“A New Way of Working” – Expanding First Nations Involvement in British Columbia’s Renewable Energy Sector

By Lauren Peng
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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

As the climate crisis worsens, there is growing urgency to transition away from GHG-intensive energy systems, which has prompted extensive efforts to advance renewable energy alternatives. Within British Columbia (BC), the Provincial Government has set emissions reduction targets which will stimulate a need for more clean energy sources to support decarbonization efforts in the years to come. Over the last few decades, many First Nations in BC have expanded their involvement in renewable energy development on their territories through small-scale and community-owned renewable energy projects, advancing these projects as an avenue for self-determination, a source of economic opportunity, self-sufficiency, and energy security. Many First Nations in BC have expressed a desire to continue growing their involvement in the renewable energy sector and are well positioned to meet the growing demand for clean electricity sources. However, many have also faced institutional barriers that have stymied their efforts to advance these ambitions. This thesis begins by developing an analysis of how energy policy and governance in BC shapes opportunities for First Nations involvement in renewable energy development. It then draws upon interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts working in the field of renewable energy development to better understand First Nations' aspirations for involvement in BC's renewable energy sector, the barriers that are inhibiting these aspirations, and potential pathways to overcome these barriers.

Interviewees expressed clear aspirations for self-determination, self-sufficiency, and meaningful partnerships across the electricity system. Insights from interviews combined with the policy and landscape analysis clarified barriers embedded in utility models, mandates, policies, and processes that constrain these aspirations, and highlighted potential pathways to more effectively advance goals of 'reconciliation' through the renewable energy sector. Findings

emphasize that First Nations are not solely seeking to expand their involvement in energy at the local level, but are also seeking fundamental change to the electricity system that would enable meaningful, self-determined partnerships with the state where First Nations can play a role in energy governance more broadly, and can work collaboratively with the state to achieve shared goals. Advancing these goals will require establishing trust-based and equitable partnerships between First Nations and state energy actors to enable greater collaboration within energy governance and decision-making, as well as institutional changes to policies, decision-making processes, and mandates in support of this work.

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Acknowledgements & Dedication

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…

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, for encouraging their climate anxious and justice-driven little girl to find an outlet through her education and career

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2021, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released the report, Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector, which calls for rapid phase-outs of fossil fuels and a transition to renewable energy on a global scale (IEA, 2021). This was followed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report released in March 2023, which further calls for "deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas [GHG] emissions" (p. 12) to mitigate future losses and damages resulting from global warming (IPCC, 2023a). Both the IEA and the IPCC have said that it is not too late to make changes to shift our trajectory and secure a future for generations to come. The IPCC reminds us that for this to occur, climate resilience solutions must be "rooted in our diverse values, worldviews and knowledges, including scientific knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge" (IPCC, 2023b, para. 13).

With calls for energy transitions across the globe, this leaves many jurisdictions looking to expand clean and renewable energy resources to meet growing electricity demand. Many Indigenous communities in BC have responded to this call. The Government of British Columbia (BC) has sought to portray itself as a leader in 'reconciliation'[1] as the first jurisdiction in Canada to commit to bringing laws and policies into alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) through the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (2019) (DRIPA) (Nicholst & Morales, 2021). The accompanying DRIPA Action Plan commits the Government of BC and its institutions to supporting and growing

[1] When referring to 'reconciliation' throughout this thesis, I am specifically talking about state-led efforts to address and remedy colonial relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian and Provincial governments. 'Reconciliation' will be further discussed and critiqued in Chapter Three.

opportunities for First Nations to become involved in the energy sector[2] (BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, 2022). With these commitments, there is growing optimism that the Government of BC's priorities of electrification and 'reconciliation,' and desires from many First Nations to expand their involvement in the renewable energy sector, could be mutually supportive (Lovekin et al., 2021; Molander, 2022). Furthermore, several scholars and practitioners have speculated that energy transitions, both within BC and across Canada, could potentially offer an avenue for 'reconciliation' between Indigenous peoples and the settler-colonial state (Stefanelli et al., 2019; Mang-Benza et al., 2021).

BC is home to the highest number of Indigenous[3]-owned renewable energy projects in Canada, including a variety of projects and ownership models (Henderson & Sanders, 2018; Cook et al., 2017; Lovekin et al., 2021). Communities pursue these projects for several reasons: environmental sustainability, economic opportunity, energy security, self-sufficiency, and a potential path to self-determination[4] (Henderson, 2013; Cook et al., 2017; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015; Stefanelli et al., 2019; Fitzgerald, 2018). First Nations in BC have worked

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[2] Goal 4.43 from the DRIPA Action Plan commits the government to "Co-develop recommendations on strategic policies and initiatives for clean and sustainable energy. This includes identifying and supporting First Nations-led clean energy opportunities related to CleanBC, the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro, and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities. (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation)" ("Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan," 2022, p. 28).

[3] In so-called Canada, the Crown legally recognizes three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (Government of Canada, 2024a). First Nations in BC hold rights and title and have existed as distinct societies with diverse cultures, practices, and governance structures for millennia prior to European contact (Government of British Columbia, 2023a). When referring to a specific Nation's leadership structure recognized by the Crown, I will use the term "First Nations." However, as this term is a colonial label defined by the *Constitution Act,* 1982, I will otherwise use "Indigenous" when referring to communities and hereditary leadership.

[4] Self-determination is defined by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the right for Indigenous Peoples to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (art. 3). The assertion of self-determination takes on many different forms depending on a community's priorities, and has economic, legal, and social implications. As Atleo et al. (2022) illustrate, this has included both resistance to and participation in dominant colonial, capitalist economic and political systems. Ultimately, self-determination is the right for Indigenous peoples to decide what occurs on their territories, on their own terms (Atleo & Boron, 2023).

hard to forge relationships in the renewable energy sector and have become provincial leaders in independent power production, now operating or co-partnering at least 79 grid-tied renewable energy projects across the province[5] (Sayers, 2019; Lovekin et al., 2021). Given the growing interest from First Nations and Indigenous organizations to expand their involvement in renewable energy development, there is potential to align these priorities with the need to transition away from reliance on fossil fuels in society as a whole.

However, many Indigenous communities have experienced barriers when expanding involvement in the renewable energy sector, including limited opportunities through BC Hydro, policy decisions such as the cancellation of the Standing Offer Program (SOP) that have marginalized their involvement, and insufficient financing (Cook et al., 2017; Fitzgerald, 2018). Many First Nations in BC are also confronted with BC and Canada's extractive energy legacies that have inflicted colonial violence on their territories, particularly through the centralized energy system serviced largely by destructive hydroelectric mega dams along the Peace and Columbia Rivers (Fitzgerald, 2018; Dusyk, 2016; Goldtooth & Saldamando, 2021; Linnitt, 2018; Palmer, 2021; Simmons, 2021; Dusyk, 2016; Cox, 2018).

The energy transition in BC is at a crossroads. There is interest from First Nations to play a more significant role in the renewable energy sector (Lovekin et al., 2021), and there have been small efforts from the Government of BC to support this involvement. At the same time, First Nations are experiencing challenges when advancing renewable energy projects. These challenges lead to questions about what precisely an energy transition in BC will entail for First Nations, and what might be a pathway to achieve the level of involvement that they would like in

[5] IPP's, including Indigenous-owned IPP's, are responsible for generating approximately 21,436 GWh of power each year (BC Hydro, n.d.g).

a system that is not currently reflecting their priorities. Molander (2022) similarly asks, “what will [the energy transition in BC] look like, whose interests will be represented, and who will be leading the transition?” (Molander, 2022, p. 2).

Answering these questions requires a deeper exploration of the opportunities and barriers within BC’s renewable energy sector for First Nations, as well as a better understanding of what First Nations in BC envision for a renewable energy transition. Through this, we can explore whether and how the priorities of reconciliation, upholding of Indigenous rights, and growing demand for renewable energy in the face of climate change can be brought together. This thesis will explore these issues through three research questions:

1) What are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in BC’s renewable energy sector?
2) What are barriers to these aspirations?
3) What are pathways to overcome these barriers?

1.1 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized by six chapters, beginning with this introductory chapter which briefly describes the desires for First Nations in BC to grow involvement in the renewable energy sector, and the challenges they are facing to advance these interests. This context ultimately informs the three overarching research questions for this thesis which are introduced above. Furthermore, this chapter draws on existing literature from BC, Canada and abroad to reveal the potential for Indigenous-led renewable energy to stimulate energy transitions, and how settler-colonial institutional contexts might work against these efforts to maintain the status-quo. This chapter is followed by positionality and methods in Chapter Two, which describes my personal motivations for pursuing this research as well as the methodologies that I have selected.

Chapter Three provides an overview of energy policy and governance in BC to illustrate the context that Indigenous power proponents[6] are navigating in what I refer to as the "policy and landscape analysis." This chapter offers critical background to situate the interview findings in the subsequent chapter, which especially helps to understand mechanisms that might be posing challenges for First Nations in BC's renewable energy sector. I begin this chapter by describing the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP), which is the framework that I use to organize the policy and landscape analysis. Through this framework, I first describe the physical and sociopolitical landscape (macro) influencing energy decision-making. I then describe the actors, institutions, policies, and laws making up the electricity system, or the regime (mezzo). I then describe Indigenous renewable energy leadership at the niche (micro) level, and situate this within the regime and landscape. Through this analysis, I bring in academic literature on Indigenous-led renewable energy in BC to provide additional context about the institutional barriers that First Nations face when pursuing renewable energy projects within BC's centralized electricity system. From this analysis, as well as utilizing a case study of the Site C dam, I illustrate how power across the existing electricity regime upholds state interests and marginalizes First Nations from meaningful participation and leadership in the renewable energy sector.

Chapter Four offers a thematic analysis of the findings from expert interviews conducted with Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts working in various capacities on Indigenous inclusion in BC's renewable energy sector. This chapter is organized according to the three research questions, and uncovers aspirations for self-determination, self-sufficiency, and genuine partnerships that enable First Nations to exercise authority within energy governance; barriers

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[6] "Indigenous power proponents" is a term from Fitzgerald (2018) which I will use to describe Indigenous organizations, businesses, communities, and individuals advocating for greater involvement in the electricity sector.

caused by colonial legacies that manifest in utility models, policies, and processes that structurally exclude Indigenous peoples from meaningful involvement in the renewable energy sector; and pathways to collectively bridge goals of 'reconciliation' and renewable energy, which could potentially be supported through DRIPA.

Chapter Five brings interview findings into conversation with the policy and landscape analysis to illuminate the magnitude of change that Indigenous power proponents in BC are striving for. This research illuminates that First Nations are not solely seeking to expand their involvement in energy at the local level as a niche, but are also seeking fundamental, regime-level change to the electricity system that would enable meaningful, self-determined partnerships with the state where First Nations can play a role in energy governance more broadly, and can work collaboratively with the state to achieve collective goals. This chapter charts a pathway to achieving the vision of partnerships and self-determination that interviewees are calling for. This will require building trust-based and equitable partnerships reflecting co-governance and joint decision-making, and collaboratively making changes to policies, decision-making processes, and mandates.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the findings, as well as an overview of the key research contributions and limitations from this research project. I then discuss further reflections and considerations that arose as I was conducting this research and conclude with recommendations for future research articulated by interviewees.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Understanding settler-colonialism and its relationship to energy

When exploring renewable energy transitions in BC, it is critical to recognize that this research is occurring on Indigenous lands that have been occupied by settlers since first contact

on Turtle Island hundreds of years ago. Laying a foundation for what settler-colonialism means in relation to energy, and the associated implications for energy transitions as well as policy, governance, and relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples, is critical to begin this research.

Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) defines settler-colonialism as a relationship that is:

> …characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority (p. 13-14).

An integral element of settler-colonialism, according to Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe (2006), is the "logic of elimination" (p. 388) for the sake of building settler society. Wolfe says: "settler colonialism destroys to replace" – it is not a singular event, but an ongoing process (p. 388). Within Canada, this dispossession occurs through various mechanisms including "undermining and eradicating traditional systems of government" (McGregor, 2019, p. 141), state violence, dispossession of Indigenous lands, and laws and policies that leave Indigenous peoples in a relationship of dependency wherein they are left to seek recognition and accommodation of their rights through colonial legal mechanisms (Coulthard, 2014; Borrows, 2017; McGregor, 2019, Manuel, 2017). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) considers these acts as cultural genocide.

According to Patrick Wolfe (2006), "the primary motive [of settler-colonialism] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory" (p. 388). Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor (2019) reminds us that within Canada's natural resource

dependent economy, "land remains central to the prosperity of Canada"[7] (p. 141). The theft of Indigenous lands in contemporary Canada occurs in two key ways: overtly through physical relocation, dispossession and state violence (which was historically the primary mode of asserting state power and still occurs today, albeit less explicitly); and covertly through legislation that restricts freedoms and rights to land, resource extraction, and environmental degradation through energy infrastructures built on Indigenous lands without consent (Coulthard, 2014; Pasternak, 2019; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Anishinaabe writer and economist Winona LaDuke and settler scholar Deborah Cohen (2021) say that "energy infrastructures constitute the contemporary spine of the settler colonial nation" (p. 249). Energy infrastructure, and state-owned infrastructure more generally including oil pipelines, hydroelectric dams, railways, and roads – all of which are considered 'critical' infrastructure to the nation-state, are responsible for the destruction and theft of Indigenous lands (LaDuke & Cohen, 2021). This infrastructure becomes sites where settler-colonial relations are reproduced.

Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel criticizes arms of the colonial system – including states, corporations, or non-governmental organizations – for placing value on the planet "as a tradeable commodity to be militarized and exploited" (Corntassel, 2013, para. 2). In an interview with Naomi Klein, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013) says:

> Extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. My body is a resource and my children are a resource because they are the potential to grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation system… That's always been a part of colonialism and conquest. Colonialism has always extracted the indigenous—extraction of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples (para 11).

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[7] This is largely made possible through *terra nullius* which is the basis of Canada's jurisdictional legitimacy, and is "inextricably tied to the denial and subjugation of Indigenous jurisdictional authority and self-determination" (Atleo & Boron, 2023, p. 104).

Despite the centrality of extraction and exploitation of Indigenous lands to the making and maintaining of Canada, Simpson (2013) reminds us that "over the past 400 years, there has never been a time when indigenous peoples were not resisting colonialism" (para 6). Corntassel (2012) indicates that these resistance efforts can include reclaiming relationships with the land through place-based existences, which threaten the survival of the colonial capitalist system. For many Indigenous peoples and communities, renewable energy projects have been a vehicle for resistance against the settler state, and a way to reclaim these relationships to land (Kinder, 2021). Understanding the foundations of settler-colonialism in Canada, as well as the connections between settler-colonialism and extraction that characterize the energy sector, is critical to consider as we explore how energy transitions within BC might unfold.

1.2.2 Exploring energy transitions in settler-colonial contexts

Many scholars across several disciplines discuss the theories, processes, and practical applications of energy transitions. This literature, namely sustainability transitions, energy justice, energy democracy, and energy sovereignty, is interdisciplinary and entangled, and it is difficult to identify clear delineations between each field. This literature review is not meant to provide a robust exploration of each field, but rather clarify how these literatures can be brought into conversation to identify key concepts and contexts for specifically exploring Indigenous-led energy transitions within settler-colonial contexts.[8]

[8] I have also selected key texts that have informed my thinking when conceptualizing this research project, in particular when examining how power is wielded across varying levels of energy systems – both from Indigenous peoples asserting their authority and through settler-colonial institutions resisting this power.

Much of this literature is situated within the scholarly field of Sustainability Transitions[9] (or Sociotechnical Transitions). This field emerged in the early 2000's in Europe (Stevis et al., 2020), and predominantly explores the multi-dimensional ways that transitions to low-carbon modes of production and consumption occur across energy and other systems (Markard et al., 2012). Sustainability transitions literature has evolved from exploring energy transitions as challenges to be solved with properly suited technological solutions (Geels, 2002), to recognizing that energy transitions are often resisted by politics and power structures that perpetuate carbon lock-in and limit the success of sustainable technologies (Geels, 2014). This has prompted scholars to consider power dynamics (Geels, 2014) and implications of justice (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015) when considering transition pathways.

The Sustainability Transitions scholarly field has had minimal engagement with Indigenous perspectives. This has prompted scholars such as Köhler et al. (2019), Hopkins et al. (2020), and Doyon et al. (2021) to call for alternative research agendas that expand the field's conceptual understanding of energy transitions through including decolonial and global south perspectives.[10]

Doyon et al. (2021) write:

> Energy transitions in particular can be chaotic or challenging for those involved. There is a need to consider the harms and benefits, as well as who is involved in these processes (and who is not), who the winners and losers are, and whether these experiences are connected to historical exclusions of people and worldviews. (p. 1)

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[9] Sustainability transitions are long-term, multi-dimensional transformation processes through which socio-technical systems undergo fundamental shifts to more sustainable modes of production and consumption (Kemp 1994; Schot & Geels, 2010). Geels (2004) defines a sociotechnical system as, "the linkages between elements necessary to fulfill societal functions" (p. 900), such as energy supply, water supply, and transportation (Martens, 2015, p. 13; Markard et al., 2012).

[10] Other scholars who have included perspectives on Indigenous involvement in energy transitions within settler-Colonial contexts include Williams and Doyon (2019), Martens (2015), Broto et al. (2018), MacArthur and Matthewman (2017), Karanasios (2018), and Karanisios & Parker (2018).

Doyon et al. (2021) remind us that it is especially important to explore Indigenous perspectives on energy transitions within settler-colonial contexts given the harm that Indigenous peoples have experienced from colonial energy systems, as well as the barriers they face when growing involvement in the energy sector. Furthermore, Doyon et al. (2021) note that "Indigenous peoples' relationships to systems, justice, and governance can inform new research directions in power and politics in transitions and governance of transitions research, as well as different ways to understand and confront power" (p. 9). Not only do Indigenous perspectives provide a more fulsome understanding of energy transitions within settler-colonial contexts, but failing to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into energy transitions literature renders invisible the ways that Indigenous peoples resist hegemonic power and lead energy transitions in their own right.

Conversations of energy justice emerged from within the sustainability transitions scholarly field through the work of Benjamin Sovacool, who was one of the first scholars to discuss the importance of integrating justice in analyses of energy transitions (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015). Through integrating a justice lens when examining energy transitions, Sovacool & Dworkin take inspiration from environmental justice literature to recognize the unequal distribution of cost and benefits associated with energy systems and their particularly devastating effects for marginalized communities. They advocate for "a global energy system that fairly disseminates both the benefits and costs of energy services, and one that has representative and impartial decision-making" (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015, p. 436). Similarly to sustainability transitions literature, Sovacool & Dworkin's energy justice framework has been criticized for its Eurocentric focus (Sovacool et al., 2017). Conversations within this space have evolved to reflect a need for an intersectional approach to considerations of energy justice that includes gender, Indigeneity, and other equity lenses (Sovacool et al., 2023).

MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) contribute to these growing conceptualizations of energy justice within settler-colonial contexts through their research that explores Māori-led energy transitions in Aotearoa (New Zealand) as a response to elite capture of political and economic interests, which has stimulated desires for decentralized and locally owned energy. MacArthur and Matthewman draw from Coombs et al. (2012) and Mey & Diesendorf (2017) to ask: "who owns the energy transition?" (p. 17). Considering this question within the settler-colonial histories and political contexts of Aotearoa illuminate that Māori are particularly well positioned to lead renewable energy transitions given their relationships to land, environmental ethic, and governance systems that have existed well before the settler-state. MacArthur and Matthewman's research also points to the settler state's responsibility to ensure that energy transitions do not cause further harm to Indigenous and other marginalized populations.[11]

MacArthur and Matthewman's (2018) case study illuminates "…a unique and important alternative dimension of energy transitions…that links the recognition of the centrality of Māori and the value of their environmental ethic to a just and sustainable path forward in [Aotearoa]" (p. 22). In doing so, MacArthur & Matthewman argue that energy transitions occurring within settler-colonial contexts must confront and rewrite their violent histories in order to be truly just. Feola et al. (2021) and MacArthur (2017) echo this perspective and forward that a sustainable and just energy future will not occur through merely adding solutions to existing systems, but will instead require us to challenge and eradicate the exploitative systems, structures, and relationships that are perpetuating conditions of marginalization in the first place.

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[11] Atleo and Boron (2023) note that energy transitions often entail an increase in extraction for minerals necessary to build renewable energy technologies, largely from Indigenous territories in Canada in the Global South. This places "Indigenous territories, peoples, and livelihoods…under threat, not despite, but also because of the emerging drive to decarbonize" (Atleo & Boron, 2023, p. 112).

Exploration of justice and power within energy transitions is further articulated through concepts such as energy democracy and energy sovereignty. Burke and Stephens (2017) see decentralized, community-owned renewable energy as a potential way to reorder existing power relations within the energy sector and as a potential pathway for justice – which they call energy democracy. Importantly, they point out that justice is not inherent to decentralized and community-owned renewable energy itself. Instead, for justice to be achieved in these configurations, renewable energy projects must actively challenge existing power relations, which in settler-colonial contexts, requires centering renewable energy around Indigenous self-determination and anti-colonial practices (Grosse and Mark, 2023; Cook, 2019). In Burke and Stephens' (2017) words: "renewable energy systems offer a possibility but not a certainty for more democratic energy futures" (p. 80).

Energy sovereignty builds on the tenets of energy democracy and energy justice to consider how decentralized and renewable energy can be "…an emancipatory project" (Broto et al., 2018, p. 647), particularly when energy projects are owned by Indigenous communities and centred around self-determination. Schelly et al. (2020) consider energy sovereignty in the legal sense, meaning having settler governments recognize Indigenous rights and authority, and in the non-legal sense of having the ability to exercise control over decision-making within their traditional territories[12] (p. 109). Schelly et al. (2020) draw attention to the challenges of advancing energy sovereignty for Indigenous peoples and communities within settler-colonial

[12] "Sovereignty" is a term that is inherently tied to state authority. As such, I will not be utilizing "sovereignty" throughout my thesis in the way that Schelly et al. (2020) describe. Instead, I will use "authority" when referring to Indigenous rights to govern, and "self-determination" when referring to Indigenous peoples making their own decisions on their lands. I will, however, utilize "sovereignty" when it is named by other scholars as well as interviewees.

contexts, in their case the United States, as existing policy and institutional frameworks dispossess Indigenous peoples of their rights and authority.

Drawing from energy transitions, energy justice, energy democracy, and energy sovereignty literature illuminates that energy transitions in settler-colonial contexts are complicated and contested landscapes of power that hold the potential (but not the certainty) to reshape harmful colonial power dynamics; however, this could face resistance from organizations embedded in existing colonial energy systems. This literature reveals that pursuing energy transitions do not only provide the opportunity to move toward low-carbon and more sustainable futures, but also to address the systems that perpetuate exclusion and dispossession of marginalized groups.

1.2.3 Indigenous leadership in energy transitions

Community-scale renewable energy alternatives, and particularly those that are Indigenous-led, are emerging in diverse contexts across the globe. Communities are often driven by their frustrations toward the failures or harm caused by existing extractive energy systems, and a desire to respond to the climate crisis through innovations at the local level (MacArthur, 2017; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015). The motivations behind Indigenous-led renewable energy projects vary depending on each community's unique context and priorities (Stefanelli et al., 2019). These projects have the potential to provide economic opportunity, energy security, a way to assert authority, an avenue for cultural revitalization and reclamation of rights, and a pathway to self-determination (Henderson, 2013; Ozog, 2016; Lowan-Trudeau, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2018). More recently, scholars such as Stefanelli et al. (2019), Mang-Benz et al. (2021), and Scott

(2020) have also suggested that Indigenous-led renewable energy could be an avenue for reconciliation.[13]

Many scholars argue that Indigenous-led renewable energy not only supports communities at the local level, but has the potential to stimulate energy transitions at regional and national levels (Mang-Benza et al., 2021; MacArthur & Matthewman, 2018; Stefanelli et al., 2019; Scott, 2020; Smith & Scott, 2021). Scott (2020) illustrates this through exploring Indigenous power proponents in Canada who have advanced national energy democracy agendas (p. 482). She argues that many of the policies that support energy democracy in Canada exist because of Indigenous leaders who are pushing this field forward, and also sees energy democracy as an umbrella to bridge multiple priorities: "Indigenous-owned power production is not only an effective reconciliation opportunity but also powerful climate action and a foundation for energy democracy to flourish through rural and remote areas of Canada" (p. 483).

Most existing literature on Indigenous-led renewable energy within Canada is focused on off-grid communities[14] that are dependent on diesel generators whose key motivations are to decrease reliance on fossil fuels in response to health and environmental concerns (Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015; Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Rakshit et al., 2018). Early scholars spoke of

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[13] Although these scholars are referring to the state-led process of 'reconciliation' that I address earlier in this chapter, these scholars are also more generally speaking about the potential for renewable energy projects to act as vehicles for improving relationships between the settler-state and Indigenous peoples. Throughout this thesis, the use of reconciliation without quotation marks will thus refer to improving relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples, while 'reconciliation' will refer more specifically to more formalized, state-led commitments. As I will expand on further in Chapters 2 and 3, state-led attempts at 'reconciliation' have been widely criticized by many Indigenous peoples. However, Daigle (2019) reminds readers that the true meaning of reconciliation is "not a performance or feel-good mandate, but relations of responsibility and accountability based on Indigenous law that Indigenous peoples continue to embody, regenerate, and demand for radical and transformative change" (p. 715).

[14] The regulatory contexts between grid-connected and off-grid communities differs significantly, leaving many of the nuances of community renewable energy for grid-connected communities under-addressed within academic literature. This is a gap that scholars such as Fitzgerald (2018) have contributed to addressing, through examining the injustices faced by grid-connected Indigenous communities in BC who are limited in their opportunities for renewable energy generation due to lack of supportive government policy.

Indigenous renewable energy projects in off-grid communities as a way to meet Canada's sustainability and development goals as well as energy needs through reducing the usage of diesel (Krupa, 2012). Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2015) critique this approach as it sees Indigenous renewable energy as "low-hanging fruit" to meet GHG emissions reduction targets (Calvert & Simandan, 2010, as cited on p. 790), and fails to centre the emancipatory and disruptive potential of these projects for fostering self-determination and transforming energy systems.

Métis scholar Gregory Lowan-Trudeau (2017) argues that Indigenous-led energy projects are not only a means of stimulating energy transitions, but are "a manifestation of resistance that emerges from working both within and outside of established political and economic systems in the service of Indigenous well-being" (p. 602). Métis scholar Jordan B. Kinder (2021) took a similar approach through his concept of "Indigenous solarities," which sees the potential for renewable energy (solar, in the case of the Lubicon Cree First Nation in Alberta used as a case study in his article) to act as a medium of Indigenous resistance and a "form of solidarity among the human and nonhuman world" (p. 64). This is made possible through relations between the human and more-than-human world that are forged through harnessing natural resources in a sustainable way[15] (Kinder, 2021). Kinder's conception of "Indigenous solarities" reflects Powell (2006) who calls Indigenous-owned renewable energy projects "technologies of existence," arguing that these projects build avenues for Indigenous peoples to resist natural resource extraction while living in relationship to the land and in alignment with their worldviews.

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[15] Renewable energy, however, has potential to lead to more extraction of natural resources, which should not be overlooked. Kinder (2021) engages with Riofrancos' (2019) term "green extractivism," defined as "the subordination of human rights and ecosystems to endless extraction in the name of 'solving' climate change" (para. 19). In Riofrancos' article, they are referring specifically to lithium mining in Chile for renewable technologies. Atleo & Boron (2023) note that this expansion of mining to power the renewable energy transition is happening on Indigenous territories both at home and abroad. Kinder points to the need for solarities – that is solidarity which must accompany the material elements of renewable technologies – to ensure that extractive relationships harming Indigenous peoples, lands, and ecosystems are mitigated in the energy transition.

Literature often portrays Indigenous-led renewable energy projects in an idyllic way, which has prompted scholars such as Bargh (2010) to caution against its over-romanticization,[16] pointing out several barriers and challenges that can arise when Indigenous peoples seek to advance renewable energy projects. Recalling Burke and Stephens' (2017) insights on energy democracy, the revolutionary potential is not inherent to renewable and decentralized energy itself, as the structures, ownership models, relationships, and types of projects have the potential to reproduce systems of injustice. These considerations have prompted Campney (2019), Hoicka et al. (2021), and Savic & Hoicka (2023) to explore different project ownership models for Indigenous-led community renewable energy in Canada, and ultimately argue that Indigenous control and ownership is necessary to realize self-determination and 'reconciliation' through renewable energy projects. Similarly, Leonhardt et al. (2023) draw on Smith and Scott (2021) to argue that energy system transformation through renewable energy projects is only possible if Indigenous authority can be exercised through them.

Some scholars have also emphasized that human and resource constraints, as well as limited access to appropriate financial supports, limits the ability for communities to participate fully in developing energy projects (Krupa, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2018; Cook, 2019; Rakshit et al., 2018). These challenges often prompt communities to pursue renewable energy projects in partnership with the state and/or industry to provide additional capacity, access to capital, and expertise that communities may lack internally (Fitzgerald, 2018; Savic et al., 2023). In fact, Campney (2019) found that the ownership models of most Indigenous renewable energy projects in Canada are partnerships between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous corporations.

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[16] Lowan-Trudeau (2017) and Bargh (2010) remind us that renewable energy projects are not exempt from environmental destruction, as they still have caused harm to communities and ecosystems.

However, scholars have drawn attention to the potential of partnerships to recreate harmful colonial relationships and extractive conditions unless Indigenous communities can exercise decision-making authority and have control over energy projects (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017; Savic et al., 2023; Leonhardt et al., 2023). Furthermore, Walker et al.'s (2021) research reveals that the potential of reconciliation through renewable energy partnerships is stymied by non-Indigenous partners' lack of education about Canada's colonial history, systemic inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples, and their own personal responsibilities to reconciliation while working within colonial energy systems.[17]

Scholars further point to several institutional barriers that stifle opportunities for Indigenous involvement in renewable energy. MacArthur (2017) points out that:

> Local [energy] actors do not operate on a level playing field with large private energy companies or with centralized state-owned ones, so the uptake of community renewables differs greatly among jurisdictions and is dependent on targeted policy interventions, human and financial resources, and political culture (p. 16).

MacArthur (2017) further argues that policies that support renewable and decentralized energy transitions are often resisted by actors who benefit from existing institutional arrangements (p. 5). For example, profit-driven utility structures can pose challenges when transitioning to renewable and decentralized energy models, as utilities have a vested interest in protecting their market opportunities and are therefore less likely to openly share with independent power producers (Brunhuber, 2016; Lowan-Trudeau, 2017; Walker et al., 2021; Schelly et al., 2020). This is reflected by Leonhardt et al. (2023) who note the challenges of pursuing energy transitions within centralized energy systems "with historically embedded rules and regulations,"

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[17] For this reason, McGregor (2019) calls for the "genuine restructuring and transformation of contemporary relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples" (p. 140) in policy more broadly.

such as BC, and suggest that "supporting community energy directly implies the need for alternatives to traditional, centralized structures" (p. 8).

Several scholars, including MacArthur and Matthewman (2018), MacArthur (2017), Smith and Scott (2021), Berka et al. (2020), and Leonhardt et al. (2023) have also found that governance and policy environments have a significant impact on the success of these projects. According to Leonhardt et al. (2023):

> Government instruments, referred to in this paper as formal policies, programs, or regulations, play a critical role in either enabling or constraining energy transitions (Grashof, 2021), and are paramount to transformative energy and economic growth (Belain et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022a) and improving access to CRE [community renewable energy] (Astuti et al., 2019). Government instruments comprise the basic institutional arrangements (Williamson, 2000) of energy systems and thus impact the nature, opportunities, and extent to which energy systems can transition. (p. 1)

Smith and Scott (2021) and Richards et al. (2012, as cited by Lowan-Trudeau, 2017) suggest that for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects to meet their transformative potential within energy systems, supportive policies and political environments are required to enable the expression of Indigenous authority and hold existing institutions accountable to these priorities. Hoicka et al. (2021) draw from Scott (2020) to call for "stable enabling policy frameworks" to be "co-created with Indigenous communities, with credible and aspiring targets and clear responsibilities" (p. 484).

Grosse and Mark (2023) find this particularly challenging within settler-colonial contexts, as their research has illuminated that "[l]egal, material, and social barriers, rooted in colonial power structures of land expropriation, domination of settler values and norms, and cultural and environmental oppression, have prevented much renewable development and shaped existing projects to benefit settlers more than or at the expense of Native communities" (p. 9). Walker et al. (2021) had similar findings when inquiring into whether renewable energy will contribute

toward ‘reconciliation’ commitments, arguing that “[renewable energy projects] are unlikely to go very far if they are set within the same arrangement of colonial practices that expect Indigenous communities to change and adopt more “sophisticated” business practices” (p. 650). MacArthur (2017) echoes these concerns and argues that community renewable energy configurations are further challenged by capitalist economic structures that are not supportive of decentralized and renewable energy. Each of these scholars emphasize the need for wide-spread institutional changes to support Indigenous-led renewable energy projects, and more broadly, Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions at the systems-level.

The literature above suggests several areas where changes might be necessary to grow Indigenous involvement in renewable energy, including through providing additional capacity supports, moving away from profit-driven utility structures, improving policy frameworks, and adopting partnership models that support community ownership and expression of Indigenous authority. Lowan-Trudeau (2017) raises the question, “...is the system really ready for such changes? Will governments and utility giants allow Indigenous communities to continue down the path of energy sovereignty or will they be stopped somehow and kept in their place?” (p. 611) Scott (2020) provides an important consideration as we conceive of these potential changes: “as our energy decision making evolves, so too must our imagination about who can and should profit” (p. 483).

1.2.4 Indigenous-led renewable energy in BC

There is a growing body of literature that explores Indigenous-owned renewable energy within BC. Ozog (2012), Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2016), Cook et al. (2017), Rezaei (2017), Fitzgerald (2018), Cook (2019), Molander (2022), and Hoicka et al (2024) have all unanimously articulated aspirations from various Indigenous communities in BC – both grid-connected and

off-grid – to grow their involvement in the renewable energy sector. Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2016) explore the motivations and desires of remote Indigenous communities in BC when pursuing renewable energy projects, and find that this hinges largely on self-sufficiency as a component of self-determination. Rezaei & Dowlatabadi define self-sufficiency in the material sense, meaning supporting communities to supply their own energy (and subsequently displacing reliance on diesel), as well as in the political sense through expanding a community's decision-making power, defining relationships to land, and decolonizing energy planning processes (Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015, p. 804). Through this research, Rezaei & Dowlatabadi find that:

> community energy projects are seen as a part of bigger projects of decolonisation aimed at addressing different elements of the colonial system, be it eliminating dependence on colonial institutions, reinvigorating communities' ability to practise cultural and political self-determination, or ultimately addressing the injustices of the colonial system and its patterns of dispossession by returning resource governance decisions to the community level. (p. 801)

Fitzgerald (2018) contributes to this literature through exploring motivations behind grid-connected First Nations who are seeking greater involvement in the renewable energy sector, noting that most of the existing literature within this space is focused on off-grid communities. Similarly to Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, Fitzgerald also finds that self-determination and self-sufficiency remain linked as core motivators to pursue renewable energy projects. Her research reveals that Kanaka Bar and Sts'ailes First Nations' renewable energy projects created employment opportunities, and own-source revenue from grid-tied projects was invested in foundational infrastructure and food security initiatives. Energy self-sufficiency was also a benefit through these projects, as when the main grid went down, these communities could rely on their own domestically produced energy to power their buildings. For both Fitzgerald and Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, reducing reliance on the settler-colonial state was critical to self-determination and self-sufficiency, and a core motivator for these projects.

The challenges imposed by settler-colonial institutions that resist efforts for Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions have been particularly evident in BC. Opportunities for Indigenous communities to grow their involvement in this field have significantly diminished over the last 5 years, largely due to policy decisions which have cancelled programs that provided integral support for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects[18] (Fitzgerald, 2018). In her master's Thesis, Fitzgerald utilizes a lens of energy justice to argue that the Government of BC's policy decisions resulting in declining power procurement programs are an injustice toward First Nations. Fitzgerald draws inspiration from Rezaei's (2017) PhD dissertation, both of whom illuminate that policies have been utilized by the Government of BC to further entrench the status-quo of large-scale hydroelectricity production, resulting in systemically marginalizing Indigenous power proponents from the energy sector, in addition to creating further dependency and forced displacement. These examples situate energy *injustice* as a result of active and ongoing policy decisions, and demonstrate the inertia and resistance to change within institutional spaces that draw attention to the challenges ahead in advancing energy justice within BC.

In Molander's (2022) Master's Thesis, she situates the pursuit of Indigenous-led renewable energy projects and the associated barriers within the context of the Government of BC's commitments to 'reconciliation' and UNDRIP through DRIPA. Molander critiques the Government of BC's climate policies as well as its approach to consultation and engagement with Indigenous peoples for failing to deliver on provincial commitments to UNDRIP, which has consequently undermined opportunities for First Nations to grow their involvement within the

[18] Namely, the Standing Offer Program (SOP) which I will detail in the policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three.

energy sector. To address these failures, Molander argues that “BC must acknowledge its colonial roots in energy decision-making, and act in a way that takes all measures necessary to adhere to Indigenous rights and title and [privilege] the place-based knowledges and expertise of local Indigenous peoples” (p. 50). This also includes “revis[ing BC’s] climate policies and strategies to ensure alignment with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (p. 50).

Molander’s research gestures toward a desire for system-wide transformation to make way for the level of involvement that Indigenous peoples in BC are striving for in the renewable energy sector. This is further explored by Hoicka et al. (2024) who’s research in partnership with Clean Energy BC examines ongoing efforts from several Indigenous communities and organizations to develop a First Nations Power Authority (FNPA) in BC as an intermediary to support communities in their pursuit of renewable energy projects and challenge BC Hydro’s monopoly to transform the electricity landscape. Hoicka et al. articulates “how the lack of institutional control at the regional scale is viewed by British Columbia First Nations as one of the key barriers to generating renewable energy for socioeconomic development and self-determination” (p. 2). Hoicka et al.’s research illustrates the perception from several First Nations that BC Hydro’s monopoly limits their ability to achieve the energy future they want, and demonstrates the potential of an FNPA to “stretch and transform” the electricity system in favour of Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Existing literature illuminates the challenges of advancing an Indigenous-led renewable energy transition within an electricity system that is state-controlled and has historically prioritized large-scale hydro development while undermining opportunities to grow involvement in renewable energy. Leonhardt et al. (2023) note the challenges of pursuing energy transitions

within centralized energy systems "with historically embedded rules and regulations," and suggest that "supporting community energy directly implies the need for alternatives to traditional, centralized structures," (p. 8) which is also reflected by the FNPA model in Hoicka et al. (2024). This leads to questions about how, precisely, these exclusionary rules and regulations are historically embedded and maintained within BC's electricity system.

1.2.5 Summarizing the literature review

This literature review illustrates the potential that lies in Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions to fundamentally shift extractive energy systems toward a decentralized, just, and more sustainable future. The growing momentum at the community level for Indigenous peoples to build renewable energy projects illuminates the potential for these projects to support self-determination and resist colonial powers; however, this hinges on Indigenous communities having control and ownership over projects on their territories. This literature review also points to barriers including human and financial resource constraints, profit-driven utility models that seek to protect their market opportunities, and unfavorable policy environments that stymie Indigenous communities when advancing renewable energy projects in settler-colonial contexts. This literature reveals that governance and institutional environments play a significant role in determining the success of Indigenous-led renewable energy projects, and the potential for Indigenous-led renewable energy to stimulate energy system transformation. With existing literature in BC pointing toward growing momentum for Indigenous communities to pursue renewable energy projects and potentially transform the electricity system, as well as institutional barriers that stand in the way of this vision, BC is a well-situated case study to further explore these questions.

1.3 Research scope

For this study, I chose to interview individuals from grid-connected as well as off-grid Indigenous communities. Although each of these contexts is unique, I wanted to provide as broad of an overview as possible of the renewable energy field at this particular moment. I chose to focus only on BC for several reasons. Firstly, BC was the first jurisdiction in North America to commit to implementing UNDRIP in law, and is recognized as a trailblazer in advancing 'reconciliation' (Borrows et al., 2020; Nicholst & Morales, 2021). Since the adoption of DRIPA in 2019, the policy and governance landscape has shifted, and inquiring into what these changes mean for Indigenous power proponents is increasingly important. Secondly, BC is home to the highest number of renewable energy projects with some level of Indigenous ownership or involvement in Canada, which speaks to the leadership within this field (Henderson & Sanders, 2018). Thirdly, the legal context in BC is unique as the majority of the land remains unsurrendered and unceded, with very few First Nations having entered into modern treaty agreements.[19] Finally, BC is where I am currently living, and where I am pursuing my master's degree. This offers a particularly complex governance context to explore – one that may provide leverage for Indigenous leadership within the sector.

[19] The modern treaties that currently exist in BC include the Lheidli T'enneh Treaty (2018), Tla'amIn Final Agreement (2011), the Yale First Nation Final Agreement (2011), the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement (2009), and the Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement (2007) (BC Treaty Commission, n.d.).

Chapter Two: Positionality and Methods

In this positionality chapter, I will chronicle the process of developing this research project. In an interview transcript with Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson about their book, *Rehearsals for Living,* Maynard and Simpson discuss the concept of "rehearsal as study" (Maynard et al., 2021). They highlight the importance of treating their academic and activist work as rehearsal. Simpson says, "in rehearsal there is always possibility. There is always the chance to stop and rethink something and do it differently. There are no mistakes in rehearsal, only chances to try it again. And while you can have a perfect performance, you can't ever have a flawless rehearsal" (Maynard et al., 2021, p. 145). Drawing inspiration from Maynard & Simpson (2023), this thesis research process has been an opportunity to rehearse the scholar, student, and person that I would like to be.

In the spring semester of 2022, I had the privilege of taking a class with Dr. Sarah Hunt / Tłaliłila'ogwa called "Decolonizing Methodologies" which laid critical groundwork for how I have approached this research project. Throughout this course, we had the privilege of reading and learning from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars about how to conduct research in a good way, and how to approach solidarity and decoloniality within our studies, praxis, and life. We learned that decolonization is an everyday practice and a lifelong journey, and solidarity and allyship is a dynamic process and active relationship rather than a destination or fixed identity (Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Kluttz et al., 2019).

During the "Decolonizing Methodologies" class, Sarah encouraged us (the majority of us being settlers) to draw connections to our own experiences with colonialism, and to inquire into the ways that settler-colonialism has impacted us, our families, and our own connections to

home.[20] Nathalie Clarke (2016) cites Wilson (2008) and Meyer (2008) to say, "Indigenous scholars no longer willing to leave spirit at the door have reminded us to situate ourselves in our writing, to start from our intentions, to answer the question: Who are you and why do you care?" (p. 48) Before we move further, I will answer this question.

2.1 Who am I, and why do I care?

My name is Lauren Peng; I'm a 27-year-old cisgendered white settler woman of mixed European ancestry. Although my exact ancestry is difficult to pinpoint, I carry English, Scottish, and Irish ancestry on my mom's side, and German, French, and Hungarian ancestry on my dad's side. My families have been in Canada for many generations, so my relationship to my ancestral homelands feels elusive. The closest connection I have is through my paternal grandfather's parents, Leo and Anna, who both died many years before I was born. Leo and Anna immigrated from Austro-Hungary to Kitchener, Ontario in the 1930's. Their memories are kept alive through fleeting stories that my dad and grandpa would share, and the occasional time when my dad would cook a (sometimes botched) version of chicken paprikash for dinner or buy us poppyseed strudel that reminded him of what Grandpa Leo used to make.

I was born and raised in Kitchener, Ontario as the oldest of three kids to two cisgendered, heterosexual, middle-class, suburban parents. My parents are wonderful people who have taught us to walk through the world with love and respect for people and the planet, to be open-minded and curious, and to leave every place we enter into better than we found it. My upbringing brought with it many privileges, and with my identity and social location, I am mostly able to move through the world and society with relative ease.

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[20] In a class discussion, Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2022) shared, "the colonial present is dislocating for everybody."

My own process of unsettling came into focus during my Bachelor's degree in Public Affairs and Policy Management where I specialized in Development Studies, which provided me with a robust background in understanding colonial history globally and its creation of, and continued impacts on, the Global South. Unfortunately, and perhaps tellingly, my degree strongly lacked a focus on colonialism within Canada, which, alongside my research interest in community renewable energy spurred through my undergraduate honour's research essay, is ultimately what pushed me toward my interest in Indigenous-led renewable energy projects as acts of self-determination and resistance in Canada.

At first, my interest in this topic was fuelled by a feeling of responsibility as a settler with a background in policy and government to use my knowledge and skillset in support of and in solidarity with Indigenous resistance through renewable energy – particularly given the harm caused by the colonial systems and institutions I have inherited and continue to benefit from. This was largely inspired by a talk from Jen Gobby, a settler scholar and activist, who spoke of moving from "research as scholarship" to "research as allyship" (Gobby, 2021). Through this process, I have endeavored to use my privilege as a white settler graduate student through this thesis, not to *make* space for Indigenous peoples — which assumes they cannot do so themselves — but rather to identify, problematize, and challenge the structures and systems that work to prevent Indigenous peoples from taking up this space themselves. One way to mobilize my agency to bring about change is to make current conditions and power relations visible through writing, as Slovin (2020) does in their paper.[21] As this research project has taken shape and I have continued along my own decolonial journey, I have also come to realize through readings,

[21] This wording is taken from a paper that my friend, Findley Dunn, and myself are in the process of writing on approaching research as solidarity as young settler scholars. Many thanks to Fin for their blessing to also use these words in my thesis.

relationships, and conversations with interviewees, peers, faculty, and others, that researching in solidarity[22] with Indigenous energy leaders seeking to expand their involvement and authority within the renewable energy sector is not just about my responsibility as a settler living on unceded lands, but about our collective survival (Estes, 2019).

As the world continues to burn, settler-colonial violence wages onward nationally and globally in full display with little consequence, and the impacts of capitalism reveal themselves in increasingly destructive ways, I have found myself drawn to other ways of living, seeing, and relating to the world. Indigenous ways of living and resisting settler-colonialism are manifestations of alternatives to the extractive capitalist, settler-colonial order. I take inspiration from Lilla Watson and the Aboriginal Activists Group in Queensland in 1970 who said "if you come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together" (Watson, 2004).

2.2 Methods

I began this chapter with my positionality, as this is ultimately what my methods have stemmed from. I draw inspiration from Fitzgerald (2018) who begins her thesis methods chapter in the following way:

> How do you know what you know? Traditionally, scholars might call this a methodology chapter but since I did not begin the research with a specific methodology approach in mind, my intent here is to instead locate myself in this research, name key influences, and describe how I proceeded with the research (p. 29).

[22] As a white woman, I want to acknowledge that I am privileged in being able to choose when I show up in solidarity with Indigenous and other forms of resistance (Flowers, 2015; Saad and DiAngelo, 2020; Starblanket, 2018), and I am able to hide behind this privilege whenever it is convenient (Smith, 2021). This is a reality that Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized groups do not experience (Saad and DiAngelo, 2020).

For my own research process, I also did not begin with any specific methodological approach in mind. Now that I have shared with you more about myself and my own personal motivations for this research, I will now follow Fitzgerald's lead and talk about how this research project was shaped and executed.

2.2.1 Shaping the project

My supervisor, Dr. Kara Shaw, and many of her past students (namely Fitzgerald [2018] and Cook [2019]) have conducted excellent research in the Indigenous renewable energy field for their masters' thesis. When I chose to come to UVic for graduate school, I was excited to learn from Dr, Shaw and draw from her networks. One of the most common lessons for scholars working with Indigenous communities is the importance of relationships and relationship-building – research should not be done without establishing meaningful connections with those you are working alongside and whose stories you are representing (Kovach, 2021). Since I was not conducting research with a community in the geographical sense but rather was endeavoring to work within and alongside a professional community, I still sought to develop critical relationships before beginning my research.

In fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, Dr. Shaw and I had Zoom meetings with Indigenous leaders who were actively working toward advancing opportunities for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects in BC. Through these conversations, it became evident that there was a need for more public awareness about the importance of Indigenous leadership in energy, and to draw attention to the ways in which the Provincial Government was failing to recognize or prioritize Indigenous authority and aspirations in energy policy. The leaders I spoke with agreed that

academic research could be helpful in supporting broader efforts of advancing energy opportunities for Indigenous power proponents.[23]

Following these calls, I sought out conferences where I could further develop relationships with other leaders in the field. I virtually attended the First Nations Energy Summit in November 2021 where I was able to gain a broader understanding of how leaders in the field are moving in and around the landscape. I then attended the Renewables in Remote Communities conference in Whitehorse, YT in April 2022 where First Nations, government actors, Members of Parliament, private sector actors, researchers, and others gathered to discuss how to advance energy involvement for rural and Indigenous communities. This conference provided critical opportunities for further developing relationships as well as context as to how to best frame my research in a way that would be most helpful to the field. During this time, I also began conducting research for my literature review and was initially inspired by pieces such as Stefanelli et al. (2019) and Hoicka et al. (2021) who were considering the connections between Indigenous sovereignty through renewable energy to state commitments to 'reconciliation,' as well as Fitzgerald (2018), Cook et al. (2017), and Lovekin et al. (2021) who drew attention to some of the systemic and governance barriers facing Indigenous communities in BC's renewable energy sector.

At each of these conferences and in-person gatherings, there were conversations about inertia within settler-colonial institutions that makes it difficult for Indigenous power proponents to take on a bigger role in the energy sector – particularly in terms of electricity generation – as well as stories about how Nations and allied organizations were relentlessly pushing against these barriers. The narratives at conferences seemed to indicate that many felt frustrated and

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[23] It is important to note that a formal research relationship was not established for this thesis.

unsure about how to move forward within the existing energy sector and suggested that further research would be helpful to better understand this inertia. Following these conferences, and after many months of deliberation, further reading, and refining, I developed the three research questions that guide this thesis:

1. What are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in renewable energy?
2. What are barriers to these aspirations?
3. What are pathways to overcome these barriers?

The first research question – *what are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector?* – seeks to first explore the desires and visions from Indigenous energy leaders within the renewable energy sector, as well as how state institutions are understanding these desires. The second research question – *what are barriers to achieving these aspirations?* – seeks to understand *how* Indigenous power proponents are being stymied in their efforts within BC's settler-colonial energy sector, and to consider specific mechanisms and institutions that might need to change. Finally, the third research question – *what are pathways to overcome these barriers*? – considers potential ways that Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions can be realized within BC's settler-colonial energy context.

In Natalie Clarke's (2016) work with Indigenous girls' resistance to colonialism, she challenges western norms of research that perpetuate telling Indigenous stories of trauma and harm. Clarke reminds us that "it is vitally important in our listening and our witnessing that we do not continue to create narratives of risk and harm separated from the stories of strength,

resiliency and survivance" [24] (p. 54). I integrated this strengths-based lens into my research questions by asking about aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector as well as pathways to overcome existing barriers, rather than solely focusing on the barriers. In doing so, I endeavor to represent the potential and hope within this field, and to open space for interviewees to illustrate how we can move forward collectively toward a more resilient energy future.

Since the research design was not formally collaborative as we did not have any Indigenous partners, my supervisor and I intentionally chose broad questions to create space for interviews to influence the direction and analysis of the research, and to avoid being prescriptive in the findings. We then developed 10 interview questions loosely based on observations from conferences as well as the preliminary literature review, which was further refined by support from my committee member, Professor Deborah Curran.

2.2.2 Recruitment and interviews

Once the research and interview questions were decided, I began reaching out via email to individuals that I had met at conferences or those who were in relationship with my supervisor to ask whether they would be interested in interviewing for my thesis. From here, I utilized snowball sampling to find other interviewees and attended other conferences in the meantime to

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[24] One of the people interviewed for this research, P2, made clear to me that they are not interested in being part of a story that was not about hope, so I have taken this to heart in how I have framed and written this thesis. Dr. Judith Sayers (2019) also draws attention to the importance of illuminating the good-news stories of First Nations renewable energy in BC in her policy brief from the Yellowhead Institute, which challenged a brief called "'Decolonizing' Clean Energy Policy in Canada?" written by Kornelson et al. (2019) that painted a bleak picture of the failures of existing provincial/territorial renewable energy policies to reflect Indigenous desires. Although these barriers are necessary to illuminate, Sayers challenges Kornelson and his colleagues' narrative by illuminating the strength portrayed by First Nations in BC who have fought to take up space within the renewable energy sector. Although many barriers still exist, it is critical to clarify that the renewable energy sector in BC has been actively changed due to the work of First Nations and allies.

continue developing and deepening relationships. I conducted 12 interviews with 10 individuals from December 2022 to June 2023 with Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals working in the Indigenous renewable energy field within communities, civil society, the Government of BC, and the BC Utilities Commission. Interviews varied in length, lasting between 45 and 105 minutes. I was unable to secure an interview with a BC Hydro representative, which is a critical perspective that is missing from this research.[25] The individuals interviewed, their identity, as well as their occupations have been listed in the table below. Names and exact positions have been redacted and pseudonyms have been selected to protect the identity of interviewees. I have chosen not to refer to the gender of interviewees throughout this thesis as another identifying factor, and instead utilize the pronoun "they" for everyone.

Table 1: Interviewee details

Identifier	Number of interviews	Indigenous/non-Indigenous?	Professional role
P1	1	Indigenous	Executive director of a clean energy industry association
P2	2	Indigenous	Retired First Nation Chief
P3	1	Indigenous	Climate action coordinator for their nation
P4	1	Non-Indigenous	Director of an energy non-profit
P5	1	Non-Indigenous	Policy analyst in the Government of BC
P6	1	Non-Indigenous	Director in the Government of BC
P7	2	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous relations lead at BCUC
P8	1	Indigenous	Former Chief and current Business manager for a First Nations development corporation
P9	1	Indigenous	Energy coordinator for their nation
P10	1	Non-Indigenous	Senior policy advisor for a First Nation organization

[25] Although I did attempt to remedy this through drawing from BC Hydro's primary sources wherever possible.

2.2.3 Analysis

I coded and analyzed my interview data using NVivo in three stages. In the first stage, I went through each interview and created codes close to the text based on common words or experiences that were consistent with findings from literature, conferences, and previous conversations that had shaped my understanding of the field. This process was iterative, meaning that I often returned to previous interviews to re-code as more themes revealed themselves. In the second stage of coding, I created parent and child codes where I saw broader themes emerge and summarized high-level insights from each code in a separate document to illuminate similarities and anomalies within the data. In the third stage, I organized the high-level insights from each code to correspond with the three research questions that guided this thesis and identified three to four overarching themes per research question, as well as corresponding quotes that articulated these themes in a powerful way. From here, I wrote an initial "thematic overview" that brought these findings and quotes together, which has evolved into the findings chapter for this thesis.

2.2.4 Theoretical framework: the Multi-level perspective

The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) is a theoretical framework originating from Sustainability Transitions literature that I use loosely as an organizational tool for this thesis, in particular the policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three. I have chosen to use the MLP as an organizational tool and helpful heuristic rather than an analytical framework for the purposes of my research. I have selected it due to its utility in representing the various forces and actors interacting at macro, mezzo, and micro levels that influence energy policy and governance in BC. My usage of the MLP is not meant to be a robust application of the framework wherein I lean on the MLP's logic to better understand and describe the changes to low-carbon energy to which I am referring throughout this thesis. This would contribute to expanding the utility of the

framework in Indigenous-centred research, which is seen in the case of Karanisios & Parker (2018). Rather than take this approach, I am using the MLP to organize the various actors at each level and illustrate the process of change within institutions and policy environments, as well as where power is concentrated.

2.3 Language and terminology

2.3.1 Indigenous 'reconciliation,' decolonization, and resurgence

Across literature depicting Indigenous experiences within settler-colonial systems and research, scholars have utilized different terminology including reconciliation, decolonization, and resurgence, each of which surface within this thesis. These terms have distinct meanings and cannot be used interchangeably, which I will clarify in this section.

The Canadian state's process of 'reconciliation' is defined as "building a renewed relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect and partnership" including through addressing past harms and supporting Indigenous communities to advance self-determination (Government of Canada, 2024b). The state-led process of 'reconciliation' is criticized by several scholars including Michelle Daigle (2019) who sees it as a hollow display of settler grief and remorse that centres settler individuals and institutions, while fetishizing and re-inscribing trauma-based narratives around Indigeneity.[26]

According to Tuck & Yang (2012):

> Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future. Reconciliation is concerned with questions of *what will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition? What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler?...*We want to say, first, that decolonization is not obliged to answer those questions - decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (p. 35).

[26] This will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

While ‘reconciliation’ is predicated on Indigenous peoples forgiving settler individuals and the state to move toward a conciliatory future, decolonization is fundamentally a process of unsettling – both for individuals, and the colonial systems we exist within (Tuck & Yang, 2012). According to Flowers (2015), decolonization “refuses to reproduce the present and affirms alternative futures” (p. 36). Here, Flowers calls on settlers to stand alongside Indigenous peoples in relationships of solidarity and co-resistance (p. 37). Nick Estes (2019) sees the climate crisis as inherently intertwined with the struggle for decolonization and identifies the importance of placing settler and Indigenous peoples in common struggle against colonial and extractive forces that threaten our collective futures. Fundamentally, ‘reconciliation’ suggests a continuation within our existing colonial systems, whereas decolonization calls for a dismantling of them.

Some scholars have utilized language of Indigenous resurgence which is defined by von der Porten et al. (2019) as “a reframing of decolonial praxis…[that] re-centers Indigenous nationhood in political movements and focuses on the complex interrelationships between place-based relationships and community-centered practices that reignite everyday acts of renewal and restoration” (p. 62). Drawing on Alfred (2005), Corntassel (2012), Martineau (2014), Simpson (2011), and Wildcat et al. (2014), they articulate that “Indigenous resurgence is focused on regeneration, expression, and reinvigoration of autonomous governance, nationhood, and cultural, political, and spiritual practices” (p. 62). Jeff Corntassel (2012) sees decolonization and resurgence as “interrelated actions and strategies that inform our pathways to resistance and freedom” (p. 88).

In contrast to ‘reconciliation’ which maintains the state’s apparatus and centres colonial authority, decolonization and resurgence centre a move away from state recognition and rights-based discourse that further affirm the state’s existence (Corntassel, 2012). Rather, resurgence is

practiced through everyday acts that reconnect Indigenous peoples to their "homelands, cultures, and communities" (Corntassel, 2012, p. 89, 97). As these terms emerge throughout this thesis, I will follow the terminology used by the interviewees or scholars with whom I am engaging. When these terms are otherwise mentioned by me, I will utilize them according to how they are understood and articulated by scholars that I have drawn on in this subsection.

2.3.2 "Interviewees" vs. "participants"

A number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars remind us that relationships within the research context are steeped in uneven power dynamics that reinforce the supremacy of Western knowledges and epistemologies, and elevate the expertise of the researcher above local and Indigenous knowledge (Ahmed, 2000; de Leeuw et al, 2012; Kovach, 2021; Nagar, 2002 and 2019; Grimwood et al., 2012). Throughout this research process, I have sought to keep these power dynamics front of mind, while also recognizing my position as a master's student interviewing experts in the Indigenous renewable energy field who have been doing this work for years. Nonetheless, in the spirit of 'rehearsal' and as a white settler, I sought to approach my research from a position of humility, by "stepping beyond the position of 'expert' in order to also be a witness or listener" (Hunt, 2014, p. 31), and a perpetual learner (Nagar, 2019; Grimwood et al., 2012). To demonstrate this, I have chosen to refer to those I have interviewed for this project as "interviewees" rather than "participants."

Chapter Three: Policy and Landscape Analysis

The province of BC provides a unique case study to analyze energy transitions in settler-colonial contexts. Many Indigenous communities in BC are interested in increasing their involvement in renewable energy development, and the provincial government has simultaneously committed to "reconciliation' through the adoption of DRIPA. As I discuss in the introductory chapter, there is powerful potential in uniting these seemingly aligned interests to meet the growing need for electricity as the climate crisis sparks urgency to transition away from fossil fuels. The literature review in Chapter One also identified several potential barriers that stand in the way of Indigenous-led energy transitions, including profit-driven utility models that limit market opportunities to sell power and unfavourable policy environments, both of which we see in the case of BC. Assessing potential pathways forward in this context requires an understanding of the current energy system in BC, which is where we turn to next.

This chapter develops an analysis of energy policy and governance in BC to illustrate the context that Indigenous communities operate in when seeking to advance involvement in renewable energy. In this chapter, I will describe the actors, processes, policies, and laws that make up BC's electricity system, seek to illuminate how different institutions and phenomena influence energy decision-making, and offer an analysis of who benefits. Drawing on and expanding from the work of Dusyk (2016), Fitzgerald (2018), and Molander (2022), I explore in particular some of the barriers and complexities of advancing an energy transition within BC. Energy typically encapsulates oil and gas, electricity, renewables, and nuclear energy production and usage across all sectors including transportation, industry, buildings, and domestic use (IEA, 2022). For the purposes of this chapter and in the remainder of this thesis, I will focus primarily

on electricity, and more specifically on electricity generation[27] as literature suggests that this is an area of interest for Indigenous power proponents[28] that is particularly challenging to navigate in BC (see Lovekin et al., 2021; Fitzgerald, 2018).

I begin with a brief description of the framework used to organize this chapter, followed by an overview of relevant phenomena, actors, institutions, policies, and legal frameworks that shape BC's electricity system. I then use the example of the Site C dam to analyze how this regime functions to shape and constrain opportunities for Indigenous peoples in relation to energy governance processes and institutions, focusing especially on areas, actors, or processes that are supporting or hindering Indigenous involvement. Given the complexity of energy policy and governance, this analysis is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, I will represent the core actors, trends, and processes that I understand to be most relevant to Indigenous power proponents in the renewable energy sector to better understand their current and potential role in BC's energy transition.

3.1 The Multi-Level Perspective

To garner a better understanding of the different phenomena, actors, institutions, and mechanisms that are at play within BC's renewable energy transition, this chapter will utilize the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) as an organizational tool.[29] The MLP is a framework that originated from sustainability transitions literature, and provides a means to distill how complex

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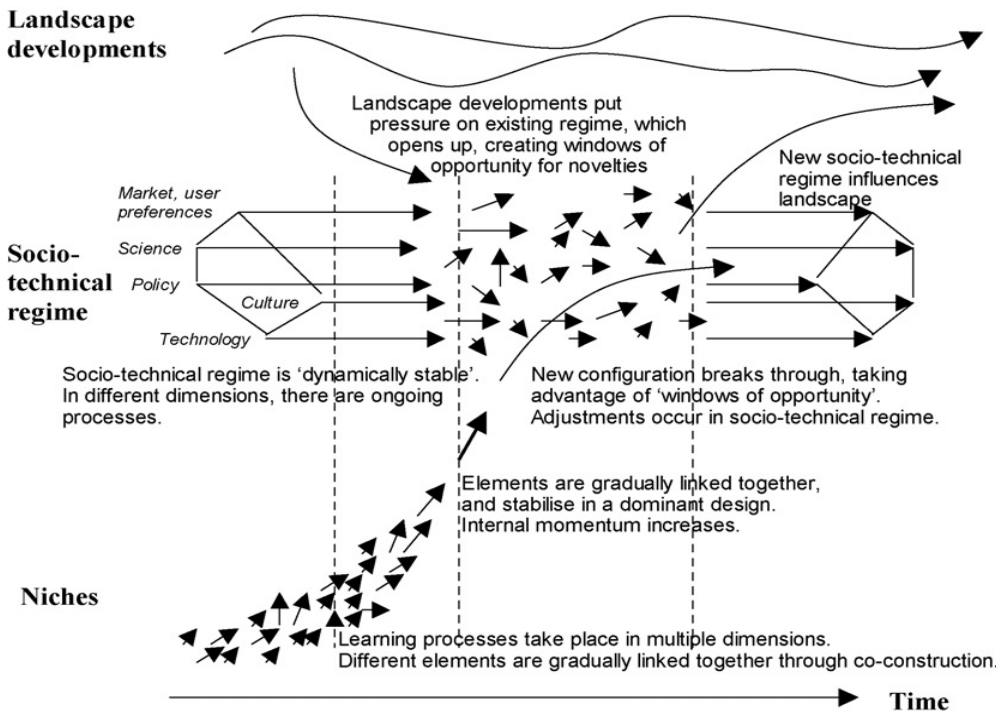
[27] Electricity usage (demand side management) and transmission are also growing areas of interest for Indigenous power proponents. Although they will not be the focus of this chapter, these elements will also be referred to here and in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

[28] For the purposes of this research, "Indigenous power proponents" refers to Indigenous groups, communities, Nations, organizations, or individuals who are involved in BC's energy sector.

[29] As described in Chapter Two, I have chosen to use the MLP as an organizational tool and helpful heuristic rather than a robust application of the analytical framework to represent the various forces and actors interacting at macro, mezzo, and micro levels that influence energy policy and governance in BC.

sociotechnical change to low-carbon and sustainable modes of production and consumption occurs or is challenged by existing factors (Smith et al., 2010). An infographic illustrating the MLP is in Figure 1. This framework was initially coined by Rip & Kemp (1998) and Geels (2002) to demonstrate how low-carbon transitions occur across landscapes between actors and forces operating at three levels: niches, regimes, and landscapes.

Figure 1 - the Multi-Level Perspective



Note. Sourced from Genus & Coles (2008).

According to Geels (2014), the regime upholds the status-quo that resists low-carbon transitions. For sustainability transitions to occur, localized niches build up momentum for low-carbon innovations (see "niches" at the bottom of Figure 1), while factors and phenomena across the exogenous landscape (see "landscape developments" at the top of Figure 1) put pressure on the regime (see the "sociotechnical regime" in the middle of Figure 1). Pressure from the niche

and landscape destabilize the regime, creating windows of opportunity (represented by the group of arrows in the middle of the "sociotechnical regime") for niche innovations to diffuse beyond the local level and into mainstream society to develop new sustainable norms. The MLP conceptualizes how innovations are governed by processes within each of these levels, and how developments within the regime and landscape influence processes at the local level through the niche and vice versa (Geels, 2002).

Framing energy policy and governance within BC from the landscape, regime, and niche is especially useful as BC's settler-colonial governance context is multi-jurisdictional and highly contested. Indigenous legal authority existed long before the settler-colonial states of Canada and BC were formed (Borrows, 2006, p. 175). Consequently, as Rezaei (2017) points out, focusing solely on state policy and governance processes risks re-inscribing the hegemony of the settler-colonial state and rendering invisible Indigenous legal authorities that have existed since time immemorial. However, the state's role in supporting as well as hindering the growth of Indigenous power at the grassroots level makes it an important area of focus for the purposes of this research. This nuance is best illustrated in the words of MacArthur (2017):

> Power does not reside solely with the nation-state, but its dominance in exerting economic, social and regulatory power means that our interest in community energy systems needs to locate these organizations within the broader complex of relationships outside the niche. (p. 4)

The MLP's multilevel examination of energy transitions provides a way to illustrate this web of relationships within BC's electricity system.

When examining governance and policy in Canada, it is important to utilize a dynamic framework such as the MLP that accounts for the mechanisms that re-inscribe hegemonic power, as well as the forces that are pushing against it, which opens space to recognize other sources of authority beyond the settler-colonial state (Smith et al., 2010; Martens, 2015). Geels (2014),

Meadowcroft (2009), and Seyfang et al. (2010), among others raise the importance of examining different factors beyond technology that drive sociotechnical change. Köhler et al. (2019), Hopkins et al. (2020), and Doyon et al. (2021) call for the integration of decolonial and Indigenous perspectives into energy transitions research. Following these scholars, I will use the multi-level perspective to make sense of how Indigenous-owned and led renewable energy projects – both as alternatives to extractive energy sources and as embodiments of Indigenous self-determination – are working to transform energy systems at the regime and landscape levels in BC, while experiencing challenges in their efforts to do so.

3.1.1 Defining the Landscape

Geels (2002) defines the landscape as the "external structure or context of interactions or actors" (p. 1260) that can both constrain and support sustainability transitions. This includes the landscape in the literal and metaphorical sense: the geographic and material landscapes making up a particular context where transitions are occurring; as well as the cultural, sociological, and macro-political phenomena that affect how transitions manifest (Rip & Kemp, 1998; Schot & Geels, 2008). When examining the exogenous landscape affecting the renewable energy sector in BC, it is important to consider how settler-colonialism and extractive interests have shaped political, social, and economic realities, as well as relationships to the land itself.

3.1.1.1 Putting the "land" in landscape: Indigenous territories, extractive interests, and climate change.

Drawing inspiration from Indigenous scholars such as Sarah Hunt / Tłaliłila'ogwa, I first want to situate us on the physical lands where these renewable energy projects are emerging. Prior to European contact, Turtle Island was an abundant land populated by Indigenous peoples belonging to distinct cultural groups (Matheson et al., 2022). Indigenous peoples across Turtle

Island had – and still have – unique legal orders, diplomatic and political cultures, and traditions cultivated through intimate relationships with the human and more-than-human world that have existed since time immemorial (Simpson, 2008; Hunt, 2023). Indigenous ways of living, governing, and stewarding the lands and relations across Turtle Island persist today despite colonial attempts at assimilation and eradication (Hunt, 2023). I situate us in this way to illustrate not only what settler-colonialism sought to destroy, but to illuminate that Indigenous authorities and governance predate settler presence on the lands that we currently call Canada.

Many scholars, land defenders, activists, scientists, and leaders unequivocally tie colonialism and capitalism – in particular the extraction of natural resources and burning of fossil fuels – with destructive changes to our physical landscapes, leading to climate change. Centuries ago, European settlers, including my ancestors, arrived on Turtle Island with European patterns of settlement and cultivation and a political and religious agenda of assimilation. As scholars such as Wolfe (2006), Coulthard (2014), McGregor (2019), Simpson (2013) and others engaged in section 1.2.1 have expressed, the lands and natural resources across Turtle Island have been treated as resources to support the existence of the settler-colonial state, with settlers establishing governance regimes that sought to eradicate Indigenous cultural, legal, and political practices.[30] Potawatami scholar Kyle Whyte (2017) also articulates this:

> Together, colonialism and capitalism then laid key parts of the groundwork for industrialization and militarization—or carbon-intensive economics—which produce the drivers of anthropogenic climate change, from massive deforestation for commodity agriculture to petrochemical technologies that burn fossil fuels for energy. The colonial invasion that began centuries ago caused anthropogenic environmental changes that rapidly disrupted many Indigenous peoples…(p. 154).

[30] This will be expanded upon in the "regime" section below.

Colonial logic has informed a capitalist economic system that prioritizes extraction and profit over regenerative land practices and has brought us starkly into the climate crisis that we find ourselves in today. This is occurring at a global scale through worsening weather crises including flooding, rising sea levels, and wildfire seasons that become longer and more destructive with each passing year. Despite Indigenous peoples being the least responsible for the climate crisis, and in fact being responsible for the continued stewardship of land and protection of biodiversity globally,[31] Indigenous peoples are among the most affected by these impacts (Whyte, 2017; Sobrevila, 2008).

In the face of climate change, there is a growing urgency for transitions to sustainable ways of living, and particularly a transition away from colonial systems responsible for environmental destruction. Much of this urgency has come from the grassroots level led by Indigenous land defenders, communities, and environmental groups across the globe. Meanwhile, states and industry have been notoriously slow to respond to calls for change. Canada continues with the status-quo of exploiting Indigenous lands and resources, and climate policies have continued to ignore the root causes of the climate crisis – namely unfettered extraction, economic development, and colonial governance systems (McGregor, 2019, p. 141; Reed et al., 2021; Indigenous Climate Action, 2021; Molander, 2022).

3.1.1.2 Material and infrastructural landscape.

In BC, industrial development and economic growth are closely linked to the electricity system. The majority of electricity in BC is generated through large-scale hydroelectric dams[32]

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[31] Indigenous territories across the globe maintain 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity thanks to the continued nurturing of traditional land use and cultivation practices (Sobrevila, 2008, p. xii).

[32] According to the draft of the 2021 Integrated Resource Plan, BC Hydro's power sources and infrastructure include "an integrated system backed by 30 hydroelectric plants and a thermal generating station, as well as approximately 18,400 kilometres of transmission and 59,000 kilometres of distribution lines" (BC Hydro, 2021, p. 40).

owned by BC Hydro, a Crown Corporation that is also responsible for transmission and distribution of electricity[33] (BC Hydro, 2023a, p. 6). Within BC's centralized electricity system, electricity generation is a source of provincial revenue[34] and a key driver in economic development through providing access to an inexpensive and "clean" energy supply to support energy intensive industrial development[35] (Government of British Columbia, n.d.b; Rezaei, 2017).

BC's contentious history of hydroelectricity began in the early-mid 20th century with the construction of large-scale dams along the Peace River (Dusyk, 2016). The majority (87%) of BC's electricity comes from dams in the Peace Region in the northeast of BC, and the Columbia Region in the southwest (BC Hydro, n.d.c; BC Hydro, n.d.d;). This electricity is then distributed via kilometers of transmission lines cutting across the province to service 95% of the population – the majority of which live in urban areas in the Mainland and Southwest (BC Hydro, n.d.e; WorkBC, 2024). Hydroelectricity in BC is bolstered by a "legacy" narrative that instills "clean," cheap, and reliable hydro power as the lifeblood of BC's economy and a source of livelihood for many (Dusyk, 2016; Yunker, 2022a; Government of British Columbia, n.d.b.). Hydroelectricity in BC goes beyond simply turning on the lights in our homes – it is embedded in provincial identity, infrastructure, politics, communities, and the economy.

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[33] More details on the electricity sector including the institutions, governance, and policies will be detailed in the "Regime" section below.

[34] According to the 2023 British Columbia Financial and Economic Review, BC Hydro netted $360 million in Provincial Revenue in 2022/23. Comparatively, this is much lower than natural gas royalties which netted $2.25 billion and forests which netted $1.8 billion (Government of British Columbia, 2023c, p. 30). However, as expressed in the chapter, BC Hydro is a driver of these industries.

[35] It is important to note, however, that the interests of state and industry are not always synonymous. Although often the Government of BC prioritizes economic development in favour of accruing revenue for the Province, it is also responsible for enforcing environmental protection measures, meeting climate targets, and making decisions in the "public interest." However, as I will explain in the following chapter, this rarely aligns with Indigenous interests.

Similarly to the rest of Canada, BC's economy is largely dependent on extraction of natural resources for activities such as mining, natural gas production, hydroelectricity, and forestry (IEA, 2022, p. 22). This activity, occurring on Indigenous territories across BC and Turtle Island, has destroyed Indigenous lands, ecosystems, and ways of life[36] (Cox, 2016). The expansion of industry in BC, and more specifically the natural gas sector, is also tied to the expansion and development of large-scale hydroelectric dams to power said extraction – particularly in the case of the Site C dam (Rezaei, 2017). Rezaei (2017) outlines this tension in her dissertation where she discusses "energy plenty," referring to the Government of BC's fabricated promises of natural gas repositories as a plentiful supply of domestic energy and economic resource for BC. This promise is used to justify the construction of dams to power industry and natural gas extraction (p. 5-6). Although the Government of BC has sought to peddle a narrative of "clean" electricity that does not contribute to GHG emissions and is in line with provincial climate priorities, this fails to reflect what this "clean" electricity is used for – to fuel future industrial demand and extractive interests, despite the significant environmental damage caused (Rezaei, 2017, p. 106, Dusyk, 2017).

The close linkages between extractive industrial development and BC's centralized electricity system illuminates that the development of energy infrastructure[37] is a key aspect of

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[36] Large-scale hydroelectricity is a particularly destructive form of energy production. When the land is flooded to create a reservoir for a hydroelectric project, mercury that occurs naturally in soil is converted into methylmurcury – a potent toxin that accumulates within the waters and animals in that habitat (Burrows, 2016). This has especially devastating effects for Indigenous communities living in the surrounding regions who rely on fish and animals as food sources, putting them at risk of mercury exposure (Burrows, 2016). The flooding of lands to construct hydroelectric mega dams has also had an impact on Indigenous ways of living through destroying sacred sites as well as lands for hunting and gathering traditional foods and medicine (Kassam, 2016). This is referred to by Huseman & Short (2012) as "a slow industrial genocide."

[37] This infrastructure is often deemed "critical" by the state to justify the dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources. According to Kinder (2021), who cites Pasternak and Dafnos 2018; Cowen 2018;

how settler colonial power relations are reproduced (LaDuke & Cohen, 2021; Kinder, 2021, p. 65; Mavhunga & Trischler, 2014). Recalling LaDuke and Cohen (2021), "energy infrastructures constitute the contemporary spine of the settler colonial nation" (p. 249). Therefore, the existence of BC's economy is effectively upheld *through* settler-colonialism and the centralized electricity system, which continues to undermine Indigenous rights and ways of life (Kinder, 2021).[38]

In contrast to the Government of BC's "energy plenty" narrative, many communities that are not connected to the BC Hydro grid – the majority of which are Indigenous – experience energy poverty as they are powered by inefficient and unreliable diesel generators, many of which are owned and operated by BC Hydro[39] (Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016; Rezaei, 2017). The concentration of large-scale hydroelectric infrastructure in the Peace and Columbia Regions also contribute to an uneven landscape wherein rural and remote Indigenous communities, many of which are not grid-connected, are given little choice but to sacrifice their lands for the purposes of energy development that powers the majority of BC's urban population hundreds of

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Spice 2018: "critical infrastructures represent some of the most concentrated sites that reproduce settler colonial relations" (p. 65). Barker et al. (2016) also remind us that "it is not uncommon for land to be seized from Indigenous Nations under the pretence that it serves the national good" (p. 160). This is reflected by Atleo & Boron (2023) who state: "unfortunately, when Indigenous peoples hear "the national interest" in Canada, it usually means their rights are about to be infringed" (p. 104). This was seen through the Trans Mountain Pipeline, which the Government of Canada is justifying through job creation and economic revenue for the country (Jara & Bruns, 2022).

[38] Although this dispossession and relocation has largely been at the hands of the settler state, it is important to note that non-state actors – that is industry, or industry-state partnerships – have also been responsible for the dispossession, exploitation, and undermining Indigenous rights and authority on their land. The connections between state and industry across Canada, as well as the role of industry in causing harm, are further articulated by Barker (2016): "While it is undeniable that the Canadian state has been a primary opponent of Indigenous peoples throughout the twentieth century, in this chapter we demonstrate that settler colonisation has been driven co-operatively by non-state actors working in partnership with the state or, in some cases, prefiguring state law and policy by pre-emptively claiming land and infringing on Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood" (p. 153).

[39] In BC, many remote communities are serviced by BC Hydro who purchase, own, and operate diesel generators and microgrid infrastructure. These communities are known as "non-integrated areas." There are also some remote communities in BC that independently own and operate their own microgrids, meaning they are responsible for purchasing, installing, and maintaining their own generation infrastructure and are separate from BC Hydro in this way. Many of these communities who operate independently from BC Hydro are funded by Indigenous Services Canada to purchase their own energy infrastructure (many thanks to P5 for these observations).

kilometers away[40] (Behn & Bakker, 2019). Rezaei (2017) points out that experiences of limited energy access for remote Indigenous communities is a result of systemic processes and policy decisions that have reflected the Government of BC's priorities – which includes supporting industrial development for the Province's economic benefit, as well as meeting energy demand from urban (and mostly settler) populations, rather than reliably powering Indigenous communities.

Understanding the impacts of natural resource extraction on the physical landscape of BC, and the material elements of the electricity system – predominately centralized energy infrastructure that results in an uneven distribution of benefits across urban/rural and Indigenous/non-Indigenous populations – helps us to gather a sense of how settler-colonialism has shaped the energy landscape in BC. The specific processes, actors, and policy decisions entrenching settler-colonial authority and industrial interests within the electricity system will be further articulated in the "regime" section below.

3.1.1.3 Cultural, social, and macro-political landscape: Indigenous resistance and "reconciliation"

Part of the landscape, according to the MLP, includes examining cultural, social, and political phenomena within a particular place. Simpson (2013) identifies that "over the past 400 years, there has never been a time when indigenous peoples were not resisting colonialism" (para 6) – therefore, it is important to explore this history across the landscape. BC's economic reliance on natural resource extraction has occurred at the expense of Indigenous peoples whose lands

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[40] This was especially true for the Tsay Keh Dene Nation who were displaced from their lands due to flooding of the Williston Reservoir for the construction of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam. The Tsay Keh Dene have been dependent on diesel generators for power and experience severe dust storms as a result of the dam (Rezaei, 2017; Izony & Dowlatabadi, 2016).

and resources are harvested for the state's economic gain, often without consent. This has led to growing resistance movements across the landscape by Indigenous peoples to assert their land rights and counter extractive interest across BC, often joined by settlers including those whose communities are also affected by said development and those standing in allyship.[41]

The natural gas sector has been an especially relevant locus of conflict. Most recently, the construction of the Coastal Gaslink pipeline moved forward despite contention and ambivalence from affected First Nations. While 16 First Nations signed equity agreements with TC Energy, including five out of six Wet'suwet'en band councils, Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership opposed the project (Simmons, 2022). This sparked resistance efforts from hereditary leadership, land defenders, and allies, which resulted in several cases of extreme violence from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) (Simmons, 2021). The Site C Dam – whose construction has been tied to the expansion of natural gas development in BC (Dusyk, 2016) – was another significant focus for land defenders and environmental groups. Indigenous communities in the surrounding region, including West Moberly First Nation, asserted their rights and title to resist the project[42] (Sheehan, 2021; Gilchrist, 2022).[43]

As Indigenous resistance forces settler institutions to confront their roles in the historic and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples and lands, many Nations have turned to the courts when their rights are infringed by state and industry. This has been especially relevant for Indigenous peoples in BC as much of the province remains unceded and does not fall under

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[41] In 2021, a report from the Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International indicated that "Indigenous resistance has stopped or delayed greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to at least one-quarter of annual U.S. and Canadian emissions" (Goldtooth & Saldamando, 2021, p. 1).

[42] This will be detailed below in Part 2: Regime in Action

[43] Between these conflicts and others in recent years, including the Trans-Mountain pipeline, and Fairy Creek, the state has spent over $50 million on policing across these conflicts (Forester, 2023), eliciting criticism from the international community for violently infringing on Indigenous rights (Cox, 2021a).

treaty or land claim agreements, which has implications for challenging the legitimacy of natural resource development across the province (Atleo et al., 2022; MacArthur, 2017, p. 7). Some of the most important court cases regarding Indigenous land rights in BC include *Calder v. British Columbia, 1973; R v. Sparrow, 1990; Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997*; *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014;* and most recently, *Yahey v. British Columbia, 2021.* Each of these cases has contributed toward building a strong foundation for the recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, and consequently a stronger role in governing their territories, in addition to further defining what constitutes justifiable infringement on Indigenous territories.

There are many barriers to pursuing legal action including the financial burden and lengthiness of litigation, and many of the prolific court cases mentioned above have not resulted in "clear-cut victories" for First Nations (Atleo et al., 2022, p. 159). However, these cases have ultimately led to shifts in the Canadian state's legal and political framework to support recognition of rights and title (Coulthard, 2014), and have compelled governments and industry to "be more proactive with consultation and accommodation" (Atleo et al., 2022, p. 160). These court cases ultimately demonstrate a way that landscape level developments, in this case through Indigenous resistance, can lead to changes within the legal structures making up the regime, which will be further explained below.

Shifting legal orders and growing Indigenous resistance has forced governments at the Federal and Provincial level to reckon with the ways that it has wronged (and continues to wrong) Indigenous peoples. This has prompted 'reconciliation' [44] as the state's attempt to address

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[44] Over the course of Canada's history, the Federal Government has made several commitments to improving relationships with Indigenous peoples, including the 1995 final report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Ipperwash Inquiry, 'reconciliation,' and most recently, UNDRIP (McGregor, 2019). 'Reconciliation'

this harm. Over the last few decades, the Government of Canada[45] has issued various apologies and inquiries into the harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the Canadian state, while committing to a new relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples (McGregor, 2019; Atleo & Boron, 2023). A recent iteration of Canada and BC's commitments to improving relationships with Indigenous peoples is through committing to the implementation of UNDRIP.[46] UNDRIP acts as a universal framework of "minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the [I]ndigenous peoples of the world" (UN General Assembly, article 43). It includes stipulations that require Member States to recognize Indigenous rights to self-determination, and seek free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) before pursuing industrial development on Indigenous territories.

In 2019, BC became the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt legislation – DRIPA – that acknowledges UNDRIP and seeks to make provincial laws and policies consistent with it[47] (*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2019;* Nicholst & Morales, 2021). DRIPA

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began in 2007 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which sought to bring the history and lingering impacts of Canada's Residential Schools to light (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; Crown Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2022). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) defines 'reconciliation' as "…establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been incited, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour (p. 6-7)."

[45] Although the state is a key focus of 'reconciliation,' the TRC clarifies that industry and individuals also have responsibilities to implement the Calls to Action, showing that this effort is all-encompassing across settler society (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; Walker et al., 2021, p. 638).

[46] UNDRIP was developed by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations as part of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to hold the international community accountable to recognizing and accommodating Indigenous rights ("United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," n.d.). UNDRIP is the "most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of [I]ndigenous peoples" to this day. When UNDRIP was first adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand were in opposition. Since then, each country has removed its objector status, with Canada being the final member state to do so in 2016 ("United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," n.d.; Fontaine, 2016).

[47] Some scholars and lawyers have criticized DRIPA for its soft language and see many barriers to fully implementing UNDRIP within the provincial government's colonial framework (Borrows et al., 2020). However, DRIPA is still a critical step in the right direction and has signaled a province-wide commitment to rebuilding nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples across BC.

draws from UNDRIP and the TRC calls to action to outline a provincial 'reconciliation' framework (Government of British Columbia, 2024a). The Federal Government followed suit with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2021,* which "(a) affirm[s] the Declaration as a universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law; and (b) provide[s] a framework for the Government of Canada's implementation of the Declaration" (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, S.C. 2021, c. 14, s. 4).

Canada's processes of 'reconciliation' have been heavily critiqued for not going far enough to address the root causes of colonialism, namely the dispossession of Indigenous lands and impacts on the nonhuman world (McGregor, 2019, p. 143). Atleo & Boron (2023), Michelle Daigle (2019), and Glen Coulthard (2014) have also criticized this era of 'reconciliation' for being slow moving and failing to lead to transformative action and accountability. Instead, these scholars argue that 'reconciliation' perpetuates a narrative that situates colonialism as a historical event rather than an active and ongoing process. DRIPA has also been criticized by legal analysts for its flawed implementation and the challenges posed by the colonial legal structures within which it is operating (Pasternak, 2020; Nicholst & Morales, 2021). Within Canada and BC, there is a disconnect between state-led attempts at 'reconciliation,' and the priorities of Indigenous peoples with whom the state is attempting to reconcile.

Although Canada and BC's approaches to 'reconciliation' have largely skirted accountability and failed to address the full extent of the colonial harm experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, the political and legal shifts across the landscape due to fierce Indigenous resistance has created an environment of uncertainty for the future of the natural resources and energy sectors in Canada. This was seen in the case of the Trans-Mountain

pipeline, which US-based energy company Kinder Morgan felt would be too risky to move ahead with construction under Prime Minister Trudeau's 'reconciliation' and climate platform, and decided to pull out. Prime Minister Trudeau's government considered the pipeline to be within the 'public interest' and opted to purchase it as a public asset to ensure that it would go forward (Geddes, 2018). Although the pipeline's construction is now complete, this sequence of events illustrates how the landscape is shifting in a way that positions the assertion of Indigenous rights as a liability for natural resource development, which could have implications for the electricity sector in BC given its interconnectedness with industrial development.

3.1.1.4 Summarizing the landscape.

This section examines how settler-colonial authority and extractive economic interests shape the energy context in BC physically, politically, and socioeconomically. Across the landscape, colonialism and capitalism are interwoven economic, social, and political systems of dispossession and profit generation that benefit the state and settler-colonial interests. The lens of the MLP, and in particular the landscape, highlights the foundations of industrial development, unevenly distributed benefits, disproportionate environmental impacts, and extraction that the electricity sector is built upon. Resistance movements led by Indigenous land defenders countering extraction on their territories have contributed to shifting legal orders. With regime changes through court cases, 'reconciliation,' UNDRIP, and DRIPA over the last few years stimulated by Indigenous resistance, colonial institutions and industries are being forced to recognize and accommodate Indigenous rights in unprecedented ways.[48] This is beginning to

[48] Examples include government-to-government agreements, such as those signed between the Government of BC and Treaty 8 First Nations on Treaty Land Entitlement and Land and Resource Management as a result of *Yahey v. British Columbia, 2021* (see Amatulli, 2023).

shift the way that colonial governments interact with Indigenous peoples in the context of energy and natural resource development.

Within BC, there is, ultimately, a contested governance system that manifests as a landscape filled with clashes and emergent success stories between the settler-state attempting to assert control on stolen lands, and Indigenous peoples resisting state power through asserting their laws and rights that have existed since time immemorial (Barker et al., 2016). What is most critical to illuminate within the landscape is that Indigenous authority and governance has persisted despite colonial attempts at eradication and assimilation. Rooted in these historical truths, Indigenous peoples and allies continue to fight and resist colonial domination and extraction for the sake of our collective futures in the wake of worsening climate change.

3.1.2. Defining the Regime

According to the MLP, Geels (2014) defines the regime as a multi-dimensional alliance embedded within the landscape that spans policy and governance, industry, civil society, and dominant forms of knowledge to uphold an unsustainable status-quo[49] (Geels, 2002). Drawing insights from political economy, the regime accounts for the ways that power is wielded across "politics, economics, cultural meanings and discourses" by actors and policymakers (Geels, 2014, p. 26). Following the MLP's logic, change within the regime occurs once forces at the niche and landscape level destabilize the regime[50] to propel a shift to alternative and more sustainable modes of production and consumption (Schot & Geels, 2008). This transformation

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[49] The status-quo within sustainability transitions typically refers to carbon-intensive modes of production and consumption. For the purposes of this thesis, it will refer to large-scale, environmentally destructive, centralized hydroelectricity under the authority of the state.

[50] This is aligned with Carroll's (2021) concept of the "regime of obstruction," which draws attention to the ways that the fossil fuel sector and other extractive energy processes are intertwined with governance and politics, creating a state that upholds extractive interests.

can be either supported by elements across the regime including policies, institutions, market opportunities, etc., or hindered as the regime resists niche and landscape-level change to maintain the status quo (Geels, 2014). In the following section, I will outline the actors, institutions, and governance processes that make up BC's energy regime, with particular focus on the state as represented by the Government of BC.

3.1.2.1 Laws governing the regime.

In the landscape section above, I illustrated how the legacy of settler-colonialism influences the physical landscape and relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples within BC. Settler-colonial power relations are also reproduced through mechanisms at the regime level through existing laws, policies, institutions and energy actors. In this section, I will focus on the mechanisms that support settler-colonial interests within BC's electricity system, starting with the roots of colonial law in Canada.

As expressed in section 1.2.1, settler-colonialism is characterized by the dispossession of Indigenous authority and lands, domination over territory, and a continued relationship of dependency reinforced through law, policy, and economic structures (Coulthard, 2014; Wolfe, 2006; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Manuel, 2017). In Canada, these relationships are rooted in the *Indian Act,1985* and the *Constitution Acts, 1867 & 1982*, which set the foundation of the Canadian state's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Under the first iteration of the *Indian Act* in 1876, a western governance system of band councils was imposed that, among other harms, alienates traditional governance practices and undermines Indigenous authority on their territories, while re-enforcing colonial sovereignty (Barker et al., 2016, p. 154). The right to self-governance was eventually recognized through the court's interpretations of section 35(1) of the

Constitution Act,1982, along with the recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal and treaty rights (Centre for First Nations Governance, 2007, p. 16).

Although section 35(1) legally recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and treaty rights, this law ultimately has supported attempts to "assimilate [Indigenous Peoples] into colonial society" by reinforcing Crown sovereignty and governing Indigenous peoples as wards of the state (Crey, 2009; Barker et al., 2016). Not only was assimilation of Indigenous peoples a direct goal of the colonial powers in Canada, but also elimination (Diabo, 2017). This is reflected through the words of Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913-1932:

> I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone . . . Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department... (Miller, 1989, p. 207)

Since the creation of so-called Canada, colonialism has been an explicit and active process that those in power did not attempt to hide. These colonial foundations remain apparent through laws and policies that are steeped in racism and discrimination and continue to "undermine Indigenous peoples in terms of sovereignty, authority, jurisdiction, and application of Indigenous laws in relation to the land" (McGregor, 2019, p. 140). The settler-colonial state also seeks to further entrench relationships of dependency to keep Indigenous peoples from having the resources to challenge the state itself. This is articulated by Manuel (2017): "…our dependency was not some accident of history. It is at the heart of the colonial system. Our poverty is not an accident, the result of our incompetence or bad luck; it is intentional and systematic" (p. 21). This ultimately sets the foundation for the regime.

3.1.2.2 BC's electricity system.

Energy and electricity fall under provincial jurisdiction according to the *Constitution Act, 1867*.[51] BC's electricity system is centralized, with BC Hydro – a Crown corporation – responsible for planning, generating, distributing, and transmitting[52] 95% of the electricity in the province (BC Hydro, n.d.b; British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority, 2016). BC Hydro's mandate is defined by the Government of BC and focuses on delivering reliable, affordable, and "clean" power to customers (BC Hydro, n.d.b). BC Hydro is a monopoly and is regulated by the British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC) under the *Hydro and Power Authority Act, 1996* and the *Utilities Commission Act, 1996* (BC Hydro, n.d.b). The BCUC is responsible for ensuring that provincial utilities remain accountable to the public interest when approving rates, determining a fair rate of return for the utility, approving construction of new facilities, and accepting energy purchase agreements (British Columbia Utilities Commission, n.d.).

BC's electricity system is shaped by several laws and policies that guide electricity planning according to provincial climate priorities, including the *Clean Energy Act, 2010;* the CleanBC Plan released in 2018; and the CleanBC Roadmap to 2030 released in 2021. In each of these policies, the Government of BC focuses on growing a clean economy while setting

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[51] Canada's *Constitution Acts, 1867 and 1982* indicate that provinces are responsible for "development, conservation and management of sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy" (s. 92A (1)(c)). This includes distribution, conservation, and regulation of energy, land use planning, and designing and collection of royalties; as well as natural resources and hydroelectricity (IEA, 2022, p. 30-31; Netherton, 2008, as cited in Dusyk, 2013, p. 37). The Federal government plays a limited role in energy and electricity: federal jurisdiction lies principally in international and interprovincial energy infrastructure and trade, Aboriginal and federal lands, and regulation of nuclear energy (IEA, 2022; Christian & Shipley, 2020, as cited in Curry et al., 2022). Despite its limited jurisdiction, the Federal Government plays a role in setting national standards and targets for GHG emission reduction and climate action, (IEA, 2022; *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act*, S.C. 2021, c. 22); as well as providing critical funding programs in support of Indigenous renewable energy.

[52] The BC Transmission Company (BCTC) used to be responsible for electricity transmission in the province. The BCTC was a Crown Corporation created in 2003 with the intention of supporting the development of regional transmission organizations in a move to partially privatize the grid and expand the independent power sector BC Hydro & the Government of BC, n.d., p. 1). The BCTC was then integrated back into BC Hydro through the *Clean Energy Act* in 2010, which further centralized BC's electricity system (BC Hydro, n.d.a).

ambitious GHG emissions reduction targets to address provincial climate commitments, as well as a "100% Clean Electricity Delivery Standard for the BC Hydro grid" (Government of British Columbia, 2021). Conveniently, hydroelectricity generated from one of BC Hydro's dams is considered by the Government of BC to be "clean" due to its low emissions.[53] This has enabled the Government of BC to meet (and attract) industrial demand in a "green" economy powered by BC Hydro's low-carbon electricity, while working to meet its climate and emissions reduction targets.

For grid-connected customers, BC maintains some of the lowest electricity rates in North America (Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023a; Henning, 2019). As mentioned in the landscape section above, these low rates are further discounted for industrial customers to encourage industrial development and growth of natural resource sectors (Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023a; Government of British Columbia, n.d.b., p. 4). As a result of these low rates, BC Hydro relies on profits gained from exporting BC's surplus "clean" power through PowerEx, a subsidiary of BC Hydro that trades power to the US and Alberta[54] (PowerEx, n.d.; British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority, 2016; Jang, 2020, para. 3). Like most other centralized utilities in Canada, BC Hydro operates under a Cost-of-Service model, which "ties revenue to the amount of energy sold" (He et al., 2022, p. 1).

With BC Hydro responsible for the lion's share of electricity generation, transmission, and distribution, this makes nearly every electricity consumer in the province reliant on BC

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[53] As described in section 3.1.1.2 in the Landscape, the devastating impacts of large-scale hydroelectricity on lands, ecosystems, and Indigenous communities does not reflect this narrative.

[54] According to Minister Josie Osborne, PowerEx earned a net $2.5 billion from trading activity over the last five years (Penner, 2024). This is largely through arbitrage, meaning buying and selling surplus power from other jurisdictions. Typically, this means purchasing power when it is cheapest, and then selling BC's power when it is at its peak (Yunker, 2020).

Hydro, including those who are not connected to BC Hydro's main grid.[55] In BC, there are 44 communities who are not serviced by BC Hydro's main grid, most of which are First Nation communities (Government of British Columbia, 2024d). As I touched on in the landscape above, these communities are typically reliant on diesel generators which are provided by BC Hydro for non-integrated areas that are still serviced by them. Communities in non-integrated areas pay electricity rates (known as "Zone II" rates) to BC Hydro that are approximately 20% higher than customers who are grid-connected (BC Hydro, n.d.i; Rezaei, 2017). There have been efforts over the last several years to support remote communities to transition off of diesel generators and toward renewable energy, largely driven by the Government of BC's climate and energy policies targeting GHG emissions reduction under CleanBC (Government of BC, 2024g).

Although BC Hydro maintains its monopoly, there is a small market for independent power producers (IPPs), which has ebbed and flowed over the last few decades.[56] IPPs are private energy companies who generate power and make a profit by selling their power to the BC Hydro grid where this power is then distributed to customers through BC Hydro's transmission and distribution system. Under Premier Gordon Campbell's government from 2001-2011, BC opened its grid to purchase power from private energy producers, which paved the way for many IPPs to break into the market[57] (Cohen & Calvert, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2018). This was bolstered by

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[55] As noted above, this excludes remote communities who are independent from BC Hydro and instead own and operate their own generation infrastructure and microgrid. However, as P5 pointed out, these communities often still receive funding from the federal government to pay for this infrastructure. This, as a result, maintains a level of reliance on the settler-colonial state.

[56] According to the draft of the 2021 Integrated Resource Plan, BC Hydro has "127 agreements with Independent Power Producer facilities that largely use clean sources for electricity generation, including biomass, hydro, wind and solar" (BC Hydro, 2021, p. 40).

[57] Calvert (2007) has critiqued Premier Campbell's government's approach to energy privatization for drawing revenue out of the Province and blames privatization for higher electricity rates. Fitzgerald (2018) illuminates that Calvert's critiques ignore the benefits accrued by Indigenous power proponents, which was only made possible

a suite of policies including the 2007 Energy Plan and the *Clean Energy Act*, *2010* which also introduced a critical provision to grow provincial electricity supply through a self-sufficiency requirement. This committed BC Hydro to produce enough electricity domestically to meet forecasted annual demand by 2016 as well as maintain a surplus insurance supply by 2025[58] (*Clean Energy Act,* 2010; Shaffer, 2016; Yunker, 2020; Jaccard, 2008). The self-sufficiency requirement incentivized BC Hydro to purchase additional power from within the province, which expanded opportunities for IPP's.

There have historically been four key avenues for IPP's to sell power to the grid: periodic calls for power, the SOP for mid-sized projects (over 100kW up to and including 15 MW), the micro-standing offer program for small projects (100kW and 1MW), and net metering (BC Hydro, 2016a; Fitzgerald, 2018). The SOP was introduced in 2008 through the 2007 Energy Plan and was an especially critical program to expand opportunities for IPP's as it streamlined the process for grid-connected projects selling electricity to BC Hydro (BC Hydro, 2016b). IPP's can also sell power through securing energy purchase agreements (EPAs) with BC Hydro which "formalize the amount of electricity [the IPP will] supply, the pricing, and all other terms," which is then approved by the BCUC[59] (BC Hydro, n.d.f).

Despite its success for expanding the IPP market in the province, the Government of BC decided to cancel the SOP in 2018 due to a surplus of BC Hydro-generated power that was

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through energy privatization. Although it is important to remain vigilant about the potential for energy privatization to lead to a "gold rush" of careless energy development that harms Indigenous lands and resources and infringes on Indigenous rights, privatization opened important space for Indigenous power proponents to enter into a previously monopolistic market largely controlled by a state that was unwilling to listen to desires for involvement from Indigenous communities. This prompted Fitzgerald (2018) to argue that "the province requires a more nuanced policy approach towards Indigenous power producers, one that recognizes both their agency as well as their relationship with the private power industry" (p. 101).

[58] BC Hydro, however, would still engage in arbitrage despite the self-sufficiency requirement.

[59] However, Fitzgerald (2018) notes that EPAs are not part of the utility's formal procurement process (p. 46).

anticipated with the approval of the Site C dam, as well as concerns about the impacts of the SOP on rate affordability[60] (Government of British Columbia, n.d.a; Cohen & Calvert, 2012; Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b). After the SOP's cancellation, the Government of BC also repealed the self-sufficiency requirement through Bill 117, the *Clean Energy Amendment Act*, *2020*. This effectively removed the rationale for BC Hydro's commitments to producing a higher volume of electricity within the province, meaning that BC Hydro could purchase cheaper power from outside the province rather than look to IPP's to meet forecasted annual demand.[61]

Since the SOP's cancellation, there had not been any other immediate opportunities for IPP's to sell power to the Provincial grid until the Government of BC announced a Call for Power anticipated for 2024, which is a critical economic opportunity for IPP's with shovel-ready utility scale projects (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b). The recent growth of the independent renewable electricity sector has been linked to BC's growing need to decarbonize the economy to achieve its legislated GHG emissions reduction targets and climate commitments under the *Clean Energy Act,* and CleanBC[62] (Lovekin et al., 2021; Molander, 2022).

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[60] Independent Power Projects have historically been blamed for electricity rate hikes (Shaffer, 2016; Calvert, 2017), largely because purchasing electricity from IPPs typically costs more than electricity generated from the Government of BC's heritage assets. As decarbonization leads to growing demand for electricity, rate hikes will likely need to increase to account for alternative energy sources such as independent renewable energy and Site C (which is already billions of dollars over budget) (Hennig, 2019; Kurjata & Bains, 2021). However, as Jaccard (2008) notes, rate hikes are notoriously politically unpopular.

[61] The Union of BC Indian Chiefs criticized this decision, stating: "[t]his will directly undercut BC First Nations that have developed power projects by allowing the government to purchase power from other jurisdictions rather than from BC First Nations independent power producers, a majority of which are sustainable, clean, and environmentally friendly. BC should be working with First Nations to develop the power instead of importing power from other jurisdictions" (UBCIC, 2020, para. 3).

[62] Research conducted by the Pembina Institute in partnership with the New Relationship Trust found that the most recent Integrated Resource Plan from BC Hydro released in 2021 undervalued electricity demand projections for the coming years given the level of electrification required to meet provincial targets (Lovekin et al., 2021). Given this reality, the Pembina Institute sees this opportunity as an ideal gap for Indigenous power proponents in BC to fill.

3.1.2.3 BC's electricity system as a "regime"

It is particularly fitting to refer to the existing electricity system in BC as a "regime," as the institutions and policies within this centralized system have perpetuated relationships of dependency that privilege state priorities. As a result of the Government of BC's focus on GHG emissions reduction in climate policy in recent years, most government funding programs have targeted support for off-grid communities looking to reduce reliance on diesel through renewable energy. Reducing diesel consumption in remote communities is often seen as "low-hanging fruit" to work toward legislated climate targets (Calvert & Simandan, 2010). This suggests that perhaps these opportunities are driven by settler priorities rather than the requests from Indigenous communities to transition to renewables. Consequently, opportunities for IPPs seeking to sell power to BC Hydro have not been as plentiful (Fitzgerald, 2018).

BC Hydro's monopoly wherein the Crown Corporation is responsible for electricity generation, distribution, and transmission across the province, means that any IPP looking to sell power to the grid or industrial customers, or to power off-grid communities through a microgrid, will depend on BC Hydro infrastructure. This further perpetuates colonial relationships of dependency and concentrates the state's power to prioritize self-serving interests, which is starkly illustrated by BC Hydro's rates offering discounts to industrial customers while requiring off-grid residential customers to pay higher rates (Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023a; Government of British Columbia, n.d.b., p. 4; Rezaei, 2017). In essence, off-grid communities are required to pay BC Hydro, a state-owned entity, additional electricity fees for their geographic separation from the grid that was created (and is still owned and governed) by the state itself.

The regime is also upheld by the regulatory process. The BCUC is meant to act as an accountability mechanism to ensure that the utility is operating within the public interest. However, Fitzgerald (2018) notes that, "policies rooted in notions of 'public interest' do not necessarily serve Indigenous interests" (p. 102). Historically in Canada, pursuing energy development in the 'public interest' has been used to justify land expropriation from Indigenous peoples (Fox, 2022, p. 1609; Atleo et al., 2022; Atleo & Boron, 2023). Examining BC's electricity system through the lens of the regime reveals a system that leaves very little room for Indigenous communities and power proponents to pursue their interests, or have their priorities meaningfully reflected.

The Government of BC also requires IPPs to apply for approvals and licenses when constructing renewable energy projects – which is the case even for First Nations who are constructing energy projects on their own territories. This signifies another mechanism by which colonial relations are reproduced. For power proponents looking to build run-of-river hydro projects, they must apply to the Government of BC for water licenses and pay rent to "divert, store and use specific quantities of water" (Government of BC, 2022, para. 6). This has posed bureaucratic challenges for several First Nations, including the Kanaka Bar Indian Band who were in a decades-long battle to recuperate water licenses on their traditional territory that had been held by private power companies without their consent (see Fitzgerald, 2018: pp. 49-52; 90-93; 110-116).

BC Hydro's cost-of-service model acts as a further barrier limiting opportunities for IPP's. If the majority of the province, and in particular domestic customers, are reliant on BC Hydro's electricity and it is within the utility's interest to accrue revenue through selling power, this means that energy efficiency improvements for BC Hydro customers or renewable energy

sources outside of BC Hydro are disincentivized as they result in revenue losses for the utility (He et al., 2022).[63] This is made even more challenging given BC Hydro's over $20 billion of debt, which places them in a position where they are even less likely to relinquish their market to IPPs (Cox, 2018b) and instead uphold the existing regime.

He et al. (2022) criticize existing utility business models within several provinces and territories, including BC, as they:

> "are currently not designed to encourage the progressive and accelerated changes needed to advance the clean energy transition in Canada's remote communities.[64] On the theme of this country's journey of reconciliation with Indigenous People[s], existing utility business models are not well aligned with creating opportunities for utilities to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (p. 11).

He et al. (2020) note the rapidly shifting landscape and the urgency of climate change and calls for 'reconciliation.' They draw on Proudlove et al (2020) to argue that "utilities are no longer expected to simply supply energy that is safe, reliable, and affordable, but are increasingly being asked to respond to a new set of principles and responsibilities" (p. 43). This potentially has significant implications for the BC energy context to contribute to regime destabilization, as it could push the Government of BC to revisit BC Hydro's existing mandate.

3.1.2.4 Opportunities for First Nations involvement in BC's electricity regime.

As traditional ways of life have been under attack through centuries of colonial domination, Indigenous communities have often become dependent on involvement in the settler-colonial economy for survival (Atleo, 2021). The legacies of colonialism result in

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[63] That is, unless PowerEx can sell surplus electricity for a profit. We are also entering into an era where energy efficiency improvements are further prioritized by BC Hydro and the Government of BC as growing electrification will increase demand for electricity beyond what BC Hydro has forecasted (Lovekin et al., 2021).

[64] Although He et al. (2020) focus on off-grid communities in their research, this critique still applies to grid-connected communities, which will be illustrated through interviews in Chapter Four.

challenges to accessing finance, limited access to natural resources, geographic remoteness, and exclusion from decision-making processes, which has made it difficult for Indigenous peoples to pursue economic development opportunities. This further perpetuates relationships of dependency where Indigenous communities struggle to meet the needs of their people on their own accord and are often left to rely on the settler-state for financial support (Atleo, 2021; Manuel, 2017). The energy sector – whether through extractive methods such as oil, gas, and large-scale hydroelectricity, or through renewable electricity projects – provides an avenue for Indigenous peoples to assert their rights to self-determination within a settler-colonial system that "constrains [their] options (Atleo, 2021, p. 357).

There are a number of ways that Indigenous communities and groups in BC currently participate in the energy sector.[65] For electricity generation, this includes full or partial ownership of projects in partnership with the state,[66] business joint ventures or partnerships with industry, selling electricity to industry or the provincial grid through energy purchase agreements as IPPs, and through a multitude of benefit sharing agreements[67] with government or

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[65] These opportunities differ depending on whether or not a community is connected to the grid. The options discussed here focus more on participating in electricity generation for the purposes of selling electricity to the BC Hydro grid, which is more suited to grid-connected projects. Many off-grid communities are also able to generate renewable energy, however this is often utilized to power buildings connected to their microgrid (see example of Tll Yahda Energy in Swiilawiid Sustainability Society, 2019).

[66] Indigenous ownership typically means that a project is owned in part or full by an Indigenous political organization or Economic development corporation (Savic & Hoicka, 2023). Savic and Hoicka (2023) identify that different ownership models and governance structures lead to varying levels of community control over and benefit from projects.

[67] When settler governments and industry have intentions to proceed with extractive activity on Indigenous lands, they are required by law to consult with the affected Nations – however the rigor of consultation is typically inadequate as Indigenous groups are often treated as stakeholders with limited authority rather than sovereign Nations and rightsholders (Pasternak, 2019). As a result of landscape shifts in recent years, the energy sector has largely accepted that "enlisting Indigenous support for projects…[is] a new cost of business" (Atleo et al., 2021, p. 157). It is now common for industry and governments to negotiate revenue sharing agreements or IBAs with Nations who are affected by energy developments (including generation and transmission) on their traditional territory (Atleo & Boron, 2023). However, signing an IBA or revenue sharing agreement does not equate to consent.

industry including Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs), revenue sharing agreements, taxation, and royalty agreements with energy projects developed on their traditional territories (Fitzgerald, 2018; Henderson & Sanders, 2018; Karanasios, 2018, p. 79; Cook et al., 2017; Savic & Hoicka, 2023). More recently, some Nations in BC have also sought involvement through joint ownership of transmission infrastructure within their traditional territories (McSheffrey, 2023).

Since the privatization of BC's grid in the early 2000s under Premier Campbell, Indigenous communities in BC (both grid-connected and off-grid) have been expanding their involvement in renewable energy as IPPs. According to a survey of First Nations across BC conducted in 2017 by Cook et al. for the BC Clean Energy Working Group, 98% of respondents[68] were already involved or hoped to become involved in the energy sector, with 78 renewable energy projects already in operation and 250 others under consideration[69] (Cook et al., 2017). Since this survey was conducted, interest in the renewable energy sector has continued to grow.

Although a growing number of First Nations are already involved, or interested in getting involved in the renewable energy sector in BC, and there is seemingly a market for it, they face

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Atleo and Boron (2023) illuminate that some "Indigenous Nations often turn to IBAs as a last resort, feeling that development will occur regardless of their consent" (p. 113). A s a result, IBAs and other revenue sharing models become a viable way for Nations to have involvement and reap some benefits from projects that will move ahead regardless of whether they agree to it (Fitzgerald, 2018; Henderson & Sanders, 2018, as cited in Fitzgerald, 2018). Although these agreements provide First Nations with economic benefits and some level of involvement in natural resource projects on their territory, they still operate within neoliberal, colonial structures and have the possibility of creating "new configurations of dependency" (Boron & Markey, 2020, p. 155). BC's clean energy revenue sharing agreement with First Nations reflects these critiques and leaves much to be desired as it does not include heritage assets, which accounts for the major hydroelectric developments in BC (Fitzgerald, 2018).

[68] Of the 203 First Nations in BC that were contacted for this survey, 103 First Nations and three Tribal Councils responded (Cook et al., 2017).

[69] This survey was conducted in 2017 so these numbers are not up to date. In-depth research indicating the number of projects currently in operation or under consideration in BC has not been conducted since this survey, aside from the Indigenous-led Clean Energy Project Map developed by Indigenous Clean Energy (see Indigenous Clean Energy, 2022).

barriers to enhancing their involvement. Cook et al.'s (2017) survey identified that the greatest barriers facing First Nations in the renewable energy sector were "lack of [opportunities] provided by BC Hydro programs…financing…and community readiness" (p. 4). Indigenous power proponents leveraged many existing programs to grow their involvement in the renewable energy sector, in particular the SOP prior to its cancellation. However, Fitzgerald (2018) notes that these programs were not created to benefit First Nations; rather, First Nations fought to use these programs to their advantage, were extraordinarily successful in doing so, and were negatively affected when these programs were halted, over their strenuous objections.

3.1.2.5 Summarizing the regime.

Examining the electricity system in BC through the lens of the MLP reveals that colonial laws and institutions set the foundation of the regime, which reinforces relationships of dispossession and dependency between the state and Indigenous peoples. The regime is supported by BC's electricity system governed by the Government of BC and accountable to its priorities, namely industrial development and economic growth through large-scale hydro, and the "public interest" which often justifies the state's decisions which are made at the expense of Indigenous peoples. The revenue structure of the utility further perpetuates lock-in, while maintaining dependency for Indigenous power proponents by defining the terms upon which they engage with the renewable energy sector and require the usage of provincial infrastructure to do so. Relationships of dependency and patterns of colonial supremacy are further illuminated across the regime through the ways in which First Nations are required to interact with BC Hydro-owned infrastructure as customers or power producers, even those who are off-grid and dependent on BC Hydro generators and infrastructure. Furthermore, the ways in which First Nations have sought involvement in the energy sector have been stymied by policy decisions

which further places them in a position of response to settler-colonial priorities. This lens offers a deeper understanding of why energy transitions within BC's electricity system might be difficult, given the interconnected web of institutions, policies, laws, and mechanisms that maintain the regime in favour of settler-colonial interests.

3.1.3. Defining the Niche

According to the MLP, niches refer to protected spaces at the local level that give rise to sustainable grassroots solutions, and act as incubators for potentially subversive innovations (Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012; Schot, 1998). Once these alternative solutions gain traction and popularity with the help of forces at the landscape level, they destabilize the regime and eventually shape a new norm.

3.1.3.1 The niche of Indigenous-led renewable energy

Indigenous-led renewable energy projects are considered a niche for the purposes of this analysis. The "critical context," "landscape," and "regime" sections within this chapter illustrate that there is growing interest for First Nations to take on leadership roles in the electricity sector through renewable energy projects as an avenue to assert rights to self-determination, develop community resilience, decrease dependency on the settler-colonial state, and accrue economic benefits in closer alignment with their worldviews (Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2018; Henderson, 2013; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015; Stefanelli et al., 2019). Although the analysis of the regime above shows that Indigenous communities often engage in the energy sector on the state's terms, these projects are providing a pathway for communities to reclaim some control within their territories and are paving the way for alternative energy futures at the local level.

Developments across the landscape – namely court cases requiring state governments to strengthen their approach to recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, the adoptions of DRIPA

(2019) provincially and UNDRIPA (2021) federally, and the increasingly urgent need to shift our energy systems as the climate crisis continues to worsen – have pushed the state to consider Indigenous priorities in a more meaningful way within its governance and political frameworks. Indigenous communities, organizations, and allies[70] have fought tirelessly to leverage policies and programs not previously made for Indigenous peoples to assert their rights and grow their involvement in the renewable energy sector (Fitzgerald, 2018). Although many of the programs and opportunities leveraged by First Nations in the renewable energy sector have dried up since the SOP's cancellation in 2018, this group of actors including First Nations, civil society groups, think tanks, and industry associations have continued to push for change within the regime to carve out more opportunities for First Nations leadership in this area. Thanks to these efforts, there is evidence that the regime may be showing signs of destabilization. The niche, as well as its interactions within the regime, will be further illustrated in the next section through a case study of the inflection point of the Site C dam.

3.2 The regime and niche in action

In previous sections, I used the MLP as an organizational tool to illustrate the forces and phenomena within the landscape, the mechanisms within the regime, and the momentum building within the niche. I will utilize the Site C dam as a case study to delve deeper into how these forces and actors are relating to one another, with particular focus on how the regime has worked to reinforce large-scale hydro for settler-colonial benefit. Here, I will demonstrate how

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[70] Some of these organizations and allies include the New Relationship Trust, Indigenous Clean Energy, the First Nations Energy and Mining Council, Coastal First Nations – Great Bear Initiative, the Pembina Institute, Clean Energy BC, Coast Funds, as well as academic groups such as the Institute for Integrated Energy Systems at the University of Victoria. Each of these groups have played a role in supporting Indigenous communities across BC to build renewable energy projects on their territories, whether through advocacy, capacity building, research, and/or providing funding.

the regime has wielded power to uphold settler-colonial norms and maintain an electricity system in BC that is reliant on large-scale hydro for the purposes of industrial development, despite the niche's efforts to disrupt the regime and erode its power. I will also explain how the renewable energy sector may be shifting to align more closely with Indigenous rights in the years following Site C's approval due to continued pressure from Indigenous power proponents and their allied forces.

3.2.1 The rise of the niche of independent power and signs of regime destabilization

In the early 2000's, opportunities were emerging to expand BC's privately-owned renewable energy sector through privatization of the Provincial grid as explained in the regime section above. First Nations' involvement in the renewable energy sector – which is represented by the "niche" – did not occur right away, and many First Nations were not initially supportive of the expansion of privatized renewable energy in BC. A "gold rush" of IPP's led by non-Indigenous energy companies began to rapidly develop projects on unceded land, subsequently facing backlash for failing to consult or share benefits with First Nations, thus infringing on Aboriginal rights and title (Burrows, 2007; as cited in Fitzgerald, 2018). This shifted with the 2008 Clean Power Call, when advocacy and pressure from First Nations pushed BC Hydro to consult with First Nations prior to issuing EPA's (BC Hydro, 2010). This marked the beginnings of the uptick of Indigenous involvement in the independent power sector (Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 52-53). Many Indigenous communities and organizations fought to grow their involvement in these projects as rightsholders, which has eventually led to "…over 90% of BC's IPP projects hav[ing] some form of First Nations participation — as full owners, equity partners, or through royalty agreements" (Clean Energy BC, n.d., para. 3).

Interest grew in the subsequent years as more Indigenous communities saw success stories that demonstrated the potential for self-determination, energy security, and economic gain through these renewable energy projects. This was supported by additional funding programs from the federal and provincial governments developed in response to this growing interest, which provided financial and capacity support for Indigenous communities who wanted to build renewable energy projects but struggled to enter the market.[71] The momentum during this period, as well as support for Indigenous owned renewable energy at the regime level, spurred feelings of hope that BC's energy sector was trending toward a renewable and Indigenous-led future. This momentum slowed significantly, however, when the Government of BC approved the Site C dam.

3.2.2 History and approval of Site C

The Site C dam is a contentious hydroelectric megaproject currently under construction on the Peace River in Northern BC, with a long history spanning over 50 years (summarized in Figure 2). Site C was originally proposed in the 1950s and was rejected multiple times by various governments over the years due to the potential for environmental damage and financial risk (Cox, 2018). Site C's proposal was part of the push for large-scale hydroelectric buildouts in the mid-20th century and is the third dam built along the Peace River, following the controversial and destructive W.A.C Bennett and Peace Canyon dams (Dusyk, 2016; Bakker & Hendricks,

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[71] The Government of BC responded to this growing interest through developing the BC First Nations Clean Energy Business Fund which was established through the *Clean Energy Act*. This Fund is a critical tool to support participation of Indigenous communities in BC's clean and renewable energy sector (Government of British Columbia, 2024c; Fitzgerald, 2018). Other Provincial funding programs that provided support for First Nations in the renewable energy sector included the BC Indigenous Clean Energy Initiatives (BCICEI) administered through the New Relationship Trust as part of commitments under CleanBC (Government of British Columbia, 2024c; New Relationship Trust, n.d.; Quitoras, 2022). Federally, the Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities funding program has also been an important avenue for Indigenous communities seeking support to expand renewable energy development (Natural Resources Canada, 2023).

2019; Cox, 2018). After many failed attempts at approval throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the Site C project was revived in 2010 under Premier Gordon Campbell, and then finally approved by his successor Premier Christy Clarke in 2014 (Cox, 2018).

The Liberal government touted Site C as a cost-effective way to meet long-term electricity demand (at a time when independent power was criticized for being too costly), a source of employment, and a way to support "development of clean energy projects by providing additional capacity to back up intermittent [renewable] resources" (Cox, 2018; Dusyk, 2016; Office of the Premier, 2010). Delving deeper into this narrative, however, highlights some flaws in the Government of BC's logic: the province did not need Site C's electricity at the time of approval, making this project seem like more of a political move without many long-term benefits for provincial customers

Figure 2 - A brief history of the Site C dam

while increasing BC Hydro's debt (Cox, 2018, p. 9). Although politicians were careful not to publicly connect Site C to heavy industry, journalists and analysts pointed out that the only reason for Site C would have been to justify a growing LNG sector, which would be a heavy energy user due to the liquefaction process, given the lack of domestic demand for electricity at the time (Parfitt, 2016; Yunker, 2022a; Dusyk, 2016).

Earlier dams on the Peace River have had significant impacts on the surrounding region. Communities, homes, and habitats have been flooded, turning the Peace River from what was "once a highway for intercommunity transportation, an abundant source of fish, and a rich ribbon of riparian wildlife habitat" into "an unnavigable and mercury-contaminated reservoir" (Loo, 2007, as cited in Willow, 2020, p. 50; Yunker, 2022a). Upon hearing of the resurrection of the Site C dam proposal in 2010, many concerned residents in the Peace Region including the Treaty 8 First Nations[72] began organizing to stop the dam from moving forward (Cox, 2018). Before construction could begin, Site C underwent an environmental impact assessment and review process[73] from August 2013 to May 2014 wherein a Joint Review Panel raised concerns about the "significant adverse impacts" of the dam as well as its growing price tag, and questioned the rationale of electricity demand as BC Hydro had an electricity surplus at the time (Cox, 2018, p. 22). Despite apprehension from the Joint Review Panel and push-back from the public, Site C

[72] This includes Doig River, Halfway River, Prophet River, and West Moberly First Nations (Treaty 8 Tribal Association, n.d.).

[73] Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper's leadership, public hearings were allotted for 30 days according to environmental assessment regulations passed by his government, leaving the public and the Joint Review Panel with little time for proper review and assessment of Site C (Cox, 2018, p. 22).

was approved under Premier Clarke in December 2014, and preliminary construction began in 2015 (BC Hydro, 2023c; Cox, 2018).[74]

In the years following Site C's approval, many environmental organizations, Indigenous groups, and academics continued to speak out against this decision, namely due to expropriation that would force residents to be evicted or displaced, as well as the environmental impacts and destruction of sacred sites that would result from flooding the region[75] (Sheehan, 2021; Cox, 2018). West Moberly First Nations were some of Site C's strongest opponents for decades, and took the Government of BC to court on the grounds that Site C would infringe on their rights and title (*West Moberly First Nations v British Columbia, 2018;* Gilchrist, 2022). Clean Energy BC, an industry association that advocates for independent power interests in the energy sector, commissioned a study with London Economics International that suggested a package of renewables as a "compelling alternative" that could generate the same amount of electricity as Site C for a fraction of the price, minimize environmental damage, and provide opportunities for Indigenous power producers (Singer, 2014). The resistance movement continued to grow, while Premier Clark continued to double down on the decision to move forward with Site C.

In July 2017, Premier Clark's Liberal government was defeated by Premier John Horgan's NDP government who ran on a platform promising a BCUC review of Site C following his election and expressed that he would be open to shutting down the project if necessary (Bailey, 2016). In a letter written to BC Hydro's CEO before the election, Premier Horgan raised

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[74] This was made possible through regulatory changes introduced through the *Clean Energy Act*, which transferred system planning authority from the BCUC to provincial cabinet and exempted Site C from regulatory review under the Utilities Commission Act (Dusyk, 2016, p. 89). This meant that Site C was able to skirt institutional checks and balances that typically apply to large-scale energy projects.

[75] In an interview, Sarah Cox states that the Site C dam "will have more serious adverse environmental effects than any project ever examined in the history of Canada's *Environmental Assessment Act*. That includes oil sands projects and big mining projects" (Sheehan, 2021, p. 326).

concerns about individuals being expropriated from their homes for the dam's construction, and advised BC Hydro not to sign any new contracts until a new government was formed and a BCUC review of the project had occurred (The Canadian Press, 2017). After his election in 2017, Premier Horgan stood by his promise and a BCUC inquiry into Site C commenced, bringing hope to Site C's fierce resisters as it insinuated that perhaps the fight was not yet over (Cox, 2018, p. 247-248). After many months, the BCUC issued their final report on November 1, 2017 that indicated Site C would likely run over budget and behind schedule,[76] and suggested that less destructive and cleaner sources of electricity such as wind or geothermal could meet demand for the same price or cheaper than Site C (Fitzgerald, 2018; Bakker & Hendricks, 2019; Cox, 2018, p. 12). The damning result of the BCUC Inquiry seemed that it could possibly be enough to finally justify Site C's cancellation, and "[equip] the NDP government with plenty of ammunition to terminate the project" (Cox, 2018, p. 249).

After the BCUC's inquiry report was released, a slew of pro-Site C trade unions and lobbyists who had vested interests in the project mobilized to discredit the BCUC's findings (Cox, 2018, p. 251-252). On December 11, 2017, Premier Horgan chose to forego the BCUC's warnings and opposition from First Nations, residents, environmental groups, and other concerned British Columbians. He announced that his government would move forward with Site C's construction. He stated that "the Site C project should never have begun," blaming the former Liberal government for getting it to this point, and said that his government "could not in good conscience saddle British Columbians with a tab for billions of dollars" which they had already spent on the project for "nothing in return" (Cox, 2018, p. 253). Since Premier Horgan's

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[76] In February 2021, Premier Horgan announced that Site C's price tag would rise to $16 billion, nearly doubling its initial cost when it was approved in 2014, making Site C the most expensive dam in Canadian history (Kurjata & Bains, 2021; Yunker, 2022b).

decision, six First Nations have reluctantly signed financial agreements, most recently joined by West Moberly First Nations who signed in 2022 (see Government of Canada & Government of British Columbia, 2022) and said that the Government of BC had "beat[en] them into submission" after their decades-long legal battle (Gilchrist, 2022). This decision ultimately highlights the sheer power and resources in the regime to uphold the status quo, despite public outcry, expert warnings, and resistance from affected communities.

3.2.3 Site C's impact on Indigenous power proponents

With Site C moving forward, the Provincial Government indicated that they would soon no longer need the booming IPP sector to meet demand. With PowerEx being a source of revenue for the Provincial Government, having excess electricity was economically favourable for a time as PowerEx could sell it on international markets. However, demand in the US for BC's "clean" power was waning as Site C's construction was beginning (Government of British Columbia, n.d.b.). This put BC Hydro in a greater energy surplus than usual. This rationale, as well as concerns about the impacts of the SOP on rate affordability, led to BC Hydro paring down the purchase of independent power, as well as the cancellation of the SOP (Government of British Columbia, n.d.a; Cohen & Calvert, 2012; Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b).

This decision had significant impacts on Indigenous power proponents subscribed to the SOP as it placed the future feasibility of their projects in limbo, and created uncertainty for existing projects with EPAs coming up for renewal in the subsequent years[77] (Government of

[77] BC Hydro has assured current EPA holders that they will not be impacted by the SOP's cancellation, but with EPA renewals looming, questions still remain about whether renegotiated rates will be high enough to keep their projects afloat (Fitzgerald, 2018; Lovekin et al., 2021; Government of British Columbia, n.d).

British Columbia, n.d; Fitzgerald, 2018; Lovekin et al., 2021). After years of working toward energy autonomy through a thriving independent power sector, Indigenous power proponents once again found themselves at the whim of the Government of BC's policy decisions and had to organize and advocate for other opportunities to emerge. Although the niche made strong attempts to break into the regime in the case of Site C, the regime wielded its power in the end to uphold the status-quo.

3.2.4 The niche's persistence and regime destabilization

In the years following the SOP's cancellation, Indigenous communities, organizations, think tanks, and industry groups have continued to advocate for change to advance Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector. Backed by Indigenous legal orders asserted through court cases that strengthen the settler state's recognition of Indigenous rights and title, and the Government of BC's commitments to 'reconciliation' as evidenced by DRIPA, the case for Indigenous renewable energy leadership on the grounds of self-determination is growing stronger. This group of actors fighting to expand Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, operating as a niche according to the MLP, is a powerful voice that advocates for policy change, holds the Government of BC accountable when it fails to deliver on its commitments to 'reconciliation' and UNDRIP through DRIPA, and continues to draw attention to the need for climate and energy policies that reflect Indigenous priorities and uphold their rights (see Lovekin et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2022; First Nations Leadership Council, 2022). This coalition has worked towards building frameworks and options to advance Indigenous

involvement in the energy sector, such as proposing the creation of a First Nations Power Authority[78] (Lovekin et al., 2021; Lusztig, 2021).

Despite the barriers posed by Site C, Indigenous power proponents in BC continue to leverage their legal orders, rights, and authority to push against the status-quo.[79] In 2019, the BCUC underwent an Inquiry into the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities which suggested that Indigenous energy projects on reserve, modern treaty, and self-government lands be self-regulated and exempted from the authority of the BCUC and *Utilities Commission Act* (British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2020a; Hira et al., 2020; Rand et al., 2022). This inquiry laid critical groundwork for ideas such as the First Nations Power Authority and creating an Indigenous utility in the province. The Inquiry also sparked change within the BCUC to improve its relationships with Indigenous peoples such as through launching their Indigenous Intervenor Capacity Fund Pilot Program that provides financial support for Indigenous peoples who seek to participate in BCUC processes as intervenors (British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2023).

In 2020, the Government of BC launched engagements for the Remote Community Energy Strategy under CleanBC (Government of BC, 2024e), responding to advocacy from off-grid Indigenous communities looking to reduce diesel dependency through community renewable energy projects. This led to the creation of the Remote Community Energy Strategy

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[78] A First Nations Power Authority draws inspiration from Saskatchewan's FNPA (see First Nations Power Authority, 2021). It would act as an advocacy body and third party to support First Nations involvement in the energy sector without reliance on BC Hydro or the provincial government, and could provide First Nations with a greater presence in the energy sector (Lusztig, 2021). Research is currently underway to develop potential feasible models within BC's centralized context.

[79] In a brief for the Yellowhead Institute, Dr. Sayers (2019) identified that "because of the efforts of First Nations over the past few decades, provincial bureaucrats and politicians know that our communities will be demanding seats at the table on virtually every government initiative. That most of the province is not subject to treaty makes the case for ongoing discussion and negotiation stronger and more common" (p. 2).

Working Group, which includes members from several off-grid First Nations and informs the Remote Community Energy Strategy[80] (Government of BC, 2024f).

This advocacy also led to commitments within the DRIPA Action Plan to expand renewable and clean energy opportunities, outlined in Action 4:43 (Government of British Columbia, 2024b):

> Co-develop recommendations on strategic policies and initiatives for clean and sustainable energy. This includes identifying and supporting First Nations-led clean energy opportunities related to CleanBC, the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro, and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities. (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation). (BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, 2022, p. 28).

The Indigenous Clean Energy Opportunities (ICEO) engagement stemmed from this commitment, which is co-developed and co-led between the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low-carbon Innovation and the First Nations Energy and Mining Council (Government of British Columbia, n.d.c.). This engagement is meant to foster collaboration and "position First Nations to fully participate in current and future opportunities in British Columbia's clean energy sector and align the Province's strategic clean energy policy and legislation with [UNDRIP]" (Government of British Columbia, n.d.c).

Engagements through the ICEO led directly to specific provisions for First Nations Involvement in BC Hydro's most recent Call for Power mentioned earlier in this chapter (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b; First Nations Energy and Mining Council, 2023). BC Hydro has launched an engagement process for First Nations to help shape the Call, in addition to $140 million for the BC Indigenous Clean Energy Initiative (BCICEI) to support Indigenous-led power projects to participate in the Call (Ministry of Energy,

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[80] The Working Group produced several recommendations through a report released in 2022 (Chastity Davis Consulting & Community Energy Association, 2022).

Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b). BC Hydro has sought to shape the Call based on a proposed framework from the First Nations Energy and Mining Council[81] (First Nations Energy and Mining Council, 2023). Furthermore, BC Hydro has also formed a task force that "draws on further Indigenous and external energy experts to provide strategic advice on advancing Indigenous ownership and/or equity interest opportunities," who will be giving strategic advice for the Call for Power (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b, para. 8). BC Hydro is also in the process of developing their own commitments to implementing UNDRIP (Manson, n.d.). These shifts within settler-colonial institutions as a result of pressures from Indigenous power proponents demanding involvement in the energy sector indicate potential signs of regime destabilization.

The Site C dam may ultimately prove to be an inflection point for the energy industry in BC, even though it reinscribed a future of centralized hydroelectricity potentially for decades to come. This example demonstrates how the regime has worked to reinforce settler-colonial priorities through a landscape characterized by natural resource extraction and a regime dominated by publically owned, large-scale hydroelectricity which has overrode Indigenous opposition and effectively excluded First Nations from taking on a leadership role in the electricity sector. Potential signs of regime destabilization seen above show that the regime may be capable of change and could be starting to shift in favour of Indigenous priorities. As the niche and landscape-level developments continue to put pressure on the regime, we will see the extent to which actors within the regime are willing to change to support the level of leadership and authority that Indigenous power proponents desire in the energy sector.

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[81] This includes minimum equity requirements for IBAs signed with independent power producers, prioritization under regulation for projects that have Indigenous involvement, and securing a portion of the power for projects to be owned or controlled by First Nations (First Nations Energy and Mining Council, 2023, p. 3-4).

3.3 Concluding thoughts

This chapter offers an analysis of the context within which Indigenous power proponents are operating: a landscape characterized by natural resource extraction and large-scale hydroelectricity that supports industrial development as a driver of BC's economy, countered by widespread resistance from several First Nations through assertion of their rights; a regime characterized by a centralized, electricity system backed by a web of interlocking forces through laws, policies, and governance processes that are shaped by settler-colonial authority; and the emergent niche through which Indigenous communities are seeking to advance self-determination through renewable energy. The Site C dam provides an example of how the regime challenges Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions, while the niche led by Indigenous power proponents continues to push for change despite resistance from state and industry actors across the regime. Examining the context of BC utilizing the MLP as an organizational tool reveals a complex web of forces, priorities, and actors pushing against one another in an effort to affect or resist change. This offers the necessary context for the first two research questions – what are the aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, as well as the barriers to achieving these aspirations – by illustrating that the landscape dominated by extractive and industrial interests upheld by an unfavourable governance regime has made it difficult for Indigenous aspirations in the renewable energy sector to be realized.

In the next chapter, I will present the results of interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts working in the renewable energy space, seeking to gain further insights into how this field has shifted over time in the wake of the SOP's cancelation and Site C's approval, and since DRIPA's adoption.

Chapter Four: Interview Findings

This chapter highlights findings from 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 individuals working in different capacities related to Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector.[82] The interview questions are included in Appendix A and were developed based on the three overarching research questions that guide this thesis:

1) What are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector?
2) What are barriers to these aspirations?
3) What are pathways to overcome these barriers?

Below, I have summarized the major themes that emerged in response to each research question. Three to four themes were selected for each research question and are organized accordingly.

4.1 Overview of themes

In response to the first research question – what are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector – interviews indicate that self-determination remains a core aspiration for many Indigenous communities and individuals within the renewable energy sector. This is explained under the first heading, *Self-determination and self-sufficiency: "To be self-reliant and thrive, as opposed to trying to tread water."* Similarly, building resilience in the face of climate change is also a critical aspiration given relationships of dependency between Indigenous communities and the state, which is explained in the second heading, *Building community resilience in the face of climate change: "All I know is, we'll be fine."* Ultimately, interviews illuminate aspirations for partnerships that support this pursuit of self-determination,

[82] It is important to note that interviewees who work for government entities are not speaking on behalf of their organization, but speak for themselves as individuals working within the system.

which is explained in the final heading, *Strengthening relationships: "Actually being a real partner."*

In response to the second research question – what are barriers to these aspirations – interviews reveal that the colonial roots of the energy sector and patterns of dependency are a significant challenge for Indigenous peoples when seeking involvement in BC's electricity system. This is illustrated under the first heading, *The legacy of colonialism in the energy sector: "How do you reduce the ongoing colonial violence of an entity that has played such a significant and historical role in the settler state?"* Findings also reveal that the current utility model with BC Hydro's monopoly makes it difficult for Indigenous power proponents to remain competitive in the market. This is explained in the second heading, *Conditions within the energy system constrain Indigenous opportunities: "There's just such a built-in inertia…around the status quo that they don't want to move."* Interviews also illustrate that inadequate policy and mandates that do not live up to commitments under DRIPA create further barriers to Indigenous energy leadership in BC, which is explained in the third heading, *Policy frameworks are not reflective of First Nation interests: "Just continually not putting forth policies or opportunities that First Nations want."* Finally, interviews suggest that governance processes within the energy sector systematically exclude Indigenous priorities and authority in favour of the state, which is described in the fourth and final heading, *Governance processes limit Indigenous involvement in the energy sector: "If you are not at the table, how can you influence your future?"*

In response to the third question – what are pathways to overcome these barriers – interviews highlight that the state will have to reckon with its colonial legacy and rebuild trust with Indigenous peoples, while working to shift policies and decision-making processes that limit Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector. This is demonstrated in the first

heading, *Addressing colonial structures and impacts in and through the energy sector.* Interviews also reveal that there is potential for DRIPA to stimulate institutional and cultural shifts that would support a collaborative and partnership-oriented energy sector, which is expressed in the second heading, *The potential for a shifting governance landscape through DRIPA: "A new way of working."* Finally, interviews suggest that there is potential to align the priorities of Indigenous power proponents with the Government of BC's climate and energy priorities, which is explored in the final heading, *Moving toward collective progress: "Decolonization and decarbonization go hand-in-hand."*

4.1.1 What are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector?

Interviews reveal that the extent to which Nations want to be involved in the energy sector varies depending on unique priorities and contexts of each community. Overall, communities are motivated to leverage renewable energy as a means to govern, provide, and determine their own futures. Interviewees articulated this aspiration using several terms, including self-determination, self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and self-governance.[83] Interviewees link several priorities and considerations to these aspirations, which will be detailed below.

4.1.1.1 Self-determination and self-sufficiency: "To be self-reliant and thrive, as opposed to trying to tread water".

All Indigenous interviewees identify that the impacts of colonialism have shaped material, political, and social conditions by creating relationships of dependency and limiting economic opportunities, which has made it difficult for them to survive and thrive within their

[83] Self-determination was the term that was used most consistently out of the aforementioned terms and will be used moving forward to encompass self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and self-governance.

territories. For many Indigenous interviewees, expanding involvement in the renewable energy sector is heavily rooted in a desire to leverage renewable energy as a foundation for self-determination.

> Renewable energy powers self-determination. I have all the water, food and shelter I need to live for the next hundred years. And while colonization depleted it, I still have it. What renewable energy does by entering in, getting your first one under your belt because it's so good it starts multiplying. You can generate electricity so that your lights stay on. Your communication stays on. Your systems, other systems - whether it's water, whether it's septic. All these things you depend on. – P2

One Indigenous interviewee sees involvement in the renewable energy sector as a way to build capacity and the economic conditions necessary for their community to flourish.

> We didn't like the idea of being called a third world community. We wanted to have that opportunity to grow. And become equal. Or at least get to that - get close to that form of equality. – P8

While several interviewees are motivated by securing a source of revenue and a way to become more economically self-sufficient through the revenues gained by selling their power to the grid, others want to produce just enough safe and reliable energy to independently power their community's buildings.[84] Regardless of the intention, what remains most important for the Indigenous interviewee quoted below is that each community can decide *how* they would like to engage with the renewable energy sector on their own terms.

> And I always say, like, every First Nations should have the right to decide the extent to which they want to participate in the renewable energy sector. Because…maybe they only want to be self-sufficient. They only want to provide their own power, they want to be able to be independent of the grid. And that's something that I've heard for a good number of First Nations, they just want to be independent of the grid, or at least be able to…be on the grid. – P1

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[84] As explained in Chapter Three, communities can produce their own power but are typically still reliant on BC Hydro infrastructure for transmission.

Interviewees mention several ways that renewable energy can support communities to become more self-sufficient, for example by providing a source of revenue, expanding energy capacity and infrastructure on traditional territories, building up local economies through employment and skill building opportunities, and supporting food security initiatives. This is especially important for off-grid communities who otherwise remain dependent on expensive, inefficient, and unreliable diesel generators, many of which are provided by BC Hydro. Most interviewees emphasize that renewable energy involvement is ultimately connected to aspirations for communities to be able to support and determine their own futures.

For P9 whose Nation is currently working on establishing a regional energy utility, seeking a source of revenue separate from government funding is a key motivator for their efforts.

> And this gives us all three entities, another revenue stream that isn't tied to government funding with all of these strings [that] sort of tie our hands for any expansion. Their funding will kind of keep us afloat at a basic minimum. And [this gives us]…a stronger economy than just survival. – P9

The same interviewee, along with several others, sees that rebuilding resilience and opportunities to thrive through renewable energy is particularly salient given the impacts of colonialism.

> To have self-autonomy right, in each and every village, like we had before there was [European] contact, and to be self-reliant and thrive, as opposed to trying to tread water. - P9

Some interviewees indicate that communities having ownership of projects is an important element of achieving these aspirations, which is illustrated by this quote from P6:

> …a lot of what we're hearing right now [from First Nations]…it's a lot around ownership. So less about providing funding - it still is about providing funding but it's really about self-governance, supporting self-governance, and First Nations ownership in projects. Partial ownership, full ownership, access to equity ownership in terms of transmission projects or pieces like that… – P6

Another interviewee identifies that renewable energy projects can support communities to build up sustainable housing, power, and heating infrastructure to provide places for members to live on their territories, which is critical for self-determination, nation-building, and cultural revitalization.

> ...a lot of Nations have members that live outside of the traditional territory or in urban centres, and if there's a desire for that portion of the Nation to return, for those members to go home, so to speak - then yeah, there's the practical element of there being enough homes and enough power to supply those homes with heat and electricity. So it's very much part of even just Indigenous peoples being in relationship to their territory…being able to live there. - P5

A theme of resurgence emerges in a few interviews, where one individual identifies that renewable energy projects on their territory has enabled their community to rebuild relationships with their land and knowledge systems that had been depleted through colonialism.

> If you get involved in the renewable energy sector you can take back your inherent knowledge of your land and resources because you have to study the entire ecosystem. You have to study the watersheds; you have to understand the wind, the sun, the rain. - P2

Given that renewable energy projects operate within settler-colonial systems and frameworks, another interviewee made an important distinction:

> ...prioritizing First Nations-led renewable energy projects... it's not a decolonial act, but it's certainly more of like a resurgent type of act, where you're…empowering First Nations through revenue or energy security to accomplish that energy sovereignty… – P1

Interviews illuminate that across differing motivations and priorities, self-sufficiency and self-determination remain a focal point for Indigenous power proponents. Within a colonial system that has limited opportunities for Indigenous peoples to survive and thrive on their own territories, renewable energy offers an avenue to lessen dependency on the state, and grow capacity for communities to provide for themselves, as an expression of self-determination.

4.1.1.2 Building community resilience in the face of climate change: "All I know is, we'll be fine."

For multiple Indigenous interviewees, building resilience in the face of increasing impacts of climate change is a key reason to pursue community-scale renewable energy projects and grow involvement in the renewable energy sector. There is a general sentiment of distrust toward the existing settler-colonial system's ability to support communities to navigate the impacts of climate change, and remain resilient in cases of severe weather and other crises. One interviewee's community has faced a number of climate catastrophes in recent years, but thanks to their community's renewable energy projects and associated food security initiatives, they were able to continuously meet the needs of citizens during a particularly devastating wildfire and flood season. However, a nearby settler town that was solely reliant on the centralized grid could not say the same.

> We have built a very fragile country - province - region - town. And at [community name], the communication always worked. There was always water and there was always food. We invested in our tomorrow, today, starting years ago. - P2

P2 is especially concerned about the vulnerability of BC Hydro's electricity generation, distribution, and transmission infrastructure to extreme weather and other impacts of climate change. Based on their community's experiences, P2 sees that having a province dependent on one centralized utility leads to unreliability, which has prompted them to build up their capacity to generate their own electricity through renewable energy projects.[85]

> ...climate change is the great leveler. So now we even have a greater reason to be looking at renewable energy, okay? We want safe, reliable, and affordable electricity but climate change will start wiping out the distribution grids and the transmission lines, so that means people are going to be without power for hours, days, weeks, months… So it's not

[85] This interviewee explained that through a process called "islanding," their grid-connected community is able to disconnect from the Provincial grid in case of emergency and continue to power their own buildings through a micro-grid.

> a question of if, it's a question of when you're going to lose your power - unless you are self-generated. - P2

For many Indigenous interviewees, building up sustainable food, energy, and economic resources separate from the settler state is a way for communities to take their future into their own hands. The following two interviewees share concern that settler society lacks the knowledge and resilience to withstand the worsening climate crisis.

> Our ancestors have been here for over ten thousand years. And we're not about to go anywhere. That's how I look at it. It might take a little bit but we're stubborn. We'll get it. We'll relearn. But if you do that in a concrete jungle? What's going to happen, right?...All I know is, we'll be fine - today, tomorrow, and whatever else happens. – P8

> We made the decision to invest in our future. It was never a cost. Never a cost. Regardless where our membership live, they have a home to come home to, so when the shitstorm hits, come home. So that's what we do - we invest in our region so that our region is stable. We invest in our traditional territory so that our membership, regardless of residency, know that they are going to be okay. Has BC - can BC say the same thing? As British Columbians, are we going to be okay? - P2

Many Indigenous interviewees see building up their community's resilience through renewable energy as the "best chance to survive the next hundred years." - P2.

> I just, I'm passionate about wanting to make a better future. Not a better future. But, you know, creating the best foundation today, [with] the work that we're doing in climate action. – P3

Some Indigenous interviewees also identify that making investments in renewable energy following Indigenous leadership will be necessary not only to secure their own community's future, but to secure a future for non-Indigenous communities as well.

> We will be able to help the world if we invest today. But in order to invest today, we need to have First Nations on side. The people need to know the why. Climate change is real, it's here, and it's going to get worse. We still have time to make the strategic investment in physiological foundations. And I'm not saying energy is a physiological foundation, but of the systems that give us life, electricity is the core. – P2

The worsening climate crisis continues to draw attention to the cracks in the colonial foundations that settler societies are built upon. Interviews reveal the growing importance of

building resilience at the community level as an extension of self-determination, as well as a source of survival, which can be supported through communities having access to their own energy sources.

4.1.1.3 Strengthening relationships: "Actually being a real partner."

Every Indigenous interviewee has experienced exclusion from decision-making pertaining to energy development and natural resource extraction on their traditional territories, and vocalizes frustrations at the state's approach to working with Indigenous communities in the renewable energy sector. For a number of interviewees, renewable energy projects are identified as an avenue to rebuild relationships between the state and Indigenous communities.

> Renewable energy is bloody important because as you know, it can reverse the adverse effects of colonization. It is an incredible vehicle that fosters reconciliation and collaboration. – P2

Several interviewees articulate that self-determination should be exercised through these partnerships. For one interviewee, a partnership between their community and a non-profit organization has been integral to supporting their success in renewable energy, which they felt illustrates an example of a truly self-determined partnership:

> And so we have her on board and had all this mentorship and expertise, where she recognizes that our team is in a position and leading the way to ensure that we're in the driver's seat and we call the shots. And to me, that's [the] truest form of sovereignty, for self-governance and self-determination. – P3

For this interviewee's Nation, they see the importance of having external partners who are willing to work together in genuine, trusted relationships, and are willing to grow and improve so they can work more effectively with other First Nations in the future.

> …we have a history, proven track record of engaging consultants or…other businesses organizations and building trusted relationships and making that company better for approaching other Indigenous Nations. – P3

Within the energy sector more broadly, many interviewees see shortcomings in current approaches to energy governance and revenue sharing agreements. Many desire shared-decision making and more equitable partnerships within energy production, transmission, and planning, as well as other matters related to land-use.

> I think just the shared vision - shared revenue in the transmission of power and I guess duly going down the same path together in a more 50/50 partnership [rather] than [the government] sort of listening to you but not hearing you, you know what I mean? They're just - I guess you put that down to … consulting with you as a checkmark. Actually being a real partner and trying to solve our collective issues whether it's around energy, food sovereignty, forestry and all - that we're an equal partner. – P9

Some Indigenous interviewees also share a desire for more leadership opportunities in institutional processes and provincial decision-making associated with energy, which could be facilitated through more meaningful and self-determined partnerships.

> It's hard to think of outcomes, aside from meeting our climate targets and ensuring that at least in our region, we get to our targets and play a part in helping other regions meet theirs... In terms of process, ideally, First Nations are leading the way in terms of how we answer these questions and in potential changes to legislation, policy or regulation of [the] electricity sector. And not just a checkmark for governments to consult through their various avenues…- P1

For Both P9 and P1, this means moving away from consultation as a bureaucratic process or "checkmark."

While recognizing the harm experienced by Indigenous communities and Nations at the hands of settler governments and institutions, many Indigenous interviewees are open to working collaboratively with state actors to build a collective future and achieve shared outcomes. This feeling of collaboration is particularly salient given the Government of BC's prioritization of 'reconciliation' and commitments under DRIPA, leading some interviewees to see renewable energy as a pathway to work toward these priorities.

> When the federal government does something alone, when the provincial government does something alone, when Canada's corporations, or First Nations - generates a

> win/loss or a loss/loss, one project at a time. But renewable energy brings all four to create an overlap or the quadruple win. Because everybody wins when the four of us are developing renewable energy projects... - P2

As historical experiences of colonialism have led to exclusion in decision-making and governance processes, interviewees ultimately highlight aspirations for self-determined partnerships that create space for Indigenous leadership within the renewable energy sector, while fostering meaningful collaboration to achieve shared goals.

4.1.1.4 Summarizing the aspirations.

Interviews reveal that self-determination remains a core aspiration for many First Nations within the renewable energy sector. Within a colonial context that limits opportunities for First Nations to survive and thrive within their own territories, renewable energy offers a pathway to become self-sufficient through building up local economies and generating energy independent from the state. Building community resilience in the face of climate change is also a driving aspiration for many interviewees to pursue renewable energy projects, particularly as some articulate feelings of distrust toward BC's energy system to withstand worsening weather crises. Interviews illustrate aspirations of meaningful, equitable and self-determined partnerships between Indigenous power proponents and the settler state where they can exercise self-determination, while addressing challenges collectively.

4.1.2 What are barriers to these aspirations?

Interviews reveal that the history as well as present day impacts of colonialism manifest through the material and ideological foundations of BC's electricity system that perpetuate relationships of dependency. This occurs especially through mandates, policy frameworks, and decision-making processes. This section will illustrate how these impacts manifest as barriers

that limit Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector, primarily through the existing utility model and mandates, unfavorable policy frameworks, and exclusionary decision-making processes.

4.1.2.1 The legacy of colonialism in the energy sector: "How do you reduce the ongoing colonial violence of an entity that has played such a significant and historical role in the settler state?"

The majority of interviewees recount stories and perspectives that highlight the colonial foundations of the energy sector, which ultimately manifests in and through interactions and relationships between Indigenous communities and BC energy organizations – particularly BC Hydro - today. P8's community's experience with BC Hydro starkly illustrates this.

> As I mentioned our past grievance with BC Hydro we've had back in the day, BC Electric and the Indian Affairs agent come into our community. And I say they came in, skipping hand in hand walking down saying they can get us a good deal, all we need to do is sign a band council resolution and they'll give us free electricity and they'll give us money on top of it. The only big thing we had was they wouldn't allow us to have any translators. Our chief was the only one that was allowed to be in that meeting. – P8

BC Hydro – which was BC Electric at the time – requested to build transmission lines through P8's traditional territory around the 1980s. Their Chief agreed with the hopes that their nation would receive the monetary compensation and electrical connection that they were promised. However, BC Hydro never delivered on those promises, aside from scant financial compensation for the trees cut down on their territories to build the transmission lines. In the years following, P8's community remained dependent on diesel generators, while they attempted to negotiate connection to the BC Hydro grid. Finally, after nearly 30 years of diesel dependence, P8's community signed a past grievance negotiation with BC Hydro and was officially connected to the Provincial grid in 2010. Their community was officially able to shut off their diesel generators in 2011. This interviewee's community was not the only one to experience this

treatment from BC Hydro, as P8 mentions that the surrounding communities shared similar experiences.

Another Indigenous interviewee points out that BC Hydro's historical legacy of colonial violence could potentially pose a barrier to advancing Indigenous involvement and leadership in the energy sector to the extent that they would like.

> …I hope that we move towards more partnership and that more conciliatory pathway. But obviously, that has not been the case from BC Hydro, historically…So it's a monumental task, thinking about how do you reduce the ongoing colonial violence of an entity that has played such a significant and historical role in the settler state. – P1

Several other interviewees also mention colonial relationships within BC's energy sector and are frustrated by BC Hydro's ongoing approach to working with Indigenous communities.

> ...[there has been] very little proactiveness and recognition of being in a province that has years and years and years of harmful legacy, of flooding lands in traditional territories. And see very little leadership and interest from BC Hydro to repair those damages through good policy and proactive relationships with First Nations. – P4

P3's off-grid community is pursuing a number of renewable energy generation and demand-side management initiatives, and has firsthand experience feeling unsupported by BC Hydro to meet their community's energy needs. This was particularly evident when their community was struggling with power outages during winters.

> The other issues that we take with BC Hydro, not even offering any form of support other than to give us two more diesel backup generators…Not even like, send us generators or something for each household or for four households to hook up to, because we've had terrible, terrible power outages where it was minus 20. – P3

Another Indigenous interviewee echoes a similar trend between BC Hydro and Indigenous communities.

> I think most friction is like, between First Nations and their dealing with BC Hydro, particularly around the EPA negotiations. And it's something that, you know, it's not my opinion, just, it's what you can ask any First Nation and ask them about the relationship with BC Hydro and it'll likely be a negative one. So it's a lot of friction, of course, with that so we need someone to say "BC Hydro, you can't do this. You need to be more fair

> in your dealings with First Nations, you can't just sneak up another study on a First Nation that'll cost a million dollars without really working with them or, or really kind of drawing things out." Because, you know, the longer you extend the timeline for a project, it costs money and impacts the viability of the project. – P1

For one interviewee working for the Government of BC, they see that colonial patterns are entrenched in the physical grid itself, as well as the language the Government utilizes when referring to off-grid communities.

> …We call remote communities remote–- that's to us here in like, headquarter land in Victoria. They're remote in relation to the Island, but they're the heart of their territory, their homeland. So how do you change something like that? And then another–- something that I know [a colleague] is very cognizant of is why is it that we have communities that are remote at all? Why isn't every community connected to the grid? I think the– it's been said and I agree with this, the map of the electricity grid is like a map of colonial expansion and where it stops is not where colonial expansion stops necessarily but where extractive interest in a given territory stops. And so . . . we talk about connecting these communities to the grid as being cost prohibitive but it was obviously done in many cases. It does go to some very so-called faraway places. – P5

A similar sentiment is reflected by an Indigenous interviewee from an off-grid community:

> And [a colleague] always says, 'When you take a map of BC, you take all the remote communities that are diesel-dependent today, that are not – [have] never been— connected to the grid, it's a picture of systemic racism.' – P3

Many interviewees pointed out that this colonial legacy is evident through provincial decision-making and the relationship of dependency between the Government of BC and Indigenous communities that remains baked into the foundations of the state.

> So think about it–- we are uniquely positioned throughout BC to become a renewable energy provider. To not only myself, my family, my neighbourhood, my community, and my region. Why won't the state allow us? If the transmission and distribution grids go down, why do we have to be without power? Because states are based on one thing…dependency. If you rely on the state for water, food, energy transmission, transportation, and communication - because the last thing you want is to be dealing with a bunch of goddamn constituents who don't need you. – P2

Given that these colonial ideals are foundational to the existence of the state itself, one interviewee is concerned about whether the state will even be capable of adequately responding

to the changes that Indigenous power proponents are asking for, particularly with regards to expanding Indigenous involvement and authority in energy decision-making.

> So I still feel cynical or critical when it comes to the limitations of the colonial government to make changes that will serve the interest of Indigenous Nations, because it inherently involves giving up power. - P5

Interviewees articulate that colonialism manifests within BC's electricity system through interactions with BC Hydro and the Government of BC that perpetuate relationships of dependency and have failed to provide adequate support in the face of this colonial legacy. Here, interviewees suggest that the challenges experienced by First Nations within the electricity sector go back to the foundation of the settler-colonial state, insinuating that foundational changes to the electricity system itself will be necessary.

4.1.2.2 Conditions within the energy system constrain Indigenous opportunities: "There's just such a built-in inertia…around the status quo that they don't want to move."

Interviewees point to systemic barriers posed by BC Hydro and the current provincial utility model that are limiting opportunities for Indigenous peoples to grow their involvement in the electricity sector. Multiple interviewees raise concerns about BC Hydro's monopoly that perpetuates relationships of dependency.

> A monopoly was supposed to give us safe, secure, reliable electricity. But now aren't we completely dependent and thus vulnerable to that monopoly's actions/inaction? – P2

Within this monopolistic system, interviewees also share frustration toward the existing utility structure that creates further barriers.

> And so that kind of looks again at the systems, at the utility system, vertically integrated Crown corporation. That model is also outdated, and obviously, the colonial history context. And it's very embedded in this notion of, you know, cost regulation and keeping cost absolutely lowest. Obviously, that has been used to justify colonialism such as Site C, and the Peace River dams, Muskrat Falls. So we have to move away from that notion

> of cost, above all else. It's certainly important, affordability is important, but there's also a new value that we need to incorporate in how we think about utilities. – P1

For this particular interviewee, when talking about "cost," they are referring to the state's focus on prioritizing provincially generated electricity sources that they can sell for low rates.

Within this system, the notion of "cost" is focused monetarily, not environmentally. P1 and others also criticizes this and raises concerns about the current government's conceptions of what constitutes "clean" energy, as this rationale was used to justify the Site C dam and other destructive hydroelectric megaprojects as a way to produce a large amount of "clean" energy at a low cost while disregarding impacts on the environment and surrounding communities.

> So it always bothers me, like BC [Hydro] or Hydro Quebec talk about how clean their electricity is, when it's not – sure it's clean in that it's hydroelectric. But there's also still huge cost to the environment with some of these big dams, and the human rights violations. – P1

P6 points out that this speaks to larger questions about balancing affordability amongst other priorities within the existing electricity system.

> I think affordability is huge. It's the balance between economic opportunities for First Nations, and industry I guess – affordability, reconciliation, and it's finding areas that work. I think what makes it complicated is that obviously whoever you talk to will prioritize those things differently. Each community has different needs and different objectives for economic opportunities and potential depending on where they are in the province. There's no blanket "this is the right balance between affordability for all BC Hydro ratepayers and community." That's what makes it complex in terms of how to prioritize these items. – P6

The conversation of affordability and balancing priorities is further contextualized by P10, who has a long professional history in BC's independent power sector. P10 sheds light on BC Hydro's rationale for maintaining the existing utility model: any other power producers would act as competition and would take away from BC Hydro's market share and customer base, leading to revenue loss.

> BC Hydro being the beast that it is, with its debt and deferral accounts and the volume of debt and deferral, need to have themselves building projects. That's how they pay for this stuff. And there's no way that they are going to want anybody else coming into their territory. So well, they have been dismissive of private sector or even Indigenous projects. – P10

Another Indigenous interviewee draws a similar conclusion by identifying that the Government of BC benefits from the existing utility model, and as such, is even less likely to create opportunities that will lead to competition for BC Hydro.

> … I just know that it really benefits the Province to have a Crown corporation that can produce cheap hydroelectric power that can turn up and down when the market suits them to make the taxpayer money. Which is great but… not great when you're considering First Nations renewable energy projects. – P1

The current economic landscape for renewable energy with BC Hydro's monopoly limits opportunities for Indigenous power producers as there are no other potential buyers in the province aside from BC Hydro. This means that if BC Hydro is not willing to buy their power, Indigenous power producers are unable to sell it for a profit. This, in turn, impacts the viability of their projects, which is further explained by P1's quote below.

> So there isn't that market access, you know, it's like the only buyer in town is BC Hydro. So that's a barrier, whether or not we could find a buyer for power on the…market or elsewhere, I don't know. But that's obviously a barrier and that's something that we want to explore. – P1

Interviews ultimately illuminate that the existing utility model and market conditions have created a context wherein Indigenous priorities in the renewable energy sector are secondary to the state's desire to maintain and continue to benefit from the system as it is. Interviewees suggest that any changes will perhaps require state entities to fundamentally shift their priorities, and challenge this inertia.

> ...there's just such a built-in inertia…around the status quo that they don't want to move. And I think reconciliation, if it's going to be real, has to move it and it's no longer just banging together programs and giving a little bit of money. – P10

4.1.2.3 Policy frameworks are not reflective of First Nation interests: "Just continually not putting forth policies or opportunities that First Nations want."

Interviewees see policy and legislation as tools that can enable or constrain Indigenous renewable energy involvement. Interviewees from communities, government, and civil society indicate that the mandates – that is, the legislated roles of the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC) and BC Hydro – constrain the extent to which these organizations respond to the needs of Indigenous peoples. These mandates currently fail to centre Indigenous self-determination, reconciliation, and UNDRIP, which is explained by an interviewee who works for the BCUC.

> The thing that again I need to caveat is that we do have authority to control many of our internal processes and our day-to-day work but ultimately, we're unable to go beyond - or not work within the Utilities Commission Act. And that's something that's very important to be aware of. – P7

This failure is further illustrated by policy decisions that negatively impact Indigenous power proponents. Many interviewees identified the SOP and opening of the grid to IPP's in the early 2000's as a critical moment for the expansion of Indigenous involvement in the energy sector.[86] However, interviewees note that since the SOP's cancellation in 2018, there have been very few opportunities to sell electricity to the grid and gain a profit.[87]

> What stymied [Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector] is just lack of government policy, you know, over the years since the cancellation of the Standing Offer Program…just lack of opportunity and lack of BC government really looking to First Nations, really understanding their interest and passion in this space, and then just not moving…on that interest…just continually not putting forth policies or opportunities that First Nations want… Every conference that I've been to has, you know…First Nations just saying, we want to be part of the emerging clean economy, and [there has been] very little government policy advancements to recognize or respond to that. – P4

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[86] As mentioned in the previous chapter, these programs were not developed specifically for First Nations, but First Nations fought to take advantage of these opportunities to grow their involvement in the renewable energy sector (see Fitzgerald, 2018).

[87] This was the case until BC Hydro's call for power announcement in 2023. 11 out of 12 interviews were conducted prior to this announcement, which may have had an impact on the perceptions and frustrations articulated in interviews.

Since the SOP's cancellation, many interviewees have been advocating for stronger policy and new opportunities for Indigenous power proponents.[88]

P5 explains that perhaps this has occurred due to government legislation that focuses on emissions reduction which prioritizes programs and policies to support diesel reduction for off-grid communities, but has not done the same for grid-connected communities.

> The money is really flowing from targets, because the Provincial Government has an 80% diesel reduction rate and the Federal Government has a diesel reduction target. I mean there's no target of a similar kind, and one could say maybe that's necessary for the grid side of things. – P5

Another interviewee also raises concerns about gaps within current policy frameworks that do not incentivize BC Hydro to take proactive climate measures or change beyond the status-quo.

> …climate targets, they're legislated. But your biggest utility, your Crown Corp utility, is not required to plan according to those climate targets. Because the uncertainty around how do you actually – how do you decarbonize? … Until there's that policy direction from the government, nobody's gonna jump. - P4

Interviews ultimately suggest that current mandates and energy policy frameworks may not be conducive to supporting the expansion of Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector.

4.1.2.4 Governance processes limit Indigenous involvement in the energy sector: "If you are not at the table, how can you influence your future?"

Interviewees highlight that Indigenous voices are further marginalized from the renewable energy sector through governance and decision-making processes that fail to adequately include and respond to their needs. This is experienced by interviewees in their interactions with the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC. One interviewee's

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[88] BC Hydro's announcement of the 2024 Call for Power was the first indication of policy change for Indigenous power proponents since the SOP's cancellation, which emerged directly as a result of this advocacy.

community faced challenges when competing for contracts against power companies with greater capacity and pre-existing connections to industry.

> So at the end of the day we never even had the project but yet we spent tens of thousands of dollars to be able to make sure our numbers - our pencils were sharpened right to the bottom but then we were never going to get the projects. It's happened a few times for us...Make sure that you find a way to know whether or not the owner of the company or partners or investors are not just lining their other shoe just so they can get [a] buddy buddy system in place to have the projects go [forward]. – P8

P7, who works with the BCUC, has heard from Indigenous power proponents that the BCUC's "... processes and procedures weren't developed with Indigenous participation really at the fore" [– P7]. The BCUC's visibility as an organization, the transparency of their processes, and accessibility of involvement in processes for communities and individuals with capacity constraints are the most significant barriers to Indigenous participation that P7 has been made aware of. These concerns are reflected by P8 who felt unprepared and unsupported when participating in a BCUC hearing.

> ...When I was involved in these negotiations for renewable energy I had an opportunity as a negotiator to be at the hearings with the BC Utilities Commission. I was involved in the discussions with BC Hydro. All I can say is the BC Utilities Commission and the process of how they go about the readings…if I had realized then what I know now then I would have had more people, more negotiators involved at all of the hearings…Probably would have made a lot of things easier. But you know, you can't go back and change that, right? It's just one of those things where more people need to be a little more prepared. And recognize the things that are needed to be put out there. – P8

Another Indigenous interviewee shares frustrations about competing with large utilities like BC Hydro as a small independent power producer, and spoke to the challenges of having their priorities considered by the BCUC within this context.

> So we have a system where these large utilities can essentially write their own rules' so when you're a small First Nation, you're going up against a big powerful entity that can write its own rules of the game. So it's very hard to then go into that game, intervene in the BCUC. Because there isn't really any sort of, like, recourse or ombudsperson'.

> Because it's just a difficult space to operate in as a First Nations, you know, independent power producer. So it's kind of like, how do we level the game - the playing field? - P1[89]

Other Indigenous interviewees mention similar experiences of structural exclusion from governance and decision-making.

> And the barriers…is decision making. Never being part of decision making on our resources. Fisheries is going to be decisions made in Ottawa and down in Vancouver and forestry its Victoria and Nanaimo, right? On our resources - it was never decisions made here on the Island by the elders, right? – P9

The colonial character of this relationship is further illustrated by another Indigenous interviewee who points out that Indigenous governments are required to apply for licenses and permissions from the colonial government prior to pursuing any development activity on their traditional territory. This further perpetuates a relationship of dependency and exclusion.

> ...As part of the community development plan he who holds the license or the lease or the fee simple ownership has the power of self-determination. If you do not own the lease, the permit, the landed fee simple or the licenses for whether the trees or whatever, you are now in a response mode to somebody else…renewable energy powers self-determination, but until such time as the land and resources are given back to us, we have to go through the process of application and fees. – P2

For some interviewees, these processes have resulted in delays in building renewable energy projects and have limited the extent to which some Nations have been able to expand involvement in this sector. The posture of government as the sovereign authority poses a barrier to greater Indigenous autonomy and involvement in renewable energy, as it leaves First Nations to respond to policy priorities and processes defined by the state. This is highlighted by the following interviewee who commented on government engagement efforts with Indigenous groups aimed at expanding their involvement in the renewable energy sector:

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[89] As I articulated in the policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three, the BCUC is meant to ensure that BC Hydro makes decisions within the "public interest," but as illustrated in the previous chapter, the "public interest" often does not reflect Indigenous priorities.

> ...Are these Indigenous organizations setting up the structures themselves and calling the shots? No, it's still government saying "we're going to do this, we're going to set up the structure and then we'll invite you in." – P5

Some interviewees suggest that tides are slowly changing, and there is increased opportunity for Indigenous participation in these spaces. However, the complexity and lack of transparency around decision-making processes makes it challenging for Indigenous communities and organizations to participate if they do not have prior experience, skills training, or knowledge. Furthermore, many communities face resource constraints that limit the extent to which they are able to participate in these processes.

> So we were demanding a recognition of our inherent title and rights. And now that we have it, are you giving me the corresponding resources - people, time, technology, and money? [The government] want[s] instantaneous decisions from the First Nations from a government that takes months if not years to make decisions. - P2

Interviews ultimately illustrate that Indigenous peoples are excluded from meaningful and equitable participation in existing energy governance due to resource constraints and decision-making processes that privilege the Government of BC's authority over energy and natural resources. As a result, the Government of BC and its agencies continue to make decisions that directly impact Indigenous lives and lands without their consent, which is a dynamic that interviewees would like to see change.

> ...If you are not at the table, how can you influence your future? – P2

4.1.2.5 Summarizing the barriers.

Interviews reveal that Indigenous power proponents face substantial barriers when seeking involvement in the renewable energy sector. The energy sector is inseparable from its colonial foundation, and relationships with BC Hydro and the state still reproduce colonial patterns of dependency. The current utility model that prioritizes producing low-cost power and BC Hydro's virtual monopoly over power production continue to benefit the state and reinforce

inertia that marginalizes Indigenous power producers. Policy fails to support Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, mandates do not require the BCUC and BC Hydro to consider Indigenous reconciliation and UNDRIP, and governance processes bring Indigenous peoples in on the state's terms which leads to decisions being made on Indigenous territories without their consent. This centres the priorities and authority of the settler-colonial state, while systemically marginalizing First Nations from their level of desired involvement in the energy sector. Interviewees argue that affecting change within the current system will potentially require fundamental shifts in the approach to decision-making pertaining to energy and resources, policy development, mandates, and utility structures.

4.1.3 What are pathways to overcome these barriers?

Across all interviews, there are several areas where change is either already happening, or needs to happen, to shift toward a more equitable energy sector with opportunities for meaningful Indigenous involvement and leadership. Overall, these efforts point to a need to address the foundational and ongoing impacts of colonialism that lead to exclusion of Indigenous peoples within the renewable energy sector. This section will highlight several pathways for the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC to pursue, including addressing the colonial foundations of the electricity sector through building trust and making necessary institutional changes, living up to commitments under DRIPA, and bridging priorities of decarbonization and 'reconciliation.'

4.1.3.1 Addressing colonial structures and impacts in and through the energy sector.

Several interviewees identify a need for settler organizations to recognize their role in perpetuating colonial harm, and work to rebuild trust with Indigenous communities to build a better future.

> ...And trust is a big issue that we have to overcome. Just because of the continued dictation since Canada was created. And actually be a productive partner, right? Not just one waiting for their own - living under their own rules. – P9

A key part of this, according to P4, is the need to shift whose authority is recognized and upheld within the energy sector.

> ...Yes, we're in a colonial government system right now, but it's really [about] prioritizing opportunities. It's not giving, it's not all of that. It's truly prioritizing, improving nation-to-nation relationships, considering history, and considering that…much of the land has not actually been surrendered. And that political leadership plus that ethical leadership and just looking at it from different lens of the fundamental values of UNDRIP, which is nation-to-nation relationships. - P4

According to some interviewees, doing this effectively will require fundamental changes to policy, legislative, and regulatory frameworks.

> I think there's a lot to be discussed around how, if any, changes need to be made to the regulatory system; what the potential changes there are for legislation; and what potential policy mechanisms can be introduced to facilitate greater control, or grow First Nations leadership in the electricity sector? – P1

Given that the Government of BC often makes decisions about resources and energy without consent or adequate involvement from the First Nations who the affected land belongs to, interviewees identify that settler organizations will need to create appropriate processes for Indigenous participation and leadership. The BCUC has started to do so since the Inquiry into the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities in 2019, which has led to an internal review process that is currently underway.

> …in the last month we've begun an internal process of reviewing all of our procedures and processes to see where there's opportunities to reduce barriers. And to generally make it more accessible. – P7

The BCUC's Indigenous inquiry also highlighted shortcomings in the BCUC's approach to relationship building with Indigenous communities and organizations. The existing approach to relationship building has partially led to uncertainty and lack of transparency about the ways that Indigenous partners can engage in the BCUC's processes and procedures, and is an area that BCUC staff are looking to improve.

> So that is something we need to improve - our general visibility. One of the ways that we are doing that is increasingly attending Indigenous specific events - to basically shake hands and introduce ourselves and when appropriate, provide additional information around what we do. – P7

In addition to strengthening relationships between Indigenous communities and colonial organizations within the energy sector, many interviewees discuss the importance of developing coalitions and partnerships between Indigenous communities and allied organizations to advocate for change as a united front. One interviewee believes this has played a role in creating a stronger funding ecosystem and political landscape that provides support for Indigenous involvement in renewable energy.

> What also has advanced... I think, yeah the funding, the federal government, and I guess just the overall political landscape has shifted with NGOs playing a role, or not-for-profits like First Nations Major Projects Coalition, and other industry associations that are supportive of First Nations rights and partnerships. So it all kind of is advancing towards greater First Nations involvement within the industry generally, as the baseline, basically. - P1

Another Indigenous interviewee spoke about how building coalitions with surrounding Nations has been integral to their nation's advocacy against unwanted natural resource development in their territory.

> We put a moratorium on drilling and exploration in the early 70s, and that's the primary reason the [political group] was set up incorporated, so we'd have a voice. Also it gave us equal footing with the Canadian government so that we aren't just being dictated to - so we have an entity that sort of stands toe to toe instead of being up here and down here and being dictated to like we've been the last…165 years or since Canada's been around. That gives us equal footing to make the fight fair, is what that is. – P9

This same rationale underpins concepts such as a Northern Power Authority and a First Nation Power Authority, which some interviewees alluded to. Both initiatives are in the early conceptual phase, however, interviewees are hopeful that they could act as a united regional body for Indigenous power proponents to expand market access and policy opportunities in the renewable energy sector. Although significant work is required to further develop these ideas, a few interviewees saw them as potential next steps to grow the presence of Indigenous power proponents on the provincial stage.

Interviews reveal that changes are already beginning within the energy sector to address the impacts of colonialism and expand ways that Indigenous communities and actors can pursue renewable energy projects. Given the long and challenging road ahead to affect change within and across a colonial system with a high level of inertia, these steps – that is, building relationships and trust between Indigenous communities and settler actors as well as across Indigenous organizations, communities, and allies; in addition to leveraging those relationships to collectively make changes to processes, policies, and procedures – will be part of the solution.

4.1.3.2 The potential for a shifting governance landscape through DRIPA: "A new way of working."

The majority of interviewees identify that DRIPA could potentially push energy governance to better reflect the priorities and values of Indigenous power proponents. For interviewees across government, civil society, and within Indigenous communities, DRIPA is seen as an important tool that could support the case for expanding Indigenous involvement and leadership in renewable energy. Although most interviewees had a limited legal understanding of DRIPA, there is a general sense of optimism that it holds potential to reshape Provincial governance and decision-making processes to be more collaborative and partnership-oriented.

> I hope it helps... initiate government to include First Nations so that we can begin that talk about how we can level the playing field. I think it's just a pillar that can be a building block for a new energy sector that's built on partnership and cooperation, as opposed to exclusion and dispossession. - P1

Some interviewees working within the Government of BC echo this sense of optimism toward DRIPA's potential to facilitate meaningful change in the government's approach to Indigenous inclusion within the renewable energy sector.

> I think DRIPA adds extra support and a stronger rationale for why we need to do this work. So I think it really helps - it helps with access to resources… I think it'll increase the support we get in terms of staff resources, funding resources. The flexibility to have some of these conversations. I think it's really - it makes it harder for the ministry to say 'no we can't work on that.' It enables all of this work. - P6

Interviewees working within government and the BCUC say they have already begun to see small changes bolstered by DRIPA's adoption and other commitments to 'reconciliation', mostly through culture shifts within their organizations. The BCUC's Indigenous Inquiry sparked internal dialogue about how the organization can better accommodate Indigenous involvement and interests, including developing stronger relationships, reassessing internal processes and procedures, and expanding capacity funding for Indigenous interveners to participate. Interviewees working within government are seeing potential for a new posture of collaboration with Indigenous groups, however this was largely speculation based on early trends so it is too soon to tell whether this culture shift will result in meaningful institutional change.

> I think as that culture starts shifting it will be really interesting to see a new way of working. And that new way of working will become the norm which I think is really exciting. It's going to become unacceptable to develop legislation without really thorough Indigenous involvement, and making sure we're working in partnership – [that] we're not doing things and then blindsiding or–making these decisions quickly. - P6

Despite feelings of optimism, a few interviewees are cautious about seeing DRIPA as a silver bullet for expanding Indigenous involvement within the energy sector, given that the

Government of BC has continued developing large-scale hydroelectric dams against the wishes of affected First Nations since DRIPA's adoption.

> … how can we utilize DRIPA and UNDRIP when we have a government that just says, you know what? As much as we see it, we really don't care because we already know our hidden agenda is Site C and whatever else that's there. – P8

Interviews ultimately illuminate that DRIPA has provided reason for hope and optimism for expanding Indigenous leadership and involvement in the renewable energy sector, both structurally through decision-making processes and culturally within the Government of BC and other colonial organizations. However, interviewees also identify reason for skepticism given BC's violent colonial energy legacy.

4.1.3.3 Moving toward collective progress: "Decolonization and decarbonization go hand-in-hand."

Interviewees across all sectors anticipate that there will be increased opportunity for renewable electricity generation in the coming years given the Government of BC's climate priorities, particularly through the increase in clean electricity required to meet provincial GHG emission reduction targets.

> …what I think we can be fairly certain of is that there will be a need for increased generation. In consideration of climate goals and the reality generally I think we can safely assume that a significant component of that will be renewable or otherwise cleaner. So there's going to be opportunities there. What those opportunities look like, we don't know - but I think we can be fairly certain that many Indigenous communities in this province will be well-positioned to capitalize on that. – P7

The majority of interviewees also anticipate that the increase in clean energy demand could be an opportunity to reframe provincial climate priorities to align with Indigenous values and desires for greater involvement and leadership in the energy sector. This led P1 to say, *"*...decarbonization and decolonization go hand in hand.*"* P1 further elaborated on this potential synergy:

> …what is First Nations offering the renewable energy sector, I think, is that opportunity - that lifeline for potentially more projects to come online, particularly now that there's a window of opportunity to do that, if we are serious about meeting our climate targets, and move towards a more climate-aligned framework for energy planning. And just across the board, you know, if we electrify more and more, there's going to be a greater demand for power, that wasn't necessarily the case five years ago. – P1

This potential is particularly salient given the Government of BC's commitments under DRIPA, which some interviewees believe provides more leverage to prioritize Indigenous leadership in the energy sector.

> And in a province, where I think it's the highest number of First Nation bands in BC, the highest, like an extremely high level of interest…there's just enormous market opportunities for solutions across the board, whether for power or everything else that you know about. So enormous considering where we have to get to in terms of reducing carbon emissions, the amount that we have to decarbonize the economy. So how are we going to do that, you know? There's market solutions, there's industry solutions, but in a province that has legislated UNDRIP, and there is strong, significant, multiple Indigenous voices, when you match those two up, there's just incredible opportunity to prioritize that for Indigenous communities. – P4

Within the context of shifting legal orders and the state's dependence on resources from Indigenous territories, this potentially gives Indigenous peoples significant power over the future of BC's energy economy. To move forward equitably, the state will have to acknowledge that the energy landscape and Indigenous participation will remain inextricably linked.

> First Nations have the ability to stagnate BC, but First Nations are also the biggest possible economic drivers for our province. – P2

Creating an energy sector that truly recognizes Indigenous authority and self-determination will require changing existing policy frameworks and decision-making processes so that First Nations play an active and equal role in the energy sector. This vision is articulated by P1:

> I think my personal opinion is like, carving out space for First Nations to play a significant role in the electricity sector in BC, that's partnership with the Province, to get to level of Province, the level of BC Hydro, so that we're not just an afterthought who

> they think that they can just, you know, move us aside or flood our territories, and just having – make unilateral moves. – P1

For the majority of Indigenous interviewees, moving in this direction will also mean ensuring that future energy pathways do not replicate colonial patterns of environmental destruction, such as through the continuation of large-scale hydro.

> But that's the other hope, too, is that there's no more Site Cs. No more unnecessary destruction of territories. We are mindful and minimize the impact on the land in creating these new generation projects that [are] required in addition to new transmission lines. 'Cause that's also the important thing too, is to be mindful of where we get the sources of energy, which is the land and waters and maintaining that Indigenous worldview that we have to honor our relationship to the Creation so that we continue getting rain, [and] our reservoirs don't dry up. – P1

Re-imagining the energy sector to support the pursuit of self-determination and to reflect Indigenous priorities will be challenging as it will inherently require the settler government to relinquish exclusive decision-making power over energy. However, interviews illuminate that working in partnership across the Provincial Government and Indigenous communities will be critical to achieving these changes. One interviewee remains hopeful that change within the renewable energy sector is possible, as the organization they work for has seen meaningful and effective collaboration between the state and First Nations in other areas of natural resource management.

> The ethic is all together. That's how we've done our fish reconciliation agreement. That's how we've done our carbon offsetting company. And I daresay this is a way that the renewable space should go. – P10

Interviews ultimately demonstrate that meaningful and equitable partnerships between the Government of BC and Indigenous power proponents will be necessary when moving forward, with the renewable energy sector offering an arena for alignment and mutual support between First Nations energy priorities and provincial climate and energy targets.

4.1.3.4 Summarizing the pathways.

Interviews highlight that significant changes will be necessary to overcome barriers and achieve aspirations for Indigenous self-determination within BC's energy sector. The state will need to reckon with its colonial legacy and rebuild trust with Indigenous peoples, as well as work collaboratively with First Nations to make changes to policies and processes that systemically constrain Indigenous involvement in the energy sector. Interviewees see that DRIPA has potential to shift energy governance to be more collaborative and partnership-oriented, and has shown potential to facilitate a culture shift toward more meaningful relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Government of BC. However, these changes require navigating inertia around state-led priorities that shape the electricity system, which until now has been characterized by large-scale hydro and has not reflected the desires of First Nations. Ultimately, many interviewees see potential for alignment between provincial climate priorities and the desires of Indigenous power proponents to expand involvement in the energy sector, illuminating a potential synergistic pathway forward. Interviews illustrate that Indigenous power proponents desire an equitable energy sector where they can exercise their authority and leadership as equal partners to the state.

4.2 Concluding thoughts

The interviews conducted for this thesis reveal that aspirations for Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector are rooted in a desire for self-determination and self-sufficiency, building community resilience to climate change, and forging equitable and meaningful partnerships with state energy actors where First Nations can exercise self-determination. Indigenous interviewees interacting with the state in the renewable energy sector highlight several barriers that have made it difficult to achieve their level of desired involvement,

which stem from the colonial roots of the energy sector that shape institutions and processes today. Interviews illustrate the inertia within the existing centralized, monopolistic system that entrenches state authority and priorities through BC Hydro and the BCUC's mandates that fail to support Indigenous priorities, the existing utility structure that limits opportunities for Indigenous power producers to sell power, policies that do not adequately support Indigenous desires, and decision-making processes that systemically exclude Indigenous peoples from making decisions about resources and energy developments on their own territories.

Pathways to overcome these barriers will require state actors, namely the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC to reckon with and address the colonial foundations of BC's energy sector through actively building trust, and developing equitable and meaningful partnerships that enable First Nations and the Provincial Government to work collaboratively to achieve collective goals. Moving in this collaborative direction will also require structural and institutional changes within energy governance, and there is hope that DRIPA could potentially help to facilitate these changes.

Overall, findings illuminate a key theme: fundamental, transformative, and meaningful change will be necessary to make way for a renewable energy sector rooted in partnership and Indigenous self-determination. Findings also suggest that this could provide mutual benefit through offering increased opportunities for Indigenous-led renewable energy development, while meeting provincial energy and climate needs, and ultimately creating a more resilient energy future. In the next chapter, I will connect the insights from interviews with those from scholars and practitioners outlined in the introduction, literature review, and policy and landscape analysis chapters to explore what it might take to realize these possibilities.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored three research questions: what are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, what are barriers to these aspirations, and what are pathways to overcome these barriers? The policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three illustrates the complicated terrain that Indigenous communities navigate when getting involved in the renewable energy sector. Chapter Three utilizes the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) to illuminate a landscape shaped by settler-colonial priorities countered by Indigenous resistance; a centralized regime dominated by large-scale hydroelectricity that favours colonial interests and limits the involvement of Indigenous power proponents; and a niche of Indigenous energy leaders with the potential to disrupt and destabilize the regime. This chapter thus offers critical context to better understand the current experiences and challenges facing Indigenous peoples in BC's renewable energy sector, which provides an important frame for the experiences articulated in the interviews conducted for this research.

In Chapter Four, which summarizes the interview findings, we learn that aspirations for Indigenous involvement in renewable energy are rooted in a desire for self-determination through growing economic and energy self-sufficiency, building community resilience, and growing opportunities for equitable partnerships and relationships across energy policy and governance where First Nations can exercise self-determination and authority. Interviews reveal that the most prominent barriers to achieving these aspirations are a result of the colonial foundations of the electricity system which manifest in inequitable relationships, a monopolistic utility structure that prioritizes affordability and makes it challenging for Indigenous power proponents to get involved, lack of government policy to support opportunities for grid-connected communities, and exclusion from energy and resource decision-making on their territories. Interviews ultimately revealed that pathways forward will require rebuilding trust

between the state and Indigenous peoples, and making institutional changes to level the playing field for Indigenous power proponents, which DRIPA could potentially support. These pathways could also include bringing BC's climate priorities into alignment with priorities articulated by Indigenous power proponents for them to play a leadership role in energy decision-making.

In the analysis that follows, I bring the insights from these two chapters together to develop a more nuanced understanding of the magnitude of change that Indigenous energy leaders are aspiring to, some of the barriers they need to overcome in order to achieve these aspirations, and some potential pathways to get there. In doing so, we come to understand that fundamental change across the existing electricity sector is necessary in order to realize aspirations of partnerships and self-determination.

5.1 Bringing the findings together

5.1.1 What are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector?

Interviews reveal that self-determination[90] remains the core aspiration for many Indigenous power proponents within the renewable energy sector. Renewable energy offers a pathway to become self-sufficient through building up local economies and generating revenue independently from government sources. Building community resilience in the face of climate change is also a driving aspiration for many Indigenous communities to pursue renewable energy projects, particularly as some interviewees articulated feelings of distrust toward BC's energy system to withstand worsening weather as the climate crisis worsens. When vocalizing a desire for self-sufficiency, interviews reveal that this is not only about Nations having greater financial

[90] As articulated in Chapter Three, I use "self-determination" to encompass several ambitions that support Indigenous communities to govern, provide, and determine their own futures, including self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and self-governance.

and energy autonomy, but also having the ability to exercise authority and make self-determined decisions about energy on their own territories. Interviewees articulated a desire for partnerships that enable First Nations and the state to work alongside one another as equals to solve collective issues and have a greater role in electricity leadership and decision-making.

Considering these findings from the lens of the MLP, Indigenous aspirations move beyond a niche of focusing solely on improving energy access and governance at the local level. Rather, interviews have highlighted that Indigenous power proponents in BC want to exercise self-determination through the electricity sector and take on a greater leadership role within energy decision-making, which will require fundamental regime and landscape-level changes. Interviews suggest that this can occur through expanding opportunities for ownership and leadership of energy projects at the community level, but this must also involve creating space for equitable partnerships where First Nations can play a role in energy decision-making and work with the state to advance collective goals.

Interview findings align with Hoicka et al. (2021) and Savic et al. (2023) who argue that community ownership, control, and governance over energy projects are critical for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects to support self-determination and reconciliation. Aspirations articulated in interviews that illuminate the importance of achieving self-sufficiency and self-determination through renewable energy further support Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2015) who argue that self-sufficiency is largely about the immaterial benefits of expanding governance and control over energy decision-making. While existing literature on Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector has articulated a desire to expand involvement in this sector more generally (as seen in Cook et al., 2017; Fitzgerald, 2018; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2015), this research project illuminates that Indigenous power proponents in BC are seeking to

fundamentally transform the electricity sector to create space for self-determined partnerships where the Government of BC works *with* First Nations to achieve collective goals and build a more resilient energy future.

5.1.2 What are barriers to these aspirations?

The key barriers expressed in interviews included communities experiencing mistreatment from BC Hydro and other state entities reflecting the colonial legacies of these institutions, existing mandates of affordability, a centralized and monopolistic utility model that limits opportunities for Indigenous power proponents to sell their power to the grid, lack of supportive policies to advance these efforts, and governance processes where the state makes decisions on Indigenous territories without consent. These conditions create an electricity sector that systematically excludes First Nations from meaningful participation and marginalizes their priorities. Analyzing these interview findings alongside the "landscape" and "regime" described in Chapter Three provides context to understand that the existing electricity system was effectively created to support industrial development (largely in the natural resource sectors) as key drivers of BC's economy, and maintains BC Hydro-generated electricity as a source of Provincial revenue. As a result, this research allows us to better understand the inertia and the state's vested interest in maintaining the electricity system as is, which helps to see the challenges ahead in changing it.

Analyzing the regime as described in Chapter Three highlights that dependency enforced by the settler state on Indigenous communities is a core function of the state itself, and by extension, the electricity system. First Nations are brought into the existing colonial system when the Government of BC deems it necessary, and are required to utilize BC Hydro transmission infrastructure and apply to the settler government for licenses to pursue projects on their own

territories, which fundamentally undermines Indigenous self-determination. The lens of the regime, which reveals the ways in which power is wielded by state actors across the electricity system to uphold settler-colonial interests and marginalize Indigenous priorities, helps to garner a deeper understanding of why incremental efforts for Indigenous inclusion within the existing energy system is not enough. Instead, this research indicates that efforts for Indigenous inclusion in the electricity sector that do not destabilize the regime to fundamentally reshape the electricity system will be insufficient to achieve aspirations of partnerships and Indigenous self-determination.

These findings align with Hoicka et al.'s (2024) research which explores a desire from First Nations in BC to challenge BC Hydro's monopoly through the creation of an FNPA, rooted in a desire to reduce dependency on the settler state and gain control over energy decision-making on their territories. These findings also reflect Grosse & Mark (2023), Walker et al. (2021), Schelly et al. (2020), and MacArthur (2017) who find that the colonial and capitalist political and economic configurations within which Indigenous communities pursue renewable energy projects pose significant challenges to advancing these efforts. This also further supports Brunhuber (2016), Lowan-Trudeau (2017), MacArthur (2017), Walker et al. (2021), and Schelly et al. (2020) who draw attention to the barriers posed by actors who benefit from existing institutional arrangements, such as profit-driven utility structures with vested interest in protecting their market opportunities and lack of supportive policy arrangements. Considering these broader institutional factors within BC's renewable energy sector supports Fitzgerald (2018), Molander (2022), and Hoicka et al. (2024) by illustrating how different institutions, forces, and priorities influence electricity governance, and are themselves shaped by Canada's settler-colonial legacy. Laying this out explicitly helps to identify more precisely where change

might be needed, as well as the magnitude of this change, to realize the aspirations articulated by Indigenous power proponents.

5.1.3 What are pathways to overcome these barriers?

The interview findings and policy and landscape analysis suggest that foundational change is needed to achieve partnerships and self-determination that Indigenous power proponents are aspiring to in the energy sector. Interviews indicate that these changes will require the state to build trust, establish equitable and meaningful relationships, and align interests between provincial energy and climate policy to achieve these goals, with DRIPA as a potential tool to enable this work. Interviews also suggest that Indigenous interests in expanding involvement in renewable energy and state priorities of decarbonization and 'reconciliation' could be synergistic and mutually supportive.

The policy and landscape analysis reveals that these efforts are facing a regime that upholds state and industrial interests and exhibits little commitment to create the space that is necessary to achieve aspirations expressed by Indigenous energy leaders in BC. However, the policy and landscape analysis did highlight some exogenous factors at the landscape level that have indicated potential for change, such as legal cases over the last few decades requiring the state to strengthen its approach to recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, the development of new government-to-government agreements, and the adoption of DRIPA. Interviewees expressed hope that there is potential for DRIPA to stimulate culture shifts and support necessary policy and process changes to move toward improving relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples, which suggests that DRIPA may offer an important pathway toward a more equitable energy sector.

These findings that highlight the potential for synergy between state climate priorities and First Nation interests echo Molander (2022) and Scott (2020) who argue that the state's need for additional clean electricity sources as a result of emissions reduction targets could support the expansion of Indigenous-led renewable energy projects. Findings also support Stefanelli et al. (2019) and Mang-Benza et al. (2021) who say that there is potential for Indigenous-led renewable energy to support the state's broader commitments to 'reconciliation.' Based on Indigenous resistance efforts articulated in Chapter Three as part of the landscape that have strengthened the case for state recognition and accommodation of Indigenous rights and title, as well as the state's efforts trending toward more collaboration through UNDRIP and DRIPA, we see that these futures are possible. However, Hoicka et al. (2021) and Savic & Hoicka (2023) remind us that for this to occur, Indigenous ownership and authority must be exercised through these energy projects. Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2018) shows us that historically, changes to the electricity system have occurred in response to the tireless efforts from Indigenous peoples and allies to collectively push for change and hold the state accountable to these changes; the regime and embedded inertia suggests that these changes will be unlikely to start from within the state itself.

5.2 Pathways forward

From the policy and landscape analysis and interview findings, I conclude that Indigenous power proponents do not want to remain a niche and have the Government of BC carve out space for them within the existing energy sector. Rather, they seek an energy transition that moves away from existing harmful large-scale hydroelectric models, as well as reimagines the energy sector to create space for Indigenous peoples to exercise self-determination through meaningful and equitable partnerships, which will require regime destabilization. Findings

illuminate that these aspirations are stymied by a regime that upholds state interests through a monopolistic utility model, policy frameworks that fail to reflect Indigenous priorities, and decision-making processes that exclude First Nations. This points to conclusions that fundamental changes are needed for the electricity system to reflect aspirations articulated by Indigenous power proponents, overcome existing barriers limiting these aspirations, and pave a self-determined pathway forward. However, this research also suggests that effecting foundational change will be increasingly difficult.

Recalling Feola et al. (2021) and MacArthur (2017), a sustainable and just energy future will not occur through merely adding solutions to existing systems, but will instead require us to challenge and eradicate the exploitative systems, structures, and relationships that are perpetuating conditions of marginalization in the first place. Also recalling LaDuke and Cohen (2021), "energy infrastructures constitute the contemporary spine of the settler colonial nation" (p. 249). Shifting the energy sector in line with Indigenous values and visions, as articulated through this research, thus demands more than adding new programs, policies, and structures to existing systems. Instead, achieving these aspirations requires reshaping the Governments of Canada and BC's proverbial spines, characterized by large-scale hydroelectricity and colonial dependency.

This vision reflects the emancipatory potential of renewable energy to stimulate wide-spread and regional energy transitions, as well as the importance for these changes to be imagined and advanced collaboratively. The possibilities that lie in this transition are articulated by Smith and Scott (2021):

> Ultimately, it is our contention that real promise exists in transforming energy generation/power relations through Indigenous participation in renewable energy generation insofar as Indigenous communities initiate and control those projects, govern

> them, and benefit from them collectively, and operate them, without state interference, according to their own legal and political orders. (p. 384)

The findings from this thesis echo the promise and potential for Indigenous-led renewable energy to transform power relations within the existing electricity system in BC if changes are predicated on partnerships and self-determination.

Interviews suggest that there are several areas where changes will be necessary to achieve this vision, which I have summarized according to the following two themes:

1. Partnerships: establishing meaningful, trust-based, and equitable partnerships, and rebuilding relationships for a foundation of collaboration within the electricity sector;
2. Institutional changes: changing existing policy frameworks and decision-making processes, and redefining mandates to reflect partnerships and self-determination.

In what follows, I will elaborate on what each of these changes might entail based on what I heard and understood from interviews to point to potential pathways forward, while fleshing out tensions and considerations that may arise across each of these areas.

5.2.1 Establishing meaningful, trust-based, and equitable partnerships

The findings of this thesis suggest that there is a desire to move toward a more collaborative and equitable energy sector where First Nations can have greater control over energy decision-making within their traditional territories, and a leadership role in shaping laws, policies, and regulations within the electricity sector. Interviewees mostly focused on partnerships with state actors including the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC. The policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three suggests that these are perhaps some of the most critical partnerships when advancing involvement in renewable energy in BC, as the centralized and monopolistic electricity system requires Indigenous power proponents to engage with state

entities either through accessing BC Hydro-owned transmission lines or selling power to BC Hydro's grid to make a profit.

For Indigenous power proponents to achieve their desired aspirations for partnerships and self-determination, interviews suggest that mechanisms for joint decision-making and co-governance within the electricity system will be necessary.[91] Identifying precisely what these mechanisms should look like is beyond the scope of this research project and is an area for potential future research. Importantly, however, the Government of BC should ensure that these mechanisms are developed in partnership with First Nations.

5.2.1.1 Different types of partnerships.

Literature shows that a range of partnerships beyond state actors can also be important sources of support for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects. Savic & Hoicka (2023) and Walker et al. (2021) argue that partnerships between communities and industry or government can be desirable for those who face capacity and financial constraints that make taking on a project alone too risky without access to resources. Partnerships with power companies or other organizations can help communities who may struggle with capacity constraints, financial access, or knowledge of the energy sector (Savic & Hoicka, 2023). According to Smith and Scott (2021), the transformative potential of renewable energy projects within these partnerships occurs when Indigenous communities "initiate and control those projects, govern them, and

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[91] Recently, the Government of BC attempted to bring the Land Act into alignment with DRIPA, which had potential to open opportunities for joint decision-making agreements with large development projects between the Government and First Nations through wording in sections 6 and 7 of DRIPA (Hosgood, 2024). This, however, was met with public backlash rooted in fears that the Land Act amendments would take away land use and private property rights for British Columbians while giving First Nations control over crown lands (Hosgood, 2024). As a result of this backlash, the Government of BC did not proceed with the amendments. The negative reaction to this decision suggests that perhaps the general public still has many misconceptions about joint decision-making and might resist future efforts to move in this direction.

benefit from them collectively, and operate them, without state interference, according to their own legal and political orders" (p. 384). This aligns with interview findings that identify self-determination and self-sufficiency as key aspirations when pursuing renewable energy projects. However, findings also suggest that this desire for control and governance goes beyond the project level, and stems from a desire for greater involvement in energy governance more broadly. Savic & Hoicka (2023) also reflect this in their conclusion by stating that First Nations must be included in energy planning alongside utilities, governments, and businesses "from the beginning" (p. 11).

External partnerships require resources for communities for regular engagement (Leonhardt et al., 2023), which can be challenging for those who struggle with human and financial resource constraints. For this reason, Leonhardt et al (2023) suggest "community development corporations (i.e. community-focused non-profit organizations managed by two or more communities) [as] an alternative to share costs and increase capacity resources while maintaining decision making authority" (p. 8). MacArthur (2017) also raises that "strong intermediary organizations" (p. 12) can help communities to advance policy and behavioural changes, further illustrating the importance of collective advocacy. This logic is reflected through proposals for a First Nations Power Authority and Northern Power Authority that were mentioned in interviews as well as by Hoicka et al. (2024) as models for regionalized, Indigenous-led utilities that can act as arenas for collaboration, mutual support, capacity building, and potential system-wide transformation (Lusztig, 2021).

This finding also illuminates the importance of working across coalitions and with like-minded communities, as Walker et al. (2021) show that it can sometimes be challenging for Indigenous communities to engage with non-Indigenous organizations who may not understand

or appreciate the lived realities of the communities that they are working with. To circumvent this, Ozog (2012) illustrates how the T'Sou-ke First Nation has utilized their expertise garnered through their community's successful renewable energy projects to support other Nations such as the Skidegate Band on Haida Gwaii in the process of setting up their own projects. Regardless of whether these partnerships are established with state, industry, or other community actors, interviews support existing literature to show that these diverse partnerships will be beneficial to achieving the aspirations for growing Indigenous involvement in the electricity sector. Furthermore, this research supports Smith & Scott (2021), Hoicka et al. (2021), Savic & Hoicka (2023), and Hoicka et al. (2024) by showing that it will be necessary to have Indigenous peoples at the helm of decision-making both at the community scale as well as more broadly through energy governance and planning in order to exercise self-determination, rather than have their future on their territories dictated by colonial entities.

5.2.1.2 Renewable energy as a pathway to self-sufficiency, partnership, or both?

Throughout interviews, I heard a desire for many Indigenous communities to become self-sufficient after a long colonial history of exclusion and forced dependency within a centralized energy system that continues to constrain their options.[92] Findings showed that this desire for self-sufficiency was consistent for interviewees from both grid-connected and off-grid communities, particularly as the growing threat of climate change has illuminated the vulnerability of BC's energy system to changing weather patterns[93] which has propelled more

[92] This is best summarized by Walker et al. (2021): "as one participant told us, '[First Nations] want to be financially sovereign and governmentally sovereign, but they also know that as long as they depend on [utilities] for power, [utilities have] got them by the balls.' In other words, utilities are actively trying to resist movements toward community-level energy independence and sovereignty in order to retain power" (p. 651).
[93] See in the case of the Lytton wildfire in 2022 in Mantassa-Fung (2022).

communities to pursue community-scale renewable energy projects.[94] I also heard from Indigenous power proponents that there is a desire for more cooperation and partnerships to mutually pursue reconciliation and climate action through renewable energy, as many interviewees highlighted synergy between and across these goals. For the majority of interviewees, however, there was a sense that partnerships are inevitable between state actors and Indigenous power proponents when pursuing renewable energy projects, and could perhaps even be helpful when developed in a good way.

At first glance, these two visions seem to challenge one another: one is calling for self-sufficiency[95] in the face of distrust toward the settler-colonial state, whereas the other is calling for more equitable mechanisms for collaboration and partnerships with the state. This tension of desiring self-sufficiency is especially challenging within the regime, a centralized electricity system, that forces a certain level of dependency on renewable energy projects, whether that is through relying on transmission and distribution infrastructure or collecting revenue from BC Hydro.

Fitzgerald (2018) discusses self-sufficiency in her thesis through the case study of Kanaka Bar Indian Band's run-of-river hydro project, seeing that the revenues from this project were largely utilized to support efforts to decrease dependency on the settler-colonial state through own-source revenue, enabling local employment for membership, taking back control over lands and resources, building community infrastructure to support membership living on their territories, and developing food security initiatives. Fitzgerald's (2018) analysis of self-

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[94] As mentioned in Chapter Four, Interviews suggest (which aligns with Fitzgerald [2018]) that communities – even those who are grid-connected – are able to continue powering their community buildings when the BC Hydro grid goes down through their own microgrids.

[95] Interviewees expressed this largely through desires to lessen dependence on Government revenue sources, as well as energy security.

sufficiency reveals similar aspirations behind Indigenous involvement in renewable energy reflected in the interviews for this research project, which point to a desire to build community resilience and lessen dependence on the state for energy and economic security. This focus on challenging relationships of dependency seeks to address the core functions of the regime and centralized energy landscape articulated in Chapter Three. Fitzgerald's research reveals that, although still inherently intertwined with BC Hydro, Kanaka Bar and Sts'ailes First Nations were still able to leverage the benefits from their grid-connected renewable energy projects to pursue activities that supported them to reduce dependency on the state in other ways.

Findings from this thesis expand on Fitzgerald (2018) to articulate an even bigger aspiration at play beyond self-sufficiency at the community level. Instead, Indigenous power proponents in BC seek to fundamentally reshape the energy sector to make self-determined choices about energy within their territories, and more broadly within energy governance. This perhaps aligns more closely with Rezaei and Dowlatabadi (2016) who see self-sufficiency as both a material and a political aspiration, and recognize the intangible benefits made possible by renewable energy projects that "correct the historic injustices of colonialism" through instilling pride, empowerment, financial independence, and political autonomy (p. 798-801).

Considering Rezaei and Dowlatabadi's perspectives within the context of the research findings in this thesis, it is possible that these two visions – self-sufficiency and decreasing state dependency, and expanding opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between the state and Indigenous power proponents – could be mutually supportive. Perhaps what is most critical is to ensure that all parties are supported to realize their own goals within the energy sector, which would enable Indigenous power proponents to decide what types of partnerships they would like to enter into (if at all) with external organizations, as partnerships have shown capable

of supporting Nations to meet their goals. This way, Indigenous communities have the agency to decide what relationships they will enter into and benefit from on their own terms as an exercise of self-determination, even within the existing centralized system.[96]

5.2.1.3 Building trust.

Interviews highlighted the fraught relationships between Indigenous communities and state actors in the energy sector, as well as a need for state actors to build trust with Indigenous peoples for partnerships in the electricity sector to flourish. This finding aligns with McGregor (2019) and MacArthur & Matthewman (2018) who illuminate the need for significant changes to existing colonial approaches to relationship building between the state and Indigenous peoples. Savic & Hoicka (2023) and Walker et al (2021) also demonstrate that a lack of trust, understanding of reconciliation, self-determination, and Indigenous rights have stymied relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and communities working in the energy sector both within and outside the state, including industry partners (p. 11). This suggests that efforts to build trust are critical for *all* actors working with Indigenous peoples across the energy sector.

Interviews highlight frustrations with the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC infringing on Indigenous rights, failing to live up to commitments to 'reconciliation' under DRIPA, and continuously falling short in approaches to engagement with Indigenous peoples pertaining to activities on their own territories. Furthermore, interviews revealed critiques that many of the state's efforts thus far have been reactive, waiting to make changes when they are

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[96] Based on what I have heard at conferences and workshops, and through conversations about the potential for Indigenous equity ownership of a transmission line in Northwest BC (see Link, 2023), it is likely that expanding Indigenous ownership of energy transmission infrastructure will also be an area of focus for Indigenous power proponents which could eventually shift the norm of state control over energy infrastructure in BC. However, this was not a topic that was discussed during the interviews.

pushed or incentivized to do so.[97] Extrapolating from these findings, this research shows that building trust will require state actors to demonstrate a willingness to change by making active efforts to right these wrongs through staying true to their commitments, seeking ways to improve engagement processes, making changes proactively in partnership with Indigenous peoples, no longer infringing on Indigenous territories without consent, and treating First Nations as real partners rather than an afterthought. Walker et al. (2021) further suggest that educational efforts to ensure that non-Indigenous partners are aware of Canada's colonial history and individual responsibilities in light of 'reconciliation' might also be an important element to building trust. Interviews as well as Molander (2022) suggest that building trust will ultimately require the state to live up to the commitments it has made under DRIPA and 'reconciliation,' to take action to work together in support of mutual goals, and actively reshape itself in collaboration with Indigenous peoples.

McGregor (2019) reminds us that the process of relationship building with Indigenous peoples and communities is not about surface level apologies, but about actions that continuously build and prove trust over time. Situating this within the findings mentioned above, I surmise that BC Hydro, the Government of BC, the BCUC, and industry actors can build trust with Indigenous peoples and communities by embodying these commitments over time.

5.2.1.4 Summarizing partnerships.

From this research project, it is clear that partnerships and meaningful approaches to collaboration are necessary to realize aspirations of self-determination in the renewable energy sector. This research highlights the importance of developing mechanisms for joint decision-

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[97] This often leaves First Nations to scramble in response to the state's actions, and also leads to ineffective consultation processes, such as in the case of the BC Hydro Call for Power in 2024 (FNEMC, 2023).

making and co-governance in order to achieve these goals. Although state partnerships are the key focus of this research, partnerships with industry, organizations, and other communities can also support Indigenous power proponents to achieve their goals. Perhaps contrary to assumptions, this research illuminates that partnerships can in fact support efforts for growing self-sufficiency in the electricity system if and when these partnerships are predicated on self-determination. Working toward these relationships will require necessary work to build trust meaningfully over time, through the state living up to its commitments, and treating First Nations as genuine partners.

5.2.2 Institutional changes to reflect true collaboration

The findings from this research project articulate a need for genuine, meaningful partnerships across the renewable energy sector, and a desire to "level the playing field" (P1) between state-actors and Indigenous power proponents. This reflects findings in Reed et al.'s (2021) research with Indigenous Climate Action on decolonizing climate policy in Canada:

> Personally, I see Indigenous Nations as sovereign. And as equivalent to the provincial and federal jurisdictions. So just recognizing that sovereignty. And when they say we want [an energy transition], let the Indigenous Nations decide. We have councils. There are governing bodies. They should have a seat at the table. That would help. That's decolonial. Create and leave room for new perceptions and new people to sit at the table. And not fight them (E#6) (p. 8-9).

Implicit in this vision is a call for the state to transform in relation to the aspirations and priorities articulated by Indigenous peoples, which will require the state to work collaboratively with Indigenous power proponents to make institutional changes across the electricity sector in response to these aspirations. As suggested in the section above, mechanisms for co-governance and joint decision-making will likely be important tools in this process.

Throughout interviews and the policy and landscape analysis, some of the most significant barriers limiting Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector include lack of supportive policies and limited involvement in decision-making processes, as well as existing institutional mandates, suggesting a need for substantial changes across energy policy and governance to reflect this vision. These findings align with Scott (2020) who argues that "…Indigenous inclusion in the energy transition must be amplified by fair markets and stable, hospitable policy environments" (p. 490), in addition to "stable enabling policy frameworks [that are] co-created with Indigenous communities, with credible and aspiring targets and clear responsibilities" (p. 484). The importance of developing policies collaboratively is also reflected by McGregor (2019) who reminds us that "…no policy…is going to be successful in the long run if it does not result in genuine restructuring and transformation of contemporary relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples" (p. 140). These findings make it clear that the Government of BC will need to work in genuine partnership with First Nations when shaping energy policy, mandates, and decision-making processes.

5.2.2.1 Efforts that are currently underway.

Interviews suggest that over the last few years, state actors have made progress toward supporting and growing Indigenous involvement in the electricity sector, which has especially advanced since DRIPA's adoption. As described in Chapter Three, we are seeing signs of regime destabilization through a number of changes. Indigenous Clean Energy Opportunity's (ICEO) co-developed approach to engagement, which directly stems from commitments under the DRIPA Action Plan, has been a critical space for Indigenous power proponents to dialogue with the Government of BC on energy decision-making (Government of British Columbia, 2024b; Government of British Columbia, n.d.c.). Interviews also revealed that following the BCUC

Inquiry into the regulation of Indigenous Utilities in 2019 (British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2020b), the BCUC has made efforts to improve their organization's approach to relationship building and are reviewing their internal policies and processes to better support Indigenous involvement. The BCUC has also launched their Indigenous Intervenor Capacity Fund Pilot Program that provides financial support for Indigenous peoples who seek to participate in BCUC processes as intervenors (British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2023).

The Remote Community Energy Strategy (RCES) Working Group has expanded funding for remote and diesel-dependent First Nations to transition to renewables and is working on a proposed amendment to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act which would ensure greater regulatory certainty when developing off-grid renewable energy projects (Government of British Columbia, 2023b). Finally, BC Hydro's Call for Power slated for 2024 is being developed jointly with First Nations and marks another important step forward for Indigenous power proponents (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b).

Despite these important steps, the Government of BC has been criticized for not going far enough. The First Nations Energy and Mining Council (FNEMC) (2023) has criticized BC Hydro's Call for Power engagement process for its short timeframes and failure to include Indigenous peoples from the outset, which "threaten[s] the opportunity for First Nations to gain a meaningful share of the benefits and opportunities arising from new energy project development" (p. 4). The FNEMC sees that "this threat will continue to exist unless appropriate engagement that is executed in partnership with Indigenous peoples immediately occurs" (p. 4). Furthermore, although BC Hydro has established a task force to support the advancement of Indigenous ownership opportunities and involvement in energy, this task force has representation from only one Indigenous advisor out of the 11 individuals appointed (Ministry of Energy,

Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023b, para. 8). The frustrations with these efforts are summarized by P5's quote: "Are these Indigenous organizations setting up the structures themselves and calling the shots? No, it's still government saying 'we're going to do this, we're going to set up the structure and then we'll invite you in.'"

Although these efforts show that the state is beginning to respond to desires articulated by Indigenous peoples in the renewable energy sector. these approaches do not adequately reflect the self-determination and partnerships across the electricity system that Indigenous power proponents are aspiring to. Rather, these efforts continue to perpetuate relationships of dependency by bringing Indigenous peoples *into* state-defined processes, which offers them small gains while keeping central processes under state control, and consequently maintaining the existing regime.[98] For transitions to occur that support Indigenous involvement to the extent that is articulated through this research, state organizations will need to go further in their efforts than what they have shown thus far.

5.2.2.2 Reshaping foundational values and mandates underpinning the energy sector.

While many Indigenous interviewees vocalized a desire to be part of decision-making pertaining to activities on their territories, truly equitable and meaningful involvement in these processes is challenging within current contexts where settler authority and knowledge is privileged over Indigenous authority, and capacity constraints plague many First Nations. During

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[98] We see further evidence that BC Hydro is not reflecting calls for partnerships, self-determination, and regime-level change through a conversation that was had on the main stage at the First Nations Energy Summit in November 2023, where BC Hydro's leadership affirmed that they are more interested in procurement opportunities, and wants to maintain a united system, rather than sharing the market with a First Nations utility such as through a First Nations Power Authority. These contradicted desires articulated by First Nations at the conference who were asking for more significant opportunities than procurement, as BC Hydro blaming the increasingly complicated policy and regulatory environment for wanting to maintain its centralized model.

a lecture, Dr. Sarah Hunt articulated, “The price [Indigenous peoples] pay to sit at the table is our own dispossession” (Hunt & Curran, 2023). Under these conditions, a seat at existing tables is not enough to achieve equitable partnerships and self-determination. Instead, the tables themselves – including the foundational assumptions and mandates upon which the tables are created – will need to be redefined in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. This nuances the quote from Reed et al. (2021) mentioned above, to illustrate that achieving the aspirations of partnership and self-determination for Indigenous power proponents in BC will require not only having a seat at the table, but fundamentally reshaping the tables themselves.

Within interviews, and from the policy and landscape analysis, it is revealed that BC Hydro and the BCUC’s existing mandates constrain the extent to which these organizations can reflect and respond to Indigenous interests in the electricity sector.[99] BC Hydro and the BCUC’s mandates prioritize producing affordable and reliable electricity (BC Hydro, n.d.b; British Columbia Utilities Commission, n.d.). However, it is important to ask, *who* this electricity is affordable and reliable for? The policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three illustrates that industrial customers are privileged through rate discounts to attract business (Government of British Columbia, n.d.b.), whereas off-grid communities are left dependent on diesel and strapped with much higher rates (Rezaei, 2017). Furthermore, existing mandates fail to account

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[99] Walker et al. (2021) argue that utilities and other non-Indigenous partners who state that they do not have a mandate for Indigenous collaboration reflects Tuck and Yang’s (2012) concept of settler “moves to innocence,” wherein institutions blame their context rather than take action to change the ways that their organization is perpetuating colonial harm. This is not to undermine the real barriers posed by limited mandates, which will be elaborated on below, or render invisible the efforts from individuals working within colonial organizations who are doing their best to work collaboratively and relationally despite organizational constraints (such as P7 who highlighted during their interview that the BCUC has made efforts to change their internal processes, procedures, and approach to relationship-building since the Indigenous Inquiry in 2019). However, when considering Walker et al.’s (2021) research alongside this finding, it is important to note that individuals working within and across the energy sector have a responsibility to understand the colonial legacies of their organization, and to work toward addressing these impacts. In conversations and presentations at the First Nations Energy Summit in November 2023, it became clear that some individuals operating within these spaces do not see a personal responsibility toward righting the historical wrongs perpetuated by the colonial organizations they are a part of.

for environmental costs beyond emissions – especially in the case of large-scale hydro whose environmental impacts are rendered invisible by existing mandates[100] (Dusyk, 2016). These existing mandates for the centralized utility prioritize low-cost electricity and provincial power generation under the guise of "public" or "national" interest. A conversation is required to challenge how "public interest" is considered within BC's energy system, as interviews, Fitzgerald (2018), Fox (2022), Atleo et al., (2022), and Atleo & Boron (2023) all mention that pursuing development in the "public" and "national" interest has been used to justify the exclusion and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, particularly through energy development.

As discussed in Chapter Two, BC maintains some of the lowest rates in North America (Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023a), and maintaining these low rates has become a core priority for BC Hydro. However, recalling He et al. (2022), BC Hydro's Cost-of-Service model – which generates revenue based on how much provincially owned electricity is sold – disincentivizes energy efficiency improvements or alternative, non-Provincially generated electricity as this leads to revenue losses for the utility. As a result, this excessive focus on affordability not only excludes Indigenous power proponents from selling their electricity for a profit and marginalizes off-grid Indigenous communities who are then required to pay high electricity rates; it also disincentivizes climate action through demand-side-management. Furthermore, interviews highlighted that as the impacts of climate change worsen, building community resilience through locally generated electricity is becoming an increasingly

[100] The Remote Community Energy Strategy working group under CleanBC is currently proposing an amendment to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act so that Energy Purchase Agreements are more easily approved by the BCUC to support Indigenous owned renewable energy projects in off-grid communities. This is seen as a potential first step toward potential legislative changes that could lead to the BCUC balancing "ratepayer impacts with climate, reconciliation, and other objectives" (Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, 2023c, p. 5).

popular motivation for communities to pursue their own renewable energy projects.[101] This reflects He et al. (2022) who also recognize energy sovereignty as a new responsibility that utilities will need to incorporate into their structures and mandates.

The policy and landscape analysis shows us that despite BC Hydro and the BCUC's internal commitments to improving their relationships with Indigenous peoples, their mandates do not yet include commitments to 'reconciliation' between the state and Indigenous peoples through DRIPA. When considering necessary institutional changes to support Indigenous self-determination, partnerships, and potential joint decision-making mechanisms, this research suggests that the mandates –which define the interests and responsibilities of energy institutions, and consequently shape the underlying assumptions upon which the electricity system is built – will need to be redefined in partnership with Indigenous peoples. Interviewees, along with He et al. (2022), also suggest that decisionmakers will now have to balance affordability alongside other priorities, including climate change and 'reconciliation,' when considering mandates and utility structures.

Bringing Indigenous peoples to the table when deciding BC Hydro and the BCUC's mandates in the first place will provide opportunities to ensure that mandates can also reflect their interests and priorities, rather than leaving Indigenous peoples to be governed by mandates that result in their own dispossession. This aligns with Savic & Hoicka's (2023) calls for Indigenous peoples to be included early in energy planning. Bringing Indigenous peoples in at the outset to collaboratively redefine BC Hydro and the BCUC's mandates *with* the Government of BC in the spirit of true partnership and self-determination will support efforts to move away

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[101] In summer 2023, hydroelectricity generation was at its lowest due to decreased water levels, which has energy professionals calling for integration of additional renewable energy sources into the grid to support demand in the face of climate change (Griffiths, 2023).

from unilateral decision-making within the current electricity system, and bring us into a future where Indigenous power proponents and the state can support one another to achieve collective goals.

5.2.2.3 DRIPA's role in advancing this work

Throughout interviews conducted for this thesis, nearly every individual mentioned DRIPA as a potential tool for stimulating positive change toward partnerships and collaboration in the renewable energy sector and in provincial governance more broadly. Several interviewees spoke of DRIPA's ability to stimulate necessary culture shifts across the Government of BC to move toward greater Indigenous involvement, as well as expanding the resources for this work internally. Some interviewees also had hope in DRIPA's ability to support institutional changes to "level the playing field" and expand opportunities to work in partnership. Generally speaking, Interviewees articulated a limited understanding of DRIPA's legal mechanisms, but suggested that it seems to have instigated some key shifts toward advancing partnerships and cooperation within BC. To better understand DRIPA's implications for expanding Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, I turn to legal experts who can add to the insights provided by interviewees. A fulsome analysis of DRIPA's implications for Indigenous-led renewable energy projects in BC is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, this section will offer a brief overview of the relevance for this research.

5.2.2.3.1 DRIPA's potential – will it be realized? Will it go far enough?

Legal analysts such as Curry et al., (2021) from the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre align with interviewees by also seeing DRIPA as a tool for advancing the recognition of Indigenous rights and title in BC, and in particular through the energy sector. DRIPA's purpose is "(a) to affirm the application of the [United Nations] Declaration [on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples]to the laws of British Columbia; (b) to contribute to the implementation of the [United Nations] Declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples]; and (c) to support the affirmation of, and develop relationships with, Indigenous governing bodies" (*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, 2019, c. 44). Curry et al. suggest that bringing the *Clean Energy Act,* the *Utilities Commission Act* and the *Hydro and Power Authority Act* into consistency with DRIPA would have implications for redefining the mandates of BC Hydro and the BCUC to potentially reflect joint decision-making. They also see DRIPA as a tool that could potentially support the delegation of decision-making authority to Indigenous governing bodies and move toward joint decision-making through section 7 (p. 21). This could be leveraged to support changes to existing laws and policies to expand Indigenous participation in clean energy governance, which was a stated priority in the DRIPA Action Plan.

Although legal analysts seem to align with interviewees on DRIPA's potential to enable institutional changes to foster partnerships and collaboration within the energy sector, Jessica Clogg – Executive Director and Senior Counsel with West Coast Environmental Law Association – warns that BC has taken an "incredibly conservative, narrow and bureaucratic…approach to DRIPA sections 6 and 7" (Hosgod, 2024, para. 23). Clogg's hesitations around DRIPA are further reflected by Nicholst & Morales (2021) who see that DRIPA's potential to expand the recognition of Indigenous rights within Canada is limited by our colonial legal system that operates with the underlying assumption that the Crown has power over Indigenous peoples (p. 1194). This once again reveals the settler-colonial legal bounds of the regime that shape and constrain opportunities for Indigenous peoples within governance more broadly.

When considering these critiques alongside the actions that the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC have taken (or failed to take) since DRIPA's adoption that have not reflected aspirations for true partnerships and self-determination, DRIPA has not yet manifested in the change that Indigenous power proponents hope for, and as one interviewee reminds us, the state has continued to infringe Indigenous rights since its adoption. This further contextualizes why some interviewees were cautious about seeing DRIPA as a silver bullet. Although legal analysts suggest that there is potential for DRIPA to support rationale for joint decision-making between the Government of BC and First Nations, the policy and landscape analysis shows that it exists within a landscape shaped by extraction, and a regime that incentivizes the continuation of dependency and dispossession. Perhaps in the case of this research, it is less relevant to ask whether DRIPA is functionally capable of stimulating necessary change, but rather whether the Government of BC, BC Hydro, and the BCUC will remain accountable to the commitments they have made through DRIPA and the Action Plan. The institutional changes seen thus far as well as through internal culture shifts within the Government of BC articulated by interviewees mark the beginnings of what will continue to be a long journey of building trust and working in meaningful partnerships to achieve these visions together.

5.2.2.4 Potential trajectories for institutional change.

Throughout the last few years, Indigenous power proponents and allied organizations have been advocating for several changes across the electricity system that would contribute to supporting partnerships and self-determination through renewable energy. [102] Some of these

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[102] These recommendations also align with calls from Sacred Earth Solar and Indigenous Climate Action's Just Transition Guide which calls for the "decoloniz[ation] and decentraliz[ation of] energy systems by including Indigenous leadership in utilities regulation, infrastructure ownership, partnerships, policy development processes, or all of the above" (Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023, p. 143).

suggestions include the creation of a First Nations Power Authority and a Northern Power Authority, which was mentioned in some interviews as well as in Hoicka et al. (2024). This stemmed from the BCUC's Inquiry into the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities recommendation that Indigenous energy projects on reserve, modern treaty, and self-government lands be self-regulated (British Columbia Utilities Commission, 2020a; Hira et al., 2020; Rand et al., 2022). Given that interviewees were frustrated by the limitations of existing mandates to support Indigenous-led renewable energy projects, the creation of intermediaries such as an FNPA could potentially contribute to necessary regime-level change through "incorporat[ing] relational and regional approaches, control sharing with Nations, and Nation's self-determination into institutional design to decarbonize the energy system" (Hoicka et al., 2024, p. 23)

Following the BCUC Indigenous Inquiry, Curry et al. (2022) from the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre provided assistance to Gitga'at First Nation to advocate for the creation of an Indigenous Energy Act and an Indigenous Energy Board that would approve energy projects and set rates, which would ensure that these decisions take into account social, environmental, and economic costs which the BCUC's current mandate does not do (p. 32). This same group is also proposing reforming the *Clean Energy Act*, the *Utilities Commission Act*, and the *Hydro and Power Authority Act* to bring them "into alignment with the stated goals in the *Clean Energy Act* and DRIPA," which would "compel the province to act in alignment with its goals" (Curry et al., 2022, p. 2; p. 27). Each of these recommendations has the potential to reshape the regime in ways that would support Indigenous self-determination across the electricity system.

Other ongoing initiatives include discussions between BC Hydro and 11 First Nations to pursue equity ownership in the twinning of the transmission line between the Willison Substation

in Prince George to the Skeena Substation in Terrace (Link, 2023). If joint ownership is possible through this avenue, this has the potential to embody partnerships across the physical energy landscape which, as shown in the policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three, has historically acted as a mechanism to retain colonial control and power.

The efforts listed above reflect a small sample of the ongoing work from Indigenous power proponents and allies to move toward greater Indigenous involvement, control, and self-determination across the electricity system. More of these changes will be necessary to continue building the vision of an energy system grounded in partnerships and self-determination.

5.2.2.5 Summarizing the institutional changes.

This research illuminates that changes to existing policies, decision-making processes, and mandates will be necessary to create space to achieve the aspirations of partnerships and self-determination that Indigenous power proponents are striving for. Although state energy actors have begun to collaborate more with Indigenous communities since DRIPA's adoption, most of these efforts have thus far continued to uphold the existing regime and maintain centralized control of the state. These changes do not embody joint decision-making based on equitable partnerships and Indigenous self-determination. This research concludes that the colonial mandates for BC Hydro and the BCUC will need to be redefined in partnership with First Nations and the Government of BC.

Interviewees and experts see DRIPA's potential to expand rationale for these changes, as well as potentially stimulating institutional changes toward joint decision-making. However, within the limitations of existing settler-colonial legal structures, this potential has yet to come to fruition. There are a number of suggested trajectories that Indigenous power proponents and allies are conceptualizing and advocating for, which would enable changes to the physical and

political structures that currently shape the electricity sector, to embody visions of true collaboration, partnership, and self-determination. These changes will be challenging, but necessary, in any road ahead.

5.3 Conclusion

The policy and landscape analysis as well as the expert interviews conducted for this research project paint a picture of the complicated terrain ahead in BC's renewable energy transition for Indigenous power proponents to move from a niche to destabilize the regime. Indigenous peoples in BC who are seeking involvement in the renewable energy sector are driven by a number of motivations, but interviews illuminate that building genuine partnerships rooted in self-determination to shape the energy sector around collective goals remains a core aspiration. Barriers within the existing energy regime around the mandates and priorities of existing institutions, which are embedded in a colonial history and political framework that perpetuates dependency and dispossession, makes achieving these aspirations difficult. However, enormous potential lies in co-creating a new energy sector for BC – one that is rooted in meaningful partnerships and leads to a stronger and more resilient energy system for all. This research highlights that there are several pathways that could lead us to this vision, including through implementing mechanisms for joint decision-making for First Nations and the Government of BC to collaboratively define policies, governance processes, and mandates. Most importantly, these partnerships will need to be rooted in trust and self-determination.

The Government of BC has begun to make changes in response to advocacy efforts led by Indigenous power proponents and allies, including through the BCUC Inquiry into the regulation of Indigenous utilities and internal changes that have stemmed from it, the co-led ICEO engagement process, expanded and streamlined funding opportunities resulting from the

RCES Working Group, BC Hydro's UNDRIP Implementation Plan (BC Hydro, 2023b) and Call for Power, and the Provincial adoption of DRIPA which has stimulated the beginnings of a culture shift across government. Some groundwork has been laid, yet we still have further to go, especially as historically, change has only occurred in response to the pressure and advocacy from Indigenous power proponents (Fitzgerald, 2018). A theme has emerged across the pathways mentioned in this chapter: that is, ensuring that Indigenous peoples can exercise self-determination within each of these areas, to have greater autonomy to decide the terms of engaging with the state and other partners, and to collaboratively move forward in trust-based, nation-to-nation relationships.

Importantly, this goes beyond state-led consultation, engagements, and advisory councils, which maintain the existing regime that privileges state authority and industrial priorities. Rather, this research points to a need for the state to actively transform itself in relation to Indigenous priorities, and to create space so that Indigenous peoples can exercise self-determination through energy on their own territories, as well as in energy governance more broadly through joint decision-making. This research ultimately points us toward a roadmap to move beyond the "politics of recognition" (Coulthard, 2014) within BC's electricity sector. Prescribing exactly how to do this is beyond the scope of this research and will need to be decided by Indigenous peoples themselves. What I have sought to do through this thesis is build the context for further questions and ways of conceptualizing these challenges as we move forward toward a collaborative and self-determined energy future.

MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) draw from Marama Muru-Lanning's book to ask, "what difference is made by shifting beyond the language of commodification and individual ownership, to collective models that stress relationships?" (p. 22). A similar question was asked

by P1 during their interview: “what difference would be made if the energy sector was built on partnership and cooperation, as opposed to exclusion and dispossession?” If partnerships and self-determination became the guiding light in energy decision-making in BC moving forward, then institutional changes stemming from these relationships would hopefully begin to rewrite the history of dispossession and dependency across the regime and landscape. Based on findings from this research, and as P2 articulated in their interview, this vision would ultimately benefit us all:

> When the federal government does something alone, when the provincial government does something alone, when Canada's corporations, or First Nations - generates a win/loss or a loss/loss, one project at a time. But renewable energy brings all four to create an overlap or the quadruple win. Because everybody wins when the four of us are developing renewable energy projects... - P2

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Indigenous involvement and leadership within the renewable energy sector in BC has grown over the last few decades alongside the Government of BC's need for more energy as the urgency of the climate crisis prompts decarbonization. This thesis responds to the efforts of Indigenous communities not only to expand involvement, but to take on a greater leadership role in the energy sector. Through this research, I have sought to further clarify the aspirations of Indigenous peoples' involvement in the renewable energy sector, the barriers they face, and potential pathways forward for an energy system that reflects these aspirations. In what follows, I briefly summarize the contributions of each substantive chapter, elaborate on additional considerations and limitations of my research project, and offer suggestions for future research.

6.1 Chapter summaries

6.1.1 Chapter Three – the Policy and Landscape Analysis

The policy and landscape analysis offers an overview of the history, phenomena, institutions, material conditions, and actors within BC's renewable energy sector to contextualize the emergence of and transition to greater Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector. This chapter utilizes the Multi-Level Perspective as an organizational tool to examine factors at the landscape (macro), regime (mezzo), and niche (micro) levels. Across the exogenous landscape, the physical environment is shaped by extractive state interests that are supported by centralized, large-scale hydroelectric infrastructure. This has led to Indigenous resistance which has strengthened the legal case for the government to recognize and accommodate Indigenous rights and title. At the regime level, laws, policies, processes, programs, and institutions across the centralized electricity system concentrate state authority, perpetuate relationships of dependency, and systematically exclude Indigenous power proponents from the renewable

energy sector. At the niche level, many First Nations are pursuing renewable energy involvement as an expression of self-determination and assertion of their rights, despite the barriers imposed by the regime.

Through a case study of the Site C dam, this chapter also provides an example of how the regime wields its power to uphold the status-quo in the face of the niche's resistance, which illuminates the power at the regime level to advance and maintain state priorities. This chapter shows that BC's electricity system is the cornerstone of the state's extractive economy. It also illuminates how the regime is supported by governance processes that make it difficult for Indigenous power proponents to expand involvement in the renewable energy sector. This chapter ultimately provides background to understand some of the key barriers facing Indigenous power proponents – namely the centralized electricity system, the existing utility structure, and the policy and regulatory environment that favours state (and by extension industrial) interests. This helps to answer the second research question (what are barriers to overcome these aspirations), as well as point to potential areas where change will be needed to support greater Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector that I further built on throughout the remainder of this thesis.

6.1.2 Chapter Four – Interview findings

Chapter Four offers a thematic summary and direct quotes from interviews with 10 individuals (both Indigenous [n=5] and non-Indigenous [n=5]) working within the renewable energy sector across communities, civil society, and government. Interviews revealed that aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector were rooted in desires for self-determination and self-sufficiency; growing resilience to climate change; and building stronger partnerships between the state and Indigenous peoples to work toward a collective

future through renewable energy. Some of the most prominent barriers to achieving these aspirations were an extension of the colonial history of the energy sector that manifests today through energy policies and processes that fail to reflect Indigenous priorities; existing mandates, utility structures, and market conditions that privilege the state-centred monopoly; and processes that exclude Indigenous peoples from energy decision-making. Interviews reveal the potential in creating an energy sector that unites goals of 'reconciliation' and climate action, which will require the state to build trust and meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples. Interviews also suggest that DRIPA could perhaps stimulate necessary cultural and institutional shifts to bring the energy sector into alignment with the values of partnership and cooperation.

6.1.3 Chapter Five – Discussion

The Discussion in Chapter Five begins by bringing the policy and landscape analysis from Chapter Three into dialogue with the interview findings from Chapter Four. Bringing these elements together reveals that Indigenous peoples in BC do not just want to grow their involvement in renewable energy projects within their communities at the niche level, but are also seeking to fundamentally destabilize the regime to create space for equitable collaboration and partnerships within the electricity system more broadly. This chapter illuminates that for Indigenous power proponents to take on the level of involvement and leadership that they aspire to in the energy sector, it will no longer be enough for Indigenous peoples to be brought into existing state-led processes. Rather, the state will need to work together with Indigenous peoples to reshape an energy sector rooted in self-determination.

Research findings suggest that pathways forward will first require the state to build trust-based relationships with Indigenous peoples as the foundation for this collaborative work. This can be established through living up to existing commitments, treating Indigenous communities

with respect as equal partners, and growing this trust through consistent actions over time. Concurrently, this will need to be supported by institutional changes that create space for co-developed policies, decision-making processes, and mandates. This research suggests that DRIPA could potentially play a role in supporting this work, however efforts within the electricity system since DRIPA's adoption have not reflected its full potential to create pathways for true collaboration. This chapter shows that the aspirations articulated by Indigenous power proponents for involvement in BC's electricity sector go deeper than what we have seen reflected in research thus far, and hold the potential to reshape an electricity sector that is stronger and more supportive for all involved parties to achieve their goals.

6.2 Research contributions

The Indigenous renewable energy field in BC has already changed drastically since I started my Master's degree in September 2021. When I first began this research project, I followed the advice of Indigenous leaders in BC's renewable energy sector who, during preliminary conversations, mentioned the importance of public-facing research to grow awareness about Indigenous peoples in BC who are seeking to expand their involvement in renewable energy, as well as the ways that the Government of BC's commitments under DRIPA and 'reconciliation' can align with these goals. A driving question that I heard from Indigenous energy leaders was, "we have the solutions, why aren't we implementing them?" I sought to conduct research that would contribute to answering this question by investigating the key blockages to advancing Indigenous aspirations within the settler-colonial context of BC.

Through this research, which I rooted in an understanding of settler-colonialism derived from several scholars including Coulthard (2014), LaDuke & Cohen (2021), Simpson (2013), McGregor (2019), Wolfe (2006), Manuel (2017), and others, it became apparent that the

dispossession of Indigenous lands and ways of life as well as relationships of dependency that uphold state power are reinforced through the electricity system. Furthermore, this research highlighted the emancipatory potential of Indigenous-led renewable energy to challenge these colonial systems. Through this research, I have also attempted to respond to many of the concerns expressed at conferences and in conversations with individuals in the renewable energy sector who feel disillusioned by the continuous resistance to their advancements in the space – particularly from state actors including the BCUC, BC Hydro, and the Government of BC.

6.2.1 Key contributions

This research project contributes to the strong foundation of research on Indigenous-led renewable energy in BC laid down by scholars such as Fitzgerald (2018), Cook (2019), Cook et al. (2017), Ozog (2012), Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2015), Rezaei (2017), Molander (2022), and Hoicka et al. (2024). Each of these scholars has contributed toward illustrating the specific challenges and opportunities facing First Nations within BC's renewable energy sector.

In response to the first research question – what are aspirations for Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector – this research offers a sense of the magnitude and character of change that Indigenous power proponents are striving for in the electricity system in BC. Existing work from Fitzgerald (2018), Cook et al. (2017), Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2015), and Cook (2019) recognize the leadership displayed by First Nations in BC to advance a clean energy transition. Molander's research (2022) suggests that there is potential for Indigenous-led renewable energy transitions to lead to fundamental shifts within BC's electricity system. However, Hoicka et al. (2024) goes further to explicitly articulate aspirations of many Indigenous communities in BC who want fundamental energy system transformation through expanding ownership and control over energy decision-making. This thesis follows Molander

(2022) and Hoicka (2024) to delve deeper into the priorities for Indigenous leadership in BC's renewable energy sector since DRIPA's adoption to further explore this potential for fundamental transformation, and what this might look like. This research also contributes to literature on self-determination and energy self-sufficiency by building on Fitzgerald (2018) and Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2015) to further express aspirations of self-sufficiency in the immaterial sense, which can be supported through self-determined and trust-based partnerships with the state, industry, and other entities.

In response to the second question – what are barriers to these aspirations – this research explores how the energy system works to reinscribe colonial relations and demonstrates how different mechanisms across the electricity system are impacting Indigenous power proponents. I approached this thesis initially with the purpose of attempting to better understand why Indigenous power proponents have faced challenges when advancing meaningful involvement in BC's electricity sector. Drawing heavily from Fitzgerald (2018), Rezaei (2017), Dusyk (2017), Molander (2022), Hoicka et al. (2024), and others, I sought to explicitly paint a holistic picture of the complex factors contributing to these barriers within the BC context, which to my knowledge, has not yet been done within academic literature to this extent.

This research project illuminates that the electricity system reproduces colonial relations through policies, mandates, utility models, centralized infrastructure, and decision-making processes that privilege industrial interests and marginalize Indigenous peoples from their desired level of involvement. This aligns with McGregor (2019), LaDuke & Cohen (2021), Coulthard (2017), Manuel (2017), and others' conceptions of settler-colonialism which is characterized by dispossession, dependency, and exploitation made possible through state-controlled governance systems and energy infrastructure. Further, this research project highlights

the vested interest that BC Hydro and the Government of BC have in maintaining the status-quo given the ways in which the electricity system's ability to provide affordable, reliable power generated by BC Hydro is deeply tied to the economic prosperity of the province.

In response to the third question – what are pathways to overcome these barriers – this research reinforces a growing body of literature exploring partnerships in Indigenous-led renewable energy projects, including Campney (2019), Smith and Scott (2021), Savic & Hoicka (2023), Hoicka et al. (2021), and Walker et al (2021). These scholars offer critical insights into the importance of ensuring that Indigenous authority and control can be exercised over renewable energy projects in order to achieve the potential of self-determination. However, existing literature has largely focused on partnerships and governance at the project level, rather than exploring the desire for partnerships in energy system governance that emerges through this research project. My thesis contributes to this body of literature by articulating aspirations of joint decision-making and co-governance within the energy system more broadly, which lays the foundation for future research that can explore potential mechanisms to achieve these visions.

This research ultimately supports ongoing efforts from Indigenous power proponents and allies in BC who are advocating for changes across the electricity system to reflect Indigenous self-determination to offer greater contextualization as to why efforts that go beyond state-led approaches of engagement are necessary.

6.2.2 Contributions to sustainability transitions literature

In the case of the policy and landscape analysis in Chapter Three, I opted to use the Multi-Level Perspective from sustainability transitions literature as an organizational tool to frame my understanding of the various actors, phenomena, policies, laws, and processes that make up the renewable energy sector in BC. Given that the MLP was developed and is most

often utilized largely in European contexts, applying it within a settler-colonial setting supports a growing body of literature seeking to draw attention to the unique lessons from Indigenous and non-European energy transitions.[103] The language from the MLP surrounding the "regime" proves to be useful in the case of BC's electricity system to highlight the multiple layers of lock-in that perpetuates state-led and industrial priorities in BC, upheld by the colonial foundations and material conditions of the electricity system across the landscape. Importantly, my utilization of the MLP should not be seen as a robust application of the framework, but rather demonstrates its usefulness to understand how colonial interests further concentrate the power and inertia behind extractive energy systems.

6.3 Research limitations

6.3.1 Limited range of perspectives

This research is limited by a small sample size of interviewees (n=10), some of whom work for government entities (n=3), Indigenous communities or organizations (n=5), a think tank (n=1) and an industry association (n=1). Given this small number of interviews, and the fact that many individuals who were interviewed for this thesis have already been involved in other similar studies, the perspectives represented here are limited and reflect much of what has been said across literature. This is not to say that the contributions from interviewees who were involved in this research are less valuable, but rather this research reflects perspectives from a limited sample size that must be considered when assessing and drawing generalizations about the broader field.

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[103] Namely Köhler et al., 2019; Hopkins et al., 2020; Doyon et al., 2021; Williams and Doyon, 2019; Martens, 2015; Broto et al., 2018; MacArthur and Matthewman, 2018; and Karanasios, 2018.

Perspectives from BC Hydro are also critically missing from this research. Given the number of interviewees who referred to BC Hydro's decisions and processes as particular barriers to Indigenous involvement in the renewable energy sector, interviewing a BC Hydro representative would have strengthened this research. Despite repeated efforts to schedule an interview with a BC Hydro representative, I was ultimately unsuccessful. To fill this gap, I have drawn from literature and materials directly from BC Hydro where possible. I have also drawn from Walker et al.'s (2021) research that highlighted perspectives from non-Indigenous employees of companies and utilities working in partnership with Indigenous communities in the development of renewable energy projects into my discussion and literature review. With a voice from BC Hydro missing from interviews, this limits my project's scope as an assessment of the overall renewable energy landscape in BC.

6.3.2 Time and capacity

Timing proved to be a significant limitation over the course of this research process. When I first began this project, I was headed in a slightly different direction with a possible partnership with an Indigenous organization. Ultimately, that opportunity did not pan out, so my supervisor and I designed this research project based on what we had heard from meetings, conversations, and conferences with Indigenous leaders who were a part of the renewable energy field. When I first started this research, the field was in a transitional period between opportunities, and there was a general feeling of frustration and stagnation. This made it difficult to conceive of clear-cut research questions that made sense within the context, which is why I sought to ask research questions about the field more broadly. As the field has shifted rapidly

since I began my research in fall 2021,[104] it is likely that it will continue to change over the coming years, and might soon have a different landscape that requires an entirely different set of research questions.

6.4 Additional tensions and considerations

6.4.1 "Decolonizing" the electricity sector

Throughout literature engaged for this thesis as well as through interviews, settler-colonialism, resistance, resurgence, and decolonization have been mentioned in different contexts. As I articulated in my positionality and methods in Chapter Two, I have done my best not to name these terms explicitly on my own accord, but to instead draw on these terms when they are mentioned by Indigenous interviewees and scholars.

One Indigenous interviewee, P1, said:

> And so my position is prioritizing First Nations-led renewable energy projects… it's not a decolonial act, but it's certainly more of like a resurgent type of act, where you're kind of like empowering First Nations through revenue or energy security to accomplish that energy sovereignty.

I found this quote powerful, as it illustrates this interviewee's conception of these two very loaded terms – "decolonial" and "resurgence." To me, I understood this as P1 acknowledging the colonial roots of the centralized electricity sector, and recognizing the challenges of decolonizing a system that is itself a manifestation of colonialism. Furthermore, seeking involvement in renewable energy in BC requires engaging with this colonial system. MacArthur (2017) also grapples with this tension in her research:

> A key tension is the fact that many, though not all [community energy project – CEP] actors, were motivated to start projects by a desire to shape and reshape the energy sector

[104] Since I began my research, the field has begun to see an uptick in Indigenous involvement through the Indigenous Clean Opportunities Engagement, the release of the DRIPA Action Plan, as well as BC Hydro's call for power announced for 2024.

> along more sustainable lines. However, they need to operate within that same system in order to access funding, lobby for regulatory changes and establish grid connections (p. 12).

Considering these tensions reminded me of Audre Lorde's (1984) quote: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p. 2). If renewable energy requires working within and alongside the state, and Corntassel (2012) and Simpson (2016) see resurgence and decolonization as emancipatory projects that reject state recognition, can renewable energy be considered decolonial or resurgent at all?

As a white settler, it is not my place to answer this question – rather, I pose it for Indigenous scholars to take up if they so choose. Interviews reveal that renewable energy acts as an avenue to rebuild relationships to lands and ecosystems, as well as gain autonomy from the state through energy and revenue, and to exercise self-determination. If we instead focus on the relationships that can be forged and re-imagined through community-scale renewable energy projects – that is, relationships within communities, relationships to territories, and self-determined relationships with colonial institutions – and the ways that these relationships are preconditions for a decolonial world, I wonder if perhaps this is where resurgence is possible.

6.4.2 Decentering the state

While writing this thesis, I have been sensitive to my framing and analysis focusing on the centralized and state-led electricity system. Although this focus ultimately responds to academic literature as well as the challenges articulated by Indigenous power proponents in BC, I am aware that suggesting a number of state-centered pathways runs the risk of re-inscribing and re-entrenching state legitimacy. This is a concern that Fitzgerald (2018) also articulates in the

conclusion of her thesis. Like Fitzgerald, Rezaei's (2017) thesis really challenged me on this matter, where she states the following in her conclusion:

> Making policy recommendations is an act that legitimizes existing processes of policy making and governance by affirming [the state's] claims to governing the people, places and relationships that they claim to govern…Furthermore, if we are to take the demands for decolonization and self-determination seriously, we would have to acknowledge that neither federal nor provincial governments have the moral (and increasingly legal) authority to make decisions about indigenous lands without the explicit involvement and consent of the Indigenous Nations whose lands they claim to govern. To make policy recommendations under these circumstances would give the current state of affairs a kind of legitimacy that it does not deserve (p. 180-181).

Rather than suggest policy recommendations, Rezaei (2017) writes, "my recommendations are addressed to people and communities that fight for energy justice in BC and Canada" (p. 180-181). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) also says, "I am not particularly interested in holding states accountable because the structure, history, and nature of states is exploitative by nature. I'm interested in alternatives, I'm interested in building new worlds" (p. 31).

Reading the words of these two scholars, among others, has prompted me to question whether I could have decentred the state in the frame and approach of my research, and to wonder whether my current approach further legitimizes the state's role as a colonial authority in Canada through articulating the state's responsibilities in relation to Indigenous-led renewable energy. When conducting research in this field, the renewable energy sector is itself still an extension of the state, particularly in BC with a centralized and Provincially-owned monopoly. Within our existing electricity system, it is exceedingly difficult for communities to unplug completely from the state – even those who are off-grid – as those in non-integrated areas still have some level of reliance on BC Hydro's infrastructure. Perhaps some Indigenous power proponents in BC aspire for complete energy independence, which would be supported through an Indigenous utility and ownership of transmission and distribution infrastructure. However,

from those I interviewed, I did not hear an explicit desire for complete independence yet, but rather collaboration and partnership. In the face of this tension, I attempted to hold space for collaborative aspirations while being careful not to further legitimize the state's authority through illustrating the barriers and complexities imposed *by* the state for Indigenous power proponents as they navigate an inherently colonial energy system.

Perhaps selfishly as a white settler, I hope for a future where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can work alongside one another, and it is from this lens that I seek to fight for a better world. I was grateful to see that many of the Indigenous individuals that I spoke to for this research tended to agree. But in doing so, I also want to acknowledge that some Indigenous peoples and communities may entirely reject the state and prefer not to have any involvement with it, or with settler entities (or researchers, individuals, etc. for that matter) whatsoever. Mushkegowuk (Cree) scholar Michelle Daigle (2019) draws on Nishnaabeg scholar Madeline Whetung (2018) to state that "Indigenous self-determination lies in the autonomy to remain unreconciled" (p. 714). Given this, I would emphasize that my research is not reflective of all the perspectives of Indigenous peoples with regards to renewable energy involvement.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

Given my positionality, I do not feel well placed to suggest future research directions, as this ultimately is up to Indigenous energy leaders who are steering the conversation. For this reason, I asked interviewees if there were any areas where they would like to see future research. Here are some of their recommendations:

- Ironing out the "high cost" argument against decentralized renewables, and fleshing out the economic case in support of independent power;

- Examining electricity purchase and sale from the US – is purchasing US electricity reliable? Are there market opportunities for Indigenous power proponents to sell power to the US?
- Looking into the current regulatory model in BC to question the BCUC's role in a new energy sector that prioritizes Indigenous desires, and fleshing out precisely what the BCUC's mandate should be to support these endeavors;
- Examining policy vehicles to support expansion of independent power projects within BC;
- Documenting comparisons of electricity and utility models within other jurisdictions (for example, transmission line partnerships in Ontario);
- Looking into the futurity of utilities: what will utilities look like in a decentralized energy world? Will there be a place for them at all?

Perhaps deeper research into mechanisms for joint decision-making within provincial energy policy and planning, as well as DRIPA's role in enabling these opportunities, might also be helpful. Any future research on this topic should be Indigenous-led, or conducted in close partnership with Indigenous communities/organizations.

6.6 Concluding thoughts

When I started writing this thesis, I was compelled by several questions, including: What will it take for the state to create space for Indigenous authority to be exercised within the energy sector? This was inspired by Gregory Lowan-Trudeau's (2017) question mentioned in Chapter One: "...is the system really ready for such changes? Will governments and utility giants allow Indigenous communities to continue down the path of energy sovereignty or will they be stopped

somehow and kept in their place?" (p. 611). Regardless of whether the state is prepared for the changes necessary, I am inspired by the efforts of Indigenous communities and organizations that continue to imagine and build a world where Indigenous peoples can exercise their self-governance and self-determination within the energy sector and beyond:

> Our politics of anti-capitalist decolonization must thus not only act as a form of resistance to the death drive of capitalism and settler colonialism, but also function as a vehicle for imagining a politics of life that will refuse death and instead secure a future for all our relations. (Yazzie, 2018, p. 31)

Appendix 1: Interview questions

1. Can you introduce yourself and briefly tell me about your current role and involvement in the renewable energy sector in BC?
2. Why is involvement in the energy sector important to you and your Nation?
    a. Is there anything unique about energy that makes it an especially important area of involvement?
3. What has your experience been in this sector: what has advanced Indigenous involvement and what has stymied it?
    a. In your experience, how has the provincial government responded to efforts for greater Indigenous involvement in the energy sector?
    b. What about BC Hydro or the BCUC?
4. In your view, and drawing from your experience, what potential does the renewable energy sector offer to First Nations in BC?
    a. Conversely, what does First Nations leadership potentially offer to the renewable energy sector?
    b. What have been the greatest victories or benefits that you've seen for yourself or others who've participated in the renewable energy sector so far?
5. What do you see as the biggest obstacles that are inhibiting potential for First Nations in the renewable energy sector in BC?
    a. Where are you or your colleagues facing the greatest friction when advancing renewable energy opportunities?
6. What are the changes needed to realize this potential for First Nations in the renewable energy sector?
    a. Where do you think these changes will come from?
    a. Do you have a sense of who will lead these changes?
    b. Who are the key organizations (potentially) involved with making necessary changes for more Indigenous involvement in this sector?
        a. Where might organizations need to evolve?
    c. What policy tools could support Indigenous authority in this sector?
7. How do you anticipate that DRIPA will influence the energy landscape in BC?
    a. (If they don't anticipate that it will) Why not?
    b. (If they anticipate that it will have a significant influence) Why is that?
    c. (If earlier prompts were not sufficient) What structures, organizations, or processes are hindering DRIPA from fully influencing the renewable energy sector in a way that supports Indigenous involvement?
8. What is your ideal vision for Indigenous involvement in BC's renewable energy sector?
    a. Is there any ongoing work that is critical to this vision that you think needs to be supported? (i.e. First Nations Power Authority)
9. Are there any other key questions or research areas that you would be interested to see more focus on that could help to advance Indigenous involvement in this sector? (Keeping in mind that my background is in policy and politics)
    a. Do you have any suggestions on how I can approach my research so that it helps to make sense of the key blockages and opportunities for policy change, and the way that change is understood within this sector?

b. What type of work will have the greatest impact on eliciting the changes necessary in this sector? What are your key priorities? (I.e. expanding public knowledge through news articles, policy or legal research, government pressure/lobbying, advocacy, etc.)
c. What could other allies and stakeholders do to best support ongoing efforts for Indigenous involvement in this sector?

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