

**Blowing Smoke in the Ring of Fire: a critical analysis of news media discourse on resource
extraction in Northern Ontario**

By

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Abstract

Talk of societal green transitions has become commonplace across the globe. As the need to address the impacts of human-driven climate change grows increasingly critical, so too do massive societal shifts towards environmental justice and sustainability. In Ontario, the Ring of Fire region has received considerable media attention for its potential to be mined for critical minerals key to Canada's green transition. As mining corporations move to position themselves in the centre of these green transitions, it is crucial to interrogate the language used to cover resource extraction activities in news media. This project employs a critical discourse analysis of national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire between January 1 2021 and September 27 2022 to answer the following questions: How are discourses (re)produced in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region in Canada? What general discursive themes are dominant in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire? How do the narratives within these themes relate to imaginaries for future green transformations? Grounding this analysis in ecolinguistics theory, three overarching discursive themes were identified in the data set: greenwashed and destructive discourses, Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations discourses, and conflict discourses. The dominant narratives within these themes convey a technological and market-led imaginary for future green transformations, where the region is valued purely in economic and geopolitical terms. Indigenous partnership is assumed, with any opposition framed as temporary. Linguistic tools, such as salience strategies and environmental melodrama, can challenge the dominant discourse and provide room for other imaginaries of societal green transformations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

“Interested parties should pool their awareness efforts and undertake a coordinated campaign aimed at educating the broader public about the Ring of Fire and the far-reaching economic opportunities it offers”

- Ontario Chamber of Commerce Report, 2014

Context

As the impacts of human-driven climate change become increasingly evident around the world, so too does the need to transition away from a global dependence on fossil fuels. The idea that “limiting the risk of an environmental disaster requires a radical structural transformation of production and consumption” is quickly becoming a global consensus (Besley & Persson, 2023, p.1863). The language used to describe this notion of systemic change varies, as do the myriad visions for what this change involves and how to best pursue it. ‘Green transitions’ and ‘green transformations’ are the most commonly used terms to refer to these systemic changes. These green transitions and transformations are generally seen as vital in mitigating the impacts of climate change (Bastos-Lima, 2021). Resource extraction corporations, particularly mining companies, have claimed their place in the energy transition to justify the expansion of their activities, promoting these activities as “responsible”, “green”, and “climate-smart” mining (Deniau et al., 2021, p.43). As these social actors position themselves to benefit from green transitions and transformations, a growing body of work has shown the need for skepticism towards these claims. This is especially true when considering that “Indigenous peoples denounce how ‘green’ economies and projects of climate-change mitigation implemented in their territories often add to the burdens that adapting to dramatically changing weather patterns pose to their ways of life” (Normann, 2021, p.1). Indigenous rights are increasingly being recognized

and asserted, and the intersections between ‘green’ transitions and Indigenous livelihoods need to be better understood.

Notably, while ‘green transition’ and ‘green transformation’ both refer to systemic changes needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the terms differ slightly in focus and scope. A review of the usage of both terms suggests some linguistic confusion, as the terms are used interchangeably in the literature on energy system changes (Child & Breyer, 2017). One notable difference is that ‘transition’ seems to refer most often to the process of change, while ‘transformation’ seems to correlate to discussions on the magnitude of systemic change required (Child & Breyer, 2017). Stirling makes the distinction that green ‘transitions’ involve orderly structural change and usually employ technological innovation to reach a specific and common end goal, whilst green ‘transformations’ involve “more diverse, emergent and unruly political alignments, [and are] more about social innovations, challenging incumbent structures, subject to incommensurable knowledges and pursuing contending (even unknown) ends” (2015, p.54). The term ‘green transition’ thus generally refers to controlled progress towards a shared societal goal, with existing structures and technology guiding societal changes; the term ‘green transformation’ has a broader definition, centering the role of more expansive and less orderly social innovation and restructuring in tackling the climate crisis. This thesis employs both terms; ‘green transition’ is used more narrowly to refer to concrete policy goals, while ‘green transformation’ is used more broadly to refer to general imaginaries for social change.

The Ring of Fire region, located in the James Bay Lowlands of Northern Ontario, offers insight into how these green transitions and their intersections with Indigenous livelihoods are understood and constructed. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation Elders call the wetlands in and around the region, which are dense in carbon and help stabilize the climate, “the

‘Breathing Lands’, because they are the lungs of the Earth” (Lissner, 2013, para.8). After De Beers found copper-zinc formations in the region in 2002, a minerals claim staking rush began (Cranston, 2010). The discourse around the Ring of Fire has evolved since then. In earlier years, narratives around the Ring of Fire were primarily economic. A 2014 report from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce argues that “the Ring of Fire is an unparalleled opportunity for the province to diversify its economy ... Despite its far-reaching economic potential, however, the Ring of Fire does not yet resonate in the consciousness of the broader public” (Hjartarson et al., 2014, p.4). Perhaps in response to this lack of salience in the minds of the public, the discourse on resource extraction from the Ring of Fire now has a distinctly green overtone. Ring of Fire Metals, formerly Noront Resources Ltd., boasts that it “holds the most important mineral deposits in the Ring of Fire region ... We are committed to responsibly developing critical minerals, such as nickel, copper, cobalt, chrome, platinum and palladium that are needed to support the transition to a low-carbon future” (“About us”, n.d.). Similarly, the current Progressive Conservative government has placed the Ring of Fire at the centre of Ontario’s Critical Minerals Strategy, deeming it a ‘transformative opportunity’ for Ontario’s transition to a low-carbon economy (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2022). In these ways, the Ring of Fire has been discursively transformed into a pillar of Ontario’s green transition.

How the Ring of Fire is discursively portrayed influences how the Canadian public comes to know and understand it and the developments unfolding around it. This is especially true when it comes to news media discourse; as Way (2011) asserts, “Media are ‘our central public squares’ where the public come to ‘know’ about policy issues, political interests, and governing institutions. This is particularly true for issues with which the reader has no direct experience” (p.80). The majority of the Canadian public has no experience in the far north of

Ontario, let alone the Ring of Fire region; as such, media discourse has a massive impact on how the Canadian public comes to know the Ring of Fire and comes to understand green transitions and the role of critical minerals within them. News media is not created in a vacuum—as a product of the society they are dispersed in, news media texts are both shaped by and contribute to shaping social understandings of the people, places, and events they cover. Critically interrogating what discourses dominate news media allows us a degree of insight into what discourses shape our social understandings of the world.

Research Questions, Objectives, and Significance

Approaching the Ring of Fire case through an ecolinguistics lens, this project is concerned with three broad research questions: How are discourses (re)produced in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region in Canada? What general discursive themes are dominant in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire? How do the narratives within these themes relate to imaginaries for future green transformations?

The objective of this study is to investigate and richly describe how discourses are constructed in news coverage of the Ring of Fire developments through a dual-level critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. This project is designed to identify and analyse societal patterns of discourse that are both mirrored and constructed through news coverage of the Ring of Fire; taking the Ring of Fire as a case study and analysing news texts related to it at both textual and discursive levels, the project aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the different linguistic features that create and counter dominant discourses on resource extraction in Northern Ontario.

This thesis project contributes to the limited scope of critical discourse analyses related to news media coverage of resource extraction. As mentioned in the preceding section, the impacts

of emergent national transitions and transformations towards ‘green economies’, particularly on the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, are understudied and yet essential to understand as these transitions become reality. Exploring these patterns of discourse is crucial at a time where major mining companies around the world “are positioning themselves centrally in the current vision for the energy transition, which is based purely on a substitution in the source of energy – allowing the majors to maximize profits from this transition” (Barbesgaard & Whitmore, 2022, p.16). Notably, Canada has recently taken steps towards implementing ‘green’ policies meant to transform the Canadian economy to a more environmentally sustainable model. Canada’s 2021 Federal Budget, for example, underscores the importance of joining the global pivot towards a ‘green economic recovery’ from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Finance Canada, 2021). Ontario’s Critical Minerals Strategy (2022-2027) suggests that resource extraction will play a large role in the province’s decarbonization and the energy transition (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2022). This research is therefore conducted simultaneously to these transitions and will contribute to our understanding of resource extraction and ‘green economic transitions’ as they are pursued. Questioning the narratives put forth by mining companies and their proponents, including government actors, is an immediate need; so too is exposing any environmental disinformation present in these narratives.

Thesis Project Structure

This thesis project is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two begins by exploring the literature on greenwashing and the many forms that environmental disinformation can take, especially in news media. Greenwashing is primarily understood in relation to corporate policies; I expand the concept of greenwashing to news coverage to explore how powerful social actors (politicians, corporate representatives, and academic experts) are discursively tackling the

question of green transformations and economic recoveries. Next, the literature on laws, regulations, and treaties relevant to the Ring of Fire and mining development in the region is discussed. Finally, the role of news media in discourse construction is briefly elaborated.

Chapter Three reviews the research objectives of this project and details the methods used to accomplish them. The theoretical and methodological frameworks underpinning the research are detailed, along with a detailed description of the Ring of Fire case study. The data analysis methods, including the dual-level coding framework, are also presented, and the chapter concludes with a description of my positionality as a researcher.

Chapter Four presents the findings from my data analysis; using examples of textual and discursive aspects of the articles analysed, I describe the emergence of three key discursive themes from the data set.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this research project. Beginning with a discussion of the findings, this chapter outlines the dynamics within the discursive themes outlined in the chapter preceding it. Imaginaries for future transformations from the texts are discussed, and then other imaginaries are detailed. Discursive strategies for changing the stories-we-live-by are outlined, and the chapter ends with my concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Shades of Green: Conceptualizing Greenwashing in Politics

The term “greenwashing” was first coined in 1986 in reference to hotels encouraging the re-use of towels by guests, thus appearing to be environmentally conscious while taking little action themselves to protect the environment (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). The concept of greenwashing has since expanded to include a broad spectrum of practices. Delmas and Burbano (2011) conceptualize greenwashing as the intersection of “poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance” (p.67). Generally, greenwashing thus refers to the proliferation of environmental disinformation—intentional or otherwise—that misleads the public about an organization’s environmental practices (Baum, 2012).

This disinformation can take many forms. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, an environmental marketing firm, categorizes greenwashing into seven ‘sins’ (Spaulding, 2009). In order of prevalence, these are: the ‘sin of the hidden trade-off’, where the environmental benefits of something are shared but the environmental costs are hidden; the ‘sin of no proof’, where claims of environmental friendliness are made with no evidence to support them; the ‘sin of vagueness’, where a claim is made but is so vague that it is meaningless and likely to mislead the consumer; the ‘sin of worshipping false labels’, where labels mislead the public into thinking the product is certifiably green; the ‘sin of irrelevance’, where “an environmental issue unrelated to the product is emphasized”; the ‘sin of lesser of two evils’, where a product is claimed to be the greener version of something that is inherently harmful; and the ‘sin of fibbing’, where claims are outright lies (Spaulding, 2009, p.10). Scanlan (2017) builds on these seven sins by analysing how the oil industry frames fracking. Additional sins identified by Scanlan include “false hopes, fearmongering, broken promises, hazardous consequences, injustice, and profits over people and

the environment” (2017, p.1325). A systematic review of the literature on greenwashing by de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) further notes that organizations employ these greenwashing tactics by either claim-making or invoking natural imagery, misleading consumers on an organizational level or on a product or service level.

The literature on greenwashing reveals that it is a widespread yet understudied phenomenon (Pizzetti et al., 2019). Although multidisciplinary, research on greenwashing focuses primarily on disinformation spread by corporations—much of the research occurs in the areas of “Business, Communication, Economy, Production Engineering, Social Sciences, Environmental Management and Law” (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). There is a significant dearth of research on greenwashing in other contexts—particularly in political spheres. Although the term was coined to describe corporate practices, understanding to what degree greenwashing is present in political discourse is imperative as states increasingly use green language to justify policy.

Addressing climate change is becoming increasingly urgent, as is analysing the ways in which policymakers around the globe address it. Current financial and ecological crises have raised global calls to transform economies in ‘green’ ways, and these calls are capturing attention at the highest levels of governance (Scoones et al., 2015). Canada’s 2021 Federal Budget, for example, argues that “The global recovery from the COVID-19 recession will include *seismic investments in a green recovery* ... Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$17.6 billion towards a green recovery to create jobs, build a clean economy, and fight and protect against climate change” (Department of Finance Canada, 2021, p.159-160, emphasis mine). The global transformations that are necessary to combat climate change are thus entangled in the world of politics, and green language is increasingly present in policy. Global calls to action for green

recoveries and transformations are being heard and addressed by this green language—but what ‘green’ means in political discourse is crucial to analyse.

How we move forward globally in tackling the climate crisis matters. Criticism of ‘green’ policies is mounting for employing what corporations have long been criticized for—disseminating environmental disinformation, or greenwashing. A major criticism of dominant ‘green’ political discourses argues that they “support narrow meanings of ‘green’ that ignore large swathes of human understanding, culture, values and experience. They align too easily with top-down, control-oriented forms of intervention that attempt to substitute ‘fixes’ for required structural transformations and can ride roughshod over people’s rights and livelihoods” (Leach, 2015, p.37). As such, modern green political discourses may not reflect grassroots understandings of environmental protection, but that of societal elites; instead of transforming societies and aiding in recovery, they are aimed at maintaining the status quo.

Another criticism of greenwashed politics is informed by Indigenous ontologies. While dominant Western belief systems tend to view the natural world as resources and property, many Indigenous ontologies around the world emphasize building a relationship with the environment based on reciprocity (McGregor et al., 2020). Current forms of addressing the climate crisis by international bodies such as the United Nations, which include ‘green economies’ and ‘natural capital’ approaches, “have been labeled by Indigenous peoples as ‘false solutions’ that have done little to alter the current course” (McGregor et al., 2020, p. 36). Traditional Knowledge, Indigenous analyses, and mounting scientific evidence all point to ‘green’ politics failing to maintain the health of the planet (McGregor et al., 2020). Indigenous-led approaches include bottom-up ones like the Latin American *Buen Vivir* (“to live well”); founded on Quechuan and

Aymaran worldviews, it proposes moving away from unfettered economic growth and overconsumption and instead toward the wellbeing of communities (Chassagne, 2019).

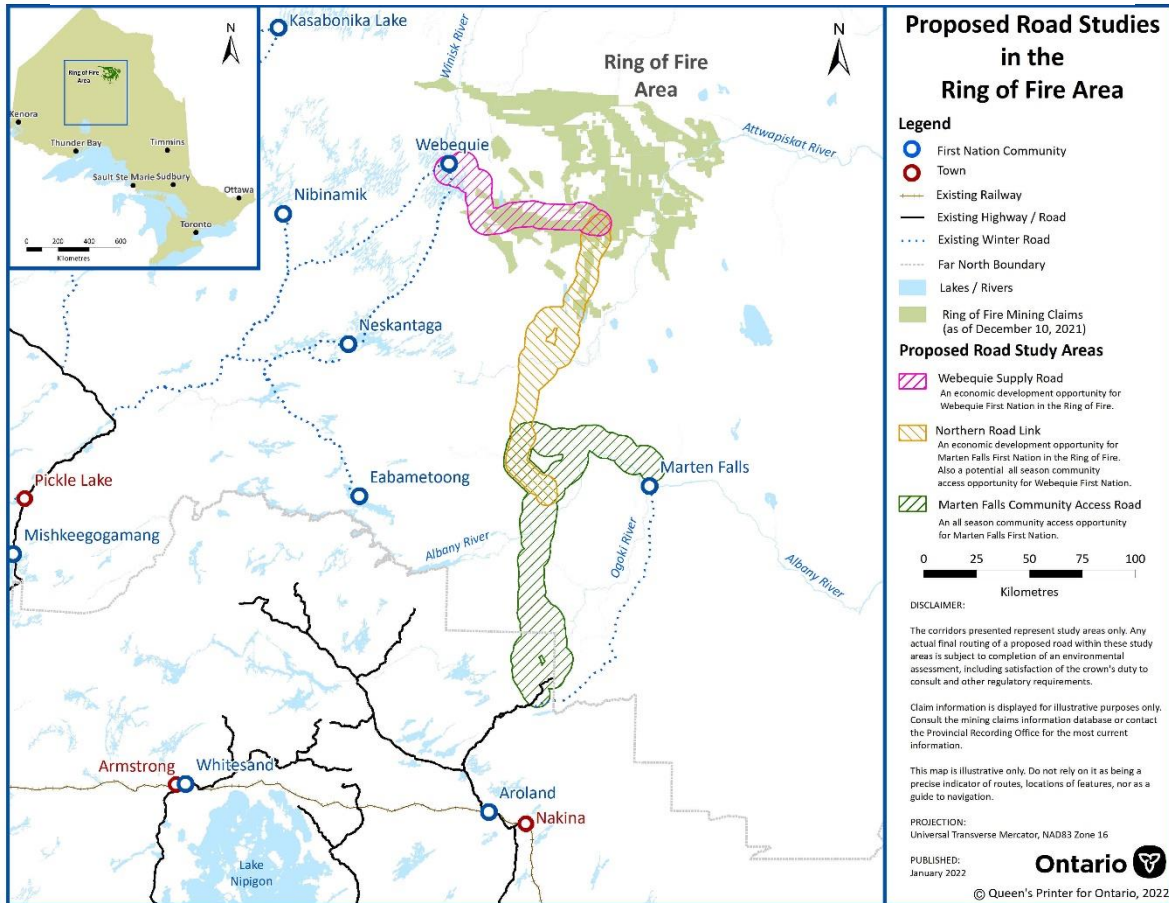
As these critiques show, it is imperative to analyse green language in politics. Greenwashing comes in many forms, and its presence in politics is especially alarming given the global crises we find ourselves in. Understanding what ‘green’ means in legislature, how politicians use the language of green to promote policy, and what impacts ‘green’ policies have on the environment are key in ensuring our societies’ ‘green recoveries’ are, in fact, environmentally just.

Ontario’s Resource Extraction Legislation, Treaty 9, and the Ring of Fire

These critiques of top-down environmental intervention that could imperil people’s livelihoods are present in Ontario’s political discourse. McRoberts et al., for example, argue that Ontario’s *Green Energy and Green Economy Act* is misleadingly named, as “the province’s centralised, top-down financing, development and approval processes ... [are] perpetuating environmental, social and procedural injustices” (2016, as cited in Tsuji, 2021, p.18). In this case, the ‘green’ in the *Green Energy and Green Economy Act* reflects the understanding of ‘green’ that is held by political elites—one that not only inadequately fights environmental and social injustices happening in the province, but one that actively perpetuates these injustices. The act allows for the expediting of hydroelectric-power generation projects that have severely negative effects on the local environment (Tsuji, 2021). In Ontario, most of the potential land for these projects exists in First Nations homelands, which would bear the brunt of the environmental costs while accruing little benefit from the projects (Tsuji, 2021). Tsuji asserts that this legislation is part of a larger body of policy that allows for environmental assimilation—

where the environment is developed so much that it no longer supports Indigenous livelihoods and cultural activities (2021).

Figure 1. Official Map of Ontario’s Proposed Road Environmental Assessment Areas in the Ring of Fire (“Ontario’s Ring”, 2022).



A troubling dimension to the Ring of Fire question lies in the implications these ‘green’ policies would have for Indigenous jurisdiction. The Ring of Fire is in Ontario’s Far North, a region in which 90 percent of inhabitants are First Nation peoples; more specifically, it is in Treaty 9 territory and is closest to the traditional territories of nine First Nations, each self-

governing but all united under the Matawa Tribal Council (Sbert, 2020). Ring of Fire developments would also impact other First Nations outside of the Matawa Tribal Council, such as those located in the Attawapiskat watershed; Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, and Kashechewan First Nations are all located downstream from the Ring of Fire and thus “will experience impacts on their use and occupancy of lands, and impacts on their ways of life, harvesting and jurisdiction stemming from the proposed mines and road routes” (Scott et al., 2020, p.33). Indigenous jurisdiction faces a unique challenge here due to the Ring of Fire’s location in Treaty 9 territory. The written treaty contains what is “Commonly referred to as the ‘take-up clause,’ [meaning] the terms of the written treaty permit the province of Ontario to reclaim any land set aside for Treaty 9 for its own purposes, from fishing to mining to economic development” (Slowey, 2022, p.126). Essentially, Indigenous peoples in Treaty 9 territory have a right to use the land until the government wishes to ‘take up’ the land for purposes including mining—resource extraction over which Ontario has full jurisdiction (Sbert, 2020). The written treaty, however, differs from accounts of the oral explanations that the Ojibwe and Cree signatories consented to; as Long (2006) details:

the Ojibway and Cree only agreed to the treaty once they were assured that they would be free to hunt and fish as they had for countless centuries, and would not be forced to live on reserves. There is no evidence that the Ojibway and Cree understood they were giving away ninety-nine percent of their land area, merely retaining small reserves. Half of northern Ontario may have been acquired through Treaty No. 9, more than a quarter it in 1905 alone, but it does not seem to have been knowingly or willingly ceded, released, surrendered or yielded up by the Ojibway and Cree. (p.28)

Questions of Indigenous jurisdiction in Treaty 9 territory are alive to this day, as the First Nations assert that they never ceded their lands or right to self-governance, while the Crown believes it has complete authority over Treaty 9 lands (Sbert, 2020). In 2011, the Matawa First Nations declared their rights to the resources on their lands, “requiring [their] written consent before any development activity may proceed” (Sbert, 2020, p.127). As such, mining is one form of development through which Ontario can, under its own laws, override Indigenous jurisdiction. Policies that would do so under the guise of ‘green development’ thus pose a threat to Indigenous livelihoods; a brief review of some of these policies follows.

In an analysis of Treaty 9, the *Far North Act*, the *Mining Amendment Act*, the *Green Energy and Green Economy Act*, and the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, Tsuji (2021) found that all contain wording that “override important clauses in the documents or amend other pieces of legislation protecting the Indigenous homelands and their way of life” (p.25). The *Endangered Species Act* also makes exceptions for resource extraction activities; it prohibits harm to endangered species and their habitats, but mining activities are exempt from it (Sbert, 2020). The *Mining Amendment Act* and *Far North Act* both stipulate that First Nations interests could be overridden if development is deemed to be in the best interests of Ontario (Tsuji, 2021). Considering that Doug Ford has claimed that mining the Ring of Fire will “benefit everyone in Ontario”, it is unsurprising that some First Nations leaders are critical of the way development is being pursued (CBC News, 2018, para. 6). In a press release, Eabametoong Chief Harvey Yesno asserted that “Ontario has been unashamed in its aggressive approach to prepare to access the wealth and resources of the James Bay Treaty No. 9 Territory” (as cited in Baxter & Smith, 2021, p. 7). Similarly, Neskantaga First Nation criticized the way in which the consultation process was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing that “the Webequie Supply Road

will bisect Neskantaga's lands and change forever the options for ensuring the continued practice of Neskantaga's way of life on Neskantaga territory” (Porter, 2020). Running the risk of changing the land in such ways it can no longer support Indigenous livelihoods means running the risk of environmental assimilation.

One of the latest pieces of legislation that could affect Indigenous jurisdiction in the Ring of Fire was the Ford government’s Bill 197, *The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, which received royal assent with unusual speed in July 2020 (Slowey, 2022). The bill was passed with no public consultation and altered twenty other legislations and seems “designed to ensure that the Ring of Fire development proceeds quickly and relatively unimpeded by processes or procedures designed to protect [First Nations] interests” (Slowey, 2022, 136). Lastly, the *Building More Mines Act 2023*, which received royal assent on May 18 2023, removes further mining regulations, including the role of Director of Mine rehabilitation and the need for a government technical review of closure plans. This act has been criticized by the Matawa Chiefs Council as it “avoids crown responsibilities to First Nations across the North” (Dufour, 2023).

The Role of Media in Discourse Construction

Understanding news media discourse on the Ring of Fire is essential to understanding the stories we tell ourselves about resource extraction in Northern Ontario. The language of news media is essential to interrogate, because it plays a critical role in shaping how individuals in a society understand it and their role within it. This is especially important in societies like Canada, where beliefs about our roles in environmental transformations are currently in the process of being negotiated. News media “has social effects: through its power to shape issue agendas and public discourse, it can reinforce beliefs; it can shape people’s opinions not only of the world but also of their *place* and *role* in the world; or, if not shape your opinions on a

particular matter, it can at the very least influence *what* you have opinions on; in sum, it can help shape social reality by shaping our *views* of social reality” (Richardson, 2007, p.13). News media is thus a key arena of, not only discourse creation, but negotiation. News texts on the Ring of Fire can shape what aspects of the Ring of Fire are worthy of having an opinion on, what those opinions are, and public beliefs about what role the Ring of Fire can and should play in Canada’s green transformation.

Importantly, news media discourse does not exist in a vacuum. News, as Fowler (1991) argues, is not a natural phenomenon grounded in reality but a product “produced by an industry, shaped by the bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry, by the relations between the media and other industries and, most importantly, by relations with government and with other political organizations” (p.222). Thus, news media has power to shape its audiences understanding of the world, and this power is linked to existing power structures in the society that produces it. Often, it reflects the values that built that same bureaucratic and economic structure.

National news media organizations and their subsidiaries have a particular ability to leave a lasting ideological impression on Canadian audiences. In a discourse analysis of newspaper coverage of the oil sands, Way (2011) notes that the audiences of Postmedia Network Inc., The Globe and Mail, and the Toronto Star “have neither direct experience with oil sands development nor acquaintance with the area. If the media simply ‘mirrors’ reality, this would not be a problem. However, since most important issues are multi-dimensional with many different angles, the media ‘frames’ issues by promoting a pre-existing storyline promoted by political elites, unearthing a dormant or alternative one, or ‘creating their own thematic interpretations” (p.80). This also rings true in Ring of Fire news media discourse; the Canadian general public

has little experience with the Far North, and most Canadians have no experience in resource development in Treaty 9 territories. As such, the way media frames the Ring of Fire, and the discursive themes that are present in news media discourse, can shape audience understandings towards one dominant narrative. Given that there are only a handful of major national newspaper organizations in Canada, and that the news industry sells a product influenced by its relations with industries and government, it is fair to say that this product will be partial to those industries and government. Way (2011) further notes that societal values, like economic ones of free enterprise, tend to lead “media to apply a ‘business’ filter to public policy issues” (p.80). As such, news media discourse from national news organizations tends toward an economic lens on multi-dimensional issues like the Ring of Fire, particularly under the current Progressive Conservative provincial government that stresses “Ontario is open for business”; other perspectives run the risk of marginalization or erasure. The language used by news media to frame such issues is thus imperative to study if we wish to reveal what stories are being told, and which are being left on the sidelines.

There is a need for interdisciplinary research on the connections between language and the comprehension of environmental and ecological issues (Alexander, 2008). Ecolinguistics provides us with a theoretical framework from which to approach this research. This branch of linguistics can be traced back about fifty years, when Norwegian-American linguist Einar Haugen conceptualized the ecology of language as the interactions between language and its social environment (Penz & Fill, 2022). As described by Stibbe, ecolinguistics postulates that we relate to nature as follows:

The link between *ecology* and *language* is that how humans treat each other and the natural world is influenced by our thoughts, concepts, ideas, ideologies, and worldviews,

and these in turn are shaped through language ... it is through language that the natural world is mentally reduced to objects or resources to be conquered, and it is through language that people can be encouraged to respect and care for the systems that support life. (2015, p.2)

Language thus plays a key role in how we relate to the environment that surrounds us; similarly, our worldviews and ideas about the environment can shape the language we use to relate to it. Ecolinguistic analyses of how language is used across texts, including news media, is meant to reveal what worldviews are produced and reproduced in these texts concerning the natural world.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter reviews the objectives and purpose behind the research and then describes the research design in detail. This serves as a prelude to the discussion of the case study framework for this project, in which the case of the Ring of Fire and its related discourse is elaborated. This chapter also describes the theoretical framework rooted in ecolinguistics, as well as the methodological framework based on critical discourse analysis, that inform the project. I then discuss the data used in this project, the coding framework used to analyse it, and considerations for analytic rigour. This chapter concludes with a statement on my own positionality in order to place myself within this research and offer transparency regarding my worldview.

Research Objectives and Purpose

This master's thesis project is a qualitative case study on the various discourses (re)produced in newspaper coverage concerning the Ring of Fire region in Northwestern Ontario. The main objective of this research is to understand and richly describe the discursive strategies and linguistic features that news media organizations employ in their coverage of resource extraction. Analysing coverage of the Ring of Fire region, a region gaining prominence in the public consciousness, can further understanding of not only the range of discourses that exist around resource extraction, but also the link between those discourses and emerging strategies for future practices and societal transformations—how discourses both reflect and create social realities.

The project uses multiple sources of information on the single case of one site (the Ring of Fire) to explore the larger issue of greenwashed and destructive narratives and their

counternarratives regarding resource extraction. It is important to note that my objective is not to reveal the biases of the news media organizations whose articles I am analysing—through a simple web search, it is revealed that these organizations tend to be biased towards corporate interests—but rather, *how* these biases reach their intended audience and what narratives are involved in this discursive process. Given these features, this project is a single instrumental case study, in which a bounded case is selected to illustrate a particular issue or concern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This project thus contributes to the field of critical discourse analysis, expanding on the limited body of critical linguistic analysis work related to extractivist language in news media. With these objectives and design in mind, the questions guiding this research are as follows: How are discourses (re)produced in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region in Canada? What general discursive themes are dominant in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire? How do the narratives within these themes relate to imaginaries for future green transformations?

Approach to Inquiry: Case Study on Ring of Fire Discourse

When attempting to answer questions related to ‘how’ something happens in the contemporary world, and the researcher has little control over the behaviours they are studying, a qualitative case study approach has a distinct advantage over other methods to the research being conducted (Yin, 2014). A ‘case’ is something that is bounded—usually, by space, time, or demographic—and a case study collects data around one or more bounded cases to describe or explain something about it (Adu, 2019). This project is concerned with how discourse related to resource extraction is both produced and reproduced in modern news media, something that the researcher has no control over; the case study approach is thus applied with intent to this project.

The case chosen to explore this problem is the discourse related to the mining developments proposed for the Ring of Fire region in Ontario.

This project was designed as a single-case study. Single-case inquiry is appropriate when the case being examined is extreme or unique, as well as when the case is critical; that is, when “the single case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building” (Yin, 2014, p. 48). The discourse related to the Ring of Fire easily presents a unique case, one that can contribute greatly to the fields of critical discourse analysis and ecolinguistics.

The minerals staking rush in the Ring of Fire area began in 2002, when De Beers explored the area for diamonds and instead found “interesting grades of copper-zinc mineralization” (Cranston, 2010, p.3). Over two decades later, politicians from all major parties of government in Ontario—Conservative, Liberal, New Democratic, and Green—have joined multiple corporations in calling for the extraction of resources from the area, particularly in the region of the Eagle’s Nest. These calls intensified in 2018 when, prior to his election, Doug Ford famously stated “If I have to hop on that bulldozer myself with [Nipissing MPP] Vic on the other one, we're going to start building the roads to get to the mining ... There's over \$60 billion up there. It's going to benefit local people but it's also going to benefit everyone in Ontario” (CBC News, 2018, paras. 5-6).

After his election and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the discourse around the Ring of Fire took on a new, unique, and not solely economic form. As mentioned earlier in this project, Canada’s federal budget emphasizes investments in a ‘green economic recovery’ (Department of Finance Canada, 2021). Crucially, the Ring of Fire is purported to benefit the Canadian public through contributing significant amounts of ‘critical minerals’ for the manufacture of electric cars, paving the way towards this green economic transition.

The Ring of Fire region is the only mining region with a dedicated section in *Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy: Unlocking potential to drive economic recovery and prosperity 2022-2027*, where it is deemed a “priority project for Ontario” (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2022, p.14). Speaking of the possible wealth of critical minerals in the region, Minister Rickford wrote that “When our products reach the market, our trading partners know that Ontario is a jurisdiction with a clean electricity grid, high environmental standards ... Ontario also has robust consultation processes for all mineral development opportunities and always respects Indigenous rights” (Ontario Ministry of National Resources and Forestry, 2022, p.5). A report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) opens with the assertion that the Ring of Fire is “the most promising mining opportunity in Canada in a century” (Hjartarson et al., 2014, p.1). Suggested in this action plan is the coordination of a public awareness and education campaign on the benefits of mining the Ring of Fire; it then states that “The OCC is offering to lead a joint effort aimed at guiding the Ring of Fire into the public imagination” (Hjartarson et al., 2014, p.27). The discourse around the Ring of Fire is thus both unique and critical to analyse—it is significant, complex, multifaceted, and to an extent, intentionally constructed. Studying this particular case is instrumental to not only our understanding of Ring of Fire discourse construction, but of discourse construction related to resource extraction more generally; this project is thus a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995).

Theoretical Framework: Ecolinguistics

The theoretical framework of this project is informed by Stibbe’s work on ecolinguistics and ecosophy (2015). Ecolinguistics is concerned with the ‘stories-we-live-by’; not stories that we consciously and individually engage with, but those that exist between lines of text and in the minds of many individuals in a culture without announcing themselves as stories (Stibbe, 2015).

These stories-we-live-by are omnipresent as part of socio-cultural transmission in societies, manifesting in news stories, conversations with coworkers, songs, and advertisements, and influence how we think and act in the world (Stibbe, 2015). Exposing these stories-we-live-by allows the ecolinguist to carefully consider what actions they promote— “if nature is seen as a resource then we may be more likely to exploit it, or if economic growth is seen as the primary goal of politics then people’s wellbeing and the ecosystems which support life may be overlooked” (Stibbe, 2015, p.6). This field of work rests on the philosophical assumption “that highlighting the way that discourse may be inhumane or destructive will create more awareness of the role of language in dealing with the environment” (Penz & Fill, 2022, p.237).

All ecolinguistic evaluation is subject to the ecosophy of the individual researcher. Ecosophy, a portmanteau of ‘ecological philosophy’, refers to an individual’s personal philosophy as it relates to the environment (Næss & Rothenberg, 1989). Simply revealing the stories-we-live-by may not involve subjective normative evaluation; however, evaluating whether the stories-we-live-by are ‘good’, or whether they’re problematic and new stories need to be sought out, is ultimately something subject to the ecosophy of the researcher (Stibbe, 2015). Ecosophies vary wildly between individuals and along the political spectrum, and a responsible researcher “will survey the wide range of possible ecosophies described in the literature, consider them carefully in light of available evidence ... and build their own ecosophy through combining them, extending them or creating something entirely new” (Stibbe, 2015). In the interests of transparency, my ecosophy is explored in the ‘Positionality’ section later in this chapter.

The project is thus approached through an ecolinguistics lens, revealing the stories our society lives by as presented in the news media articles being analysed through the methodological framework below.

Methodological Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis project unveils the role of local and national news coverage in constructing discourse surrounding the developments in the Ring of Fire region and roots its methodological framework in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a close cousin to ecolinguistics and has been used in the ecological analysis of language since the late 1990s (Penz & Fill, 2022).

CDA is a theory and method of analysing the relationships between language, the social contexts that language is being used in, and the social consequences of the use of such language (Richardson, 2007). For the purposes of this study, I am using Richardson's (2007) definition of discourse as 'language in use'; it is a definition that is simple yet precise. Resting on the key assumption that language use matters, CDA aims to not only describe discourse, but to demonstrate "how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief" (Fairclough, 1992, p.13). In other words, the purpose of CDA is to illuminate the ways in which language use both shapes and is shaped by societies and the power relations within them. Analysing discursive texts produced in a particular society—such as news articles, textbooks, and political speeches—thus sheds a certain degree of insight into the power dynamics that these texts reinforce, transform, or counter. Traditionally, the power dynamics that CDA is concerned with are those between humans, but ecolinguists have adapted this approach to cover both human-human and human-nature dynamics (Penz & Fill, 2022).

The literature on CDA is expansive and many approaches to applying CDA exist (e.g. Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Fairclough's model (1992, 2003, 2013) informs my interpretation of the newspaper articles pertaining to the Ring of Fire; on his work on newspaper analyses, Richardson argues that Fairclough's social-cultural approach to CDA "provides a more accessible method of *doing* CDA than alternative theoretical approaches" (2007, p.37). This methodological framework is both useful and highly appropriate to my analysis as CDA is a tool meant to unearth discourses that maintain existing power hierarchies and often go unchallenged, with the aim of challenging them. CDA acknowledges that the stories-we-live-by do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced by the voices that create these stories. Fairclough (2003) writes that "Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions" (p.124). As mentioned in the 'Approach to Inquiry' section of this chapter, if organizations like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have expressed a desire to shape the public imagination of the Ring of Fire, then it is crucial to understand the hidden power imbalances and dynamics of domination and struggle within the discourses available to the public imagination. I focus on national and regional news coverage of the Ring of Fire as an accessible means through which discourse and the public interact.

Data Sourcing: Online and Print News Articles via ProQuest

As mentioned, this study analyses both national and local news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region of Northern Ontario. To richly describe Ring of Fire discourse and unearth the stories-we-live-by that shape how we relate to the world around us, both online and print media sources are important to analyse. According to a recent Canada-wide study, 86% of

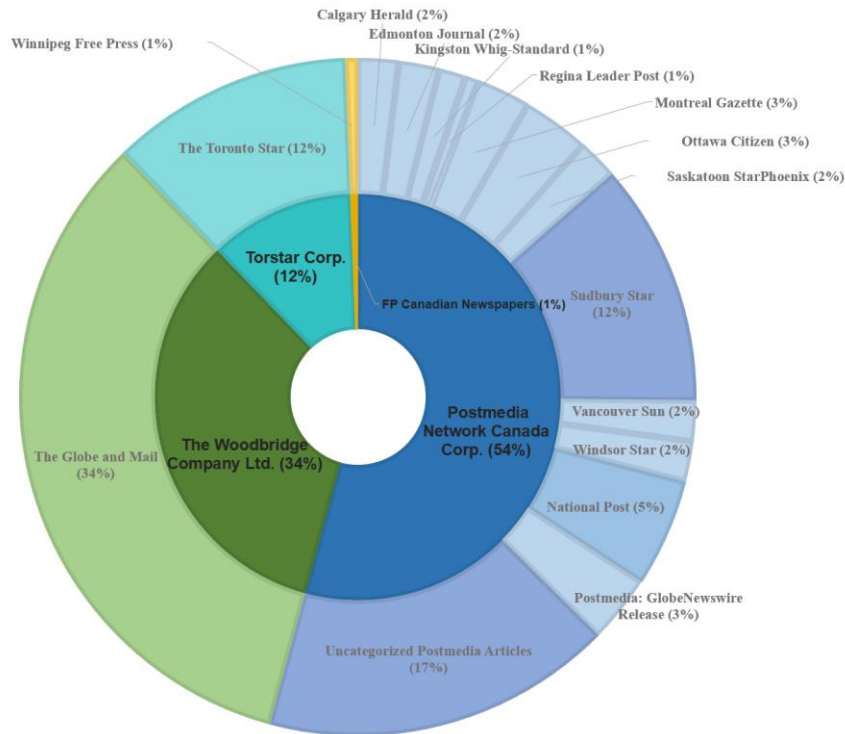
Canadians consume news on a daily basis (Maru Public Opinion, 2022). The majority of these people get their news from mainstream sources, and the top sources vary by age group. Canadians most likely to vote, those 35 years of age and older, rely heavily on newspaper websites and print media; 35% of those aged 35 to 54 consume news through a newspaper website, and of those aged 55 and up, 29% pay for or subscribe to a daily newspaper, 29% check newspaper websites, and 26% read community newspapers (Maru Public Opinion, 2022). Data from this year notes the most common source used by all Canadians for following news is the Internet, used by 80% of survey respondents, while traditional newspapers were read by 36% of respondents (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Traditional news sources have also taken on an important role for Canadians since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of misinformation about it. A survey from Statistics Canada found that “96% of Canadians who used the Internet to find information saw COVID-19 information that they suspected was misleading, false or inaccurate” (Garneau & Zossou, 2021). In order to obtain reliable information during the pandemic, many Canadians turned to established sources to understand current events. Over 60% of Canadians turned to news sites and online newspapers for their information, and 35% turned to social media posts from these news organizations (Statistics Canada, 2020). During the time period that this project is concerned with (January 1, 2021, to Sept 27, 2022), Canadians looked to online news as a source of credible information and trustworthy narratives. Regional and national news media is thus a vital source of information for Canadians about the events that occur around them.

Articles for this project were collected through Canadian Major Dailies, a ProQuest database of over 35 Canadian newspapers. All print and online stories in this database containing the phrases “Ring of Fire” and “Ontario” published between January 1, 2021, and Sept 27, 2022

were compiled. This period was chosen as it coincides with the beginning of Canada's turn towards a green recovery from COVID-19, and it ends on the date NorOnt Resources Limited was renamed Ring of Fire Metals, finalizing its rebranding from a Canadian resource extraction company to an Australian resource solutions one. Barbesgaard and Whitmore (2022) assert that this rebranding of mining companies as minerals or materials solutions ones is a common trend among major mining corporations across the globe. This nearly 20-month period also holds interest because it includes both regular coverage of Ring of Fire developments and special coverage of the provincial election, during which political actors spoke about their promises for the region to the general public. From the original 248 articles, articles were removed if they were irrelevant (e.g. four references to a "ring of fire" eclipse and one reference to a vaccination "ring of fire"); if the Ring of Fire was mentioned only briefly as part of a report on a business's financial information or to concisely describe the role of a political actor (e.g. articles exploring Doug Ford's new cabinet often noted that Minister George Pirie had "a mandate to develop the Ring of Fire"); if the Ring of Fire was mentioned briefly with no context; or if an update was published on the same day through the same news outlet (e.g. removed 10 live updates for one article and kept the main article containing all the information listed in the ones prior). The final sample included 155 items to analyse.

Figure 2. Composition of Data Set by News Organization



This data set contains news articles, opinion pieces, editorials, press releases, and letters to the editor from the following news organizations: FP Newspapers Inc. (Winnipeg Free Press), Postmedia Network Inc. (including National Post, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Kingston Whig-Standard, Regina Leader-Post, Montreal Gazette, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, The Sudbury Star, Ottawa Citizen, The Vancouver Sun, Windsor Star, and unclassified “Postmedia Network Inc.” releases), The Globe and Mail, and The Toronto Star. Many of the regional news articles under the Postmedia Network Inc. umbrella are re-hashed versions of the articles released nationally through the National Post. They were kept in the data set as there were small but significant changes to the language used in regional articles. Of the 155 articles in the data set, 99 were unique stories. 56 were stories that covered the same news development, often with

slightly different language, published through the same news organization but through a different outlet (e.g. a story published by Postmedia Network Inc. through the National Post, then republished through the Sudbury Star).

Ultimately, this project is a qualitative discourse analysis, not a quantitative content analysis. Richardson (2007) argues that, while quantitative description and coding of texts is useful in organizing and separating data, “in critical research this is only a starting point ... further questions need to be asked of the data compiled ... What points of view about life and the world as [the communicator] sees them are implied and facilitated?” (p.19). Therefore, word frequency counts and coding categories are only a start to the analysis. It is not how often a word is mentioned across texts, but the words themselves and what they unveil that are of interest. Small changes in language could convey larger changes in implied perspectives, and thus the 56 republished stories were kept in the data set. Aggregating different forms of news documents from various outlets was crucial to this project. Collecting data from multiple sources in this way is consistent with rigorous case study methodology and ensures an in-depth understanding of the case from various perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The full data set was saved and imported into NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program, used for organizational purposes and to begin the coding process.

Methods of Data Analysis: CDA Coding Procedure, Framework, and Dual-Level Analysis

Once my data set was finalized, I imported the data into NVivo. Adu’s work on qualitative data coding notes that software like NVivo “helps in running a quick preliminary analysis to learn more about the data before the coding process starts” (2019, p.64). I ran the data through the autocode function to organize it and began to note interesting themes. After organizing the data, I read through each article in the data set multiple times, noting down my

thoughts and ideas. I reflected on and explored these ideas, asking questions like: Who are the main actors in this text and what words are used to characterize them? Who is not present in this discourse? What characteristics of the Ring of Fire are foregrounded, and which are backgrounded? How is the environment in the region described? What metaphors, if any, are used? What justifications are given for resource extraction? What assumptions are being made that may reflect local understandings? What stories do these characteristics tell? Finally, and perhaps most crucially – as Fairclough (2013) invites the researcher to investigate: how do the articles “link these narratives to imaginaries for future practices, institutions, and systems ... how [do] they justify actions and policy proposals and legitimise imagined changed practices and systems?” (p.19).

‘Memoing’ my thoughts on these questions allowed me to make an initial foray into the data before formally coding through my framework; Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that memoing throughout the analysis ensures richer explanations and higher credibility to the qualitative analysis process. Recording one’s own thoughts in this manner is “a tool to facilitate the development of codes, categories, themes and theories” (Adu, 2019, p.87). I then conducted a thorough review of the literature to strengthen my coding framework. I chose to use NVivo as solely an organizational tool and ultimately conduct my coding manually, using the coding framework described below.

The coding framework draws from multiple sources: the data itself, the literature on Ring of Fire and resource extraction more generally, and the literature on critical discourse analysis and the environment. The concepts and tools borrowed from these bodies of work were used to complete two levels of analysis: a textual analysis and an analysis of discursive practices. By analyzing these characteristics, I was able to gain insight into my main research problem—

namely, how discourses are being produced and reproduced in these texts. The findings of this analysis were then organized into three broad discursive themes that emerged.

The textual analysis began with a micro-analysis of words and sentences (naming and reference, predication, collocation, and presupposition) and expanded to a macro-analysis of meanings in each text as a whole (metaphor and euphemism).

This analysis began with an exploration of how people, places, and objects were named and referred to; as argued by Richardson (2007), naming and reference analysis matters as “The way that people are named in news discourse can have significant impact on the way in which they are viewed” (p.49). Similarly, predication is “the choice of words used to represent more directly the values and characteristics of social actors” (Richardson, 2007, p.52). Describing a politician as ‘the strong-willed Premier’ during a debate, for example, constitutes positive predication; it can also be used negatively, to undermine and criticize the object of description. I extended my analysis to the naming, reference, and predication of not only social actors, but also the environment central to these news stories.

Beyond analysing singular words, I also examined the meaning of phrases and sentences through collocation and presupposition. Collocation refers to words that are habitually juxtaposed with one another. An example of this kind of analysis is described in Fairclough (2003) as follows:

In a corpus analysis of texts of New Labour and ‘old’ Labour (i.e. texts from earlier stages of Labour Party history), it emerged clearly that although the word ‘work’ was, rather obviously, rather common in both, its collocative patterns were different. ‘Back to work’, ‘into work’, ‘desire to work’, ‘opportunities to work’, ‘Welfare-to-work’ reflect

common collocations in the New Labour corpus, whereas ‘out of work’, ‘right to work’, ‘democracy at work’, ‘health and safety at work’ reflect common patterns in the ‘old’ Labour corpus. Generalizing over the results, the focus in New labour is on getting people off welfare and into work, the focus in ‘old’ Labour is on improving conditions and relations in work, on unemployment as an infringement of the ‘right to work’ and a responsibility for Government. (p.131).

Presuppositions are also an important aspect of textual analysis; they are the hidden meaning of phrases found between the lines of text, the “taken-for-granted, implicit claim embedded within the explicit meaning of a text or utterance” (Richardson, 2007, p.63). These are often found in news media, particularly in stories meant to sensationalize. An example of this is a question that aired on the BBC shortly before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, asking "Do you think military attack is the best way of *ending Iraqi belligerence*?" - presuming that Iraq was, in fact, being belligerent (Richardson 2007, p.63).

My textual analysis ends with a dive into larger portions of the articles themselves; I accomplish this through an examination of two forms of framing: metaphor and euphemism. As described by Stibbe (2015), “*Metaphors* use a frame from a specific, concrete, and imaginable area of life to structure how a clearly distinct area of life is conceptualised” (p.64). Fairclough’s definition of a metaphor describes how they are a tool for creating unique representations of the world, and distinguishes between “‘lexical metaphor’, words which generally represent one part of the world being extended to another, and ... grammatical metaphor (e.g. processes being represented as ‘things’, entities, through ‘nominalization’)” (2003, p.131). When it comes to how we speak about the environment, metaphors matter. We often use metaphors related to femininity when referring to nature, for example (e.g. ‘mother nature’, ‘virgin/fertile/barren

lands’). This “has serious implications for our relationship with the natural world and with each other. The association of women and femininity, with nature in environmental discourse perpetuates patriarchal traditions and domination” (Berman, 2001, as cited in Coffey, 2016, p.207). Metaphors can work to reinforce existing power structures in society, but they can also work to undermine those power structures. There exists the potential to promote sustainability and cultural change through the use of ‘better metaphors’ (Coffey, 2016).

Metaphors are an imaginative substitution of one idea for another; I am also concerned with euphemism, substitution that is meant instead to create a sense of comfort and safety in the audience. Euphemisms are a feature of language that “can also disguise the world. It can channel access to it in a specific way or structure it according to particular and not always honourable aims or purposes ... a euphemism is an alternative choice of word used to disguise something unpleasant or undesirable.” (Alexander, 2008, p.171). Euphemisms can be used as a tool to diminish or undermine criticism of dominant forms of discourse. Analyzing these aspects of the texts will shed some light on the discursive themes and strategies present in Canadian news coverage of the Ring of Fire.

The second level of analysis, that of discursive practices, is an essential part of CDA. To go beyond textual analysis and infer meaning from texts, one must account for the social setting of the text – particularly when it comes to news discourse, which both influences an audience and is influenced by an audience (Richardson, 2007). To account for the methods used by journalists to construct texts for their intended audiences, I employed the tools of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007).

Intertextuality is the notion that “Texts cannot be viewed or studied in isolation since texts are not produced or consumed in isolation; all texts exist, and therefore must be understood,

in relation to other texts” (Richardson, 2007, p.100). With regards to critical analysis of news media discourse, Richardson (2007) differentiates between internal and external intertextuality: internal intertextuality concerning itself with texts borrowing from previously formed texts (e.g. quotations, press copies, and reported speech) and external intertextuality being concerned with the relationship between texts and outside texts (e.g. a running news story, or a letter to the editor responding to a previously published article). Intertextuality is closely related to the concept of interdiscursivity—that is, the exploration of how texts are composed of a diverse combination of discourses (Fairclough, 2013). The relationships between discourses can be complementary, inclusive, or contradictory (Fairclough, 2013).

The unit of analysis for this project was thus the individual media article. Each article was read and coded through the dual-level framework described above. Not every form of analysis applied to every article; some articles were rich in metaphor and euphemism, for example, but did not quote any individuals or outside texts. The framework served as a toolbox through which I could explore the socio-discursive features of the articles. To group the codes into coherent themes, I followed the individual-based sorting strategy outlined by Adu (2019); this strategy involves examining the features of each code, determining the dominant codes, clustering the codes into themes according to their similarities, and labelling the themes such that the labels both represent the characteristics in the clusters and work towards answering the research question.

Considerations for Rigour, Trustworthiness, and Subjectivity

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to assessing qualitative research for quality; however, there are certain standards for rigour and trustworthiness that I have kept in mind throughout each phase of this project. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of

rigorous methods in a qualitative study—from using one or more recognized approaches in the methodology of the project, to organizing the data collected in a tabled summary and conducting data analysis on multiple levels. I have kept rigour in mind throughout the design and implementation of this project because of the subjective nature of critical discourse analysis—choosing appropriate methodological and theoretical frameworks, organizing the data set and conducting a dual-level analysis on the data, approaching my interpretation of it from both a textual and discursive lens. As argued by Greckhamer and Cilesiz, the judgement and interpretation of data through CDA “will necessarily (if not intentionally) be shaped by an individual researcher’s epistemological assumptions and values ... conducting rigorous analyses grounded in epistemological and theoretical assumptions of discourse analysis aids in establishing the trustworthiness of these interpretations and rendering defensible knowledge claims” (2014, p.425). I made use of four tools the authors propose – ‘a framework enabling systematic analysis of discourse building blocks’ within my coding framework, ‘tabulating the discourse analysis process’ and ‘crafting the description of findings’ in the findings chapter, ‘narrating the process of interpretation’ in the discussion chapter – to enhance transparency in how I have interpreted in the data and ultimately trustworthiness in how I have completed this project (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014).

As noted above, CDA by definition involves the worldview of the researcher that collects and interprets the data. Some may view this as a limitation of this project. My background in political justice influences how I think about the events and text I am analysing; a researcher from a geology, economics, or Indigenous justice background may approach the raw data differently from me and extract themes different from mine, ones made apparent to them through

their knowledge. Nonetheless, my positionality allows me a unique insight into the data I am interpreting. Below, I share my positionality with intentionality; as van Dijk (1993) explains:

Unlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit sociopolitical stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Although not in each stage of theory formation and analysis, their work is admittedly and ultimately political. Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding. Their perspective, if possible, that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. Their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice. That is, one of the criteria of their work is solidarity with those who need it most ... In this sense, critical discourse scholars should also be social and political scientists, as well as social critics and activists (p. 252-253).

Positionality

I do not come to this research neutrally. It is important for any researcher to be openly reflexive and transparent; as stated in Rose (1997), “knowledge is marked by its origins” (p.397). This is especially true when it comes to CDA. As a Latin American immigrant to Canada, I have been aware of power inequalities and the relationship between language and power since I can remember. My first political protest was in Venezuela at the age of five, against political corruption and economic mismanagement. As one of my earliest memories, I vividly remember banging pots and pans together with my parents, joining what felt like the entire apartment complex out on their balconies in a form of protest known as a *cacerolazo*. Between the noisemaking, we chanted the phrase “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido” (translated: “The

people, united, will never be defeated”). To this day, those words give me goosebumps; they have been used against dictatorships of every stripe, and hold within them a history of struggle.

As my interest in politics grew over time, so did my interest in injustice. I studied Peace, Conflict, and Justice Studies at the University of Toronto; the program is run by the Munk School of Global Affairs. While I did not get exposed to the injustices perpetuated by resource extraction companies through coursework, I was exposed to them by student protestors, who alleged that Peter Munk’s multi-million-dollar donations to the school could threaten academic integrity. I learned that the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute, a non-partisan organization, criticized the Munk School and contended that “Canada’s most influential global studies program is the brainchild of a mining magnate with a significant personal stake in a particular foreign policy, and the School has been shaped in his hard right image” (n.d., para. 9).

I decided then to learn as much as I could about the politics of resource extraction. During my degree, I learned about Grassy Narrows, and the egregious environmental injustices occurring in the same province I was living in at the hands of resource extraction corporations and the Ontario government. Multiple corporations, some consolidated and renamed—Reed Paper Limited, Dryden Chemicals Ltd., Abitibi, and Weyerhaeuser timberland company—have all attempted to sever the connections between Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) First Nation and the land around them (Ilyniak, 2014). Most famously, between 1962 and 1970 the Dryden Chemicals pulp and paper mill leaked 9000 kilograms of mercury into the river system that sustains the First Nation’s way of life, and for years the “Ontario government insisted that the poisonous fish were safe to eat, while the community increasingly showed signs of mercury poisoning” (Ilyniak, 2014, p.45). This poisoning of people and the land is ongoing; in 2007, two children from Grassy Narrows were born with brain cancer, and in 2012, an eight-year-old was

found to be born with mercury poisoning (Ilyniak, 2014). People from Grassy Narrows fight simultaneously for their lives, decolonization, and environmental justice; the story of Grassy Narrows illustrates that in Ontario, the oppressive ties between a colonial government and capitalist resource extraction corporations run deep.

As an outsider to the Indigenous communities that have expressed commitment or opposition to the proposed projects in the Ring of Fire, I have continuously reflected on my positionality and motives in doing this work. My interpretations of the language in these texts are drawn from my own worldview as a privileged and mixed-race Latin American academic researcher, as well as my own ecosophy. My personal philosophy is anchored in the Latin American concept of *Buen Vivir* (loosely translated, “living well [collectively]”). In a nutshell, it is a heterogenous philosophy that rejects “exponential economic growth as an indicator of wellbeing and within that ... the notion that natural resources are commodities to be exploited and traded for profit” (Chassagne, 2019). Instead of a focus on endless economic growth, *Buen Vivir* combines Quechuan and Aymaran worldviews and academic thought to imagine alternative strategies for the future, based on responsible resource use, reciprocal relationships with nature, and collective and intergenerational social wellbeing (Chassagne, 2019).

Lastly, a quote that has resonated with me since I first heard it is often attributed to Murri activist Lilla Watson, who created the following phrase together with an Australian Aboriginal rights group: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together”. My motivations are born of solidarity, not pity; I recognize that many of the systems that have worked unfairly against me and people like me have also worked disproportionately against Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. I also recognize that to arrive at where I am today means I have had the

immense privilege to overcome certain barriers as an immigrant woman of colour. That being said, systemic racism, colonialism, and capitalism are systems I will continue to fight throughout my life, in collaboration with those whose liberation is bound up with mine.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter explores three prominent discursive themes related to the Ring of Fire and resource extraction in the texts analyzed and elucidates how these discursive themes are (re)produced through the textual and discursive features introduced in the coding framework. The themes discussed in this section include greenwashed and destructive discourses; Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations discourses; and conflict discourses. Each theme is first described, then is linked to the data through tables that illustrate the interpretative process used to examine key textual and discursive aspects relevant to the discursive theme. The first column of each table contains examples of language in context, the second isolates the data unit of interest, the third explains the concept present in the example, and the last elaborates how the textual or discursive aspect of the text contributes to the discursive theme. Presenting the findings in this way increases transparency, “includes data samples connected to results, thereby providing evidence of original data in context of the larger text [, and] it enables a relatively concise visual representation of complex and non-linear analysis processes” (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014, p.432). Each example is accompanied by the last name of the article’s author if applicable, the news media organization that published it, and the month and date of publication.

Not every single instance of a feature is included in these tables; including every way something is named, or every metaphor in the 155 articles analyzed, would not have been feasible for this project. I took note of what overarching patterns of discourse were arising across the texts throughout my analysis, and which textual and discursive features contributed to or countered these patterns. As an example, I noticed that the language used to convey Indigenous opposition to industry and government actions tended to contain euphemisms. I collected

examples of this textual aspect to explain how they contributed to the discursive theme, Indigenous communities-government-mining relations discourse. The textual and discursive features highlighted in these tables are all examples that are particularly “poetic, concise, or insightful, and thus compelling”, and after each table a brief description of my interpretation of the data follows (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014, p. 436). The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Discursive Theme #1. Greenwashed and Destructive Discourses

The first discursive theme I identified is “greenwashed and destructive discourses”. The discourses within this theme are constructed with language that either conveys environmental disinformation, commits the ‘greenwashing sins’ from the literature, or is destructive in nature. Of the ‘destructive’ discourses, “economics discourses are perhaps the most influential” (Stibbe, 2015, p.24). Even when not referring to human-nature relationships, economics discourses often interpret and portray those relationships in ways that are alienating and destructive (Stibbe, 2015). Greenwashed and destructive discourses were commonly (re)produced across articles from all the major news media organizations in this sample. A few articles contained language that countered or presented an alternative to these discourses, but as will be discussed in the next chapter, greenwashed and destructive discourses were dominant in coverage of the Ring of Fire (ROF).

Table 1. Naming, reference, and predication strategies regarding the Ring of Fire

Examples of Naming, Reference, and Predication in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“While Noront has long promoted the swampy remote region of Northern Ontario as holding a treasure trove of strategic metals, it hasn't put any mines into production.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, May 2021).</p>	<p>swampy remote region of Northern Ontario as holding a treasure trove</p>	<p>In the first three examples: we see language of disconnect – remoteness, next to the peat but not in it, muskeg cut off and isolated from the rest of Ontario. Referred to with words that hold negative associations: soggy, swampy, bog.</p>	<p>Two distinct reference strategies:</p> <p>One of isolation and removal from anything of importance to the reader, negative characterization (soggy, swamp, bog).</p>
<p>“While Canada may have nickel projects that could have lower emissions, few cases are clearcut. The most obvious nickel deposit, the Ring of Fire near Ontario's James Bay, sits next to the world's second largest peat bog, itself a huge store of carbon.” (Friedman, Sudbury Star, Sept 2022).</p>	<p>the Ring of Fire near Ontario's James Bay, sits next to the world's second largest peat bog</p>	<p>Last example: an opposite to the ones above. The ROF is situated in relation to a city. It is described as something positive: untouched peat, lakes, land.</p>	<p>Second is a counternarrative: positive characterization of land and lakes untouched, pristine peat moss, situated in relation to a city.</p>
<p>“It's called the Ring of Fire. This soggy muskeg in northern Ontario cut off from roads connecting to the rest of the province has long struggled to capture investors' interest in its mining riches. Until lately.” (Heaven, Postmedia Network Inc., Jun 2021).</p>	<p>This soggy muskeg in northern Ontario cut off from roads connecting to the rest of the province has long struggled</p>		
<p>“...the Ring of Fire is 5,120 square kilometres of untouched peat moss, lakes and land located about 500 km north of Thunder Bay.” (Talaga, The Globe and Mail, Dec 2021).</p>	<p>the Ring of Fire is 5,120 square kilometres of untouched peat moss, lakes and land located about 500 km north of Thunder Bay</p>		

As per the coding framework, my analysis began by delving into naming, reference, and predication—in this case, the words used to name and characterize the Ring of Fire region itself. In news stories, whether an individual is categorized as ‘a family man’, ‘an immigrant’, or ‘a criminal with a lengthy record’ will “project meaning and social value onto the referent” (Richardson, 2007, p.50). This also holds true for how nature and resources are represented. In the news articles analyzed, the Ring of Fire was commonly referred to as a swamp or bog; in one of the examples in Table 1 where it was accurately described as muskeg, the word ‘soggy’ was attached to it. All these characterizations hold negative social value. In North American colonial culture, swamps were and are places of little value for the European settler until transformed into something else. They are synonymous with frustration for settlers whose expansion across the continent was slowed by wetland, and throughout the 20th century, over half of American wetlands disappeared, drained in favour of housing and agriculture (Proulx, 2022). Swamps and bogs tend to evoke imagery of decay and discomfort, of places man will not go willingly and places that impede human progress; these connotations still exist in our language, through phrases like ‘draining the swamp’ of political decay or being ‘bogged down’ or ‘swamped’ with things that impede us from what we want to accomplish. Referring to the Ring of Fire as a “swamp” holding a “treasure trove” aligns with colonial notions of wetlands requiring human plundering to hold value and of challenging terrain to be dominated in the name of human progress. Even when the virtue of peat as a carbon sink is mentioned, describing the Ring of Fire as “next to” the peat and not intrinsically part of it reinforces the idea that developing the Ring of Fire itself has little consequence.

Another quality of the Ring of Fire often emphasized to the reader is its isolation. Through descriptors like “remote region of Northern Ontario” and “cut off from roads

connecting to the rest of the province”, the Ring of Fire is isolated both from the articles’ audience and from the land around it, especially the Southern portion of the province where much of the audience resides. Often these naming strategies are present together; the result is an alienation of the reader from the Ring of Fire, both geographically and socially.

The final example in Table 1 is one of few predicational strategies that counter alienation from the Ring of Fire. Notably, it is from an opinion piece authored by Tanya Talaga, a journalist and author of Ojibwe descent, and published in the Toronto Star. Like letters to the editor, opinion pieces are of an argumentative nature and hope to convince the reader of the writer’s perspectives; in this, they are “an important site for the (re)production and/or resistance of discourse” (Richardson, 2007, p.149). This sample resists the dominant negative framing of the Ring of Fire as a soggy swamp or bog; it is the only article in the data set to use the word “untouched” to describe the peat moss in the Ring of Fire. Talaga writes that the Ring of Fire “is” peat moss, lakes, and land. In doing so she anchors the Ring of Fire in its tangible natural features, ones with positive social associations to its Toronto Star audience, particularly Ontarians—lakes and land. For better or worse, it is inarguable that untouched ‘wild’ lands and summers at the lake have a near-mythical status in Ontario’s cultural identity (Stevens, 2013). Her words not only project a positive social meaning onto the Ring of Fire, but also a more familiar conception of distance. Instead of underlining its disconnectedness from roads and the audience, she describes it by relating its distance to a major city, one present in the imaginations of most Ontarians. This textual tethering of the Ring of Fire—both socially and geographically—to the reader resists the dominant destructive discourse of alienation. Examples such as this one are few and far between in the data set; overwhelmingly, the Ring of Fire is depicted as a distant and soggy land with treasure to unearth.

Table 2. Greenwashing risk through presupposition

Example of Presupposition in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“We need to put the risk of mineral exploration and mines development into a context that southern audiences might better understand. Ontario's oldest nuclear power plant is at Pickering, which is only 45 km from Toronto's downtown city hall.</p> <p>Millions of people in the Greater Toronto Area, the most densely populated region in Canada, can live with the low-level risk of a nuclear power plant as there are many rules and regulations to keep it safe. In fact, all of Ontario’s nuclear fleet is located on the Great Lakes, which have a population of around 35 million people in their drainage region on both sides of the Canadian/American border. The total Aboriginal population of Ontario’s Far North is about 35,000 people, roughly half of who are living off-reserve. In addition, the biodiversity (ESG) risk in the Ring of Fire's boreal forests and swampy muskeg pales by a very significant magnitude to the major nickel laterite producing islands of New Caledonia, Indonesia and the Philippines and their rich tropical rain forests. Nickel laterite deposits are open-pit mines while the proposed mines in the Ring of Fire are underground and have a much smaller footprint.” (Sudol, Sudbury Star, Oct 2021).</p>	<p>Millions of people ... can live with the low-level risk of a nuclear power plant as there are many rules and regulations to keep it safe... The total Aboriginal population of Ontario’s Far North is about 35,000 people, roughly half of who are living off-reserve.</p> <p>the biodiversity (ESG) risk in the Ring of Fire's boreal forests and swampy muskeg pales by a very significant magnitude to the major nickel laterite producing islands of New Caledonia, Indonesia and the Philippines and their rich tropical rain forests</p>	<p>Presupposition that if millions of people can live near nuclear, so can thousands near a mining development. Also hidden: the idea that regulations are similar</p> <p>The biodiversity in the boreal and ‘swampy muskeg’ is lower than that of the ‘tropical rain forests’ where other nickel mines are located – presupposition that we must mine nickel from either place and boreal and muskeg are low in biodiversity, therefore ROF is the acceptable risk</p>	<p>Presupposition: Low risk involved in mining development, regulations mean safety.</p> <p>Biodiversity as a necessary sacrifice for the green economy; ROF less biodiverse than the tropics therefore acceptable sacrifice</p>

As important as the concrete textual aspects of discourse, presuppositions are also ripe with meaning and are one way of tacitly (re)producing social values and power dynamics. Greenwashed presuppositions abound in this data set; the example in Table 2 was taken from an opinion piece in the Sudbury Star and chosen because it was particularly compelling. At face value, Sudol is explaining the risks of resource extraction.

First, Sudol implicitly suggests that if millions of people can feel safe living near a highly-regulated nuclear plant, then the comparatively lower number of Indigenous people living around the Ring of Fire should also feel safe living near the proposed mining developments. Implying that regulations surrounding a nuclear power plant in the Greater Toronto Area are somehow on equal footing to regulations around resource extraction in Indigenous lands is historically ignorant at best, and an irrelevant and false equivalence at worst.

There is a history in Canada of major regulatory failure regarding mining in Indigenous lands, a history that does not exist with regulation of Canadian nuclear infrastructure. After the 2014 Mount Polley tailings dam failure in British Columbia, for example, Indigenous livelihoods were impacted as 25 million cubic metres of wastewater and tailings were released into the surrounding water; a 2016 audit commissioned by the province found that the government failed to properly regulate the mine's construction and operation and was lacking in a robust, "integrated and independent compliance and enforcement unit for mining activities, with a mandate to ensure the protection of the environment" (Roche et al., 2017, p.22). The proposed mines at the Ring of Fire are not without risk; given it is one of the largest wetlands in the world, "it will be necessary to engineer massive drainage and pumping systems or to use freeze walls in order to mine ... [which] can have serious effects on aquifers and the water table. The difficulty of managing tailings and waste rock over the long term in an environment that is saturated with

water will be enormous” (Kuyek, 2011, p.16). Ontario’s recently-passed *Building More Mines Act, 2023* adds another layer of risk by eliminating regulations such as ministry reviews of mine closure plans, allowing instead for mine employees to endorse the plans as “qualified persons”. The 2016 audit referred to above noted that this relaxation of government oversight and “increased dependence on qualified professionals” were crucial factors in the Mount Polley disaster (Bellringer, 2016, p.56).

In Scanlan’s analysis of corporate communication by the oil and gas industry, he asserts that dubious claims made about safety to downplay risk and shift its scale can be criticized as “greenwashing wrought with vague and irrelevant claims that lack proof and ignore hidden trade-offs for environmental well-being” (2017, p.1321). In this way, Sudol’s presupposition that the Ring of Fire is as safe and low-risk as Pickering’s nuclear power plant is a clear case of greenwashed language. This is especially salient when considering that his Sudbury Star audience is familiar with resource extraction, and that the purpose of this nuclear equivalence is so “we” can contextualize “the risk of mineral exploration and mines development” for a southern audience with considerably less familiarity with the topic. The framing of resource extraction as akin to nuclear—something that may conjure fear but is relatively safe—is a harmful narrative to spread to southern audiences, who may not be aware of the risk mining in the muskeg entails.

In the latter half of this sample, the muskeg is again characterized by a low-value “swampy” nature, and is then juxtaposed with the “rich tropical rainforests”. Sudol talks here about a different kind of risk – biodiversity risk – and makes the case that the Ring of Fire region is of relatively low risk, paling by “a significant magnitude” to risking the splendour of the tropics. As Scanlan (2017) asserts in his analysis however, the discourse framing risk in resource

extraction is often greenwashed. The Far North Science Advisory Panel reported that the peatlands and forests systems in this region of Ontario are “a stronghold for biodiversity ... Alteration of these habitats therefore has implications for biodiversity, not only locally but also at the continental and global scale” (The Far North Science Advisory Panel, 2010, p.xi). By comparing biodiversity in northern Ontario to that in the forests in Asia, the writer shifts the scale of risk from local to global; this greenwashing tactic “creates uncertainty regarding the risk at home and replaces it with what it believes to be much larger dangers” (Scanlan, 2017, p.1323).

This sample is thus shaped by naming strategies and presuppositions that are common aspects of this greenwashed discourse. The presupposition that mining nickel in the muskeg is a more acceptable biodiversity risk than mining nickel in the tropical rainforests implies one of those two options must occur for the green transition. In short, the underlying ideological argument is that progress is zero-sum, and to progress as a society comes at the necessary expense of the environment—in this case, either the muskeg or the rainforest. This zero-sum belief is present in other articles and underlines the discourse on the Ring of Fire.

Table 3. Metaphorical aspects of greenwashed discourse

Examples of Metaphor in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“The scramble for Noront is all about battery metals. The Ring of Fire contains rich deposits of several minerals, including nickel. A key component in lithium ion batteries, nickel has been trading at multiyear highs recently. While more engineering and study is needed, Noront's Eagle's Nest project has the potential to produce high-grade nickel that could be fed into the North American electric-vehicle supply chain.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Oct 2021).</p> <p>“Ford touted the latest investment as ‘delivering huge wins for workers and communities all over this province’ at auto parts factories that will continue feeding the massive assembly plants, along with mineral resources in the northwestern Ontario ‘Ring of Fire’ zone needed to make EV batteries.” (Ferguson, Toronto Star, May 2022).</p> <p>“Against this backdrop, Wyloo Metals head Luca Giacobazzi has said that the Ring of Fire is one of the most prospective mineral belts in the world and that he's laser-focused on building a nickel mine there, within the next five years, which could help feed raw materials for an electric vehicle battery supply chain in Canada.” (Friedman, National Post, Jan 2022).</p>	<p>Noront's Eagle's Nest project has the potential to produce high-grade nickel that could be fed into the North American electric-vehicle supply chain</p> <p>factories that will continue feeding the massive assembly plants, along with mineral resources in the northwestern Ontario ‘Ring of Fire’</p> <p>which could help feed raw materials for an electric vehicle battery supply chain in Canada</p>	<p>Metaphor: <i>feeding</i> raw resource from Northern Ontario to a wider North American industry – agent/consumer: North American industry.</p>	<p>Economic metaphor: of hunger and consumption</p>
<p>Examples of Metaphor in Context</p>	<p>Data Unit</p>	<p>Concept</p>	<p>Building Block</p>
<p>“Can Ontario become a one-stop shop in electric vehicle manufacture unlike any other market in all of North America? Premier Doug Ford thinks so.”</p>	<p>Ontario become a one-stop shop in electric vehicle manufacture unlike any other market in</p>	<p>Metaphor: Ontario as a business/market that offers comprehensive products and services to consumers. Joining</p>	<p>Economic metaphor: province as a marketplace.</p>

(“Light a Fire”, Toronto Star, Nov 2021).

all of North America? provincial government and business.

Metaphor is also a common textual aspect of greenwashed and destructive discourse. Discourse shapes social reality through language, and the metaphorical aspect of discourse involves conceptualizing something by relating it to something from a different area of life, one often more familiar to us (Stibbe, 2015). The power of a metaphor lies in its ability to portray and simplify complex and abstract concepts by reframing them in familiar ways. In this data set, resource extraction in the Ring of Fire is often framed through economic metaphors; the prevalence of such metaphors suggests that the dominant form of understanding the Ring of Fire’s environment is through economic terms. Coffey (2016) writes that economic metaphors “represent a reframing of the environment and why it is important” (p.215). The environment is framed as important for the economic benefit of stimulating consumption. In Table 3 above, the first is a consumption metaphor, and the second is a market metaphor.

Consumption metaphors are highlighted here because they were employed by writers across all major national news organizations in this data set—The Globe and Mail, Postmedia Network Inc, and the Toronto Star. In these, nickel or “raw materials” from the Ring of Fire becomes something to “feed into” assembly plants and the electric vehicle industry. The Ring of Fire becomes a passive source of food for Canadian economic growth. In an analysis of consumption metaphors, Wilk (2004) writes that “consumption as eating” follows a linear process common to the human experience: we experience a desire or hunger, we find something to satiate that hunger, use it, and when it is no longer of value, it is expelled from us as waste. Because of this, it is a powerful metaphor—as something all of us have experience doing, it is easy to conceive of something as complex as resource extraction by relating it to something as

fundamental as eating. The Ring of Fire's significance lies in its ability to feed our society's economy with something to satiate its hunger; however, this satiation is temporary. Hunger always returns, and waste management is an unsavory topic. Framing resource extraction as such places the environment in a passive role, for its 'raw materials' to be taken and used until it is no longer of value to the consumer—in this case, the electric vehicle industry. It normalizes an exploitative relationship with Northern Ontario land, wherein taking its nourishment and feeding it to Southern Ontario industry is the norm.

The second metaphor visualizes Ontario as a “one-stop shop...unlike any other market” for manufacturing and more explicitly joins together the notions of government and business, presenting Ontario as a marketplace. Employing market metaphors like this one “ensures the environment is considered in narrow anthropocentric (human centred) and economic terms, with markets and market forces positioned as the best way of promoting environmental (as well as other) objectives ... It marginalises transformative agendas, and promotes a view of environmental issues that limits their seriousness and constrains what should be done to address them” (Coffey, 2016, p.219). Here, the Ring of Fire is framed narrowly. As with the consumption metaphor, its significance lies in its ability to provide the Ontario market with goods and services of value to turn the province into a “one-stop shop” for consumers.

Table 4. Intertextuality and greenwashed discourse

Example of Intertextuality in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“Later in the month, Ottawa and the Ontario government committed hundreds of millions of dollars to an effort by automaker Stellantis NV STLA-N and South Korea’s LG Energy Solution to build what will be Canada’s first zero emissions vehicle (ZEV) battery plant in Windsor, Ont. The federal government has said it is investing in battery minerals because a consumer shift to battery-powered ZEVs is essential if the country is to meet its long-term promise to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Apr 2022).</p> <p>“In the transition to clean energy, the world is expected to need four times as much nickel in the next 30 years as it has in the last 30 years, Ragnar Udd, BHP's president for Americas minerals, said in an interview.” (Attwood, Toronto Star, May 2022).</p>	<p>The federal government has said it is investing in battery minerals because a consumer shift to battery-powered ZEVs is essential if the country is to meet its long-term promise to achieve net zero</p> <p>In the transition to clean energy, the world is expected to need four times as much nickel in the next 30 years</p>	<p>Indirect speech quotations of what the government and a mining CEO have said or written about the shift to electric vehicles and how they are essential to future green economic transitions.</p>	<p>Intertextuality: indirect quotations of both federal government and a business executive characterizing shift to EVs as ‘essential’ to environmental goals</p>

A central tenet to CDA, intertextuality holds that text must be understood in relation to other texts (Fairclough, 2013). Internal intertextuality is the notion that texts are themselves made up of other texts, and these linkages are worth exploring; in news media, such as in the example above, this reproduction of the activities and opinions of social actors can occur through the indirect reporting of speech (Richardson, 2007). Both examples in Table 4 summarize the opinions and language of authoritative actors—the federal government and the president of a mining company—something par for the course in the data set, as most of the reported speech on the Ring of Fire comes from politicians and industry personalities. The reciprocal relationship of

access between news media and prominent public figures often results in “the views of the official, the powerful and the rich being constantly invoked to legitimate the status quo” (Fowler, 1991, p.22). As Fowler (1991) asserts, “specific powerful institutions, frequently accessed (with neglect of other sections of the population, and other organizations), provide the newspapers with modes of discourse which already encode the attitudes of a powerful elite. Newspapers in part adopt this language for their own and, in deploying it, reproduce the attitudes of the powerful” (p.23). In the cases highlighted in Table 4, the intertextual dependence on the speech of politicians and industry figures promotes dominant discourses of “clean energy” and green economies, ones which rely on resource extraction and electric vehicles for green economic transformation.

The view that electric vehicles (EVs) are a sure-fire path to green economic transformation has been criticized as environmental misinformation. Greenwashing behaviours are a growing problem for the electric vehicle industry (Liu et al., 2023). While an adoption of electric vehicles over traditional vehicles will lower fossil fuel consumption, this is a narrow imagining of what a ‘green’ transformation entails. Henderson (2020) argues that “more rapid and far-reaching transitions will be needed for decarbonization than previously understood, and the rush toward EVs might divert planetary resources while doing little to mitigate global warming” (p.1994). A scenario-based assessment by Milovanoff et al. (2020) finds that relying mainly on electrification is not enough to meet mitigation targets, and that wider social changes, including a reduction in overall vehicle ownership, must occur for a successful green transition. Centering electric vehicles in the green transformation normalizes the massive demand for critical minerals, and thus resource extraction, that will result from these kinds of policies. Employing the threat of climate change to justify increased consumption and resource extraction,

when the use of those resources will not meet mitigation targets, is a key strategy in dominant discourses on the Ring of Fire.

Discursive Theme #2. Indigenous Communities-Government-Mining Industry Relations Discourses

Having explored greenwashed and destructive discourses, the second discursive theme covered in this chapter is that of “Indigenous Communities-Government-Mining Industry Relations”. Unlike the prior theme, in which one form of discourse heavily dominated the texts, the discourses within this theme vary considerably. Some overlap, whilst others contradict. The relationships between these three broad groups themselves are nuanced; not all Indigenous communities in the region, and not all individuals within those communities, hold the same views and interests when it comes to how to move forward in the Ring of Fire. Politicians, particularly during the election period covered in these articles, also held differing views. Discursive patterns in how these relationships were portrayed nonetheless arose; this section explores how these relationships are constructed through textual and discursive aspects of language.

Table 5. Reference and collocation strategies and 'multistakeholderism'

Examples of Reference and Collocation in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“‘There's a lot of remote infrastructure needed to enable this whole basin to become productive and obviously a lot of stakeholders to manage including communities, First Nations and various governments, and then of course a significant investment of capital.’” (Friedman, Postmedia Network Inc., Oct 2021)</p> <p>“Greg Rickford, Ontario's Minister of Energy, Mines, Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs, said the province is starting a public consultation period on critical minerals, with a goal of reducing red tape and attracting more investment into the sector. The consultation will be open to a range of stakeholders, including the mining industry, Indigenous land owners and investors.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Mar 2021).</p> <p>“Wyloo Metals hopes that an investment towards feasibility studies for an Ontario-based battery metals supply chain may lead to the construction of an Ontario smelter for the electric car industry. The long-term capital commitment to such a project would likely run in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and require buy-in from legions of stakeholders, such as local communities and First</p>	<p>obviously a lot of stakeholders to manage including communities</p> <p>The consultation will be open to a range of stakeholders, including the mining industry, Indigenous land owners and investors</p> <p>require buy-in from legions of stakeholders</p>	<p>Characterizing the First Nations communities involved as stakeholders/ landowners, centering their political / economic stake in the ROF; as a group ‘to manage’ with an interest in ROF projects</p>	<p>Grouping First Nations into ‘stakeholders’; ‘multistakeholderism’</p>

Nations, and necessite [sic] years of environmental study.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, May 2021).

Examples of Predication in Context

“Ontario Premier Doug Ford has publicly stated that development in the Ring of Fire is going ahead ‘if I have to hop on a bulldozer myself,’ and that he's got First Nations support. But the Premier overstates, Attawapiskat Chief David Nakogee, Neskantaga Chief Wayne Moonias and Fort Albany Chief Robert Nakogee wrote in a letter to Mr. Ford last week, because not all Nations think as one and agree.” (Talaga, The Globe and Mail, Dec 2021).

Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
not all Nations think as one and agree	First Nations communities as separate and distinct from one another, with different opinions	Predication: undermining the claim that Ford has First Nations support by characterizing First Nations as distinct entities with differing opinions

One prominent pattern across the texts is the reference to First Nations communities as one of many stakeholders in the Ring of Fire. These characterizations of communities as ‘stakeholders’ are then accompanied by collocations found in the language of business—‘stakeholders to manage’, ‘consultation ... of a range of stakeholders’, and ‘buy-in...from stakeholders’. The word ‘stakeholder’ carries with it moral weight, particularly when it comes to the mining industry. Stakeholder theories suggest corporations have economic responsibilities to shareholders, but also other responsibilities to ‘stakeholders’—those who have a ‘stake’ in a project, or whose wellbeing could be affected by company activities (Cragg & Greenbaum, 2002, p.319). Issues of stakeholder ethics are particularly pressing in the mining industry, where potential benefits and risks of mining are both great. Among various studies, it has been proposed that “mining is not necessarily incompatible with principles of, for example, justice and

sustainability, provided that the decision-making process *takes into adequate account the values and interests of all stakeholders*” (Cragg & Greenbaum, 2002, p.320, emphasis mine).

While engagement of all local communities is an important step towards just industry practice, this ‘stakeholder’ language is worth interrogating. In a comprehensive analysis of 2021 trends in the mining industry, Deloitte reveals that ‘traditional community approaches’ of mining companies are failing to build social trust with those communities; to ameliorate this ‘trust deficit’, they suggest mining corporations engage in open stakeholder dialogue to avoid “a tumultuous stakeholder relations landscape. In worst-case scenarios, they also spill over into community protests, anti-mining advertising campaigns, abrupt tax increases, and dramatic changes in regulatory regimes.” (2021, p.33). This strategy to avoid everything from grassroots protests to strengthened regulations means that “in interviews and public relations materials, mining companies have very adeptly incorporated such considerations into the framing of their practices” (Barbesgaard & Whitmore, 2022, p. 14). The first two examples in Table 5 above are representative of this trend—intertextual quotations from a chief development officer for a mining corporation and from the minister with a mandate to develop mines in the province, both using the language of stakeholder engagement to forestall any potential dissidence. It is yet to be seen whether the values and interests of ‘the stakeholders’ involved are adequately accounted in decision-making, or whether this is simply a linguistic strategy to maintain the status quo.

A pressing dimension of ‘multistakeholderism’ is the vague definition of a stakeholder—who they are and how they relate to one another. In these examples, “Indigenous communities” and “landowners” are lumped together into one entity as stakeholders, on equal footing with the other stakeholders listed alongside them— “various governments”, “investors”, and “the mining industry”. Unlike rights-based governance systems where “governments, as

representatives of their citizens, take the final decisions on global issues and direct international organizations to implement these decisions ... in multistakeholder initiatives vaguely defined ‘stakeholders’ become the central actors – treating diverse actors (from local ‘communities’ to transnational corporations) as equals, glossing over power imbalances and questions of legitimacy and democratically determined mandates” (Barbesgaard & Whitmore, 2022, p. 14). Consolidating multiple First Nations communities into one stakeholder group not only erases the differences in values and interests between those communities, but also erases the power dynamics in the relationships between the communities and the other actors involved in these developments. This stakeholder discourse thus takes complex and nuanced dynamics of human rights, treaty rights, and land rights and shapes them into something easier for audiences to digest: multiple equal and homogenous groups having a ‘stake’ in the development of a project.

Historically, ambiguous policies of “Indigenous stakeholder engagement” have strained First Nations-Industry-Government relations and failed to adequately account for the values and interests of First Nations communities in Northern Ontario. The case of the De Beers Victor Diamond Mine, located about 90 kilometres west of Attawapiskat First Nation and 170km northwest of Fort Albany First Nation, exemplifies this. The environmental assessment (EA) for the mine had ‘First Nations stakeholder support’ from Attawapiskat First Nation, but “Four of the five communities identified by De Beers to be primarily impacted by the Victor Diamond Project (the exception being Attawapiskat) have been shut out of the EA process” (Kooses, 2004, as cited in Whitelaw et al., 2009, p.209). De Beers worked primarily with Attawapiskat First Nation and excluded the other First Nations from the EA process; as a result, the EA “took place without any investigations into the most basic land use planning activities. ... the values of the Cree along the entire coast with respect to the land were not collected and used to assess the

mine development. There was no discussion of broad community development objectives and compatibility of the mine with these. Regional consultations were lacking” (Whitelaw et al., 2009, p.213). Further developments have involved a breakdown of these relationships. As Baxter and Smith (2021) detail:

De Beers is accused of failing to report mercury and methylmercury levels at its water monitoring stations; it pressured regulators for a third landfill site atop wetlands and paid a meagre \$226 in royalties in 2014. The government likewise failed to train and support First Nations workers, and a promised college program to train local diamond-cutters never materialized. In 2016, while the mine was still in operation, a state of emergency was declared after 11 individuals from Attawapiskat attempted suicide in one night. Three years later, and two months after the mine closed, a second state of emergency was declared after tap water was found to be toxic. (p.7).

As shown in the last example in Table 5, Premier Ford has claimed ‘First Nations support’, despite opposition from various First Nations in the region based in part on a lack of meaningful consultation. Evidently, the meaning of ‘First Nations support / stakeholders’ is much too vague to provide assurance that the developments in the Ring of Fire will not share parallels with those of the Victor Diamond Mine.

Narratives that resist this group characterization are also present in the data set. These narratives tend to arise from intertextual quotations of Indigenous Chiefs and community leaders. In the predication example above, three distinct Chiefs are named, and then their words directly counter the idea that First Nations are one stakeholder group by predicating their differences and disagreements. In this quote, the notion that the Premier has First Nations support is undermined by the characterization of First Nations as separate and distinct entities. Indigenous criticism of

how development is pursued is present in the data set; although sometimes presented clearly, as in this example, it is more often presented in a softened way.

Table 6. Softening criticism through euphemism

Examples of Euphemism in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“Canada has yet to tap its immense mineral wealth, the report found, because of regulatory burdens and hesitancy among capital investors, among other roadblocks.” (Snyder, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, Jun 2021).</p> <p>“A road would cost hundreds of millions of dollars, at minimum, and would have immense impacts on the handful of First Nations' communities that live in the region, not all of which are keen to see the project move forward.” (Friedman, Sudbury Star, April 2022).</p> <p>“A number of obstacles have held the project back over the years, including significant environmental and treaty rights concerns from the dozens of First Nations in the region that will face the brunt of the development's impact.” (Jensen, Sudbury Star, May 2022).</p> <p>“Doug Ford has been working alongside Indigenous partners to break the logjam and take important steps forward in getting an all-season road built to the Ring of Fire.”</p>	<p>because of regulatory burdens and hesitancy among capital investors, among other roadblocks</p> <p>would have immense impacts on the handful of First Nations' communities that live in the region, not all of which are keen to see the project move forward</p> <p>A number of obstacles have held the project back over the years, including significant environmental and treaty rights concerns</p> <p>working alongside Indigenous partners to break the logjam</p> <p>Some are already pro-development, and welcome the job opportunities mining would bring, while others have expressed their opposition owing to concerns</p>	<p>Euphemizing criticism and opposition by First Nations communities as something either temporary to overcome (e.g. a logjam breaking the flow of progress, roadblocks, concerns while others are <i>already</i> on board) or something light (to not be keen vs. to be opposed to)</p>	<p>Euphemism: tempering opposition to resource extraction</p>

(Holmstrom, Paradis, & Ali, Sudbury Star, May 2022).

“Ring of Fire Metals must also carve out a working relationship with the roughly nine Indigenous communities who would be affected by either development of the mine or the construction of a road. Some are already pro-development, and welcome the job opportunities mining would bring, while others have expressed their opposition owing to concerns about the environmental impact.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Sept 2022).

Euphemisms were most widely used to characterize Indigenous criticism of how the proposed projects were moving forward. These were widespread throughout the data set and across multiple news organizations. This is not to say that the mining industry lacks Indigenous support – multiple articles in this data set affirm that the Chiefs of Webequie and Marten Falls First Nations support development in the Ring of Fire, with Marten Falls Chief Bruce Achneepineskum quoted in the Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, and the Sudbury Star as affirming that the mining industry offers a step towards economic reconciliation. However, as in the ‘stakeholder’ naming strategy, support from these nations was sometimes characterized as unanimous First Nations support. Criticism had a much more concrete pattern of language attached to it—one that softened its blow.

Criticism was euphemized in these articles in various ways. Sometimes, it was characterized as a temporary blockage—imagery of a logjam to be broken or a roadblock to be removed frame opposition as a temporary obstruction to progress. Once removed, roadblocks and logjams no longer impede its flow. Another euphemism was more indirect, stating that some First Nations were *already* pro-development—implying that the critics would naturally be pro-development, too, once their ‘concerns’ were addressed. Similarly, criticism was framed as a lack of keenness—outright opposition tempered into a lack of enthusiasm for the projects in development.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, euphemisms can be used as a tool to diminish or undermine criticism of dominant forms of discourse. In Alexander’s CDA of the Reith Lectures, he argues that using the phrase ‘differences of opinion’ to refer to pointed criticism was an example of “Euphemizing the true threats and problems, playing down the issues, and contributing to the hegemonic views of what is really good for the planet ... leave it to good governance, the United Nations, the World Bank and business interests and all will be well” (2008, p.86). Along these lines, euphemizing opposition (particularly Indigenous opposition) to how political and mining elites plan to move forward in Ring of Fire by portraying criticism as a temporary hesitancy (re)produces hegemonic views in which those holding power know what is best for the environment and those that inhabit it.

Table 7. Interdiscursivity and Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations

Examples of Interdiscursivity in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“Wyloo Metals is committed to creating value from resource developments and retaining that value in the region in which it is generated. In respectful consultation with First Nation partners, we will together generate value for the coming seven generations of First Nation communities.” (Wyloo Metals, via Postmedia Network Inc., Aug 2021).</p> <p>“And the federal government's climate-aware stance favours Ford's pledge to nurture multi-generational economic prosperity through the auto industry's swing to EVs.” (“Light a Fire”, Toronto Star, Nov 2021).</p> <p>“Noront's ROF land package hosts some of the most prospective mineral deposits in the world. These deposits have the potential to become Canada's next great mineral district, supporting the production of future-facing commodities for multiple generations” (Sudol, Sudbury Star, Oct 2021).</p> <p>“The underlying mineral value of the Ring of Fire is immense and, when developed, will support a multi-generational, critical metal mining district.” (Wyloo Metals, via Postmedia Network Inc., Oct 2021).</p>	<p>we will together generate value for the coming seven generations of First Nation communities</p> <p>Ford's pledge to nurture multi-generational economic prosperity</p> <p>production of future-facing commodities for multiple generations</p> <p>will support a multi-generational, critical metal mining district</p>	<p>Entangling together ‘seven generations’ discourse of stewardship with economic discourse of prosperity</p>	<p>Combination of two distinct discourses, possible co-opting of language</p>

A final point of interest in this theme is how the various discourses in this data set interact to portray Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations. An interesting combination of two distinct discourses emerged throughout various texts, relating a discourse of stewardship with a discourse of economics, to form something entirely distinct.

The first discourse is based in the Seven Generations Principle. This principle is one of stewardship; it derives from the Haudenosaunee Kayanerenkó:wa (“Great Law of Peace”) and forms part of the constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, asserting that “in weighing any decision, the rotiyannershon [Chiefs] are instructed to consider the effects of their choices on the seven generations downstream from them” (Williams, 2018, p.357). This principle is widely considered to be an emblem of Indigenous philosophy in a more general sense and has inspired discourse on holistic sustainability of future well-being in other areas of life. ‘Sacred civics’ discourse on ‘seven generation cities’ is an example of such interdiscursivity, joining civics discourse with discourses of sustainability and collective future well-being based on the Seven Generations Principle (Engle et al., 2022).

Here, future sustainability discourse is joined with a discourse of economics—the most overt example of this is the first in Table 7, taken from a press release from Wyloo Metals published by Postmedia Network Inc. It asserts that the relationship between Wyloo Metals and Indigenous communities is one of long-lasting economic prosperity, of working “together [to] generate value for the coming seven generations of First Nation communities”. This re-imagines the Seven Generations Principle from one of environmental sustainability, its most accepted form, to one of economic sustainability (“generating value”). Less overt examples of this interdiscursivity are present in indirect speech from Premier Doug Ford (“multi-generational economic prosperity”), an opinion piece from mining strategist Stan Sudol (“production of future-facing commodities for multiple generations”), and another Wyloo Metals press release “multi-generational, critical metal mining district”). All of these examples are (re)productions of the views of government and mining industry actors, perceiving their relationships with local and Indigenous communities on strictly economic terms. Interestingly, the number ‘seven’ is often

dropped in favour of ‘multiple’ generations. In the original ‘seven generations’ principle, the number seven is intentional, as it is greater than the number of generations we have a physical capacity of knowing in our lifetimes (Williams, 2018). It is unclear how many generations are meant to prosper from the mining of the Ring of Fire, or how holistic this prosperity is meant to be.

Discursive Theme #3. Conflict Discourses

The third discursive theme that arose in the data is one of conflict. This data set was rich with language of war and strife as well as descriptions of struggle and security issues. Within this theme, I explore how conflict is portrayed through linguistic features in ways that counter and reinforce dominant discourses. I also explore discursive notions of conflict, and how the language of conflict is used in framing and sensationalizing the Ring of Fire.

Table 8. Predicating political and economic dominance

Examples of Predication in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“Yet Canadian governments and business have long taken advantage of Northern Ontario - greedily dragging out diamonds, gold, lumber and clean water for all it has got to give, while leaving behind whatever they want. Meanwhile, Neskantaga First Nation has now gone 9,800 days under a boil-water advisory. When will these contradictions ever end? First Nations peoples are not afraid to fight back, even though we know what Canada too often does in response: send in militarized police forces,” (Talaga, The Globe and Mail, Dec 2021).</p> <p>“The pillaging of the North, which has been a consistent feature of economic recovery plans since the inception of Canada, is a tiresome, unacceptable narrative.” (Talaga, The Globe and Mail, Aug 2022).</p>	<p>Yet Canadian governments and business have long taken advantage of Northern Ontario - greedily dragging out</p> <p>Canada too often does in response: send in militarized police forces</p> <p>The pillaging of the North, which has been a consistent feature of economic recovery plans</p>	<p>Characterizing Canadian governments, their economics policy, and business in the same way – with greed, history of plundering Northern Ontario. Characterizing Canada as eagerly militaristic towards dissent.</p>	<p>Predication: Canadian government and business as dominating Northern Ontario</p>

These examples of predicative strategies were chosen because they contribute to a narrative of resistance that is largely ignored in the data set but contributes significantly to the discourse on resource extraction in Northern Ontario. Within these samples, those who hold power in Canada are characterized negatively. Given that many of these articles source their information from politicians and industry representatives, this is a rare occurrence. Canadian governments and business are predicated as greedy and quick to militaristic action when faced with dissent; economic recovery plans are described as consistently pillaging Northern Ontario. This use of language of conflict frames resource extraction in a startlingly different light from

the dominant discourses already discussed—not promising economic prosperity, but continuing a process of military dominance, pillaging, and violent robbery.

By using this language of conflict Talaga centers the struggle that Dunk (1991) terms the ‘hinterland/metropolis’ relationship. As is highlighted in the “Ontario as a marketplace” metaphor described earlier, the lines between business and government are blurred in the province and have been for decades. When the Dryden pulp and paper mill leaked its mercury into the rivers used by Grassy Narrows First Nation in the 1970s, Reed Ltd. “was able to influence local media coverage of the mercury pollution ... This is further evidence of the hinterland/metropolis relationship which northwestern Ontario is locked into. Large corporations whose principal responsibilities lie with investors who live outside the region determine the economic future of the region and the lives of the local inhabitants” (Dunk, 1991, p.52). Using the language of conflict, Talaga draws parallels between the Ring of Fire and this history of corporate domination of Northern Ontario. Rather than characterizing the appearance of corporations and investors from outside of the region as an economic opportunity, she weaves them instead into a historical narrative of exploitation of the hinterland, one where they can influence public knowledge of their extraction activities and where northern Ontarians are unable to decide a future for themselves. She characterizes this narrative as tiresome and unacceptable, inviting her national *The Globe and Mail* audience to challenge it.

Table 9. Conflict metaphors as part of a global security discourse

Examples of Metaphor in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“We are in the midst of a global battery arms race, where the world's major economies are building a base to the energy storage revolution,’ Moores said. Jeffrey Kucharski, professor at Royal Roads University, told the committee that critical minerals are often used by China as ‘political leverage,’ while rising demand for electric car batteries and other products within China is likely to reduce its output to other countries.” (Snyder, National Post, Jun 2021).</p>	<p>are in the midst of a global battery arms race, where the world's major economies are building a base to the energy storage revolution</p>	<p>China as dominating the EV industry on their own, “cleaning our clocks” and running laps around a Canada that is just starting to “show signs of life” – Canadian industry as nascent, in danger. Nickel as an indicator of where Canada may go, with the ROF being critical for Canada’s position in global industry</p>	<p>Conflict metaphor: Chinese dominance over Canadian potential. ROF and nickel as potential for Canada to gain influence and power on global scale</p>
<p>“I'm not necessarily a rigid central planning advocate, but there is a reason why China is cleaning our clocks in the race to dominate the battery supply chain,’ said Martin Turenne, chief executive of Vancouver-based FPX Nickel Corp. ‘Any hope we have to compete is predicated on close co-operation of mining companies, chemical companies, battery companies, car companies, as well as the very explicit funding support of governments.’ Nickel in particular may be a bellwether.” (Friedman, Postmedia Network Inc., Aug 2022).</p>	<p>Nickel in particular may be a bellwether</p>		
	<p>Canada is playing catch-up to China, which dominates both the electric-car industry</p>		
	<p>Federal government needs to protect critical minerals industry as China tightens grasp</p>		
	<p>... China for decades has invested heavily in acquiring strategic mineral assets in Africa</p>		
<p>“Canada is playing catch-up to China, which dominates both the electric-car industry and the refining of battery metals.” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Sept 2022).</p>	<p>Canada’s battery metals sector is showing signs of life, but impediments remain</p>		
<p>“Federal government needs to protect critical minerals industry as China tightens grasp, report</p>			

says ... China for decades has invested heavily in acquiring strategic mineral assets in Africa and elsewhere” Snyder, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, Jun 2021).

“Canada’s battery metals sector is showing signs of life, but impediments remain to this country gaining meaningful global market share in an industry dominated by China” (McGee, The Globe and Mail, Apr 2022).

“Bethlenfalvy ... pushed for more help in building a road to the massive "Ring of Fire" mineral belt in northwestern Ontario. That road ‘is critical for positioning Canada as an electric and hybrid vehicle manufacturing powerhouse,’ said Bethlenfalvy, praising the federal Liberal government for its help in landing new automotive investment in recent weeks.” (Ferguson, Toronto Star, Apr 2022).

to this country gaining meaningful global market share **in an industry dominated by China**

Canada as an electric and hybrid vehicle manufacturing **powerhouse**

As evident in Table 9, the language of conflict is used much more extensively on a global scale, situating Canada in the midst of major opportunity for geopolitical power. This data set is rife with conflict metaphors—an inexhaustive list of examples include an “arms race” to build batteries for an “energy revolution”, China “cleaning our clocks” in this race and “dominating” Canada, a call to protect our mineral resources “as China tightens [its] grasp”, and the potential for Canada to be positioned as a “powerhouse”. Across these metaphors forms a narrative that China is dominating Canada in the global battery and electric vehicle arena, but that Canada has potential to come out on top in the form of nickel found in the Ring of Fire. Again, implicit in

this narrative is the assumption that electric vehicles are essential to green economic transformations globally.

In his analysis of oil and gas industry (OGI) discourse on fracking, Scanlan (2017) notes that:

The OGI goes to great lengths to turn the tables on fear using didactic framing to reinforce risk uncertainty. According to the industry, the real risks are a stagnant economy, joblessness, energy dependency and insecurity, and vulnerability to global conflicts and instability – for all of which it argues fracking to be a solution. The potential for yet another ‘sin’ associated with greenwashing, therefore, emerges – the sin of fearmongering and fabricating insecurity associated with not ‘buying in’ on fracking (p.1326).

Intertwined with greenwashing discourse, the same patterns of fearmongering and fabricating insecurity are present throughout this data set. Articles from all major news organizations in the data feed into this narrative that the risk for Canada isn’t in extracting resources in the muskeg, but on not extracting resources from it at all. This rhetoric is arguably more greenwashed than that of the oil and gas industry; through these conflict metaphors it is emphasized that not extracting resources puts not only Canada’s geopolitical position at risk, but that of the green ‘revolution’ itself.

Also noteworthy is the positioning of China as Canada’s imposing global rival in the battery race, having already “invested heavily in acquiring strategic mineral assets in Africa and elsewhere”. On her work interrogating the ‘specter of global China’, Lee (2017) asserts that “Nowhere is the specter of a ‘Chinese scramble’ more salient and controversial than in sub-

Saharan Africa. ‘China in Africa’ has become a popular subject of global media reporting ... Being singled out and problematized, Chinese capital is widely perceived as ‘unnatural’ in a neoliberal world order that otherwise naturalizes the market and upholds the principle of free capital flow as sacrosanct” (p.1). This characterization of China is pervasive in Canadian news media on the Ring of Fire. In the examples above, China is presented as a domineering and monolithic entity, one single authoritarian force with a unified state agenda investing in the global free market. China and Canada are portrayed as two players competing in a scramble for power in the battery race. This characterization distorts the reality of Chinese investment practices and relations between the two countries.

Resource extraction is indeed a core part of China’s national strategy for geopolitical power, but in practice China has little control over the practices of its corporations; “despite bearing state missions and being subject to centralized institutional control, what Chinese state capital does on the ground is not determined by those path-dependent, equilibrium-prone institutional configurations among labor market, capital market, and corporate networks. Rather, state capital abroad improvises, negotiates, and transforms itself in the process of engagement with local politics and global pressures” (Lee, 2017, p.163). In short, presenting Chinese investment in critical minerals as a homogenous and threatening actor mischaracterizes the more fractured reality of poor Chinese state control and improvisation by Chinese mining corporations in the pursuit of profit over state interests. The relationship between Canada and China is also not as simple as portrayed when it comes to the Ring of Fire; Noront Resources Ltd., now Ring of Fire Metals, had a property in China in 2010, and in 2011 China’s Baosteel group owned a 9.9 percent stake in Noront that was portrayed as “the initial step in a potential long-term partnership” (Cranston, 2010; Reuters, 2011, para. 5). Andrew Forrest, owner of Wyloo Metals

and thus Ring of Fire Metals, has billions of dollars of business interests in China and “insists China is not a national security threat” (Bagshaw, 2023). Clearly, this relationship has long had more nuance than is portrayed through news media discourse. Whilst criticism of Chinese industry practices is valid, that is not what is occurring in these texts. Here, the ‘specter of China’ is invoked as a boogeyman, a dominating and unified threat, to justify Canada’s resource extraction in the muskeg.

Table 10. Language of war to connect a running story

Examples of Intertextuality in Context	Data Unit	Concept	Building Block
<p>“Australia's Wyloo bid for Canada's Noront shows battery metal scramble” (Lewis, Postmedia Network Inc., Jun 3 2021).</p> <p>“Australia's Wyloo battles for Canadian nickel-copper miner Noront” (Lewis, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, Jun 4 2021).</p> <p>“Inside the battle to own a prized nickel deposit in Ontario's remote Ring of Fire.” (Friedman, Postmedia Network Inc., Jun 8 2021).</p> <p>“BHP swoops in to buy Canadian miner Noront Resources, trumping Andrew Forrest's bid.” (“BHP swoops in”, Postmedia Network Inc., Jul 27 2021).</p> <p>“Mining Magnate Trumps BHP in Duel for Ring of Fire Nickel Play” (“Mining Magnate”, Postmedia Network Inc., Aug 31 2021).</p> <p>“Australian Magnate Beats BHP on 'Superior' Offer for Canadian Nickel Miner” (“Australian Magnate”, Postmedia Network Inc., Oct 18 2021).</p> <p>“Even amid bidding war for Noront, challenges encircle Ring of Fire mining project” (Friedman, Postmedia Network Inc., Oct 20 2021).</p> <p>“Australia's BHP Group Ltd, one of the world's largest miners, on Wednesday upped its offer for Toronto's Noront Resources Ltd., escalating a bidding war for control of the mineral claims on land around northern Ontario's James Bay lowlands, colloquially known as the Ring of Fire” (Friedman, Postmedia</p>	<p>shows battery metal scramble</p> <p>Wyloo battles for Canadian nickel-copper miner</p> <p>Inside the battle to own</p> <p>BHP swoops in to buy Canadian miner Noront Resources, trumping</p> <p>Mining Magnate Trumps BHP in Duel</p> <p>Australian Magnate Beats BHP</p> <p>Even amid bidding war for Noront</p> <p>pped its offer for Toronto's Noront Resources Resources Ltd., escalating a bidding war for control</p>	<p>Running story: news that generates new developments.</p> <p>Existence of this ‘chain’ is furthered by words denoting conflict – scramble, battle, duel, bidding war</p>	<p>Intertextuality: conflict and war used to connect a story throughout various texts</p>

Lastly, a common discursive practice in these texts is the use of conflict language to weave a running story. Running stories are a form of external intertextuality, where news stories incorporate, reinterpret, generate, and elaborate upon prior instalments—analysing the stories as they relate to one another and to social practices allows for a more holistic understanding of the meaning embedded within and between them (Richardson, 2007). The examples in Table 10, listed in chronological order, are from a running story by Postmedia outlets. They employ the language of conflict and war to characterize the competition for ownership of the mineral claims in the Ring of Fire. New social developments are linked to former ones textually as “battles” fought in a “bidding war”—occasionally, one opponent “trumps” the other in a “duel”, and the bidding war is reported to “escalate” as tensions rise between two mining “magnates” looking to claim the treasure that is the Ring of Fire. Rather than framing the bids to own Noront Resources Ltd. as business moves, they are framed as strategic plays of power.

The result is an audience understanding of business through these conflict metaphors meant to capture their attention. War metaphors are often used in sports reporting to sensationalize, shaping “our understanding of sport as an extraordinary activity – an activity that allows us to abandon reason and sense of proportion ... in all-out-war, expenditure is all-out, imprudent – war being defined as an emergency in which no sacrifice is excessive” (Richardson, 2007, p.67). Here, just as war metaphors create a melodramatic narrative around sport, they do so for business; northern Ontario is at once a battlefield and a treasure trove for the powerful Australian magnates that will spare no expense to secure it. Framing these business activities as ‘extraordinary’ turns the Ring of Fire into a specific kind of spectacle. In this narrative, the actors

involved in a struggle for power are not the local communities or governments, but two rival mining magnates. The Ring of Fire and its residents are backgrounded, and the ‘real’ story is the extraordinary power struggle between two Australian mining firms.

Chapter Summary

This research was guided by the following questions: How are discourses (re)produced in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region in Canada? What general discursive themes are dominant in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire? How do the narratives within these themes relate to imaginaries for future green transformations?

Despite holding industry interest for roughly two decades, the rise in public awareness of the Ring of Fire is much more recent; patterns of discourse around the Ring of Fire in news media are still emerging and thus not homogenous. Discourses are (re)produced in a myriad of ways in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire. In the coverage studied, certain patterns of discourse emerged. A greenwashed and destructive discursive theme reigned dominant across texts from all major news organizations and several local ones, shaping the ways in which Canadian audiences relate to the Ring of Fire and come to understand the developments in the region. The political and industrial elite’s vision for the future of Ontario’s green transformation is reinforced, one which asserts that battery metals for electric vehicles are essential to the green economy.

Other discursive themes surrounding the Ring of Fire are not so homogenous in their social messaging. The linguistic aspects that make up discourse on Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations do not tell one coherent story, but several. A dominant discourse related to these relations is ‘multistakeholderism’. Characterizations of Indigenous communities as one group among many stakeholders occurred dozens of times in regional and

national news texts. When thought of as distinct communities, Indigenous criticism of how development was being pursued in the Ring of Fire was often euphemized. The ubiquitousness of these patterns shapes how news audiences understand Indigenous participation in their relationships with government and the mining industry. Lastly, conflict is an integral part of Ring of Fire discourse. The ‘spectre of China’ haunted news stories in all national newspapers in this data set, framing Canada’s geopolitical potential as hinging on the Ring of Fire. Aspects of language shape audience understandings of conflict in Ontario, and conflict language shapes understandings of resource extraction and development.

The next chapter will discuss these findings, their implications for future practices, some recommendations for further research, and end with concluding thoughts.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter expands on the findings of this research project. Three prominent discursive themes were found in the news articles analysed—greenwashed and destructive discourses, Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations discourses, and conflict discourses. Among these broad themes, greenwashed and destructive discourses were dominant in the text, as were discourses of multistakeholderism, softened opposition to industry and government action, and geopolitical insecurity and potential. The social dimensions of these findings are explored in this chapter, beginning with a discussion of the dynamics between strategies for change within the discourse. Once these dynamics are established, I elaborate upon the imaginaries for social change that characterize this discourse. After this discussion, I briefly describe possible strategies for challenging and changing the stories-we-live-by. Recommendations for further research are considered, and the chapter ends with my concluding thoughts.

Discourse Dynamics: a struggle of strategies

Writing amid a global financial crisis, Fairclough (2013) asserts that in times of crisis, the focus of CDA should shift from a critique of established structures to one of emerging strategies. This involves looking at the textual and discursive features of text to explore questions like what strategies for change emerge, what ‘social agents’ promote them, and “which strategies are emerging as ‘winners’ from strategic struggles; which strategies are coming to be ‘selected’ at the expense of others, becoming dominant, or hegemonic?” (Fairclough, 2013, p.18). CDA is a crucial tool for understanding these strategies as they often “have a strongly discursive character: they include imaginaries for change and for new practices and systems, and they include

discourses, narratives and arguments which interpret, explain and justify the area of social life they are focused upon – its past, its present, and its possible future” (Fairclough, 2013, p.18). The discourse analysed in this project was chosen in part because it was created in a time of global financial crisis. Canada’s 2021 Federal Budget underscored the importance of joining a global pivot towards a ‘green economic recovery’ from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Finance Canada, 2021). Ring of Fire discourse is coloured with imaginaries for what this green economic recovery might look like. Among these texts, various strategies for change emerge and clear patterns of which strategies are selected and promoted via news media discourse arise.

As discussed, dominant discourses in this data set include those of greenwashing, multistakeholderism, soft opposition, and geopolitical insecurity and potential. A common theme among these discourses is the notion that resource extraction from the Ring of Fire is crucial to the success of Ontario and Canada’s green economy; this future imaginary is detailed in the next section. The articles in this data set rely heavily on the voices and statements of prominent social actors—politicians like Premier Doug Ford, Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy, and Energy, Mines, Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs Minister Greg Rickford; mining industry executives, like Wyloo head Luca Giacobazzi; and academics, like Professor of Energy Security and Business Jeffrey Kucharski. These prominent names have all contributed to examples of dominant discourse in the findings chapter. Newspapers rely on people with prominence in society for validity and convenience—politicians, businessmen and academics all have established authority, whether official or gained through social status or success, and the resources to schedule statements and pay for public relations (Fowler, 1991). Thus, it is no

surprise that the discourse in news articles heavily mirrors the values, imaginations, and strategies of these social actors.

That is not to say that there is only one future strategy or one group of social actors presented in these texts. Discourses that counter and resist these dominant framings of the Ring of Fire are present in the data set; however, they are much less prevalent. A single letter to the editor written to the Sudbury Star by an environmental consultant named Brad Bowman, for example, directly criticizes the Sudol article as “typical of the selective social messaging that both mining promoters and our elected officials use to advocate their agendas to promote stocks and remain in power, respectively”. Postmedia Network Inc. republished a single article originally from The Conversation titled “Peatlands protect against wildfire and flooding, but they're still under attack in Canada”. Talaga’s article that details strategies of resistance to the plundering of Ontario was an opinion piece on page A13. These articles all contain either criticism of dominant discourses or alternatives to them, but none are featured prominently in their publications. Counter-discourses and resistance discourses are thus present but marginalized, found in opinion pieces and letters to the editor. They are one-off stories, and never make the front page.

Similarly, the voices of residents of the First Nations communities around the Ring of Fire are marginalized. The only locals quoted in this data set are the chiefs of some of the First Nations communities in the region. In the data set composed of 99 unique stories, only seven unique stories contain direct or indirect quotes from First Nations chiefs. Of these seven, three exclusively quote Webequie Chief Cornelius Wabasse and/or Marten Falls Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, two leaders who have expressed a commitment to working with the province. Only four unique stories include direct or indirect quotes from First Nations chiefs that oppose

the way in which the government and mining corporations are moving forward in the Ring of Fire. Significantly, two of these stories are opinion pieces written by Tanya Talaga, a journalist of Ojibwe descent. The voices and values of First Nations leaders and community members opposed to how development is being pursued are largely missing from the national and regional news coverage of the Ring of Fire that was analysed in this project. Again, the voices of these social actors are marginalized, confined to one-off stories and opinion pieces. Their imaginaries and strategies for social change and green economic transitions are largely excluded; audiences are largely exposed only to the strategies that align with the values and visions for the future held by elite social actors.

These dynamics are not unique to the Ring of Fire. A critical discourse analysis of the Calgary Herald's coverage of the oil sands found that "the paper devoted much less attention to dissenting voices within the province ... Such criticism would have challenged the plausibility of a storyline that depends on the portrayal of critique as the hysterical fears of outsiders" (Gunster & Saurette, 2014, p.342). Here, however, critique is not only portrayed as the 'hysterical fears of outsiders'. Instead, the developments in Ring of Fire discourse seems to run parallel to the history of the Victor Diamond Mine, where an agreement with one First Nation close to the mine represented widespread First Nations support, despite overt opposition from other communities in the region. In dominant discourse on the Ring of Fire, support from two First Nations is framed as general First Nations support. Opposition from other First Nations is often not given a voice. Unlike the oil sands stories, critique is presented not as hysterical fear but euphemistically, as either soft or temporary opposition. Gunster and Saurette's analysis of resource extraction rhetoric concludes that:

The presence of competing narratives or contradictory facts, however, does not compromise the ideological power of a storyline. Instead, they more often serve as the raw material from which a storyline is fashioned. The power of a good storyline lies not only in its ability to provide conceptual, narrative, and philosophical unity to otherwise disconnected facts and events, but also in its capacity to insulate its adherents from facts and events that might otherwise challenge the values and worldview embodied in the storyline: or, even better, it enables the rhetorical disarming of threatening elements and facilitates their incorporation into the storyline in such a way that reinforces one's pre-existing values and worldview (2014, p.351).

The presence of discourse that contradicts, resists, or challenges dominant discourses on the Ring of Fire ultimately serves a similar purpose. These discourses are marginalized, present in few news texts and never on the front page. Elements that threaten the dominant discourse and the values and strategies embedded within it—such as opposition from First Nations communities in the region—are ‘rhetorically disarmed’ through textual aspects like euphemisms and metaphors. The result is a reinforced idea that there exists little real challenge to developing the Ring of Fire, something crucial to the technological transformations deemed necessary in the dominant discourse.

Greenwashed Imaginaries for Future Transformations

The dominant mode of discourse in these texts pivots around one central imaginary for future green transformations in Canada: one where battery metals, meant for the North American electric vehicle chain, form a crucial part of Canada’s green economic recovery and transformation. In the majority of these texts, the green transformation is to one of a green economy, where electric vehicles are a panacea for the impacts of climate change. They are

synonymous with decarbonization, clean energy, ‘net-zero’, and a societal transition; language of emergency and urgency is often juxtaposed with the potential for the nickel in the Ring of Fire to build Ontario’s electric vehicle sector. There is a clear pattern, especially among the quoted speech of elite social actors, that electric vehicles are a cornerstone to our green transformation, and thus the ‘critical minerals’ in the Ring of Fire are needed to fight climate change. This is only one imaginary for change and new practices.

The success of this imaginary for change hinges on technology and centralizes the role of the market. This aligns with Scoones et al.’s definition of technocentric transformation narratives, where “the challenge essentially lies in finding the right combination of technologies to meet rising demands in greener ways ... The aim is to reduce ecological footprints through technological innovation without altering systems fundamentally. Reorganizing economies or institutions and unsettling prevailing power relations is less of a priority” (2015, p.10). The green transformation is thus typically envisioned as a market-led joining of ‘green’ and ‘economic benefit’, with innovation chiefly stemming from technology start-ups and corporations (Scoones et al., 2015). Dominant discourse on the Ring of Fire is underpinned by the assumption that meeting a social need for cars through ‘green’ battery technologies is the key to a green transformation; the need to reorganize social systems in the face of economic and climate crises is entirely ignored.

This is part of a larger worldwide trend wherein “Companies are painting their mining activities as being part of the solution to the climate crisis, attracting investors by promoting their own Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) factors and promising massive profitability of their projects due to the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy. Companies point to an undersupply of these critical minerals in an effort to show the strategic role they play in filling

the gap” (Deniau et al., 2021, p.7). As established in the prior chapter, this is an exaggeration of the role that critical minerals play in green transitions; this narrow understanding of transformation as solely technological ignores the social dimension of green transformations. Transitioning to electric vehicles is “not a silver bullet ... Meeting CO2 budgets will require a move from technology-oriented policies to activity-oriented policies to provide better substitutes for [light-duty passenger vehicles], such as transit-oriented land-use policies” (Milovanoff et al., 2020, p.1106).

It stands to reason that a technological solution to these crises would become hegemonic, appealing to politicians, industries, and the public alike as this involve no major changes to everyday life. Policies that pursue decarbonization by discouraging widespread personal vehicle use, such as compact cities or personal vehicle taxes, would be met with political backlash in societies where cars are symbols of personal freedom (Henderson, 2020). This symbolism is particularly salient in North American societies, where long distances between and within cities and a widespread lack of rail and public transit infrastructure have created car-dependent cultures; a car ultimately affords individuals more opportunities, jobs, and access to healthcare (Pritchard, 2022). With an extensive history of sprawling cities, harsh winters, and long distances between urban centers, Canada is uniquely car-dependent (Edge et al., 2018).

A technological solution to car emissions and fossil-fuel consumption in the form of EVs is a comforting vision of the future, but this dominant narrative omits social, political, and environmental realities associated with car-dependent societies. In 2021, there were 26.2 million motor vehicles registered in Canada, with passenger cars being the most common vehicle type; this number is steadily increasing (Statistics Canada, 2022). Continuing increase of private vehicle ownership comes with negative social and environmental consequences; EVs are six

times more metal- and mineral-intensive than traditional ones, and realistic scenarios of ‘mass EV uptake’ would vastly exceed current supplies of cobalt, lithium, nickel, neodymium and dysprosium, leading to shortages and conflicts over these minerals (Deniau et al., 2021; Henderson, 2020).

Ultimately, the EV transition as imagined means “reproduction of the automobile’s historic dependency on conflict minerals ... with new colonial ventures to secure resources” (Henderson, 2020, p.2001). Even assuming that mining nickel in the Ring of Fire is somehow more ethical than mining nickel elsewhere, the government and mining corporations involved in the Ring of Fire have failed to obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of all Matawa First Nations regarding mining in their traditional territories, and are prioritizing their own interests “over current and future generations of First Nations communities and other nonhuman beings that rely on the land for physical and cultural sustenance” (Sbert, 2020, p.162). Simply put, pursuing development as it is currently being pursued in the Ring of Fire is a continuation of colonial injustices with ‘green’ justifications. Forecasts and projections of EV uptake, such as the one by the International Energy Agency, assume an increase in both car ownership and driving distance in the next two decades; an increase in renewable energy sources to meet these increased electricity demands will supplement, not offset, increasing fossil fuel use (Henderson, 2020). The Ring of Fire region is also situated in a delicate peatland ecosystem, which stores an estimated 35 billion tonnes of carbon—the amount of carbon emitted yearly by seven billion cars (Baxter & Smith, 2021).

The policies surrounding colonial patterns of resource extraction and commodification of nature in the Ring of Fire are shrouded in the language of green economic transformation. The future imaginary of an energy transition based mainly on a pivot to EVs is not enough in the face

of a climate crisis, and major social change is needed to create meaningful change and avoid ecological injustices. The Ring of Fire is far from a perfect source of nickel; notwithstanding biodiversity and colonial injustice concerns, disturbing the muskeg in the region has the potential to release massive amounts of carbon. It has yet to be seen how many electric cars will need to be built to offset the carbon released by building road and mine infrastructure. Given these realities, critics of EV discourse describe “electric cars as the false solutions to the climate crisis” (Deniau et al., 2021, p.48). A plan for the future based primarily on EV uptake reproduces colonial injustices and will likely do little, if anything, to combat a climate crisis that is increasingly urgent to address meaningfully. As described in a Polaris Institute report, “Simply recommending electric vehicles as the answer to car induced environmental degradation cannot be complete without a serious look at how Western society has developed with individual automobiles as the focal point for our economy. The sum of the positive results from electric cars will not be enough to outweigh the overall negative consequences of a car dominated society” (Girard, 2011). Other solutions requiring social and economic change may be less palatable, but given the crises we find ourselves in, are necessary to consider.

Changing the Stories-We-Live-By

Different ways of imagining green transformations exist, each with “very different theories of power, politics and governance, and so implications for justice and distribution” (Scoones et al., 2015, p.17). Market-led imaginaries center technological entrepreneurs, green capitalists and consumers as the agents of change towards green growth; state-led imaginaries conceive the crisis as one of governance, where states lead the transformation of markets and infrastructure projects; and citizen-led imaginaries emphasize that change comes from below and involve radical restructuring and steering towards degrowth economies (Scoones et al., 2015).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the specifics of these imaginaries and how they could be applied, yet it is important to emphasize that visions of future change exist beyond those prominently represented in the newspaper discourse analysed for this project. Exponential economic growth via technological development as a societal goal is just one of many stories we can live by. One example of an alternative viewpoint is a mobility justice view of green transformation where freedom is reimagined, not as unfettered individual mobility, but as universal public access to transportation, cycling, and walking systems (Henderson, 2020). Discourses broadly categorized together as ‘New Economics’ also offer new imaginaries and “use language in very different ways from neoclassical economics to tell new stories about what it means to be human”, moving from language of ‘endless growth’, ‘competition among separate selves’ and ‘irremediable crisis’ to language of “degrowth, abundance, and the gift economy” (Stibbe, 2015, p.41-42). *Buen Vivir*, described earlier in this project, is an alternative to ‘sustainable development’ discourse and rejects its emphasis on economic growth as a measure of wellbeing (Chassagne, 2019). Positing that sustainable development does not adequately address worsening climate change and social inequalities, Chassagne (2019) argues that *Buen Vivir* is a tool for communities to join Indigenous worldviews with tangible grassroots practices for social and environmental wellbeing. Lastly, an ecological law approach to the question of the Ring of Fire would affirm First Nations jurisdiction and uphold ecological integrity (Sbert, 2020). These discourses all offer tools for imagining future transitions and transformations beyond the pursuit of technology. While new technologies have their roles to play in these imaginaries, the need for social change and restructuring is implied in all of these—a change in how industries and governments relate to Indigenous communities, as in *Buen Vivir*, or a change in societal beliefs about the meaning of freedom of mobility.

These alternative stories can be told but are not likely to be represented in national news organizations or their subsidiaries, who depend on prominent social actors and on the promotion of consumption ideals for their success. Opportunity for promoting alternative imaginaries through other means exists, however. Linguistic strategies can be used to change the stories we live by—discourse is spread in many ways, from independent news media organizations to personal conversations.

Discursive patterns of salience are a tool that can be employed in changing Canadian perceptions and relations to the Ring of Fire. Salience patterns are “a linguistic or visual representation of an area of life as worthy of attention through concrete, specific and vivid depictions” (Stibbe, 2015, p.162). Widespread use of vivid imagery to describe something increases its salience in the minds of the audience—people may be more interested in something they have a concrete visual understanding of, and are less likely to ignore it (Stibbe, 2015). The audiences of the newspapers this project is concerned with tend to have little experience with muskeg. Many Canadians, particularly those in urban areas, have never experienced muskeg; to these audiences, their understanding of the muskeg is coloured by the naming and reference strategies discussed in the findings chapter. Muskeg, and by extension the Ring of Fire, as simply “swampy” or a “bog”, and even “peatlands” is an abstraction of this environment. Rather than forming a strong mental image and relationship with these words, they are abstract descriptions and thus of generally little importance or notice to the audience.

Stibbe (2015) details linguistic strategies that can increase the importance of the ‘more-than-human’ world to the reader, including vivid lexical references to natural features, representing the environment as active and dynamic rather than passive, personalization of nature, and using words like ‘forest’ or ‘soil’, that readers generally have more sensory

experience with (and will thus conjure stronger connections to). The following introduction to the Ring of Fire from Baxter and Smith was published in Briarpatch Magazine, demonstrating the potential for salience strategies to conjure up powerful imagery and emotion:

Nemis's Ring of Fire isn't really a ring at all, but a crescent-shaped blip on a map in the James Bay lowlands of northern Ontario. It is an area marked by coniferous forests and coated with peatlands. Waters spill from bogs into streams, rivers, and lakes before meandering into James Bay. Under the surface is some \$60–\$120 billion worth of copper, nickel, and chromite, among other desirable materials. For the Anishinaabayg, these materials are simply known as money rock. (2021, p.5).

This text sample diverges greatly from the descriptions of the Ring of Fire analysed for this project. It is not much longer than the other samples, yet brings the Ring of Fire into the minds of the audience with far more vivid imagery – the details of the conifers, land coated with peat, and water meandering across the landscape all “creates strong and vivid images in the minds of those who read it, building up a salience pattern to counter the abstraction and erasure of the more-than-human world in so many texts that we come across in everyday life” (Stibbe, 2015, p. 164). Referencing forests and water are a form of connecting a place likely foreign to the body with familiar experience; unlike “muskeg” and “peatlands”, these are all concrete descriptors to the audience as “we have all seen the sky, touched water, breathed air and walked in forests” (Lakoff and Wehling, 2012, as cited in Stibbe, 2015, p.165). Activation also occurs in this text sample. In the dominant discourse studied for this project, the Ring of Fire was typically backgrounded and passive—the object over which mining magnates were duelling, for example, or a ‘treasure trove’ to be uncovered. Here, the natural features of the Ring of Fire are active, foregrounded, and dynamic—the forests mark the land, peatlands coat it, and water meanders

across it. The forests, peatlands, and water are represented here as tangible actors with agency and inherent beauty, while conversely, the ‘desirable minerals’ are passive and simply described as ‘money rock’. As such, the Ring of Fire is portrayed as something alive—not a swamp that holds treasure to be plundered, but instead a part of the more-than-human world worthy of the audience’s attention, interest, and care. The salience strategies outlined here can work to change readers’ perceptions of the muskeg and the Ring of Fire.

Salience strategies can also promote different understandings of relationship to the Ring of Fire. The articles in the data set contained an economic understanding of Canadian relationships to the Ring of Fire; it was described varyingly as a ‘one-stop shop’ and marketplace, as an object for ‘stakeholders’ to invest in, and as a source for Canadian economic potential on the global stage. In an article for *Alternatives Journal*, Pirozek (who identifies as Ukrainian and Norway House Cree) outlines the way in which she and her family relate to the muskeg, differing greatly from this hegemonic economic relation:

As the bog disappears for farmland, roads, and mining, so gone is the identity of the people. We are the Muskeg; Mushkego, we are the medicine and part of the ecology of these vast differing gardens ... My personal identity is wholeheartedly tied with my relationship with the Muskeg. Our identity for millennia is the relationship with this land. We live and breathe because of this land. The Muskeg, this giant being, is made up of many relationships to its parts—it cannot be separated from my body, from any of our bodies. It is our lifeblood. It feeds, it heals, and if you do not respect the awesome nature of that being, it has no issue to swallow you whole and integrate you. (2021, p. 55-56).

As with the Baxter and Smith article, this sample contains a much different way of relating to the land than those in the news articles analysed for this project. Here, the muskeg is

described by someone who is familiar with it as something greater than its economic and aesthetic value. The language used to describe the muskeg builds its salience in the minds of the reader through activation and personalization. The muskeg here is not a passive and abstract bog and is instead foregrounded as a ‘giant being’ essential to the identity of the people who live in relationship with it. It is a homeland as much as it is an inseparable part of the culture and lives of the people residing within it, a relative for millennia. The muskeg interacts actively with humans – ‘feeding’, ‘healing’, and ‘integrating’ them into itself if need be—and even the capitalization of its name works towards underscoring its personal identity. As Stibbe asserts, language that increases salience builds “a sense of ‘sacredness’” by highlighting the qualities which make the natural world unique and irreplaceable (2015, p.167). Here, muskeg is a powerful being to be respected; destroying it through mining would mean destroying ‘the identity of the people’.

In these ways, linguistic strategies for building salience are an important tool for changing the stories-we-live-by. Unsurprisingly, Briarpatch Magazine is an independent news magazine, run as a non-profit with a mission to build social movements (“About Briarpatch”, n.d.). One of the two authors of that article, Eli Baxter, is from Marten Falls First Nation. Alternatives Journal is similarly concerned with “independently publishing intelligent & informed environmental journalism”, and the author of that article has lived experience in the muskeg (“Our Vision”, n.d.). Although their reach may not be as broad as those of the corporate news organizations analysed in this project, independent news media organizations are a valuable site of discourse re(production), particularly in exposing audiences to non-hegemonic discourses and the voices of people who can articulate worldviews that would otherwise go unrepresented.

‘Environmental melodrama’ is another linguistic tool for changing the stories-we-live-by. Conflict discourse was prevalent in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire—language of war and strife is powerful and leaves a lasting impression on the reader. The characterization of China as a domineering villain, as discussed in the ‘conflict discourse’ section of the preceding chapter, aligns with what Schwarze (2006) deems ‘environmental melodrama’: a rhetorical strategy composed of “a focus on socio-political conflict, polarization of characters and positions, a moral framing of public issues, and development of monopathy” (p.245). In this socio-political conflict, China is positioned as the villain of the geopolitical story and Canada is its polar opposite—an underdog with rising potential. The issue of resource extraction is framed morally; as the underdog in nickel mining, Canada’s position elicits empathy, whilst China is portrayed as a domineering force to overcome, a longstanding exploiter of mineral goods in ‘Africa and elsewhere’. Lastly, ‘monopathy’ is defined as a “‘singleness of feeling’ that strengthens identification with one party to a controversy ... In doing so, it provides a rallying point and source of identification” (Schwarze, 2006, p.251). Here, it is evident that audiences are meant to align themselves with the goals of Canada and its resource extraction industries—the interests of the audience are joined with those of the Canadian government and relevant corporations. Positioning China as a boogeyman, where the reality of the situation is far more nuanced, is a melodramatic characterization of current events meant for the audience to align themselves with the economic interests of those who are pursuing the development of the Ring of Fire. A similar trend occurs in Calgary Herald (Postmedia Network Inc.) coverage of the oil sands, where Gunster and Saurette (2014) find a similar use of environmental melodrama to victimize the oil sand industry and villainize its critics. Although Schwarze’s work on environmental melodrama centers its ability to counter dominant discourses, Gunster and

Saurette (2014) find that “this rhetorical mode may be equally useful for those seeking to legitimate (and expand) existing structures of power” (p.352).

Granted its increasing employment in dominant discourses, environmental melodrama is nevertheless a tool with notable success in garnering support for counter-discourses. Talaga’s use of conflict discourse, also outlined in the preceding chapter, is an example of its effectiveness. Polarizing ‘northern Ontario’/‘the North’ as the victim of plundering from ‘greedy’ Canadian governments and businesses uses similar rhetoric for a very different outcome. Schwarze postulates that melodrama has the most transformative and productive potential when public issues are emerging and “when the initial bonds of identification between victims and audiences are relatively weak ... When bonds are strong, melodramatic rhetoric may do little more than reinforce existing identities and perspectives on a controversy; but when audiences are encouraged to empathize with unknown or far-flung victims, there is a much greater possibility for transformed perceptions of public problems” (2006, p.255). While there is a long history of resource extraction from Northern Ontario for the benefit of those in the South, the general public’s exposure to the Ring of Fire and the Indigenous communities around it is much more recent. The discursive remoteness of the region and the communities that live there means they currently have little salience in the minds of readers—this lack of salience can be used to transform the stories most commonly told about them. Melodrama is thus a tool that can help bring attention to the Indigenous opposition that is commonly euphemized or erased through grouping all Indigenous communities under one ‘stakeholder’ umbrella. While two Indigenous communities near the Ring of Fire are committed to working with the provincial government and mining industry, euphemizing or erasing the opposition of the other First Nations in the region does not tell a full story. Employing melodrama does not necessarily mean oversimplifying the

events of the Ring of Fire into one villain against one victim, either; rather, as Schwarze (2006) argues:

Melodrama provides a rhetorical framework that can articulate multiple concerns that are hidden, ignored, or repressed in a culture that operates according to a simplistic calculus of “progress” and “economic growth.” It can bring emotion into the foreground, complicating public discourse that takes a purely scientific and technical approach to environmental problems. It can polarize situations so that victims of environmental degradation might have a voice, complicating public discourse systematically dominated by producers of that degradation. And it forces moral questions onto the agenda, complicating public discourse that focuses on technical matters to the exclusion of issues of right and wrong. To the extent it synthesizes these oppositional rhetorical actions, melodrama presents itself as a productive inventional resource for countering the ideological simplifications of dominant public discourses and prying spheres of controversy open to a wider range of voices (p.255).

In this way, melodrama can complicate the dominant discourse on the Ring of Fire. It can complicate dominant narratives of weak or nonexistent opposition from First Nations communities in the region to better reflect the more nuanced reality of strong opposition, multiple interests and competing values, forcing dominant discourses to exist alongside what they commonly gloss over. Melodrama is a powerful linguistic tool for bringing public attention to matters audiences may have little familiarity with.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This research project was undertaken due to a need to comprehensively explore news media discourses on the Ring of Fire region and contribute to our understanding of how language

can shape how we think about, relate to, and ultimately act towards nature, resource extraction, and notions of future green transformations. Some limitations of this research have already been mentioned (primarily, the subjective nature of critical discourse analysis), and here I briefly touch on a few other limitations of this project. The developments and discourse around the Ring of Fire are ever-changing, and I hope research in this area continues.

My research was limited to newspaper coverage from Postmedia Network Inc.'s regional and national news outlets (National Post, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Kingston Whig-Standard, Regina Leader-Post, Montreal Gazette, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, The Sudbury Star, Ottawa Citizen, The Vancouver Sun, Windsor Star, and unclassified "Postmedia Network Inc." releases), The Globe and Mail, FP Newspapers Inc. (Winnipeg Free Press), and The Toronto Star. This was primarily due to feasibility concerns; critical discourse analysis requires striking a balance between the breadth of data used and the depth of the analysis. All these organizations are privately-owned and considered corporate news organizations; conducting a critical discourse analysis of CBC news media discourse on the Ring of Fire would add an interesting dimension to this research, as its dominant discourses may differ due to its publicly-funded nature. Similarly, future research possibilities include a critical discourse analysis of independent or Indigenous-produced news media discourse, via newspapers or other means of news dissemination; organizations such as The Conversation, The Narwhal, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, and Canadaland have all published Ring of Fire stories that may contain discursive features and themes not found in this data set. Comparing how discourse differs among different news organizations could reveal some interesting dynamics, as well. Along these lines, social media is becoming an ever-increasing source of information for Canadians about the world around them. While my research was focused on news media used by those who vote, youth are much more

likely to obtain their news from social media (Maru Public Opinion, 2022). As a site of discourse construction, it is an interesting avenue for future research.

Lastly, my research was limited to one case study, the Ring of Fire region in Ontario. Exploring resource extraction discourse in other regions of Canada or the globe, regions with differing culture, laws, and regulation regarding resource extraction, could shed light on hegemonic discourses and resistance discourses not found through this exploration.

Conclusion

Language has the potential to shape how individuals perceive the world and their relationship to it; it is coloured by the social context that produces it, and in turn has social consequences. Discourse, defined as “language in use”, can be analysed to reveal the stories-we-live-by implicit in this language. Examining resource extraction discourse is particularly pressing, as governments, companies, and investors capitalize on climate crisis discourse to promote mining developments across the globe (Deniau et al., 2021). The Ring of Fire region in Ontario is one such place where the interests of government, companies, and investors converge, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic; as the Canadian and Ontario governments take steps towards a ‘green’ economic recovery, it is crucial to question what this means. News media, often reporting on these developments, is a crucial site of discourse re(production) and has the power to influence how audiences come to know and understand the events of the world around them. This research project was thus concerned with three main questions: How are discourses (re)produced in national and regional news media coverage of the Ring of Fire region in Canada? What general discursive themes are dominant in news media coverage of the Ring of Fire? How do the narratives within these themes relate to imaginaries for future green transformations?

To answer these questions, this research project was designed with a theoretical framework rooted in ecolinguistics and a methodological framework rooted in critical discourse analysis. The Ring of Fire was chosen as a single instrumental case study, and a dual-level coding framework was developed to explore the textual (naming and reference, predication, collocation, presupposition, metaphor, and euphemism) and discursive (intertextuality and interdiscursivity) aspects of news articles concerned with the Ring of Fire. Three key discursive themes were (re)produced through these textual and discursive aspects of the texts in the data set. The first, “greenwashed and destructive discourses”, involved dominant patterns of discourse that conveyed environmental disinformation, committed the ‘greenwashing sins’ from the literature, or was entirely economic in nature. Some counter-discourses were found but were marginalized in the newspapers sampled. The second, “Indigenous communities-government-mining industry relations discourses”, was much more varied in how it described these relationships; multistakeholderism and euphemized opposition were prevalent, and so was an economic interpretation of the seven generations principle. Lastly, “conflict discourses” were common across these texts, as the language of conflict was used to sensationalize business and the geopolitical potential of Canada in the face of global rivalry with China. All in all, the dominant narratives within these themes relate to one imaginary for future green transformations—a technological and market-led one in which a societal transition to EVs is marketed as the necessary solution to both climate and economic crises. Indigenous partnership is taken as a given in this story, and Indigenous opposition is euphemised as a temporary obstacle to change. While an energy transition is necessary to mitigate the effects of climate change, this market-led story is just one of many we can tell ourselves. Other imaginaries for green transformations exist—ones where Indigenous worldviews lead grassroots societal change,

for example, and ones in which economic growth as an ideal is rejected in favour of degrowth and gift economies. As the need to find and implement solutions to the crises we face becomes more urgent, so too does the need to interrogate how we communicate to one another about these potential futures. As Richardson (2007) proposes, “Another world *is* possible. It is the point of [critical discourse analysis] to show how discourse conceals this from us, normalising inequalities and closing down the possibility of change” (p.45).

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