Grossman and Parker, 2012). It is a vibrant time for environmental organizing and alliance-building that seeks to confront and challenge the fossil fuel industries. These important issues and fossil fuel industry resistances are emerging right now with robust expressions in both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in very concrete fashions that can be effectively examined in an academic context.

When it comes to Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances, we also need to recognize that there is a long history of broken promises and ineffectual

collaboration that has worked more to perpetuate neo-colonial harm on Indigenous people's (Wallace, 2013). Such examples have worked to cause a lot of mistrust in the past. But there is also a strong tradition of effective collaboration. In this new era where eNGO's and other settler community organizations seem to be asserting that they understand the historical trauma and exploitation of Indigenous nations, it is important to examine critically if such an understanding actually exists and if it at all improves collaboration or working relationship.

### **Xwe'chi'eXen and the Lummi Totem Pole Journey.**

While the methodologies section discusses briefly the idea that attempts to construct a narrative where historical accuracy and detailed precision about particular events and actors may, in fact, potentially muddle the meaning and significance of certain events in the timeline of these collaborations and alliances, it is important to lay enough of that history out as a framework, so that the narratives and themes spoken to in the interviews discussed here make sense to the reader. It is important here to acknowledge that Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT) and parent company Carrix began pursuing in earnest the development of a coal terminal megaproject at the Cherry Point deep water port site in the early 2010's, after decades of holding on to the undeveloped property. Lummi Nation itself and various community organizations responded in opposition at different paces and with different intensities to this emerging reality but, by 2013-2014, after the faith-based Native Connections group at the Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship was tapped by Lummi allies to play a role in connecting the Lummi

resistant to a broader community opposition, a wider Whatcom County coalition coalesced around a strong, shared rejection to the coal terminal proposal. One key catalyst in this opposition was the unpermitted and rogue destruction by GPT of several acres on the sacred burial grounds of Xwe'chi'eXen in 2011 that violated both development regulations and, possible, the antiquities act for the desecration of this archeological site.

Bellingham eNGO RE Sources for Sustainable Communities, who had filed a successful lawsuit against GPT for some of their illegal behavior, also played a powerful role in connecting Lummi opposition both to local allies and to broader eNGO allies, like the Power Past Coal coalition, who worked in solidarity with Lummi interests to stop the coal terminal project. After several years organizing, from PR stunts to packing state agency public hearings on the topic, this coalition, led by Lummi Nation, saw a huge success when, in the Spring of 2016, the US Army Corps of Engineers determined that the project could not move forward as proposed, due to how it jeopardized and violated the Lummi Nation's treaty rights.

The Lummi Totem Pole Journey is tangentially related to the coal terminal fight and is a campaign of master carver Jewell James and the House of Tears Carvers, a familial group of James and his brothers that had worked for years creating carvings and totems for both the Lummi community and for other communities, Indigenous and non-indigenous alike, elsewhere in the region. After the events of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, James was personally compelled, as well as prompted by others, to conduct a tour of the country with totem poles that

focused on healing our communities after that shared tragedy. The first couple journeys, usually a year apart from one another, took totem poles that Mr. James had made across the country, stopping in cities and towns along the way for blessings and ceremonies as Mr. James tried to spread collective healing and bring communities together.

After taking several years off from conducting these journeys and donating these totem poles he worked hard to make, the debate surrounding the proposed coal terminal at Xwe'chi'eXen prompted James to restart up the Totem Pole Journey, this time with a focus on the environmental damage and destruction of fossil fuel megaprojects. James saw an opportunity to create awareness and connect resistance to these plans, whether that be in frontline communities at the points of extraction or along the transportation corridors or at proposed export points like Cherry Point. The last three annual journeys have traced fossil fuel transport routes back to communities on the frontlines of extraction, where the totem poles have been donated to honor those communities. They have had a dual purpose of exposing the corruption, power and environmental harm caused on the ground by fossil fuel companies while also nurturing concerned citizens to foster new connections with each other, whether locally in their own communities or regionally as they shared their struggle across the miles. These journeys have also done a lot to draw massive amounts of attention and support to the Lummi battle at the Xwe'chi'eXen site and played a powerful role in uniting opposition to that proposed coal terminal. This introduction of the Totem Pole Journey hopefully works to help contextualize some of the themes from the interviews that will be



discussed, without convoluting or minimizing the very real interpretations and particular significance those interviewed placed on particular events or moments for this alliance. As discussed more below, the relationships those interviewed have forged with the Totem Pole Journey and how they recount the specifics of their shared support and collective work is given precedence over any attempts at historical accuracy of events as they have unfolded.

## **2. Literature review.**

The relevant literature for this thesis comes from several pools of research in a few different fields of inquiry with theoretical underpinnings that align well with interdisciplinary approaches. Broadly, I will draw on employ theories from the fields of critical human geography, political ecology and Indigenous studies. Some of the research discussed also employs themes and trends from the scholarship and literature in cultural anthropology, sociology and social movement theory.

The role of extractive industries has been studied from many different angles in many different disciplines. Assessing the impact and role of these industries environmentally, politically or socially and at many different scales, from the local, regional and national impacts all the way up to the global impacts has been examined. For example, these examinations can emerge from the natural sciences taking a look at the environmental harm that happens at many levels, economic and political economy examinations that seek to understand the positive and negative impacts of the industries, sociological, anthropological and geographic inquiries that seek to understand the role on human communities and

societal agents and Indigenous studies trying to understand how Indigenous communities and resources are affected by the industries. This research would not be complete without taking a look at some of the trends, questions and conceptualizations seen in these fields, especially where they relate to the ability of local communities to organize and collaborate in engaging and confronting these large industries at the local level.

### **Climate justice, indigeneity & alliance building.**

The manifestations of global climate change felt at the local scale are often felt most acutely by Indigenous communities. This is one of the primary recognitions of climate justice constructs and is an important thing to keep in mind when it comes to the development of fossil fuel megaprojects and fossil fuel transportation infrastructure on native lands. These Indigenous populations often assert a livelihood that is more directly tied to a subsistence lifestyle based off their natural resources and is born out of centuries of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and the usage of local plants, animals and ecosystems for survival. In modern times, many tribes struggle economically and are vulnerable when it comes to their ability to secure the needed resources to support themselves and their families, which makes the benefits of traditional agricultural and harvesting practices all the more important for their survival. These are a few factors that make native communities extremely aware of changes caused by climate change and the potential harm it can cause on their livelihoods.

When examining the relationship between the effects of climate change on tribal well-being and how the population is doing economically, there is often a

troubling relationship in Indigenous communities, though. For tribes that do struggle economically, the benefits of fossil fuel development can sometimes outweigh the environmental damage caused by such projects. The cash flow to economically struggling tribes is often weighed against the harm caused immediately on-site with industrial practices but also through the detrimental effects that usage of such fuel cause through climate change. Many tribal communities are connecting the local harm caused by climate change to the global usage of these fuels. This connection has helped to inform the decisions that many Indigenous communities are making when it comes to their support for fossil fuel extraction and transport megaprojects.

With the rise of the climate change paradigm and the more rapid dissemination of global information due to technological changes, many tribes have been able to connect the dots on emerging environmental phenomenon happening locally with global climate change issues. In their study on how climate change has affected Indigenous ways of life in British Columbia, Turner and Clifton assert that Indigenous communities are readily aware of changes caused by climate change, due to the traditional phenological knowledge they have passed down (Turner & Clifton, 2009). In examining an annual salmon harvest for the Gitga'at Nation, the elders, who are accustomed to seasonal variabilities, saw rare anomalies like torrential rains and the erratic behavior of bears and wolves. Coupled with other changes they were witnessing, it was easy for the elders to conclude that there were transformative forces at work and for them to see the need to draw attention to and confront these changes. Turner and

Clifton see such recognitions as fuel for the locally-centric, bottom up adaptations and mitigations that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report suggested in 2007, as well as a recognition of the unique knowledges that Indigenous populations globally can bring to confronting the effects of climate change effectively (Turner & Clifton, 2009). Such informed strategies and confrontation could arguably include the resistance to fossil fuel transport and export projects on Indigenous lands, given that these industries are large drivers of global climate change.

Turner and Clifton point (2009) out, as well, the historical recognition of settler colonialism and that indigenous populations are all too accustomed to rapid, emergent threats to their livelihoods and communities. Considering the colonial legacies of natives populations and all the death, disease, war and even the imposition of education and government styles on native populations around the world, these native communities have remained resilient and often survived during violent, rapid transitions with their heritage and communities intact (Turner and Clifton, 2009). These researchers and others (Bardsley and Wiseman, 2015; Barker 2015) point this out in an effort to spotlight the possible synergistic power of TEK and natural sciences when confronting climate change and to suggest that the same Indigenous knowledges work to provide Indigenous communities with the authority and authenticity to confront the fossil fuel industry, especially when the legal rights to their lands and resources are involved. We can acknowledge that these communities have become well accustomed to the exploitative and harmful behavior of large, outside forces

before (Hindery, 2004), and that part of their traditional knowledge base relates to engaging and confronting outside forces or threats (Watts, 2007).

One thing that many researchers point to, as well, is that through TEK the use of more meaningful metaphors can be employed in the dialogue about the effects of climate change (Turner and Clifton, 2009). Employing metaphors that harken to the natural history and environmental stewardship of the lands carrying with them a stronger ability, through being rooted in more authoritative histories and long-standing TEK sciences, and can help to transform the dialogue and possible outcomes of climate change debate, including the controversy surrounding fossil fuel transport and extraction plans.

### **Examining the role and impact of extractive industries.**

It is impossible to talk about the climate and dialogue surrounding fossil fuel megaproject resistance and the role of Indigenous assertions of their sovereign rights without considering the paradigms that national governments and industry assert into the conversation. These resistances are often born out of the inequalities that emerge when these industries bring both economic wealth and ecological harm that are distributed disproportionately and unjustly. For this reason, political economists have often critiqued or examined these relations of power and capital. Although postcolonial and Indigenous Studies perspectives are appearing more frequently, there is room for much more intersectional research that applies these critical lenses and decolonial perspectives on the role of extractive industries in Indigenous communities, especially as it pertains to alliance-building.

This existing disparate body of research offers a lot to the data collected here, especially when trying to fully understand the power and sway that fossil fuel industries bring to the communities they are present in. Such relationships between these industries and those communities are very complex and often nuanced, which warrants consideration for this thesis. The threats that these extractive industries pose to communities and ecosystems are often immense, as is the new economic paradigms they bring, and it is important to review how other researchers have approached and contextualized these forces as this thesis makes its own attempt to approach them with postcolonial and decolonizing lenses.

Many researchers have aimed to comprehensively understand the powerful role the fossil fuel projects play on multiscalar levels, from the local community up to the nation state (Bebbington, 2012). Scholars have been writing about this in the Canadian context (Veltmeyer and Bowles, 2014) and researchers point to the concepts of oil insecurity or scarcity as a driver for industry expansion (McCreary and Milligan, 2014). In Canada, visions of the use of the “True North,” the Arctic, as a last frontier to be utilized for the greater well-being of the country have become popular over the last decade (Sherval, 2015). While the long-term strategic plan for the region entailed the protection of the environment and traditional ways of life, the politics of oil scarcity have prioritized a rampant wave of extraction and fossil fuel development. While Canadians have stepped back from some of the earlier, more aggressive proposed projects for the “True North,” due to a lack of financing and infrastructure, the government has put a tremendous amount of resources into the Alberta tar sands around the Athabasca region with

hopes that income raised from that project alone could fund the more expensive efforts farther north (Sherval, 2015).

It is in fact some of those areas to the north, which are often economically desperate, that may see the clearest route to market for tar sands and other non-conventional fuels. Acknowledging the death of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline and the growing resistance on the part of both native and non-native allies to transport routes in British Columbia, plans for pipeline routes north to Arctic shipping channels have become more palatable. In fact, Indigenous populations in the Northwest Territories have already opened up their borders to fracking operations and some communities and leadership there are eager for the sort of economic stimulus such pipeline and shipping plans might bring (Sherval, 2015). Called the Arctic Energy Gateway, the creation and use of Arctic shipping channels (to both European and Asian markets) are, in fact, made much more feasible due to climate change itself. This does not dismiss the devastating impact witnessed by the Indigenous populations surrounding the tar sands but does pit these Indigenous communities up against those native nations to the north who would welcome the industrial development. It is almost a reversal of roles as what is seen tangentially in this thesis in the Pacific Northwest regarding coal transport and export. In that case, communities at the point of proposed coal extraction, like the Crow Nation, are supportive of the plans but Indigenous communities along the transport route and export route, like Lummi Nation, stand out in opposition (LaDuke, 2014).

Some who analyze the impact of fossil fuel development have focused on the economic reasoning used by governments and the sway that economic arguments have in helping make such projects implementable despite the known environmental impacts. The “economic stimulus” that is often promised to come with the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure is often, as it is in this thesis, a powerful force to be confronted by those who oppose such development. Bradshaw, in his examination of offshore oil development in Eastern Russia, takes a look at this from a geographic view and examines the power dynamics and policy-shaping that happens at scales of interaction on two types of axis. The first is the “global-local,” which includes the role of neo-liberal economic policies in shaping local environments and the second is what he calls the “centre-region,” which exists inside national boundaries between the power brokers in Moscow and the frontline communities in Sakhalin (Bradshaw, 1998). Such research exposes the complex web of influence that these industries bring to bear on local communities, through the leverage of influence they hold elsewhere.

Other research that examines the dynamics of extractive industry power on communities see the imposition of a global economic will, expressed through the power of the nation-state, as really creating tension and shifting the dynamics of power and authority at the local, Indigenous level (Bebbington and Bebbington, 2010). In examining extraction developments in Bolivia, these researchers see tensions arise between Indigenous rights and the rights of the central state when the state decides to superimpose the “greater collective interest” on local populations, despite opposition or social movements. They also acknowledge the



leveraging and asymmetries of power that occurs when such resources are brought to bear on local, often-underdeveloped communities. New industries and local business leaders are propped up, often new social or community development programs are created by the outside powers and new employment inequalities emerge (Bebbington and Bebbington, 2010). The fact that all of these changes are prompted and executed by outside agencies is problematic for these researchers because it alters locally and Indigenously controlled community structures and creates new inequalities at the local level. Such dynamics are critical to understand when sifting through how local communities and community resistances are working to forge alliances to confront these forces.

Another framing of the role and dynamics of extractive industries uses a critique of neoliberal economic globalization to suggest that there is the presence of both “double exposure” and “double movements” (Bebbington et al, 2015). Double exposure is the notion that communities and locations are exposed to both the harmful effects of climate change while simultaneously being exposed to economic globalization and the harmful effects of the extractive industries (Leichenko and O'Brien, 2008). These forces can create vulnerabilities and influence the agency that local communities and individuals have. Double movement is the notion that while forces for economic globalization, like the extractive industries, push for the expansion of markets and commodities, other forces, local communities, push against the frontiers of market expansion in efforts to reign in the adverse consequences of these industrial forces (Polanyi, 1944). This framing is a powerful indictment of the role that transnational,

capitalist enterprise plays in undermining or significantly altering localized community dynamics that seek to confront both the benefit and the harm that industries like extractive fossil fuel corporations bring to their regions.

McNeish (2013) takes a look at what happens with such localized, Indigenous confrontations bubble up into the national consciousness and how dangerous it can be to oversimplify both state and Indigenous actors in these contexts. His research looks at the role and historical context of indigeneity as manifested through the reaction of the supposedly progressive and Indigenous-friendly Bolivian government to rural Indigenous communities blocking transport infrastructure for extractive industries (McNeish, 2013). McNeish, recognizing both how these Indigenous movements can spur up and spark national consciousness and the risk of the “Indigenous-friendly” government’s continued alliance to harmful extractive industries, calls for paying greater attention to the subtle and historical dynamics for communities that have long-standing relationships with and confrontation to resource extractive industries.

As mentioned, this body of research focuses on the powerful role these extractive industries play at multiple scales. From transnational market maneuvering to the swaying of national governments and regulatory bodies, to the impactful manipulation of local leaders and economies, these fossil fuel and mining industries exert much force upon environments and communities. In his research examining potential linkages between these industries and the rise of civil wars, Ross (2006) problematizes much of the existing research on extractive industries but does see strong connections between the presence of these resource

extractors and the presence of civil wars (Ross, 2006). These extractive industries can undermine the safety, health and well-being of local communities due to the influx and movement of money, power, weapons and even contraband. The connections could be strengthened in the literature but certainly as the wealth of these industries rise in a region, the role of volatile markets and trade shocks help destabilize areas, as does the emergence of a will for independence in these newly resource-rich regions (Cox, 2015). The long and often violently history of the extractive industries in local, Indigenous communities is something that is of concern to this thesis and seems to help frame individual and community conceptions of the how powerful these fossil fuel companies are.

Researchers have explored such local framings and some have argued that local resistances always have to position themselves defensively when extractive industries and proposals arrive, which makes it hard for them to go on the offense with economic alternatives and may make it hard for their localized, often Indigenous, resistances to scale up to larger communities (Lopez and Vertiz, 2014). They argue that without this scaling up, though, it is hard for local movements to make the case against national and transnational development ideas. While these development ideas may entail local environmental or economic harm, other communities may see benefit, which is why it is challenging to broaden the appeal and scale up the resistance to such massive projects. The authors argue these movements must become more widespread in order to successfully confront the neoliberal models that harm them. The authors also think it is important to remember that it is the presence of these neoliberal and

transnational capital projects that have given birth and necessitated grassroots and indigenous resistances (Lopez and Vertiz, 2014). The examination of the Totem Pole Journey in this thesis shines a unique light on their work, as the journey takes its local movement on the road to physically connect with others struggling elsewhere and to broaden the alliance and coalition geographically.

Others researchers having taken aim at the supposed “post-neoliberal” nationalist regimes that purport to reach out to these local groups and grassroots organizers, questioning whether the attempt of these regimes to seek socially inclusive national development strategies in Latin America are effective (Veltmeyer, 2013). This research suggests that while social and economic policies may be somewhat improved upon, when it comes to the extractive industries, we are mostly seeing a rebirth of neoliberalism. The author points to the role that mining companies based in Canada are having in perpetuating destructive industrial practices in Latin America that disempower local and Indigenous communities. Though these new Latin American governments promise a rejection of the harmful role that the global north has played throughout their colonial histories, these new developments just perpetuate the enclosing of the global commons, the privatization and commodification of land and resources and continues to put at risk the lives and livelihoods of frontline, indigenous communities (Veltmeyer, 2013).

There seems to be a common indictment in the literature over the rhetorical aims of new Latin American governments and the practical manifestation of their leadership. Hindery (2004) echoes this critique in taking a

look at the Enron hydrocarbon projects in Bolivia. The expansion of hydrocarbon sectors necessarily has entailed the influencing of state agencies and financial institutions, hindering their ability to regulate the industry. Included in this case has been the partial privatization of the state oil company and expansion of the control over natural resources of multinational corporations, which has been especially detrimental to Indigenous inhabitants and localized ecosystems (Hindery, 2014). Finer et al (2008) fired a warning shot about vulnerable communities and ecosystems in the Amazonian basin through mapping research and the plotting out of blocks for resource development. They noticed the disproportionate proximity these industry proposals had to the most species-rich areas of the Amazon Basin and the nearness to indigenous communities who had determined to live in isolation. These researchers found that proposed oil and gas development blocks covered more than two-thirds of the Amazon and warn that improved policies are needed or else the social and environmental impacts are likely to intensify (Finer et al, 2008).

### **Indigenous oppositions and alliances.**

Though not all Indigenous populations stand as one voice in opposition or support of these projects one of the strongest unified Indigenous voices to come out in opposition to fossil fuel megaprojects has come from the Idle No More movement. Much of the conversation about the emergence of the Idle No More movement considers how silenced those communities in the movement felt when it came to government and industry decision-making. The lack of public participation or inclusion in the regulatory processes and decisions which affect

the environmental and social well-being of communities is one of the pillars of an environmental justice critique of state power (Gilio-Whitaker, 2015).

One examination of the Idle No More movement asserts that it is an effort in part to maintain Indigenous identity while also fostering meaningful participation in traditional Canadian politics and society (Wootherspoon & Hansen, 2013). The researcher's analysis focuses on the dynamic of Indigenous perception of inclusion and exclusion in broader Canadian realms and focuses on the perpetuation of colonial legacies and symbolic violence in the social, cultural and economic spheres. The movement was partially inspired by the government's aggressive provisions in Bill C-45, The Jobs and Growth Act of 2012, legislation whose wide provisions slashed many of the protective regulations for the environment and indigenous communities for the sake of making it easier for industry to conduct business. These researchers assert that some of the core objectives of the movement are to work with allies to recognize First Nation sovereignty and to engender a climate of nation to nation relationships that helped foster social and environmental justice (Wootherspoon & Hansen, 2013). Not surprisingly, the rise of toxic extractive industries in Alberta and other parts of Canada have been met with strong resistance from the Idle No More movement who see these developments as an extension of how they have been silenced and marginalized.

Often referred to as the "Canadian Winter," named after the Arab Spring, the Idle No More movement had a similarly strong and vibrant social media presence that helped to promote the movement and foster a lot of support and

allies from outside Indigenous communities (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). It was of note that a lot of non-tribal social justice advocates and environmental groups responded with support and solidarity (Wooterspoon & Hansen, 2013). These researchers assert that the strength of the message resonated with broader audiences due to the traditional worldviews within, including messages about protecting future generations and environmental stewardship, the interconnectedness of our ecosystems and the idea of a baseline level of environmental health and protection to be returned to, all of which stand in stark contrast to the degradation and harm caused to ecosystems by capitalist and industrial forces (LaDuke, 2005; Thomas-Muller, 2014).

Such strong Indigenous-led coalition-building aided by the articulation of traditional knowledges is not unique to proposed projects in Canada or the west coast of North America (Powless, 2012). Manno, Hirsch and Feldpausch-Parker examined a strong collaboration formed in New York in opposition to hydrofracking of the Marcellus Shale. In this instance the Onondaga Nation held their traditional practices and forms of responsibility-based governance at the front of a tribal/non-tribal alliance with a group called Neighbors of Onondaga Nation (NOON). This alliance was able to thrust tribal sovereignty and public participation in decision-making into the debate over hydrofracking in a powerful and impactful way (Manno, Hirsch, Feldpausch-Parker, 2013).

Earlier in time in another part of the United States, 1980's and 1990's Northern Wisconsin, one researcher documented a new alliance of tribal spearfisherman and non-tribal sports fisherman, who had previously been

considered at odds with one another. When proposed mining operation threatened the vitality of fish populations, these two former enemies were able to set aside their difference to form an alliance based on environmental stewardship and a strong sense of place (Grossman, 2001). Such alliances are not uncommon and often form the backbone of resistance to plans by state, industrial or military powers to cause environmental harm through proposed projects. From alliances of tribes and farmers resisting nuclear power plants in places like Northern Minnesota to Nevada where the Western Shoshone and ranchers fought together to oppose low-level military exercises and missile testing, there is a long history of alliance building, with Indigenous populations taking the lead both in setting the pace and agenda for such resistance and also the language and historical context of the movements (Grossman, 2005). In many ways, this thesis seeks to extend and deepen the work done by Grossman and others on these issues.

Veltmeyer and Bowles see a direct connection between the historical resistance to colonial rule and the more recent social movements to oppose capitalist development projects (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014). A common features they see in studies of these recent movements is the centrality of the notion of society existing in harmony with the land and earth. Whatever the reasons and regardless of how patronizing the conservative Canadian government engaged Idle No More, for example, it is true that the movement resonated across the national borders of both the Indigenous First Nations and the federal government and sparked wide examination of fossil fuel industry practices and environmental degradation by much of civil society. This thesis seeks to expand upon where



such political economy analysis intersects, as it does here, with Indigenous perspectives and creates an opening for a postcolonial approach, with decolonizing lenses, that can tease out some of the fine-grained details present with the injection of traditional worldviews into these movements and alliances.

What caught Indigenous communities and environmental groups off guard in Canada when it came to these practices and the resurgence of this industry was just how fast this new industrial boom happened. The downturn in the manufacturing sector is to blame for what could be considered this “returning to the roots” for Canada's industrial development, which has once again embraced both large-scale agricultural development and extraction industries, like the tar sands operations and other mineral projects (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014). Quite organically, though, the collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups emerged in this resistance.

Veltmeyer & Bowles studied the emerging resistance in British Columbia to the Enbridge pipeline, which would bring tar sands to the Pacific Coast for sale and shipment to Asian markets. What they document in their research is a diverse coalition of oppositional forces coming from grassroots and environmental groups, labor organizations and, most importantly, Indigenous nations. Of the 198 First Nations in British Columbia, over 160 have signed off in opposition to the pipeline and the researchers highlight some notable alliances and solidarity accords that unite Indigenous communities along the pipeline with labor and teacher unions, tourism groups and even physician associations (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014).

Veltmeyer & Bowles also apply a neoMarxist critique and assert that the manifestations of capitalist production with these industries, through their extractive practices, puts at risk the very ways of traditional and modern life (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014). The indictment of neoliberal capitalism from Indigenous populations trying it to assert their sovereignty and own economic vitality resonates with non-indigenous peoples who also point the finger at the devastation wrought by free market principles and would seem to help fuel the creation of working alliances (Davis, 2010). The authors do point out, though, that these same Indigenous communities have not always opposed capitalist models that exploit resources on their lands. They attribute these new resistances to the fact that these fossil fuel corridors dissect habitat and natural resources, as well as jeopardize the environmental health of these resources through the risk of spill or industrial disaster. (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014). Much of this disparate research makes it evident how the intersections and analysis provided using political economy and postcolonial lenses are often complex and sometimes contradictory and, for these reasons, this thesis attempts a more fine-grained analysis of place-specific events and movements to add some depth to understandings and to avoid broad generalizations and contributes to the existing literature by studying an emerging movement, a climate justice-based resistance movement to fossil fuel megaprojects, in a strategically important and understudied region in the US.

Canada is not the only country on an aggressive path of support for extractive industries that harm Indigenous populations. Acuna takes a critical look at the rise of extractive industries in Peru and how the long legacy of colonial

behaviors on the part of state powers has given rise to the perpetuation of denying indigenuity and land rights to Indigenous populations. This denial may not be universally applied in the same degree to all Indigenous peoples but, as in the case of the examined Baguazo people, it does exist as a threat to the livelihoods and self-governing powers of tribes in the path of these industries (Acuna, 2015).

Acuna makes the case for the “plurinationalism” of small, Indigenous nation states in Peru that command recognition as such and the legitimate rights of self-determination from the colonizing nations and their extractive industries. This research and others also assert that none of these behaviors of state powers or extractive industries cannot exist separated from the long history of colonial exploitation and marginalization that must be examined (Grossman and Parker, 2012). Tied to those violent, colonial legacies are the legal recognition of tribal sovereignty, current socio-economic conditions for tribes and, as I will examine next, confronting the otherization of Indigenous populations as potentially violent or threatening to state power. Recognizing the threads that connect these colonial histories to these current industry behaviors is something that some Indigenous organizers in the Pacific Northwest seem to acknowledge up front and work to expose when examining their own resistance to fossil fuel megaprojects (James, 2013). This thesis, in part, explores how thrusting that context into the broader policy or civic debate about fossil fuel megaprojects is one of the strongest ways that Indigenous communities can affect the public dialogue on these issues.

This villianization of First People’s in Canada has recently emerged as a contentious trend in Canadian domestic policy. Preston, in what is one of many

attempts by researchers to examine the connections between historic settler colonialism and the current situation unfolding with fossil fuel extraction and transportation infrastructure notes an alarming trend on the part of the Canadian government to link Indigenous resistance, that seeks to assert tribal sovereignty and land rights, to forms of domestic terrorism (Preston, 2013). In a 2009 report prepared for the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute (CDFAI) by Tom Flanagan, a conservative expert on the Indigenous populations of Canada, First Nation groups are placed in the same pool as eco-terrorists and saboteurs as organizations that may use violence or extra-legal resistance to industrial projects. This was one of the first attempts by the Canadian government to begin to criminalize dissent against these extractive industries.

Another important manifestation of the interweaving of state and industrial powers that are a major theme to this thesis came in the altering of Canadian laws over the last decade. The conservative Canadian government had seemed to travel down the same path as the United States government has with the U.S. Patriot Acts, where community organizing and social movements have seen increasing police attention, federal monitoring and criminalization of constitutionally protected behavior by conservative forces in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. In fact, in Canada a highly controversial anti-terrorism bill was passed into law in the summer of 2015 which was widely panned by Canadian civil rights and law groups, like Amnesty International, as potentially targeting environmental and aboriginal groups who may criticize or organize to resist the extractive industries. Research that has

specifically examined the tar sands of Alberta and looks back to the long history of military incursion at the behest of resource extraction, beginning with the treaty-making processes in the Athabasca region in 1870, ties these recent efforts of the government to restrict the ability of Indigenous populations to assert their sovereign rights to the violent colonial legacy of the original settler populations (Preston, 2013). In this context, the criminalization and vilification of Indigenous populations seen today is nothing new and fits into the historical mold that state powers used in the past to justify violent and sometimes genocidal treatment of native communities.

Indigenous resistance to the plans and proposals of colonial state powers is nothing new and, in fact, has been evident since the beginning of settler colonial expansions. The recent surge in tribal organizing, here seen in opposition to fossil fuel megaprojects, fits into a long history of Indigenous assertions of tribal sovereignty and resilience in the face of violence and resource extraction (LaDuke, 2015). From these new movements, though, some trends that benefit the organizing of both strictly tribal resistances and of the formation and strengthening of tribal/non-tribal alliances have been researched (Davis, 2010).

Certainly the Idle No More movement and fossil fuel resistance in the Pacific Northwest fit the mold of other social movements that have benefited from the advent of social media and the ability to tell stories quickly and cast them widely via the internet and digital connectivity (Gerbaudo, 2012; Checker, 2016) but that is not the only thing fueling resurgent environmental movements and alliances. One trend we have seen is that the messaging coming from these

indigenous movements has harkened back to centuries of proper stewardship and responsibility-based land management, which has helped to encourage new collaboration with non-tribal groups who recognize a need to get back to baseline levels of environment health and ecosystem well-being. This has also aided the onset of tribal groups taking the lead in such alliances and movements, due to the authority they hold as long-standing protectors of the land. While such Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances, including those that have been Indigenous-led and framed with these Indigenous values and worldviews, have been studied, there is a lot of room for deepening this research, especially when it comes to these alliances confronting fossil fuel and other extractive industries.

The environmental justice movement has long argued for frontline communities, who understand such issues most, to take the lead in addressing environmental harm (Martinez-Alier et al, 2016), but unique political and cultural dynamics have often made it hard for Native Americans to be included in such movements or for their communities to be researched with an environmental justice lens (Vickery and Hunter, 2016). When it comes to resistance to fossil fuel projects, more and more we have seen a trend of native led movements and frontline communities being accepted as the most appropriate leaders of these efforts (Bardsley & Wiseman, 2015). Alongside this comes an acknowledging of the settler colonial histories and traumatic violence of neo-colonial behaviors of the state and industrial powers and the trend to prioritize this in the dialogue and discussion in these movements (Barker, 2015). Finally, it should be recognized that while tribal/non-tribal alliances have a long history in the United States and

other places, there seems to be a resurgence in such collaborations and a trend in good faith efforts of working to move past historical trauma to forge collaborative resistances to state and industrial powers whose aims put our local environments and are global climate at risk.

This research and this thesis examine an emerging front of social movement phenomenon at a critical time when these collaborations and alliances are vibrantly expressed and evolving to fit the changing climate of environmental awareness and engagement, global energy system developments and shifting fossil fuel megaproject plans and proposals for communities in the Pacific Northwest. While these alliances and relationships have historically been examined in other parts of the world where extractive industries have caused environmental or community harm, including the fossil fuel developments that geographers, Indigenous researchers and sociologists have been examining recently in Canada, these phenomena seem to not yet have been examined extensively as they could in the United States of Pacific Northwest.

The region is ripe with new and reemerging coalitions which seek to stop and slow down these fossil fuel transport and export plans, which makes this research important to conduct. Additionally, considering the emphasis on political economy lenses in the literature, there seems to be a need to fill a gap in the existing literature that documents social and community reactions to the extractive industries using postcolonial and decolonizing lenses.

Keeping in line with trends in critical and indigenous methodologies that seek to center the needs and desires of those who are researched (Brown and

Strega, 2005, Hay, 2010) and to co-create research with those who are its “subjects” (Cajete, 2008), a goal of the research is to hopefully instruct the future fostering of tribal/non-tribal alliances and to account for any missteps in these relationships as they currently exist in the fossil fuel transport and export opposition groups. It is an important and good thing, often, for these working relationships to exist but it is even more important that the colonial legacy of white supremacy and marginalized Indigenous populations be confronted and accounted for, so as to avoid damage or the perpetuation of paternalistic patterns between non-tribal organizations and tribes (Smith, 2012; Dowling 2010). For this reason, I tried to conduct myself in a way that was not harmful to participants and to operate from a center of respect and concern when it came to my primary data, results and discussion. The “Declaration of key questions about research ethics with Indigenous Communities” (IPSG, 2010) and “Discussion paper on research and Indigenous communities” (Grossman and Louis, 2009), both offered by the Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers, were also consulted and relied upon for doing decolonial research, as was “Some guidelines for working with Native communities” (Grossman, 2012).

### **3. Methodology.**

#### **Sampling and Scope.**

The primary methods used in this thesis were semi-structured qualitative interviews, supplemented by participant observation and attempts at obtaining a thick description of the ideas and phenomena investigated. The sample size was



seven individuals, all of whom were identified by name in this research. Informed by decolonizing methodologies that seek to give ownership and agency over ideas extracted from researched communities to those who are researched (Potts and Brown, 2005; Kovach, 2005), anonymity was not sought nor was it desired, as will be explained below in regards to the audio and video recordings of the interviews that are meant for a wider audience outside of academic circles. My intentions with my methods came out of a careful consideration of both the geographic scope of the Totem Pole Journeys and the breadth of actors and individuals who played a role in these alliances to make the journeys happen. I could have focused more broadly in several ways, whether to interview and include the “higher ups” from the eNGO’s and faith-based organizations or to include the Indigenous and non-indigenous members of this alliance who call other parts of the journey routes home. Many others have argued for concentrating on the grassroots, including in the faith-based movements (Malloy, 2010), I instead decided that it was important, for the scope of this thesis, to get as intimate of a view as possible into the individuals who were physically closest to the Cherry Point coal terminal proposal and were most personally connected to Lummi Nation and the Lummi STP Office. I wanted to know how these relationships unfolded at the grassroots level of actual organization and collective action, beneath the rhetoric and use of ideas like Indigenous sovereignty, treaty rights or the intersectionality of our environmental movements that I saw being put forth by the large eNGO’s during the People’s Climate March and since. Though many powerful Indigenous and non-indigenous allies of the Totem Pole

Journey are based in other communities, I also wanted to constrain my research close in proximity to the Cherry Point battle so that the relationships I was examining were those of individuals whose lives would be personally affected by the creation of the coal terminal at Xwe'chi'eXen.

I debated whether or not to augment my research with shorter telephone or skype interviews with collaborators of this campaign in other communities, or possibly even short answer and likert-scale questionnaires for a large sample size of collaborators, but I kept coming back to the idea that the story of these relationships in Whatcom County had not been told. My final decision came after the final determination from the Army Corps of Engineers and I felt that, to honor the hard work all of these locally-based Indigenous and non-indigenous allies who worked on the coal terminal and Totem Pole Journeys, it made the most sense to really focus in on the thoughts and perspectives of these local organizers.

With these intentions I used a snowball sampling technique starting with Dr. Kurt Russo of the Lummi STPO, who I worked under on the 2015 Totem Pole Journey. Very quickly, this led me to my seven interviewees, most of whom were familiar to me from the community. To get a targeted cross-section of the actors in this alliance, these seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews were done with three members of the Lummi STPO and the Totem Pole Journey team, two members of the local eNGO community and two members of the local faith-based community.

Of the three Lummi Nation voices, two were Lummi tribal members, master carver Jewell James of the STPO and media lead Freddy Lane, and one

was non-indigenous, Kurt Russo of the STPO. Dr. Russo has worked in Lummi Administration for over 30 years, usually alongside Jewell James. Matt Petryni, current manager of the Clean Energy office at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities and Matt Krogh, who formerly headed that office but is now a fossil fuels campaign director for environmental eNGO Stand, had both worked closely with Lummi allies for years on the anti-coal port campaign and the Totem Pole Journeys. The faith-based community, especially the Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship (BUF) also played a critical role in the anti-coal movement and in the Totem Pole Journeys and I interviewed Beth Brownfield and Deborah Cruz of their Native Connections group, both of whom have worked on Indigenous campaigns for decades. They were asked by the Lummi STP Office in particular to act often as liaisons between that office and the broader Whatcom community.

All of these interviews were conducted in locations that felt comfortable for the interviewees, whether it be their offices or their homes, and I used a flexible template of the same 30 questions and sub-questions to help guide the interview. Certain interviews wandered into enticing territory far from the main themes of my questions, which I allowed in order to get a deeper sense of the issues and what mattered most to my interviewees. Certain questions were relevant to all of the interviewees but the interviews were semi-structured and some questions were adapted and tailored for the individuals in particular.

This research is situated in a political ecological and critical geography framework, with a heavy focus on decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2012). This work follows the intentions of other researchers who seek to recognize the

long history of violence and exploitation of Indigenous populations on the part of settler colonialism and the historical trauma that is still carried by many native peoples (Saavedra and Nymark, 2008). Indigenous and non-indigenous researchers have argued for a decolonization of research methodologies to avoid perpetuating the same extractive and exploitative behaviors that decimated native communities over centuries of time (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). One of the many pillars of decolonized research is the need for placing a strong emphasis on the potential risk of the research being conducted and of making sure that the extraction of source data from Indigenous communities does not occur in the same one-sided, exploitative fashion that the genocidal behavior and resource extraction of the settler colonial populations manifested (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008).

It is important to remember that the public debate around the fossil fuel megaprojects that unites these alliances has, at points, been a contentious issue for communities trying to weigh the costs and benefits of these environmentally damaging but economically helpful energy projects. That debate has often centered around *how* damaging they might be and how *much* economic stimulus and job they might bring to communities. This has definitely been evident internally in Indigenous communities of the North Puget Sound who are in need of economic stimulus but also whose fish and water resources are already very environmentally vulnerable. It has also been evident externally across nations, as was mentioned in the Crow support for the same coal exports plans that Lummi nation opposes. This is a fertile area for future decolonial research but this research, though, is concerned with the Indigenous/non-indigenous relationships,

which have also been an historically sensitive place of concern. In the past it has often been hard for non-native community and environmental groups to work with Indigenous groups without perpetuating racist, paternalistic, neocolonial or extractive behaviors that undermine the safety, sovereignty and dignity of Native peoples (Coomes, Johnson and Howitt, 2012).

More so than the above risk, there are concerns about the usability of such research in alliance building and what audience might find the most meaning from such research. When we are discussing fossil fuels like coal or oil, we are talking about some of the largest corporate powers in the US. The intended relevance of this research for Indigenous and non-indigenous communities is discussed below but there is some concern that those who might want access to these interviews and knowledge about these participants are the very powers that be whose own aims would be most fulfilled by undermining the strength of local and collective resistance to these projects and in destabilizing this opposition (Strega, 2005; McCaslin and Breton, 2008). I do not want to endanger any individuals or put at risk any important bonds, relationships or connections that have been made internally for the Lummi allies or across the Indigenous/non-indigenous divides (Kindon, 2010). I made sure to reaffirm throughout the interviews that those interviewed knew it was okay to not answer questions if they were uncomfortable and that, if after the fact, they wanted me to not use things they said, I would honor that. As for confidentiality, these interviews were videotaped and audio recorded explicitly for public dissemination. At each step and following critical research methodologies, the intentions were to make sure that this research was

most powerful and available to those whose lives are most affected by the relationships explored and touched by the proposed fossil fuel megaproject (DeLyser and Pawson, 2010).

Informed by those frameworks, several aspects of this research were constructed to avoid certain pitfalls those theories critique. My first and primary concern was for the safety and comfort of those I interviewed and that these individuals fully understood the research project and where their knowledge contributions and my analysis would wind up. These individuals, Indigenous and non-indigenous alike, were not unfamiliar themselves with the criticism that, too often, scientists and researchers come to their communities and extract knowledge only for that knowledge to wind up siloed in the ivory tower of academia, having no productive bearing on the communities it came from. There seemed to be some consensus that it made a lot of sense for the interviews themselves to be shared publicly with a broader audience.

For this reason, I decided to use my journalism skills with this project and to work to create both audio podcasts and an online video series of these interviews, both as intimate free-form archives and as edited pieces with some narration and analysis. That way, the interviews and unaltered information and ideas the individuals provided will be available for a wider audience outside the confines of this thesis writing and the limited circles of academic discourse. The interviews were thus recorded with an audio device, the Zoom H4N digital recorder, and with a Canon digital video camera. Outside of using some portions of the interviews to promote the upcoming 2016 Totem Pole Journey, the timeline

for both these media series to go public has been set for Autumn 2016 to Winter 2017. These proposals were received well by the seven individuals and all consented to being audio and video recorded.

### **Positionality, Interview Participants and Participant Observation.**

The growing body of work on decolonizing methodologies in the realms of Indigenous studies, political ecology and critical geography offer much instruction for the qualitative researcher, some of which was discussed above. These authors and scientists seek to explore the power dynamics beneath the “researcher/researched” relationship and aim to expose where such relationships seem to perpetuate exploitative, extractive and colonial behaviors. With such research, self-reflexivity and a critical lens needs to be taken to the researcher’s own positionality, all with the aims of minimizing harm and maximizing the tangible benefits for communities who are researched. This research seeks an anti-oppressive positionality and seeks social justice and resistance both in process and in outcome, a key element to anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005).

Part of that “in process” social justice component is revealed in my own prior participation with the subject matter of this thesis, including past internships, smaller research projects and volunteer or stipended work with many of the individuals interviewed here. My connection to these individuals is important to share, for the purpose of this research, and serves as a good moment to introduce each of them more fully, as well. It is fair to say that my personal participation in the social and environmental work of these individuals prior to my thesis was

probably a pivotal factor in me gaining intimate access to their ideas and perspectives in the formal interview settings.

I spent several months of the summer prior to conducting this research as an intern for the Clean Energy Office of RE Sources For Sustainable Communities. One of my interviewees, Matt Petryni, was my main supervisor and head of the small office while another, Matt Krogh, had the same position prior to Mr. Petryni. These two individuals played very meaningful roles in connecting both the Totem Pole Journey and also Lummi resistance to the coal port to the broader Bellingham community. Those relationships and connections are central to this research question and analysis. Mr. Krogh is now the Extreme Oil Campaign Director for the Bellingham office of Stand, the multinational eNGO formally known as Forest Ethics, and prior to our interview, I was least familiar with his work and role in the Totem Pole Journeys.

It was during my internship at RE Sources that I expressed an interest to Mr. Petryni in volunteering my journalistic services as a traveling media ally for the 2015 Totem Pole Journey. Mr. Petryni was working closely with the STP Office to promote and raise money for the Totem Pole Journey and offered my services up which were accepted after a one on one interview with Dr. Russo and master carver Jewell James. As Dr. Russo mentioned to me in his interview for my thesis, he often plays the role of “sniffing out the white folks” for the Lummi Administration and, in this case, for the Totem Pole Journey and STP Office. The rapport seemed great at the meeting but I also think that my role as an environmental activist and organizer during the Shell No! mobilizations in the



Puget Sound (Knoblauch, 2015) played a role in their decision to bring me on board.

To add to the transparency of this research, it should be noted that, in May and June of 2015 when Royal Dutch Shell had several vessels for its Arctic Drilling Fleet harbored in the Puget Sound, I was one of thousands of regional activists who protested Arctic drilling and Shell Oil readying its vessels for an Arctic drilling mission in our communities. I spent 22 hours locked down and hanging from the exposed anchor chain of the Arctic Challenger ship in Bellingham Bay, along with an environmentalist friend of mine, as we tried to stop the vessel from leaving our port for the Arctic. I was also one of two dozen of activists who were arrested by the Coast Guard for kayaking in front of the Polar Pioneer drilling vessel when it left Seattle for the Arctic drilling mission. Though neither of those two events related directly to my journalism skills, my perception at the time was that those experiences influenced Dr. Russo's recommendation that I come along the Totem Pole Journey. Both Dr. Russo and master carver Jewell James speak often of the need for organizational strategies that go beyond the normal tactics of "lawyering and lobbying" and entail self-sacrifice and putting one's body on the line for the issues in creative and unusual ways.

Dr. Kurt Russo is non-indigenous but has worked with Lummi Nation for over 30 years in various capacities to, as he puts it, "circulate in the intersection of treaty rights, environmental protection and tribal inherent rights." He currently co-leads the Lummi Nation Sovereignty and Treaty Protection office, alongside

Master Carver Jewell James, in roles that were resuscitated several years ago in order to formulate an effective path for a Lummi Nation rejection of the coal terminal at Cherry Point (Xwe'chi'eXen). Jewell Praying Wolf James is an enrolled Lummi tribal member and heads up the STP Office as well as the House of Tears Carvers, where him and his brothers have been master carvers for decades, working to promote Lummi culture and Lummi ways on both sides of the reservation borders. He has served in Tribal leadership in many positions over the years and has traveled the world many times as a representative of Lummi Nation and interests, often alongside Dr. Russo, advocating for Indigenous rights and sovereignty, as well as environmental causes.

My connection to Freddy Lane, who is the head of the media team for the Lummi Totem Pole Journey, comes through his recruitment by his cousin Candice Wilson to co-host an all-Lummi voices and issues radio show on the radio station I was the General Manager for during all of 2015. We are friends and allies outside of the Totem Pole Journey, and our relationship is a casual one which is probably why, with both of our busy schedules, our interview together took the longest to arrange and was the most difficult to conduct. For many years now Mr. Lane has played a significant role working almost as an unofficial ambassador for Lummi Nation and Lummi interests when it comes to connecting non-indigenous organizations, including faith-based, environmental and media outlets, to issues Lummi Nation is working on. He also is an ardent champion of the cultural revival of the Lummi heritage and uses his media skills to foster identities for Lummi and other Coast Salish peoples.

Beth Brownfield and Deborah Cruz help lead the Native Connections group for the Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship, a Unitarian Universalist congregation. They both have worked for decades in collaboration with Native organizations and Tribal governments on various issues and in various parts of the country. Their prior relationships with Dr. Russo and master carver Jewell James, of the STP Office, led them to being recruited to play a meaningful role communicating the desires and intentions of the Lummi Nation to the regional faith and environmental communities in regards to both the coal terminal at Cherry Point and the Totem Pole Journeys.

As mentioned, I wrestled with the options I had to interview other key players in this alliance, many of whom either lived in other places or worked in other, non-local environmental and faith-based groups. Whether it be through conducting further semi-structured interviews or possibly even short likert-scale surveys and questionnaires, there is certainly much more to be explored in these relationships and in what they mean for better understanding how these Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances operate that this research did choose to incorporate. For example, as will be mentioned further along, the role of mid-level managers of these non-indigenous organizations to play powerful roles in leveraging meaningful resources and support in these alliances cannot be underestimated and deserves further exploration. For the purpose of this examination, though, only the role of local, mid-level organizers has been investigated.

### **Historical (in)accuracy.**

It may be important to make a quick note about historical accuracy. I am not a historian and this is, very intentionally, not a historical analysis. While I was conducting these interviews it was evident that not everyone remembered the exact time, date or place of certain shared events the same way. For many of the moments the individuals considered pivotal, though, a shared, composite picture emerged nonetheless that pulled together the meaningfulness of particular experiences, regardless of precise details like date and time. Enough of a concrete picture of crucial moments and occasion resulted from the combined memories and narratives of these individuals that it became clear to me that to interject truthfulness about dates or times, or sometimes even places, would do more to detract or cloud the depth of meaning of what was being shared than to further elucidate the important themes and connections that came from these seven interviews. For this reason, the narrative that is discussed here regarding the timeline or sequence of certain events will include much of what was collectively remembered and as much as is needed to paint as complete of a story that serves the purpose of exploring the research question and major themes of this data.

### **4. Results.**

Several dominant themes and sub-themes emerged from this series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews that will be explored here. It is important to keep in mind the context for the interviews, though, as they all came in May 2016, in the first several weeks after the Army Corps of Engineers made their final determination to deny GPT the federal permit they needed to build the coal

terminal at Xwe'chi'eXen. This landmark decision asserted that the massive fossil fuel megaproject would impact the treaty-protected fishing rights and ancestral lands of Lummi Nation and put a stop to the coal terminal plans, as currently devised. It was something that was being celebrated by Indigenous communities, environmental organizations and the faith-based groups that had rallied around this cause and by all seven of the individuals I interviewed. I discussed with them my hesitancy to do the interviews at this time, considering they might be wearing "rose-colored glasses" at the moment, but all of the individuals understood my concern and agreed to look frankly and critically at the collaborations they had forged. Everyone was also very keen on discussing the next steps for this alliance and how to ensure that this collective power survived this win at Xwe'chi'eXen.

Regardless of their assurances, it is important to read these results while keeping in mind the major win all of these individuals had just experienced. It is also important to keep in mind that each of these people come from distinct organizational backgrounds and cultures, different theories of change and with different motivations or goals for entering into these alliances. This alliance, as mentioned, was one that brought together local and national faith-based organizations, as well as, local and national ENGO's with the Lummi STPO. Jewell James and Kurt Russo head up that STPO government office for the Lummi Nation, which is far different from the church group that Beth Brownfield and Deb Cruz lead at the Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship, or the Clean Energy office that Matt Petryni and Matt Krogh managed, which was internal to the environmental non-profit organization RE Sources for Sustainable Communities.

Freddy Lane and Jewell James are the only two Lummi tribal members interviewed for this thesis and these themes and results were assembled around a conceptual centering of these Lummi perspectives.

### **The Intermediators/Renegades.**

One of the major themes that arose from these interviews was the powerful role of the intermediators or, as Matt Krogh labeled this archetype when referring to Russo and James, the “renegades.” The idea was almost universally expressed that alliances like this do not succeed without passionate, selfless and well-positioned individuals who work as “middle-persons” and liaisons, not just with the “higher-ups” in their own institutions or the day to day members, but also horizontally across the organizations of the alliance. These individuals act as vital nodes that transmit the intentions, values and needs of various actors in the alliance and help to mend differences, moving the collective will towards greater action and a growing shared identity and manifestation.

These individuals were often seen to be understaffed and underpaid, doing the work “not for a career but for a calling” and were willing to sacrificing their own needs and positions in order to champion the goals of the alliance. They often act alone, or in small numbers, and suffer with a lack of the necessary resources to do their job or play their part best. They make do, though, and quietly assume a role as transformative communicators who are constantly negotiating and leveraging their position, the position of their day to day members, their leaders position and, horizontally, the positions of those collaborators they are trying to form and nurture a strong alliance with.

These intermediators are not fully independent, though, and constantly struggle to sway their supervisors and the day to day members of their own organizations. In the case of this alliance, both Matt Krogh and Matt Petryni from the eNGO sector and Beth Brownfield and Deb Cruz from BUF brought up the constantly struggle to center Lummi treaty rights, the acknowledgment of historical trauma and the ongoing presence of settler colonialism within their own organizations. Because of this, these renegades are often playing the role of the educator, as well. Each of these individuals called for allocating time and resources to equip their colleagues and their leaders with the skills to understand sovereignty, treaties and Tribal law, to navigate the cultural protocols of Lummi Nation and to institutionalize or, as Petryni put it, “incorporate into the organizational culture” these values and new knowledges. Recognizing that RE Sources has worked with Lummi Nation in limited fashion in the past, he reflects

“I mean, our water quality programs and water quality program staff have thought a lot about it in the past and written about it and usually supported calls by the Lummi Nation on specific policy requests of the governments. Um, but I don't think it has been internalized in the way it has in the coal fight, where we have board members having to talk about and think about questions like colonialism and we have staff that are having to understand the history of the treaty and learn about all of the promises that have been broken over the years since the treaty was signed. That conversation is something that we talk a lot more about now and the necessity of it is something that I think is really becoming understood. Not just on a personal moral level... but also on the level of the mission of our organization.”

Krogh, who held Petryni's position when the coal fight was just ratcheting up, acknowledges that getting the rank and file of the organization to

acknowledge the call for Lummi solidarity also was “a pretty difficult thing to do.” Brownfield and Cruz sacrificed a lot of time at BUF going through the UU church protocol of passing a statement of support for Lummi at their congregation. Though in the end it paid off and BUF was the first religious organization to go public with such a statement, it took a lot of workshops and educating their members to get them to understand the need. Both struggled to work against a tendency for the church, like most churches Brownfield felt, to take “political stands.” Though their Native Connections group focuses a lot on connecting with Lummi and other tribes via art, music and culture and though Brownfield acknowledges that this group was “not really interested in activism,” she still sees a power in bringing these communities together to fostering solidarity with one another.

“So that our cultures are not separate, our communities are not separate, so that we know each other. And we're neighbors, so if we're neighbors than there is a concern about their well-being, our well-being, how we work together to make that support happen and, and what comes from our being comfortable with each other.”

The history there for Brownfield and Cruz is that the Lummi STP Office approached the two and, once Lummi Nation had come out in strong, unified opposition to the coal terminal, had asked them to help get the local environmental and faith-based community on board and on record as supporting Lummi. Not only did Brownfield and Cruz help introduce the struggle to dozens of local and regional faith and environmental organizations, they sacrificed much to get their congregation to come out and declare their opposition and helped



usher in a resolution of opposition to the coal terminal that was passed at the national Universalist Unitarian convention. Russo and the STP Office recognize and honor the sacrifices that everyone, themselves included, is making in this alliance. Russo shared,

“You know, nobody here makes much money. Certainly the NGO's don't make much money. The faith-based community makes almost none. And, we were wondering together, ‘so, our average pay here is what? \$15 an hour? \$16?’ ...It is not just as cliché as, ‘it is not about the money.’ Um, I believe people in those corporations have careers and I believe people that we are talking about have callings.”

It was Russo and James who called for Cruz and Brownfield to play a strong intermediary and a liaison role between their STP Office, which is a government office with a much larger agenda than just this project, and the community members and groups that wanted to help their anti-coal campaign.

Beth recalls that

“there is a lot of people that want a really close intimate relationship with the leaders or the activists with Lummi Nation, but it is very trying for them to have so many people wanting phone calls or emails answered or meetings set up. And so it has worked to have liaisons and people like myself or Deb Cruz who have that contact for people to go through us rather than go through them. I mean, they are running a nation and it's not just the coal terminal they are working on.”

This intermediary role was seen as vital throughout the interviews and with many of the individuals seeing themselves as being in such positions.

Whether it was Matt Petryni making a case for the members of Power Past Coal

coalition and his supervisors to support the journey, or Matt Krogh confronting a massive rejection on the part of the large, national eNGO's to buy in early on to the Totem Pole Journey, where he then retailoring his asks towards mid-level allies he knew he could trust, or the STP Office operating constantly as a liaison between these settler ally organizations and the demands and desires of the Lummi Indian Business Council, each of these individuals worked tirelessly to massage and nurse these relationships and to bridge the communication gaps in a way that strengthened the alliance and the collective voice of their efforts.

In particular, the role of the STP Office was considered vital in creating a channel through which Lummi Nation, a sovereign government, could communicate, at a less than government to government level with the small eNGO's and faith-based community, without compromising the integrity of the Lummi institutions. Krogh even goes so far as to assert that "without that channel, this independent nation construct I think would have made it nearly impossible to collaborate in a meaningful way." It may seem somewhat obvious to point out, but the fact that these organizations were also all local played a role in these relationships. There was history of working together in many cases and an ability to know each other through the good faith work of each organization in the community that helped these intermediators trust one another and created the space for them to work together.

These individuals, whose efforts were underfunded, understaffed and underpaid, who were "given peanuts to fight billionaires" as James put it, seemed to also be constantly struggling to find enough time and money to make this

alliance work. The way Russo sees it, “We got lucky... These are really incredible people.” He was keen on praising the mid-level and intermediary renegades they worked with, like later in the interview when he said “They’ve got it. I don’t know what they’ve got but they’ve got it, right? In 38 years I have never met this many at once. They are just aligned.” Elsewhere, Russo continues on about the organizational collaboration,

“I think there is a tectonic shift going on in this certain cohort of leadership in the environmental community and they get it. I don't know if their bosses get it. But they get it. The mid-level folk we work with, the people in Portland not in DC. I don't know about the upper ups. I have not been around them, but I can tell you one thing, these women, they are mostly women, they understand that, unless we work together, we will all die separately.”

Regardless of the skills that Russo appreciated, there seemed to be a recognition that, despite working in completely different organizations, everyone was in the same, difficult boat of trying to persuade the higher-ups in their organizations and inspire their rank and file to support and value this alliance. They also had to face the challenges of organizations that typically have high employee turnover rates which makes the creation of institutional memory that can be passed down to successive generations of leaders and rank and file members all the more difficult.

Krogh acknowledged that, from his perspective and experiences, there is still a long way to go. For example, in the hesitancy to just follow the Lummi lead on what should happen at Cherry Point were the eNGO’s to work to help give Lummi ownership over the land, he noticed settler attitudes that were culturally

condescending and perspectives engrained with “cultural superiority” over worries about whether Lummi Nation might just make their own large-scale, environmentally damaging project at the site. This was astonishingly offensive to Krogh, though the environmental concern itself resonated somewhat. Petryni had to confront allies in the Power Past Coal Coalition (PPCC) who were skeptical of the power of the journeys and worried there were no measurable deliverables or ways to assess the impact that they were having on creating awareness or affecting regulatory decisions. Both of these two seemed to think that if these values were institutionalized and became part of the regular organization memory and lexicon, it would make roles like theirs much easier in the future.

### **Existential Forces.**

When it came to what made this alliance function, there was a significant amount of talk about developments and forces bearing down on the collaboration that were partially or fully external to the relationships and connections being made. Probably the largest of these was the dual existential threat of not only global climate change but also of the powerful hold and harmful effects the fossil fuel companies had on communities at the frontlines of these industries. This provided a unique form of motivation to sometimes compromise, or let go, of personal or organization priorities in order to ensure the alliance progressed effectively. Other external impacts to the alliance included what many considered to be the changing demographics of the traditional environmental and other non-indigenous social movements. Throughout the interviews, external positive developments in social and environmental movements seem to play a role in

pulling people together in this alliance as well as the specter of climate change and powerful industries that forced these allies to put differences aside in order to work for a common cause and shared purpose.

Industry often plays the role of the “bad guy” in environmental organizing but a perfect storm of mistakes, violations of law and trust, corruption and lies that unfold over several years made it easy for all members of this local alliance to villainize the GPT project and its managers. Everyone saw this company as very corrupt, whether it be from bribes it handed out, the renegeing on legal settlements, the lying about the size of the terminal project or the amount of economic stimulus it would bring and, perhaps most egregious, the unpermitted destruction of several acres of land at Xwe’chi’eXen, which destroyed and comprised this ancient burial ground and oldest archeological site in the state. That act alone worked to cauterize much of the local community together in opposition to the coal terminal proposal. Russo, who has been working with Lummi Nation for over 30 years, considered these to be extremely “bad actors,” with the “mean factor” twice as high in this struggle as any other he has worked on. This is an industry that also went after both Russo and Krogh personally, trying to drag them in to court, subpoena them and to sully their reputations.

What this also exposed was just how much power and influence the fossil fuel industry has, over the regulatory processes and elected officials, both locally and beyond. When environmental damage from industrial projects becomes simply a matter of how much damage is permissible to the state, it is clear

“system is broken,” as Matt Krogh and others put it. Petryni recognized this in that the government was

“getting pressure from the fossil fuel industry all the time to go the wrong way on all of these questions. And unless we're their participating, holding our elected officials accountable, holding our regulators accountable, resisting that power structure that exists already, uh, I don't think that (our goals) will be possible. I think that the fossil fuel industry just gets its way. That is the default mode of existence.”

Especially recognizing, like Brownfield does, that industry is “licking its chops” and “never going to give up,” this shared sentiment on the existential threat of industry was enough for these individuals, and the organizations they were a part of, to put aside differences between settler and Indigenous identities and begin to work together in earnest to stop these forces. According to Krogh, past work with Lummi Nation had centered around small collaborations regarding water quality but there had been no closer alliance work “in terms of anything to do with strategy, values clarification, coalition building, uh, working together building relationships. All of those things really came about because of the coal terminal.”

When it comes to aligning the settler community in support of Lummi Nation, Petryni notes that this sort of coming together and intersectionality of local progressive movements around this issue may also be something of a default for communities as small as Bellingham, where “for any elements of the progressive movement to achieve victory in Whatcom County, we have to be working together. There is not enough people involved in the progressive

movement in Whatcom County to carve ourselves up.” Each of these factors influenced how closely these groups would wind up aligned.

Climate change and climate chaos remained the largest existential threat mentioned in these interviews, though. From James suggesting we needed a WWII-style national mobilization to transform our energy systems and confront the crisis, to others like Krogh who are simply stumped that we would even consider expanding our fossil fuel infrastructure, everyone connected the dots and realized the ramifications for their grandchildren and future generations if they did not work in collaboration to put a stop to the Cherry Point proposal and help support the Totem Pole Journey. This may have, again, allowed for rough points to be smoothed over or past disagreements to be put aside, all for the sake of rising to meet the challenge of stakes that were high enough to threaten both life on the planet and the health of ecosystems that support these communities.

Another subtheme that arose was how many of those who were interviewed spoke of the connectivity of all life. There seemed to be what was a fresh, yet deep, understanding that the health of our own communities is tied to the health of others, just like the health of certain species in an ecosystem depend upon the well-being of others. Brownfield spoke to this, in regards to how the journey makes these connections from across the miles:

“You know, we are all centered on where we live, where our problems are but when you can see, when you can connect the dots and see, you know, these people are struggling with their waterway and their salmon or these people are struggling with the effects of fracking on their drinking water because they are surrounded by trucks and, and sort... you begin to realize that we are all

connected. This coal, all this coal that is mined in the Powder River Basin effects all of us. The pipelines that are breaking and spitting and poisoning waterways. You know, if those pipelines, if they came through up north they could potentially ruin an entire aquifer. And so we do feel like we are connected, like what happens in one place affects everything else.”

As both Cruz and Brownfield noted in their interviews, unlike many other faith communities, there is a strong connection to nature and the interconnectedness of all beings that is present in their values and principles in the UU church. Cruz often spoke of the power of the Totem Pole Journey to help settlers reconnect with nature and foster their spiritual connections to other life and our ecosystems. This interconnectedness was a theme in other interviews, too, and especially in regards to the intersectionality not just of people but of people-powered movements that is discussed later.

### **The Significance of the Totem Pole Journey.**

Though some of what is discussed in this section overlaps with others, it was important in many of the interviews for the individuals to speak of the Totem Pole Journey as powerful and distinct on its own. The way master carver Jewell James constructed the journey, applying his decades of experience advocating and fighting for Indigenous rights and sovereignty, is something that warrants being considered in its own light, separate from the influence of what the settler allies bring to the campaign. That so many of the individuals here would set aside so much of their own time and organizationing work, to help support and promote the Totem Pole Journeys says a lot, as did their interviews, about their belief in the power of the totems James carves, the themes attached to each trip and stop,



and the ability of it all to speak to local communities and bring them together and to inspire those who see it to action.

The journey shines a light that exposes, through abundant media coverage of this traveling spectacle, the industries and regulatory bodies that are causing and allowing too much ecological damage and human harm to communities on the frontlines of fossil fuel infrastructure projects. On its own, through the words and symbols used by James, it inspires a tremendous amount of personal agency for those who partake in the blessing ceremonies. It is also considered an expression of direct action, as these individuals see it, and breaks out of many dominant paradigms of how social change happens, connecting communities and creative space to strengthening ally relationships along the way.

Though the first couple of journeys were related to the tragedy of 9/11, the first totem that the House of Tears Carvers were commissioned to make by settler communities was in memorial for the explosion of a gasoline pipeline in Bellingham that killed three youth. When the focus of the totems returned to fossil fuel concerns a few years ago, James realized that there were many allies of the fight against the Cherry Point coal terminal and there needed to be a way to connect them and inspire them to action. As James says,

“We decided to look for alliance building activities and that is how the Totem Pole Journey developed as an idea. Because we know that, when it comes to Natives, we either have to blockade something, we have to walk around raising our fist in protest, we have to raise our voice and scream out. You know, we have to do something that looks like the ‘rampaging Native’ or nobody pays attention... You know, so all of the sudden the media is there. So,

the totem pole became a logical step to do it. Cause, a lot of people would gather, a lot of people would do prayer, a lot of people would give speeches and exchange names, numbers and form alliances. And, so that is how the Totem Pole Journeys began.”

Beth Brownfield agrees that the traveling nature of the journey, as it visits frontline communities in solidarity with their struggles and calls people to action, is a big reason why the journeys are a success. She sees this as part of a larger climate justice movement, where “people are stepping up, stepping out, taking risks and speaking out, because it is intolerable to let other people make decisions that are detrimental to the entire earth and existence.”

The two both also highlight that element of solidarity, where communities that may be isolated in rural areas or without many resources of their own, welcome the Indigenous journey. James speaks of the journey that gifted a totem to the Beaver Lake Cree, where he said “we hear you, we see you and we are with you,” and that the community there felt more empowered and felt that maybe their cause wasn’t lost. This is a community that is at the gateway to the Tar sands, ecologically devastated by that industry, and James recalls that they took a stronger stand against the Tar sands after the visit. Similarly, the Northern Cheyenne, whose leadership seemed torn on the proposal for a massive coal transport project that would cut through their traditional territory, came out strongly opposed to the Tongue River railroad project after the 2015 journey visited their territory and gifted them a totem. James does not at all take credit for the evolving of these frontline positions, but he thinks that the Indigenous solidarity does make a difference in letting these communities know that others

are watching and bearing witness to their struggles. As Brownfield put it, the totem poles work in “bringing acknowledgment to those communities in recognizing what they are facing. People are thankful that someone knows what is happening to them.”

As these totem pole events work to broaden connections and help to build alliances, their primary goal according to James, the ceremonies and blessings at the stops along the route are also a uniquely artistic and spiritual endeavor. Kurt Russo sees in these journeys a magnificent piece of art that “has a way of waking up the spirit and the courage of the calling.” He brought up the power of the ceremonies, where the congregation all put their hands on the totem, in prayer or with intention, and remembers how these blessings “literally do something that you just have to be there to understand.”

Russo, like others, recognizes that these fossil fuel industries thrive when people are divided. One of the things that all of these individuals brought up is the power of the journeys to bring people together. Jewell considers the totem itself as just something to focus on during the blessings and ceremonies. He says,

“they gather because of the totem pole but the real value is in the alliance that is formed and in the power they share together. That’s where the real power is. It’s not in the totem pole, it’s in the people. So, when you have a reason to pull them in like that, when they have a cause to respond to, then it helps to build that up.”

Russo sees a universality and diversity in these events that he concludes is extremely unsettling and unnerving for industries who are trying to keep the people divided and without collective power.

“I think one of the powerful influences of the Totem Pole Journey and the message that it carries is... ‘Look! There is the Natives, there is the Christians, the environmentalists, civic leaders... and they are all saying the same thing!’ That’s important not just for fossil fuels and not just because it is a big blow to our opponents who would love to see us, like, *very* divided, but it is also the critical calculus for addressing climate change.”

All of this is worth bringing up here because the power of the Totem Pole Journey is one of the main reasons the individuals interviewed here are drawn to advocate for it and to try and get their organizations to prioritize support for the journey. James doesn’t really know anybody else that proposes these types of campaigns and acknowledges that getting such non-indigenous support is a bit of a tough sell, since “it’s not something they would normally do.” That buy in is crucial, not only for the financial and organizational support reasons, but also so those who do support the campaign understand, as James says, that “it is their project, too. We are all working together, we are all invested in this.”

Allies like Petryni at RE Sources, who has had to make that tough sell to his own people, sees a remarkable power in the journeys. Much of that comes down to working outside of the normal frameworks his job finds himself stuck in, whether it be in the settler colonial, capitalist economy where his non-profit struggles to survive, or in the tedious work of rallying support to appeal to state environmental regulatory authorities to protect communities and ecosystems better.

“The interesting thing about the work that I do is that we do a lot of bullshit regulatory process, like, we’ll be rallying hundreds of people to comment on the utilities and, transportation commission

proceeding on whatever. And a lot of that work feels very, it's challenging, and it also feels like you are in their box. You know, we're operating under the colonial capitalist system and, you know, there is a lot of talk about how NGO's are a part of that system. And, it's basically true, I think. You know, I am even working for an NGO and having serious reservations about those systems and trying to overcome them. Totem Pole Journey is one of the few things that we get to work on where I feel like we can break out of that box and we can build something that is bigger than that or be able to take that on and be an alternative to that. And it's a much, it's a decolonial framework, it's lead by tribes it's about building relationships between tribes but it is also about building relationships between tribes and the rest of the settler community that is here.

It is for reasons like these that Petryni has worked to carve out space at his job to show support for the Totem Pole Journey, both at RE Sources and with the Power Past Coal Coalition. He believes the journey, the events and blessing, forces his own allies in the eNGO sector to pause and to listen to another way of looking at these shared environmental challenges. That is powerful, he feels, and though he agrees with some of the internal criticism he hears about it being hard to measure the influence of the journeys and hard to connect the dots directly to policy changes or traditional campaign deliverables, he admits

“there is just tremendous amounts of power behind it. When you have that many people coming together, when you have... There is this democracy element, too. Which is that it helps us put pressure on the public agencies, the governments that we are expecting to act in a more responsible way. It also is getting the message out to the public in a way that is different and they can relate to. Where if we are trying to tell them about some obscure regulatory process, you're not gonna listen to that if you're an average person. But if you are talking to them about this history and the sort of the *moral*

case that the Totem Pole Journey really makes, I think a lot more people can relate to that.”

Matt Krogh also understands the lure of the journey and was there as an ally when the first fossil fuel-focused journey was being planned. For him

“And when you are talking about the Totem Pole Journey you are talking about a series of essentially events, with press in advance, announcing that people who have a solid ethical approach to life are coming, they are going to perform a ceremony that is trying to unify people, not divide people. They are providing, essentially a spiritual connection to some sort of healing. And, again no matter what side you are on it is probably a good idea, or feels like it is a good idea, right? So, I do think that people are missing something (in their lives) and real principle-voiced leadership, derived from solid ethics and a spiritual approach is something that people, when they understand what is happening will gravitate more and more to.”

Understanding the design and intentions of the Totem Pole Journeys is invaluable to really understanding what has made this alliance work, and also, what has brought stress or discord to this Indigenous/non-indigenous alliance. For every Matt Petryni or Beth Brownfield or Matt Krogh, who articulate the power of the journey well, there are many skeptical people in their organizations who these intermediators have had to convince that it was worth supporting with time, resources and organizational capital. Referring to these non-indigenous allies, Russo said at one point that “he ain’t never ran into this caliber of people” in his 30 plus years and it may very well be that the alliance that supports the Lummi Totem Pole Journey may not have survived as easily if it weren’t for the luck, as he sees, it of what Russo brought “these incredible people” to support Lummi.

## **Unassailability and synergism.**

All of those interviewed considered that there was something very powerful and synergistic when it came to the various forces, the eNGO, faith-based and Indigenous, that were aligned in this collaboration. That assembly itself was a very intentional creation on the part of Jewell James and Kurt Russo and came out of their offices prior battles with the IRS in the 1980's. These individuals feel that this alliance is able to operate with a familiar and commanding moral authority, born out of spirituality and Indigenous values and environmental stewardship, that the fossil fuel industry and their plans just simply cannot respond to or counter. Add to this the creative artfulness of the Totem Pole Journeys and it is clear how this collaboration treads very far from traditional channels of influencing policy or regulatory outcomes. No one interviewed demeaned the role of lawyers, lobbyists, traditional public relations campaigns and other established forms of influencing the federal and state government but everyone championed the formidable way that this alliance is able to leverage public support and Indigenous rights to sway elected leaders, regulators and industry itself on the matter of fossil fuel infrastructure projects.

Part of what individuals felt makes this alliance so effective is the groundswell of broad and diverse support it has created with organizational leadership coming from the faith-community, the environmental community and Lummi Nation. These allies were seen even to need each other in order to succeed. Those interviewed seemed to notice a synergistic effect when their values and strategies align in this coalition. For Elder James and the STP office,

they learned from their battles with the IRS in the 1980's that "they can't do these things alone," and that a coalition of religious, environmental and Indigenous leaders creates a very effective voice that can go along way to holding the government accountable and pressure for elected leaders and industry to listen. Aligning these constituencies together allows for a broad, diverse coalition to leverage that pressure on the decision-making bodies. Elder James shared

"We recognized that, first of all, we need to make damn sure that the Army Corps of Engineers *knows* that the public is watching them, okay? And we have to make sure that the politicians *know* that the public is watching them. You know, this is a representative government and the power of popular sovereignty is, 'I put you in office and I can take you out.' And that doesn't happen unless the voters are informed. We have to depend not just on their goodwill but on their intelligence to make the right choice. So, these campaigns are important in that light. I think the Army Corp was aware that *a lot* of people are paying attention to how you are treating Lummis treaty rights."

For people like Petryni, who often have to deal with colleagues who are unable to sometimes see the worth of the Totem Pole Journey and how it connects to regulatory goals or policy changes, this leverage point of public pressure is key. Petryni also sees that the alliance creates a separate front, one that breaks free from the confines of regulatory processes, using a decolonial framework and takes on and challenges the legitimacy of the political, industrial and regulatory processes. Answering the skeptics, Petryni recalls

"We had to have a conversation that was like 'without this movement, without this sort of level of cross-sectional awareness, we are not going to have regulatory decisions that we like.' We're not going to have the political power that we need to convince state



policy makers and federal policy makers that saying no to fossil fuel projects is the right approach. To resist the fossil fuel industry we need not only broad base of power but also a diverse base of power. So, everybody got that eventually...”

While Dr. Russo and Elder James agree with others in Lummi Administration that “lawyers and lobbyists” play a very important and central role, the STP Office has had to advocate to their own supervisors for this “outside the box” strategy. The way Dr. Russo sees it, the broad, populous coalition they worked so hard to forge played a critical role.

“Naive cynicism says that it is all up to the lawyers and the lobbyists and the boys with the money. And that is not what happened here. In order to get it to the place where the lawyers can do, what I will call, pardon me, the ‘kill shot’ we positioned it, so that they could get dead aim. It couldn't have happened without all of those thousands of people in those organizations. The Lummi's, the Yakima's, the other tribes... when those voices joined together, we pushed them off. There are all kinds of ways that our opponents are trying to finagle their way in but they just couldnt get in, right? They were foiled. And then the moment came when our legal team put together an airtight case and, um, the rest is history... In every case, lobbyists and lawyers are necessary but not sufficient for victory. You got to position your lobbyists. You got to position your lawyers. And use them selectively. And usually once.”

Very clearly, all of the individuals interviewed for this research understood the worthiness of the coalition they were fostering and the broad perspective and values they brought to the journeys. It was not just the depth of support these aligned consistencies brought to the cause, though it was very important that each of these groups had their own member bases of thousands and email lists, social

media presence, etc. It was also important that there was a cross-section of values and that industry and regulators were unable to.

For example, the STP office recognized the power of the faith-based support, with Russo going so far as to suggest its indispensability to the alliance. He says, “one of the reasons they can't pick apart the tribes from the NGO's is the faith-based is there. They are like the glue, you know? They are like the glue.” That several of the Universalist Unitarian principles, of the interconnectedness of life and the need to protect nature, align with Lummi values was seen as important. It allowed the journey and alliance to speak with a higher moral authority, one based in the sacredness of all life and, with the environmental organizations, too, in the need to protect and sustain our ecosystems from degradation or harm.

That Xwe'chi'eXen was an ancient burial site reinforced early on the Lummi's this higher moral ground, not even considering that the industry had desecrated several acres of it and inflamed the tensions. As Dr. Russo puts it, industry had a hard time responding to criticisms that came from a moralistic or spiritual set of values and it made their case to the public and to the regulators far shakier. “They could never respond to it, they couldn't defend against it... It was a complete blindside for them.” Speaking also of how faith-based and diverse this alliance is, something that is evident in the totem blessing events when everyone is gathered together, Dr. Russo sees an unassailable coalition, one that industry “can't pick apart” when “they have *no* response to the sacred. Nothing”

The relationship with the churches is a sticky one that Elder James brings up frequently. Recognizing the long history of colonial violence the churches took part in or allowed to be perpetrated on Indigenous peoples, recognizing the sheer challenge of climate change and the purported Christian values related to stewardship and recognizing how massive the Christian congregations are in the United States, they are an easy target for him to assess blame and seek accountability from. Such pressure from Lummi and other Indigenous peoples actually led to a regional “Apology of the Churches” that was first issued in 1987. Elder James sees this Apology as a mandate for the churches to take an active role in the Lummi struggles and he remains thankful and humbled by those, like the UU fellowships, who have worked in solidarity with the alliance. He also sees the immense potential for inspiring change when it comes to Indigenous rights and environmental stewardship, if the churches would work to remind their congregations their obligation to protect the Earth and confront the forces that are destroying it.

It was felt that the collaboration with the churches is important because it expands upon and further legitimizes that “higher moral ground” that empowers people like Cruz and Brownfield in the journey campaigns. The Catholic Pope’s own encyclical on climate change, *Laudato si’*, called for much of the same action and changes to our lives and in our communities that the Totem Pole Journey is calling for, as well. It was noted that many of the stops on the journeys are in religious congregations, where the pews or aisles are filled with believers, which reinforces both the call Elder James has for these individuals to work hard to

protect the Earth from these industries and pollution and helps amplify the already powerful, moral and ethical aspects of the journey in spaces where the Lummi values resonate with the attendees.

Those interviewed here also spoke of the power of this alliance, with its moral and environmental calling, to use these platforms to inspire personal agency, as the ceremonies for the journey have, as Dr. Russo tells it, a “way of waking up the voices and waking up the spirit with the courage of the calling.” Brownfield sees how this calling resonates with her colleagues and recalls a national UU conference that Elder James and other Lummi leaders “took by storm.” Cruz harkens back to the similarity in shared values in helping to explain why the conference of 4,000 reacted in such a way and why so many answered the call to support the journey and to begin the critical work of alliance-building with Indigenous communities back in their hometowns. Petryni sees an important place in the journeys and ceremonies for his colleagues and other white settler allies “to step back and to listen and to just be in the room as supporters. Which,” he thinks, “is a really important experience for us to go through.”

This notion of our interconnected spirituality, environment and, in the case of climate change, is a powerful theme that was brought up often. Cruz recalls that Elder James often likes to bring up how “we all come from Indigenous roots and histories, it’s just some of us have been removed from them and cut off for much longer than others.” Those interviewed noted that recognizing that we share the same fate with one another is something that emboldens the solidarity aspect of the journey. It means a lot to the frontline communities visited, who are

suffering with the degradation of the fossil fuel industry and the stress of the industry presence has on their communities, that not only are Indigenous allies present, but that the faith-community and eNGO's are paying attention to their struggle and offering support, as well.

### **Lummi leads.**

Another powerful theme that arose in these interviews was the deference that was given to Lummi to lead the decision-making processes in the alliance and the importance of acknowledging the role of settler colonialism and the historical trauma that continues to affect Lummi Nation and other Coast Salish peoples. Though advocating for Lummi to lead the effort created tension at points for some in the alliance and though Lummi leaders themselves were not always able to move forward in a unified fashion or at an expeditious pace, the non-indigenous allies who were interviewed fought internally in their own organizations and advocated strongly for their Indigenous allies to take the lead on actions and strategies related to opposition of the proposed terminal at Xwe'chi'eXen and for the Totem Pole Journey. Baked in to this was a recognizing that Lummi Nation is a sovereign nation, that prioritized government to government communication and relations over engaging with non-profits and the faith community. It was also considered, though, that these non-profits and faith-based collaborations hold a special place and should be explored, so long as they are kept from taxing or tokenizing Indigenous allies.

At times, for several of the settler individuals this tactic led to some discord, as it was recognized that decision-making processes move much slower

for a Lummi government that often sought to get a democratic measure of where the Tribal membership stood before moving forward. Or, often times smaller requests for assistance would come too late for these settler allies to fulfill the request fully. But everyone understood that everyone in this alliance was dealing with slim resources that made it hard to operate to full capacity all the time. Elder James was very thankful that these settler allies could hold restraint, especially when it came to hesitancy on the tribes part to come out in full opposition to the coal terminal.

Dr. Russo, Elder James and Matt Krogh all indicated that the influence of the fossil fuel industry had permeated the tribe to some extent, Krogh remembered one public event where the Tribe passed out a list of bribes going back decades that the industry had tried to use to influence Lummi leaders. The three were able to work to create a communication channel and foster a relationship that allowed for them to collaborate without being bogged down by the influence of industry or slow-moving Tribal government bureaucracies.

Several times it was brought up that, despite the ongoing legacy of colonial violence and racism, Americans, as Edler James put it, “kind of like the Indians.” He and others point to surprising surveys that show, while Americans don’t understand sovereignty or Indian government, they feel what James calls a “kind of tenderness towards the Native people.” One survey of Whatcom county folks that Krogh brought up showed that the Lummi Indian Business Council was by far the most trusted governing body in Whatcom County. It beat out the city councils, the county councils and other bodies. Krogh thinks “people understand

where they are coming from, that they are doing their work from a place of principle and ethics, primarily, that respects the need to value the place and the family first and other stuff later.”

Elder James and Dr. Russo had nothing but positive things to say about their settler allies always being supportive, letting Lummi take the lead, and providing requested assistance and information as needed, with research on industries or environmental struggles along the journey route, for example. In return, the settler allies interviewed here always deferred to Lummi as the leader in this alliance. It was not always easy to respect that role, due to their colleagues wanting to go in different directions sometimes, but for allies like Krogh, who never wavered, he “always found myself wanting to support where they were going. They were putting a lot of thought into it and it didn’t really diverge in any way from the outcomes that we were interested in.”

One example that came up several times in regards to following Lummi lead was the desecration of the ancestral burial site 45WH1 at Cherry Point. This sacred place, the oldest known site in the state archeological record, is of immense spiritual and cultural value to Lummi Nation. The way Krogh shared it, RE Sources, who after the bulldozing brought a lawsuit against the GPT project, knew that the lawsuit would likely be more powerful if 45WH1 was a part of it. But they were unable to secure Lummi consent or support and opted not to include the site in their lawsuit, which covered more of the environmental damage done at Cherry Point. Cruz, like all involved in this alliance, recognizes just how powerful of a violation of Lummi rights the destruction of 45WH1 was and how

easy it is to paint GPT as the bad guy in that story, but she stays away from telling the story because it is not hers to tell. This sort of reverence to Lummi desires and agendas was seen across these interviews and in this alliance.

The decades of Indigenous collaboration Brownfield and Cruz had gave them a special understanding of what it means to play a supportive role for Indigenous allies. Cruz recalls a service that a board member of their congregation gave, who spoke on the distinction between helping and serving, and reflected that

“In the service she said, ‘There is a difference between helping and serving. Helping indicates that there is a problem that somebody can’t handle. And it projects that idea of inadequacy that they are not capable of taking care of their own problems.’ So we have gone away from that mode of thinking into, well, how do we serve? What can we do that's going to help you get you where you want to go? Not where we want to go but where you feel you need to go? And how can we serve, I thought that was pretty cool that she did that. And so, that’s what we are pushing with other faith communities and with other UU congregations and even in the social justice and the NGO's, the environmental groups is to ‘let them lead.’”

Krogh, recalled one conversation from very earlier on in the alliance building, when his own local and regional eNGO colleagues in the Power Past Coal Coalition were trying to figure out their organizational strategy. Everyone was beginning to realize the potential power of Lummi asserting their treaty rights and a hypothetical question was posed as to



“If we could win right now would we want to? And I think I was the only person in the room who said ‘No’ and this was the executive committee for Power Past Coal. And they are like the Lummi might have a kill strategy if they choose to use it and, my belief at that time, and it remains today, is that one of the most important things that we have been able to do in the last five or six years is to actually grow community support for tribes and treaty rights.”

It is that deference to Lummi treaty rights that was shared deeply in the interviews. Krogh speaks of them as everyone’s treaty rights but also everyone’s treaty obligations. Krogh says “we as settlers and citizens of the United States have an obligation to respect the treaty and in return we actually get to live here.” Petryni agreed completely, but also spoke compellingly of the perpetual violation of those treaty rights and the ongoing legacy of historical trauma that Indigenous citizens deal with on an institutional and structural level. For the most part, Petryni reflected, “there are so many ways that our industrial society is constantly violating the obligations of the treaty.” Brownfield acknowledges that the treaties themselves are a horrible compromise and sacrifice birthed from the violence waged on Indigenous communities but, thanks to the foresight of Indigenous leaders, the treaties are now powerful tools that can protect both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The full ramifications of how these treaties came about and how they became the powerful law of the land cannot be minimized or the significance of treaty rights and obligations to these settler allies, especially, for example, as when Krogh recalls a powerful and stark moment shared with Lummi leader Jay Julius, who said

"When you read the treaties what you understand is that the local tribes have temporarily relinquished the land surface as long as their fishing and hunting and gathering rights are protected. And if their fishing and hunting and gathering rights *aren't* protected and the treaty is violated, they get the land back. They get the land back, that is what the treaty says."

All of this is relevant as each of these settler allies has worked to incorporate Lummi Nation treaty rights into the work they do in their own organizations. Petryni and others see a "moral obligation" to honor the treaty and, in doing so, a need to follow the Lummi lead on how best to honor it. It has been hard to center Lummi treaty rights for some of the settler organizers, who work to educate their members and supervisors in how it connects to their own agendas, but it is work that they are compelled to do. Petryni pointed often to the historical violence and genocide that must be recognized and, especially, its permutations that continue today. He recalled his own profound moment that came from the words of Jay Julius, as well. Petryni's executive director was taking with Julius about how the growing threat of climate change could create an "unimaginable future" for not-so-future generations when Julius pointed out that Indigenous communities have been living an "unimaginable future" since settler colonialism began 500 years ago.

In that profound recognition is the impetus for these settler allies to try and center not only treaty rights while letting their Indigenous allies take the lead, but also centering this violent history of colonization and the historical trauma it has brought. As Cruz says, "we have a long sordid history to account for, and" for Krogh and Cruz it is a matter of working to heal collectively from this history.

Both believe the Totem Pole Journey is a powerful way to bring Indigenous and non-indigenous communities together to focus on that healing. In regards to this healing, each of the settler allies brought up frequently how they are on a path of learning, critical thinking and self-correcting, as they are trying to figure out how to be the strongest ally they can for Lummi Nation and how they can work to further educate their often reluctant members and colleagues to see the value in centering Lummi struggles and Lummi needs.

For BUF, this means education around acknowledging that these are occupied lands and that the Coast Salish people were the first inhabitants. Not only that they were the original peoples but that they were the majority population throughout most of history and their stewardship and worldviews helped these ecosystems flourish and sustain human and non-human populations. Brownfield worked with others in 2007 to formalize an official acknowledgment, that included a public presentation with the governor and other state and local politicians. She sees a need to continually acknowledge this, recognizing that it is hurtful not to and it is a reminder that the traditional ways of these first peoples, who in the North Puget Sound numbered around 50,000, helped keep the land and the human communities healthy and thriving. Russo points to the fact that these Indigenous populations have lived here long enough to have survived their own massive climate change and, in fact, these Indigenous nations may hold keys and answers that can help us survive anthropogenic climate change we are now bound to face.

As Krogh puts it, when the Tribes take a stand on their treaty rights, we need to have their backs. He contends that it was a very courageous thing for Lummi Nation to assert their treaty rights to protect Cherry Point from this fossil fuel megaproject and, if the Army Corps had decided the other way, it could have had future negative ramifications not only for Lummi treaty rights but the rights of other Coast Salish peoples. He concludes

“That is where I worry most. It is true that the treaty rights tool has been a super effective one... but I think that one of the biggest areas of concern for me is that if there is indeed increasing Indigenous leadership and willingness to use their treaty rights, their side of the treaty rights, to protect environmental values for all of us. That, without appropriate (settler) support, (us) being on the frontlines with them making sure they are not taking it on the chin while we are hiding behind them. That is, I probably think, my biggest concern. What people might take from this lesson of treaty rights being so important and standing shoulder to shoulder and helping ensure that the tribe doesn't take all the heat. That that lesson (doesn't) get lost.”

### **Building Trust.**

There was a strong theme in the interviews that recognized that “all politics is local” and that these sorts of alliances are all about the building up of personal relationships and, primarily, of trust between the allies. While the next section deals with more future-focused and organizational level needs and concerns, this theme emerged with a focus on the personal one on one relationships that engendered trust at the grassroots level of the alliance.

The complexities of how this trust were fostered, especially considering the colonial legacies and continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples, are

worthy of exploring in detail. There were many similarities in the responses in how they saw these relationships being built and how important it was to foster trust, but there were some differences and limitations seen as to how much the extent to which trust and collaboration could be created. The intermediators interviewed here also had to spend some time focused internally to their own organizations in order to foster the sort of constituent behavior that would build up, not sabotage, the trust and relationships that powered this alliance.

Despite the often positive assessment by those interviewed of this alliance at this stage, it must be noted that there is still some skepticism and hesitation on just how interwoven this relationship is, how much trust there exists and where it can go. Dr. Russo very candidly admitted, “You know, there are environmental organizations that I believe at the top levels, their only concern is how to use the tribes.” When asked if these settler organizations operated with the sort of solidarity that allowed them to understand the concerns, needs and desires of Lummi Nation when it came to the protection of Lummi and the growth of Lummi prosperity, Elder James answered “No. I think they understand the need to protect the area, based upon what their mutual interest is.” Dr. Russo brought up that he often hears whispers about their settler allies in Lummi Administration that “you can’t trust them, you know?” or “they are just friends for hire. They are with you now but they will be against you later and they are going to use their information against you.” To which Russo responds

“About whom is that not true? Is there any group outside of Lummi that you can unconditionally trust? Anybody. No. So, the question is, ‘trust to what (extent)?’ Trust to join forces and kill a

coal terminal. Now, we prevailed with that logic but the argument never went away... They are always bringing this little thing up, as if all the tribes get along just swimmingly all the time. Of course they don't. Nobody does, right? They are alliances, they're not marriages, you know?"

As Elder James alludes to above, the idea was broached in interviews repeatedly by settler and Indigenous individuals that these sort of Indigenous/non-Indigenous alliances call for creating a collaboration with limited connective tissue, essentially that individuals might only really work together on the very specific issues that are necessitated by the collaboration and nothing more. As we will see, this sentiment was also seemingly contradicted by repeated calls from the same individuals to personalize the relationships and “show up” for your allies’ events and causes, even the ones not related to the shared work.

Though Elder James made a point to express his hesitancy with “jumping into bed” with eNGO’s because “their agenda is not our agenda,” limiting the alliance to common goals and shared values seemed to be suggested by many as a good way of assuaging those concerns. As he put it when asked later on if he had any fears related to interspersing his work with these particular settler allies and their organizations:

“No, I think it is pretty clear that we are working on this project together and it is not, we are not endorsing every project each other is doing. We are focused on what is common for this project here, this campaign. I don't even know, I don't know what they are doing and I never asked them. Because we do assume that it is a good non-profit organization with good intent. As long as they are not trying to undermine us, or doing covert activity against us, we think we are doing good.”

His biggest concern, in this regard, seemed to be that Lummi Nation, as a sovereign people, were equipped with more rights in general to take legal action or pursue other governmental-level engagement. Both Petryni and Krogh emphatically acknowledge that Lummi Nation is a sovereign nation, with its own bureaucracies and varying levels of government operations, and that these are of such a higher caliber, to be held much higher than their own positions as managers of small environmental non-profits. They both fully understood any and all hesitations for Lummi leaders or offices to want to engage with a small non-profit when their primary channels of communication were expressed their sovereign, government to government relationship. For this, Krogh saw finding ways to communicate and finding ways to support to be very challenging, but he welcomed the channels that his office and the STP Office were eventually able to establish and use.

When it comes to sincerity and following through on words spoken in those channels, Elder James adamantly brought up at multiple points that “none of these alliances are worth anything if you don’t take action to make them worth something.” James honed in on this frequently, especially when talking about the faith-based organizations, and recognized that, though it starts with written statements of support from eNGO’s and the churches at blessing points along the route, what is way more important to him that individuals and organizations did more than just talk or make statements. Especially of concern, was these groups mobilizing their own members or constituents to stand up and take action in

solidarity with Lummi and other frontline communities. As Elder James puts it, “the whole idea is to get action, not promises.”

When it comes to actions, though, one of the strongest concerns brought up throughout all the interviews was the need to guard against the overzealous, white horse/white savior complex. Looking at the alliance, while Elder James may have been satisfied that settler allies were not “running in front of us and claiming glory or doing anything like that,” others like Krogh, had a big fear that, especially considering the existential threats faced and the deliberative and calculated pace that Lummi operated with, there might be “problems from environmental activists who feel such an overwhelming sense of urgency that they won’t be able to wait for others to join them” and that they’d risk “getting out ahead of the tribes in terms of taking actions that are problematic for everybody, including the tribes.”

Overzealousness was also a main concern for Cruz and Brownfield at BUF. As Cruz put it, you can’t just walk in and say “Here I am! I’ve come to save you!” Her biggest fear was of members at BUF being too overzealous and she recognized from her decades of experience that while “their intentions are good, good intentions have a tendency, especially within Indian Community, to turn out really, really bad.” The two spend a lot of time educating their members and training them how to be patient and deliberative, operating with humility and sincerity. This entails a lot of listening, a lot of learning and allowing the Indigenous allies to take the lead. When asked about what is different in this latest Indigenous alliance she has worked in, Cruz mentioned that



“In this particular cycle of unification it has been that the tribes that the lead. It’s not us going in and saying to them, ‘well this is what you need to do to fix your problems.’ They’ve had enough of that and I think that’s the difference and that’s why there hasn’t been quite as many challenges. But, um, instead of riding in on our white horses, you know, to save the Indian communities, the thing that we are stressing and we’re working with is, ‘they know how to deal with this stuff, so follow their lead.’ ‘When they ask for something, do it. Don’t tell them what to do but let them ask you what it is, you know, you can do for them. And let them tell you how they can help you.’

Everyone brought up this listening as an important component in fostering this trust. When pressed as to what most she wished her members could be equipped with in order to be better allies, she responded “Learning to listen. Keep your mouth shut and listen.” Dr. Russo acknowledged just how important this was when reflecting on how lucky the STP office was to be working with this group of allies and intermediators

“It is really night and day when you are with people who can listen with intention. And, um, people that are only listening so they can figure out what they are going to say next. And you know the difference when you are sitting with it. And I just find it fascinating that all of these people that we have been allied with, they are all intentional listeners. How did that happen? I dunno.”

When asked directly what was new about this alliance, Russo reflected on the curiosity these allies wielded, responding excitedly that it was

“Their questions! They would ask really intelligent questions. I never got asked this stuff before... Not just about ‘what is a treaty?’ or ‘When was it written and who signed it?’ But, also ‘How do they make their world?’ and ‘What is it?’ ‘How do they connect with nature?’ Uh, so they want to know about the belief.

Not the deep, private knowledge but, I think they wanted to be convinced of what they think they already know: That those beliefs endure still in Indian Country. And they do, but they aren't talked about much but they get a sense that they are. And I think that they acknowledge that. And, I think they think... it may well be that somewhere nestled in the native world-making process is our salvation.”

There also appeared to be a bit of a tension, though, between this curiosity and the genuine desire for these settler collaborators to follow the Lummi lead, to learn how to become better allies, and the risk of this learning and education process to be taxing on either the Lummi organizers, who are already overworked and understaffed, or on the settler organizers, who are also overworked and understaffed. At BUF, so much of the work that Cruz and Brownfield do helps to prepare their constituents for being effective allies, but with RE Sources and the Power Past Coal Coalition, constant work and progress on the campaign was happening alongside this learning process. Petryni recognizes that “it is important the organizations in this coalition are asking these kinds of questions” but laments that “it is unfortunate that we have to learn this *through* the work.” Petryni would much rather education exists at the outset, or early on in organizers experiences, so that the alliance is not jeopardized or weighted down by this “on the fly” learning. The next section explores more fully the takeaways that these individuals saw for having the collaborative mindfulness and intentionality to make these alliances work in an enduring, institutionalized fashion.

### **Mindfulness and intentionality.**

The individuals interviewed here also seemed to share a mindfulness and intentionality when it came to discussing these relationships. There was a real desire to be self-critical and to looking towards what will make the connections in this alliance grow and prosper long after the coal port success. Many of the interviews talked about what sustained solidarity looks like, how important learning about colonial legacies was, how the alliance can better avoid tokenism, encourage intersectionality across movements and how important it is to continue to show up and support each other's causes. This alliance was seen as a long-term commitment that has been a struggle at times, that may even hit a wall when it comes to how far it can take these communities down a decolonizing path, but it was also seen one that has played a positive role so far that needs to be further pursued for the health and well-being of the communities.

Fresh off of the Army Corps decision, there was a lot of focus on where these alliances will go next and an almost unanimous fear of individuals dropping out or disappearing. Dr. Russo's fear was that maybe "these folks will now move on, it happens all the time" and of having to deal, once again, with working to establish relationships with another generation of allies. These intermediators recognized that it can be a shock and hindrance to this sort of collaborative work to have individuals cycling in and out. Cruz recognized that this is nothing new for these relationships

"Well, one of the things... it's cyclical. Because if you look at the 60's there was a big push, in let's say the late 60's, early 70's, when there was a lot of action within the Indian communities and then the support coming in from non-Indian communities. And the problem with it had been is that it's like cyclical and it's, like I

said, about being in fashion. Something comes up, the tribes try to address it or the Indian communities try to address it, they get the support of various factions and people and movie stars and things like that. But then it kind of dies away, once the issue is resolved or dealt with one way or the other. And then it kind of dies away and the Indian community goes into obscurity again. Then, something else comes up and people say okay ‘ya, ya, ya, ya, ya’ and we start all over again. We start the networking, we start the unifying and things like that and then it will go away and then something else happens and ‘let’s get going’... so it’s cyclical. What I am hoping with this time around is that, it stays.”

When asked about their hopes for the alliance moving forward, Petryni echoed a common, simple sentiment that “I am hoping that first off, it continues. I think that is a real big part of it.” Krogh reflected on his biggest regret when he left RE

Sources, sharing

“For myself, I have been away from active work with the Lummi the last 1.5 years or two years and I think that was a mistake. I was trying to be a little bit deferential to the folks at RE Sources who wanted to continue having those relationships. But, regardless, folks at the tribe don't care if I am working for RE Sources or Stand, right? We've been doing things together and I regret failing to show up for the last couple years and I think one of the lessons I have more recently learned, that I think is a valuable one, is that having it be a professional collaboration only is a mistake. And, the thing about being an ally and working together, on a non-professional level to be a good ally, you got to show up for their stuff. And if you invite them they'll show up for ours. People show up for each other, that is what they do. And I think that, because of the uncertainty of how to talk to each other, because of the uncertainty of how to connect, because of some fear of screwing things up... a lot of folks on the settler side and, also on the Lummi side, were at least one or two steps back from where we could have been. We could have been much more actively engaged and, the ability to work more powerfully together to enrich those relationships to be able to do more in the future would have... it

would have been nice to see that, to see a much greater commitment to those relationships and moving that forward.”

There was also a recognition that, though there was tremendous settler community support for these alliances with Lummi Nation, many of the rationales that brought people into this support had nothing to do with Xwe’chi’eXen or Lummi Treaty rights and these folks might drop off. Petryni and others point with some worry as to the diverse aims or desires of their members, while Cruz felt that

“Now that GPT is off to the side, there is no longer that threat so you're gonna see a certain number of people stepping back and withdrawing because Lummi Nation wasn't their focus to begin with. Okay, and it hadn't necessarily become their focus in the interim between that point of time and the time that the decision was made. So there will be a drawing back of certain populations, certain people, groups and what we're hoping is that there is enough of us who are willing to make the commitment to stick with the next levels and the next steps to move that on and I think we are. I think we have a number of people in the social justice and in the environmental communities who have kind of made it their personal goal to [laughs] make sure these things stay to the forefront and they don't slip back in to obscurity again, so...”

As Krogh alludes to, one more powerful way that these individuals saw these relationship moving forward was to make it about more than just the single issue or just the professional relationship, and for the settler allies to “show up” for Lummi, not just on the Totem Pole Journey or coal issue but for other issues Lummi is working on. Recalling the “showing up” role that settler allies played in raising money for and volunteering at the 2007 Canoe Journey, an annual Coast

Salish inter-tribal event that is seen as a hub of Indigenous regional cultural revitalization, Brownfield recalls it that, for many, it was

“the first time they actually experienced the culture of the Canoe Journey and the revival of Coast Salish culture. They had wanted to have a relationship with Lummi but didn’t know how to do it. And Lummi didn’t know that their were people out there who cared about them, that wanted to support them. So that was kind of an ice breaker in the county... and that has grown. So, there is really a deepening relationship that is being developed and that keeps growing and once people get to know each other, there is more opportunities and there is more invitations from Lummi for the people in the county and more invitations from the county for the Lummi to participate. So, I mean, that is a beautiful thing.”

One of the aims of Brownfield and Cruz’s work with the Native Connections group was to try and create situations for these communities to engage and share experiences with. Petryni felt similarly that so much about making these relationships endure came down to the settler allies creating the space for tribal members and tribal activists to take a leading role. He saw the settler allies working exclusively in a supporting role and

“making sure that there is opportunity, that there are events that we are doing together. That we're hosting events that we are inviting tribal members to and that the tribe, or tribal activists, are hosting events that they are inviting us to... That kind of, like learning, that we are participating together and seeing ourselves as one community. Um, even if we can't fully break down this (colonial) disconnect, like, that is going to take years. But being in more spaces where we can participate together and feel comfortable participating together I think is something that is important.”

“Showing up” as a theme was not just relegated to events and occasion. As has been mentioned, there was a real hunger for understanding and prioritizing the historical trauma and colonial legacies that Lummi, and Indigenous people in general, have suffered through even to this day. The role that these intermediators played in trying to educate their colleagues, their supervisors and the members of their organizations was mentioned earlier and, part of why that was so critical, it seemed, was in how it helped orientate the alliance for surviving past the current collaboration of the Totem Pole Journey and anti-coal port campaign.

The motivations for this are much deeper and more ethical, though. Petryni recalls Julius words and acknowledges that, when it comes to their settler organizations,

“We have to understand... that a lot of people have the privilege of having a lot of their basic needs met. They are experience environmental problems as something for their children to worry about, as something for other people in their community to worry about. This kind of thing where, it’s like, abstract, it’s far away. But for most people experiencing environmental problems, it’s current. It’s present. It’s been happening all their lives, It’s been happening all of their parents lives. It’s something that has gone on for generations and, um, and it’s real to them in a way.... and they may not have access to all of the science or all of the work that has been done to really quantify those problems and everything like that but it’s a real thing and it’s an emotional thing and it’s a personal trauma in addition to being kind of an, uh, abstract one. I think that is an important lesson that we have to walk away from this with. We can’t understand these problems as abstract and really do this work well. I just don’t think that that is an option.”

Petryni had just recounted a Lummi youth event where he was able to learn about the social, economic and environmental health struggles of Indigenous children

and families. In recognizing that not only do these historical legacies of trauma and violence exist, they exist in the current day, we see an effort on the part of these settler allies to center these Lummi experiences and to make a case that the work in this alliance must always recognize the injustices of our shared colonial legacies.

For these individuals, this portends what Petryni calls a “cross-sectional opportunity” as well as the “necessity of intersectionality.” It’s valuable to take a minute to consider some extensive thoughts from Petryni, Cruz and Krogh, who were not alone in these recognitions that this alliance needs to endure past the GPT fight and must endure with a deepening understanding and bridging of Indigenous rights, climate justice and the need to decolonize these social and environmental movements. Cruz shares that

“The alliances, if they are going to mean anything, they have to be based on something other than Gateway Pacific Terminal. We start with it on that level and start dealing with it on other levels and start raising that awareness that these are really important places and move beyond GPT into a much bigger mindset of human lives, climate justice or environmental justice, however you want to put it. Which is something that is kinda new and was kinda lacking with the environmental community for a long time. They would focus on the water pollution and the air pollution and things like that and not acknowledging or work with the social aspects of it, or at least being peripherally aware of it but not incorporating it into their overall philosophy. So that is where the term environmental justice came from. It is asking ‘how do these changes that we are making to the environment impact the people and the human and the natural communities that rely on them?’ So, that’s kind of a relatively new phenomenon that’s being adopted in a number of places.”



Or as Petryni puts it, when asked about the limits of settler contributions to Indigenous peoples in past collaborations.

“The problem has been that they have not supported them enough, or they haven't supported them in the way the tribes are asking. Um, so like the environmental movement might be about, say, ‘let's transition to renewable energy’ but hasn't gone as far as saying, ‘we need to learn from the Indigenous people of this ecosystem what it takes to achieve sustainability.’ So, that is kind of a gap. There is a lot of people in the environmental movement that think they already have the solution that are not understanding it yet and I suffer from this, too. I am not calling out everybody else, this is something that we all have to work on as a movement. It's that we don't actually have the answers and part of our problem is believing that we do. And we need to start asking other people and listening to other people, other voices that have historically been marginalized about what the answers are because they, um, if they are given voice in that conversation, we are going to find solutions that are not things in our framework and from our privilege that we can actually imagine.”

Krogh acknowledged what this thesis acknowledges as well, that these conversations within the larger eNGO communities, about climate justice and seeking out the perspectives of marginalized populations who might have a much more nuanced, justice-based approach, have been intensifying, saying

“All of these things are happening at the same time, where in the last 5 year, even less, the last 3 years you start hearing thought leaders and executive leaders of the big NGO's saying that we cannot win on the environment without also solving the underlying and interconnected systems of oppression that create racism and sexism and whatnot, or that are racism and sexism. And within that should fit Indigenous rights and treaty rights and whatnot. I don't know if it is true. I haven't seen any proof that it is truth because you can pretty easily point to some places like South Africa, which are gone now, that were sustainable, massive and wonderful swaths of nature from which they had evicted all the people who

were living there, who were all black, and put them in crawls and other places... but that had done a wonderful job, with a top-down racist society, of protecting nature!

Nobody wants that. Or at least most sane people don't want that. So, I don't know if it is true that you cannot but why would you want to go forward and win on the environment and not also create a much more egalitarian, less sexist, or not-sexist-at all hopefully, not racist at all hopefully, society that affirms indigenous values?"

When asked what was perhaps so powerful or persuasive about the Totem Pole Journey, in particular, Petryni remarked that it helped bridge this divide in that

“It is a cross-sectional, you know, undertaking. So, it’s bringing people who care about social justice and decolonizing and breaking down oppressions and, I think, you know there is a movement in that and it's a civil rights movement, essentially. That movement and the environmental movement which, historically, has been really focused on saving wildlife, on preserving ecosystems, etc. It's an opportunity that those movements can come together and it's not forced really, it's like they have to come together in that context. There is no way to understand the Totem Pole Journey without a social justice and civil rights component, there is no way to understand it without an ecosystems preservation component. You have to have both to properly get it and you sort of have that realization, people in both those movements have that realization that, or, people that are working on the social justice civil rights side of it definitely see that in order to advance those causes and to break down colonialism and to undermine the systemic oppressions that exist in our capitalist system, that they also have to think about ecosystem preservation and food justice and, you know, resource constraints that exist and the way that resources are allocated.

So those questions, you know, that movement gets exposed to those questions and the environmental movement gets exposed to questions like racism and colonialism and things that they might not think about as part of the means through which environmental degradation is perpetuated. In that way it is a cross-sectional

opportunity. You get different movements coming together that way. I think through events like the Totem Pole Journey those people are starting to see a decolonial framework as critical to climate change resistance. So, I think that there's a lot of opportunities there, too.”

The ability of the Totem Pole Journey to bridge divides in our social and environmental movements, through centering Indigenous rights and sovereignty, was something that was acknowledged throughout the interviews but was also contrasted by the sometimes simplistic prescriptions of Elder James or Dr. Russo who, while understanding these theoretical considerations, prioritized settler allies embracing a shared environmental future while backing up their words of support with action, with commitment, with vigilance and with an ability to listen and follow directions. For James, promises, intentions and even awarenesses or knowledges, were meaningless if they weren't backed up with the sort of actions and mobilizations that could engender the trust that the alliance necessitated. Dr. Russo was as skeptical of eNGO's and other settler groups at backing up their words with action but recognized the potential of the cross-sectional and intersectional approach, reflecting that “we need that kind of diversity of interests and cultural backgrounds.” This was important for Russo, especially, when it came to the future targets of the alliance, reflecting that

“Let's look at how we are going to build this alliance out to the *big* issue of climate change. We are already having that discussion because now it is a little amorphous, it's not like its a (coal) terminal, it's climate *chaos*, right? So, we are just beginning to discuss how can we interrogate these alliances so that they have a lifespan long enough to intervene in a meaningful way in the defining issue of our time.”

While it is evident that these settler allies considered it a moral obligation to center the core issues of historical trauma and our colonial legacies when seeking to deepen these relationships and broaden out the alliances, more critically it was acknowledged by most that commitment is the child of trust and action. For Cruz, it was simple. When it came to the level of commitment, “you have to be there, be in it, for the long run. Otherwise, you’re not going to affect much change... This is not a short term thing.”

## **5. Conclusion.**

This research revealed that, while the settler allies in these alliances carried with them improved understandings of Indigenous sovereignty and the legacy of settler colonialism and historical trauma, a more determinant factor for how strong these alliances were came from the perceived existential threats of the fossil fuel industries and the immediacy of global climate disruption. The improved settler understandings of these issues did, though, help those interviewed guide and regulate their own behaviors in building the relationships with their Indigenous counterparts and also partially inform how both parties used such concepts of Lummi rights and Indigenous values to create a powerful public narrative and moral case during the Totem Pole Journey. Similar narratives were also used in the eNGO and faith-based organizations by the settler allies interviewed to help encourage internal support for the Lummi campaigns. Limitations were seen by all, though, in just how much these settler allies did or could currently understand these issues, as well as to what extent these values

could currently be advocated for in settler communities. More determinant to the strength and success of these alliances, overall, were the existential threats that industry posed at Xwe'chi'eXen and in other frontline communities dealing with fossil fuel infrastructure projects, alongside the growing threat of climate disruption, and such threats did more to constrain these relationships to the common and immediate needs of the Totem Pole Journey and Xwe'chi'eXen coal port resistance.

Evident in several of the interviews was an allusion to the possible limits of how closely entwined the work of these Indigenous/non-indigenous allies could remain moving forward. Though everyone unanimously sought to continue these relationships, question marks emerged when speaking about the extent of future collaboration, as it was acknowledged by many of those interviewed that these expressed values of Tribal sovereignty, “righting the wrongs” of historical trauma and justice for Indigenous communities seemed to involve some “logical progressions” that several said their communities might not be ready for. These concerns were only spoken off in vague terms and distant settings, but the word “reparations” and “giving the land back” were used, prompting some to think that these communities were decades away from being able to even wrestle with the full ramification of what holding these values and supporting Lummi Nation could mean. No one seemed to think the settler communities were fully ready for this.

For this research, this insight might beg the rhetorical question: “What purpose does it serve, then, to embrace these desires for protecting the treaties,

advancing sovereignty and following the lead of Lummi leaders, if the intention is only to follow the Lummi leaders as long as it is comfortable enough for one's own settler needs and desires?" While Elder James pointed out several times the unique legal power of Lummi treaty rights, rights that eNGO's and other settler allies did not have, one could even ask whether, "If settler allies hadn't seen these Lummi legal rights as a unique and powerful tool in the Xwe'chi'eXen coal port resistance, how much would they have worked to support the Lummi cause and Totem Pole Journey, versus work more independently to stop the coal port?" Exploring the complexities surrounding whether increased understandings like this actually link to better outcomes has been explored in relation to environmental justice issues (Mohai et al, 2009) but I believe that in this case, while these intermediators would have still been there in personal support, their jobs of working to convince their rank and file and their higher ups to embrace and allocate organizational resources for the Totem Pole Journey would have been much more difficult, along strict lines relating to these understandings, without the perceived moral and treaty authority that Lummi asserted.

Yes, there was an intersection of environmental values and ecological needs that overlapped enough to work to protect Xwe'chi'eXen and advanced the causes of both these Indigenous and non-indigenous allies but as Dr. Russo, Elder James and Freddy Lane often made clear, Lummi Nation is in constant struggle to defend all of their rights, not just their environmental ones, and to combat generationally-transferred stresses and the historical trauma that finds Lummi families still struggling economically and socially to survive. As Matt Petryni

mentioned above, the abstract and future harm that a fossil fuel future will bring to all communities through climate disruption is marked with painful realities that Indigenous communities *already* live with daily in Indian Country. I might even refine the above rhetorical question and ask, “What use is it to express values related to Indigenous sovereignty, treaty rights and healing from settler colonialism if such values will only be wielded when it best serves settler needs?” The answer, I believe, is in the call for action mentioned above by the Indigenous allies to “show up” for Lummi Nation and in the expressed intentions of these settler allies to answer that call. It is as much a call to continue these relationships and this alliance here as it is a call for settler communities to take steps forward to further meaningfully support Lummi needs and domestic campaigns, whether they be environmental or otherwise. Great uncertainty was seen as for what was next in this alliance. Perhaps for the settler allies, including several who said so themselves when thinking about this future, the answer is as simple as “showing up.”

As mentioned, this research did discover that the settler allies interviewed here from the eNGO and faith-based communities did assert, what they considered to be, clear and strong understandings of treaty rights, Tribal sovereignty, settler colonial historical trauma and the needs of their Lummi allies as they were expressed in this alliance. They all admitted, though, that what they knew was not enough and each had an empathetic desire to keep learning more from Lummi allies, especially as it pertained to continuing good relationships and a strong alliance. It was also discovered that the Lummi allies could, in fact, see

that these settler allies did hold some understanding of these issues, though it was acknowledged that it was limited and, in fact, that they likely could never fully understand tribal sovereignty and settler colonialism or, as Dr. Russo put it,

“I think there is going to be, at some point, a bright red line. They are not going to see, well I can’t speak for them, but I think they will have a difficult time seeing a tribe as a ‘total sovereign nation.’ I am not seeing them see that. It remains a political ideal... You talk about colonialism. For people to actually, at the deeper levels of predisposition of belief, admit that, the entire continent was stolen. Now, they can admit it theoretically. They can admit it politely, aesthetically, and that is it. And what difference does knowing it make, you know? (*mimics settler allies*) ‘Well, what do you want? You want us to give all the land back?’ What are you saying?’ ...so, it kind of dies off there. That is going to be the next generation of (settler allies), I think. I am talking about sometime in the middle part of this century.”

Elder James, when asked whether these allies understood the needs and desires of Lummi Nation when it came to the protection of Lummi rights and the growth of Lummi prosperity responded, with a hushed, “No” and continued on, as mentioned earlier, saying “I think they understand the need to protect the area, based upon what their mutual interest is.” Commenting on polls of settler communities, he then added that they suggested that “generally, the public kind of likes Indians. They don’t understand them, they don’t know much about their sovereignty or their form of government but they have a kind of tenderness to the Native people.” Elder James thought this was shocking considering how settler colonialism has kept Natives “suppressed and oppressed, impoverished for generations” with a system of “colonial institutions” and a cornerstone of Indian law, the Johnson v. McIntosh decision in 1823, that was based on *admitted to lies*



and assertions that Indians, as Elder James remarked, “are savage heathens, atheist pagans so you, as the Christians, now own everything I own and I have no say over it.” Dr. Russo seemed to acknowledge in the interview that this “new generation” of settler allies *were* more advanced than prior allies in their understanding of these issues and Elder James seemed to think they had “a lot more respect for Lummi in regards to it being a treaty tribe” and the “legal standing” it brings, but neither seemed to think it mattered too much when the main issue at hand for this alliance was, according to Elder James, “knowing that we are all working towards the same thing, that we have a common goal.”

While the Lummi allies did not necessarily see their settler counterparts having an extensive understanding of these issues, or think that it mattered too much, there was this common goal with Xwe’chi’eXen and the existential threats that propelled and help foster the alliances. It should be noted again that both Dr. Russo and Elder James personally sought out these settler allies to form these alliances, regardless of any perceived disadvantages to working with them, and recognizing, as was mentioned above, that the existential crisis of industrial might and climate disorder were, as Elder James said, “too big to take on alone.” The combined threats and issues of confronting GPT, protecting Xwe’chi’eXen and drawing attention to the role of the fossil fuel industries in polluting local communities and the global atmospheric commons, were enough reasons to lay aside any preexisting hesitations or concerns and to form alliances with the eNGO’s and faith-based community. In that regard, while all considered it helpful that settler allies were evolving in their understandings, it was somewhat

irrelevant in the face of such large challenges that confronted all communities, Indigenous and settler alike.

It did seem that the sensitivities and practical ramifications that emerged from these new settler understandings of treaty rights, tribal sovereignty and the legacy of settler colonialism and historical trauma had a positive impact on both the internal dynamics of these relationships and the external ability of this alliance to achieve the goals it set out to accomplish. Internally, while it may have only affected the organizational actions and personal behaviors of the settler allies, many of the themes explored in the interviews, from letting Lummi take the lead on organizing, to fostering a culture of service and of listening, to focusing on creating trust and avoiding the overzealous “white savior” complexes, all seemed to help guide the settler allies in navigating and co-nurturing the relationships with their Indigenous allies well. Due to their understandings of settler colonial histories, each of the settler allies was remarkably self-reflexive and critical of their own behaviors and those of their organizations, which seemed to positively affect the relationships they had with their Indigenous allies internal to the alliances. Externally, in the actions and public steps taken on the Totem Pole Journey and the Xwe’chi’eXen coal port resistance, these values of tribal sovereignty, Indigenous rights and acknowledging settler colonial legacies seemed to be expressed often and used by both Lummi and settler allies to employ the use of powerful metaphors to make the moral and spiritual case that was mentioned in the interviews above as being “unassailable” or unable to be successfully countered by both industry and regulatory authorities.

## **Decolonizing Climate Justice Alliance Research.**

This thesis is significant because it adds to a growing body of research that intersects at several of the main considerations explored here. As more Indigenous/non-indigenous alliances appear or reappear and as intersectional approaches to environmental as social movements continue to grow and to focus, at least in part, on the environmental degradation and climate change impacts of fossil fuel extraction and use. Alongside this, new fronts of inquiry continue to open as researchers examine both the influence of these industries on human and non-human populations, as well as investigate the vibrant grassroots hubs of community organizing and resistance to these fossil fuel companies. Especially considering the seeming lack of research on the manifestations of these Indigenous/non-indigenous resistances to the fossil fuel industries in the US, the Totem Pole Journey case study examined here can help provides a lot of insights into these movements and alliances. Of considerable interest is how such alliances built on Indigenous leadership and treaty authority work to bring communities together in opposition to fossil fuel plans while growing and strengthening a collaboration that does not back away from conceptualizations around settler colonial legacies, Tribal sovereignty and the intersectionality of our social justice and environmental movements.

This research has sought to inject a postcolonial/decolonial perspective into what has largely seemed to be a body of research primarily infused with a political economy narrative. My hope was to bring together political economy and postcolonial lenses to strengthen the social theoretical analysis around community

movements and opposition to fossil fuel industry megaprojects. The presence and depth of these intersections can often be complex and sometimes contradictory, which necessitates the sort of fine-grained, thick analysis of place-specific developments and events like the Totem Pole Journey, as to avoid broad generalizations in these movements. There are many intersections in the literature where research has paired up some aspects of alliance building, Indigenous resistances, the influence of the fossil fuel industry on communities, the role of settler colonial legacies, environmental justice and social movements (Grossman, 2002; Mohai et al, 2009) but, outside of some of the published scholarly research on these dynamics in Canada, but there hasn't been enough conversation across fields of study that have focused on one or several of these areas, and this interdisciplinary examination seeks to achieve that. In general, there seems to be much more room for such phenomena to be examined in the literature, especially with lenses borrowed from Indigenous studies and critical geography that seek to decolonize these examinations and expose the underlying power dynamics at work in these relationships. This thesis tries to contribute to and extend the reviewed work in these existing studies in this way. While research in this vein does exist in a Canadian context, there is need to understand these phenomena in the US where the laws around government to government and nation to nation relations are much different, the sort of thick and in-depth examinations of fossil fuel resistances and alliances that have been researched there.

For researchers, who should see this region as an ongoing hotbed for potential examination of fossil fuel resistances and alliance-building on these

fronts, hopefully this research offers some suggestions or openings for conducting this sensitive research. I have attempted to conduct this research in a way that works to decolonize research methodologies and to empower the researched communities to find broader agency and voice through my work. Each of the individuals interviewed here agreed to be video and audio recorded, so that their stories and perspectives could be shared in their own voices, and the researcher will be editing this footage for free online distribution and community radio airplay. The material and findings will also be shared in small print or zine form and presented at least a few community events. Considering that many of the communities on the frontlines dealing with these environmentally harmful companies are vulnerable populations often dealing with being disproportionately impacted by these forces industries, it is of utmost importance that researcher communities work to not perpetuate settler colonial behaviors such as extracting knowledge or colonizing spaces or ideas with their work. For these reasons, decolonizing research methodologies is important, as is conducting collaborative research that seeks to place the desires of the researched communities at the center of the work and coupling one's research with meaningful service, not "help," for those engaged (Howitt and Stevens, 2010).

### **Limitations and Future Directions.**

This research was limited by many factors, some of which were self-imposed. In constraining the examination of the Lummi Totem Pole Journey to lengthy interviews with seven individuals who worked very close locally on the project, a lot of the critical relationship dynamics and themes of collaboration at

the local level were exposed and investigated. But, in foregoing interviewing or surveying any of the other allies of this coalition, whether they be the higher ups in some of the eNGO's or faith-based and grassroots allies in other communities the Totem Pole Journey was supported from, this research misses out on the flow of many of the tributaries of influence and support that round out and strengthened this alliance. If we are to fully understand how these conceptualizations of settler colonialism, Tribal sovereignty and the intersectionality of grassroots movements are being utilized, it would also make sense to investigate how these concepts flow hierarchically and vertically through the settler organizations that worked to support the Totem Pole Journey. As this research showed, there is a lot of power and an onus of unique influence for the intermediary or "renegades" who are ethically driven by these principles and act as liaisons between the organizational demands of their higher ups and the goals they have in common in their relationships horizontally within the alliance. This research focused a lot on what these individuals do at the grassroots level but it would be valuable to explore the views and perceptions of their supervisors higher up the bureaucratic, decision-making chain in these eNGO's and faith-based organizations.

Furthermore, this research was limited in that it did not talk to members of this alliance farther out geographically from the epicenter of Xwe'chi'eXen and the Lummi STP Office. It would be instructive to know how these values are used horizontally across the alliance, in communities in different regions, where the nexus of work to expand these collaborations and grow the alliance occurs. What

role does the brandishing of these principles horizontally play in either growing the numbers of allies or fortifying the collaboration from across the miles?

Surveying or interviewing collaborators in communities the Totem Pole Journey has spread its expanding alliance in would be very instructive.

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## Appendices