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Northern Crises

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Northern Crises

WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS AND RESISTANCES TO RESOURCE EXTRACTIONS

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Abstract

Using feminist disability studies and intersectionality, this article draws upon the ongoing resource extractions in Labrador, Canada to argue for examining local communities and relationships as one way to understand gender and global social, economic and environmental crises. The article explores how crises in Labrador have been constituted and maintained around global agendas of economic and resource development, historical and current colonial practices and a limited and constrained international relations with local Indigenous nations. The lives of women and their communities in Labrador illustrate one wave of a global crisis that extinguishes diversity and connection to the land in a race to extract natural resources, maintain global military power and gain profit in the global economy. The actions over the past thirty years by NATO and the Canadian federal, provincial and municipal governments, coupled with transnational mining corporations such as Vale, have “normalized” crisis in the communities and reduced the capacity of these communities and Indigenous nations to respond to the issues arising as a result of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development project. Yet the women and their communities illustrate their agency and reject an analysis of them exclusively as victims. Together with researchers and activists, the women in Labrador have built a community of practice in the Feminist Northern Network.

Keywords

feminist disability studies, Indigenous, intersectionality, resource development, hydroelectricity

By 2017, hydroelectric energy will be taken from the newly built Muskrat Falls dam and sent by undersea transmission cables from Labrador, Canada to the island of Newfoundland, on to Nova Scotia, and perhaps, eventually, to the United States. Many laud this project as a new source of more renewable energy for the region, for the additional jobs it is creating in a part of the country with high levels of poverty and unemployment and the underwater infrastructure that will allow for transmission of multiple forms of energy and assist with addressing the impacts of climate change. Yet many diverse women in Labrador identify this as a time of crisis – for themselves, their communities, their culture and ways of knowing and being and the global community.

Using feminist disability studies and intersectionality, this article explores how crises in Labrador have been constituted and maintained around global agendas of economic and resource development, historical and current colonial practices and a limited and constrained international relations with local Indigenous nations. The current crisis resulting from the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development, built on the foundation of previous crises such as NATO low-level flying and dislocations, serves to perpetuate structural inequalities and negatively affects diverse groups of girls and women, including women with disabilities. Drawing on five years of community–university research relationships with women in northern Canada, this article brings novel and unexpected relationships of crisis into view and illustrates complex interconnections between and among women in the contexts of these crises. In particular, the article illustrates the critical role of relationships and communities in understanding global social, economic and environmental crises as well as the ways in which colonial and neocolonial practices justify and require the inclusion and exclusion of particular bodies during times of crisis. Finally, the article illustrates the creation of one “community of practice” around particular crises in Canada’s north that has enabled women to come together across their diversities, resist victimization and offer alternatives for their communities.

FEMINIST DISABILITY STUDIES AND INTERSECTIONALITY

For this analysis, this article uses feminist disability studies and intersectionality. Feminist disability studies is not simply feminist analysis with disability or ability added in or foregrounded. Rather, feminist disability studies recognizes that by including and addressing the experiences of women and girls with disabilities, we transform feminist theory and practice to examine diverse embodiments as part of a range of humanity and illustrate experiences that are evident as well as those that are invisible and silenced. Feminist disability studies challenges us to explore who fits and misfits within existing societies and practices (Garland-Thomson 2011) and why, and how women

and girls' diverse identities, embodiments and material situations are created and maintained in the contexts of families, societies and economies.

Across the world, more than one billion people experience disability and many more live in families where disabilities shape their lives (WHO and World Bank 2011). More than half are women and over 100 million children experience disabilities. Diverse embodiments are evident in neuro-diversity, living with chronic or episodic illness or conditions, hearing and deafness, blindness and sightedness, amputations or walking with legs, prosthetics, walkers or using wheelchairs, diverse ways of learning, communicating and comprehending and many more examples. Yet for the last century over much of the colonized world, diverse embodiments have been valued unequally, with some labeled as normal while others are abnormal (Davis 2006).

That devaluation of so-called abnormal embodiments has led to the exclusion, institutionalization and impoverishment of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities. Feminist disability studies engages in understanding these differences, recognizing that they are socially constructed – evident in discourses, ideas, environments and material realities of those who fit and those who misfit. Fitting is being in sync or union with one's circumstances, while misfitting reflects disjuncture or contradictions. Garland-Thomson (2011) argues, "a good enough fit produces material anonymity" (596) while "the experience of misfitting can produce subjugated knowledges from which an oppositional and politicized identity might arise" (597). Feminist disability studies scholars recognize that these fittings and misfittings are dynamic and change, and that government and societal policies and practices can support certain ways of fitting or misfitting.

These understandings of feminist disability studies clearly align with a feminist intersectional approach in which we illustrate privilege and oppression in differing experiences; highlight how systems and structures over time and through space reinforce those inequalities; and be reflexive about our positions as researchers (Cho et al. 2013). Hirschmann (2012) suggests that addressing disability is a new frontier for feminist intersectionality. Disability does not simply mark the crossroads of intersections, but illustrates the webs of complicated interconnections and, as a result, "the ways in which 'difference' is just another word for being human" (Hirschmann 2012, 404).

The importance of intersectionality for this article is its ability to interrogate both multiple locations and experiences of diverse women in Labrador as well as explore the structural contexts within which their experiences are constituted and maintained, especially in the context of crises. To analyze and engage using intersectionality requires thinking about inclusion and exclusion, distribution of resources, manifestations of global inequalities such as racism, ableism, colonialism and sexism, as well as systems and structures used to maintain inequalities. In particular, this article considers resource extraction in Labrador, Canada and the experiences of Indigenous and settler women in the crises, as they articulate it, in their communities.

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

A crisis can be described as a moment in time when what is understood or practiced as the status quo is threatened and at risk of destruction. In times of crisis, difficult choices must be made and changes implemented to mitigate the perceived risks or prevent destruction of key institutions or practices. Global crises have widespread effects in terms of movements of people, capital and commodities. Cynthia Enloe (2013) argues that significant global crises such as the 2008 financial crisis have a gendered dimension that has not been taken seriously. To consider global crises without considering gendered dimensions, Enloe argues, is to ignore key aspects of these crises, including the agency of women and the ways in which governments use crisis to shape women's behaviors.

Global crises are also created and sustained within and by communities. Looking at local situations within the context of the global situation can expand our understandings of crises. Kirsch (2006) argues that "the sense of place, where people live, resist domination, and maintain their communities" is often forgotten in discussions of globalization and large-scale changes (5). The dynamics and indicators of crisis at a community level may be different from those evident at a transnational or global level. A crisis may indicate an imbalance between a threatening situation and resources to cope with that situation (McCormick 2007). The threatening situation can be immediate and acute, or chronic. For some individuals and communities, there can be a precipitating event(s) requiring an emergency response. However, for others, crises may be chronic and cumulative and a crisis situation may become a "normal" way of life. These "communities in crisis" illustrate how underlying causes can put communities in chronic crisis mode, or leave them vulnerable to being tipped over the edge into crisis mode by less-than-critical events (Health Canada & FNIHB 2004).

When we focus on the local in global crisis, we recognize the tendency to identify only the impacts of crisis on communities and thus to portray people within communities primarily as victims of crisis. This robs them of their agency and neglects the possibilities of seeing resistance and alternatives that sustain communities. Setting the local primarily as affected by global crisis disregards the possibility that local communities can be a source of global crises. We underestimate and render invisible the role that local governments and politics play in creating and supporting practices that produce and reproduce inequalities, including those played out in colonial and neocolonial relationships across the globe.

FEMINIST DISABILITY STUDIES AND CRISIS

By looking to the local in crisis and using the tools of feminist disability studies, we focus attention on who has been included and excluded within

communities. Exclusion can happen in many ways and has been justified through the discourse or ideas evident in neoliberalism, which structures out people with disabilities or excludes them as “not-capable” (Stienstra 2002). This ideological act provides justification for displacing people with disabilities from their communities and/or rendering them invisible through a lack of inclusive structures and supports, and for implicit decisions to provide services and supports to some community members and not others. Colonial relationships, especially with Indigenous peoples, can complicate and intensify the displacement of disabled people (Stienstra 2015). Erevelles (2011) invokes Fanon’s notion of internal colonization to illustrate the created invisibility and non-recognition of disabled people, especially by their segregation in special classrooms, sheltered workshops, nursing homes and institutions.

Inclusion and exclusion by states can rely on personal and often hidden relationships (Enloe 2013). For many people with disabilities, relationships of caring and support provided by family members and others are essential to their existence and survival. For some, including some without oral communications, their very beings are interpreted in and through these relationships. These relationships of caring and support, evident in networks of families, relatives, friends and neighbors, are rendered invisible in many of the global discussions despite their impact on the families’ income and well-being (Grech 2012). A feminist disability studies perspective on global crises makes visible these relationships of caring as well as the ways in which states and governments provide or fail to provide support for these relationships.

Feminist disability studies, together with attention to the local in global crisis, enables us to ask: who is included in communities during times of crisis? Who is invisible or ignored during times of crisis and how is their invisibility maintained? What resources ensure inclusion or facilitate exclusion? How are relationships of caring addressed in crisis? What ideas, discourses, mechanisms or structures are used to maintain these unequal relationships? What are the responses of diverse women to these situations? With a focus on Labrador, Canada and the current crisis of the construction of a hydroelectric dam on traditional Indigenous territories, we can better understand international (including between and among settler and Indigenous nations) and global inequalities.

CANADA’S NORTH, LABRADOR AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Canada bounds the Arctic Circle with the northern part of Canada above the sixtieth parallel and comprising Canada’s three territories – Yukon, Nunavut and North West Territories – called the “far” north of Canada. The “near” north includes the northern parts of Canadian provinces, and shares with the far north many geographic features and a remoteness from urban centers. The community–university research alliance, Feminist Northern

Network or FemNorthNet (<http://www.fnn.criaw-icref.ca/>), from which this research emerges, works in partnership with women in several communities in Canada's near north, including in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador.

Labrador (population 27,000) is part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), on the eastern coast of the mainland of Canada, and shares a border with the province of Quebec (Figure 1). It is geographically and culturally distinct from the island of Newfoundland. Three groups of Indigenous peoples are the original peoples – the Inuit in northern Labrador (Nunatsiavummiut), the Innu primarily inland on their land Nitassinan and the Nunat-Kavummiut or southern Inuit-Metis. In addition, settlers have been in Labrador since the mid-1900s, although various Christian missionaries lived in the region since the 1700s.



Figure 1: Labrador

Source: Feminist Northern Network

The Labrador Inuit govern their own territory called Nunatsiavut. Their self-government was created in 2005 along with a land claim agreement for their territory. While the Inuit initiated their claim in 1977, the negotiations did not gain momentum until 1996 when the federal and NL governments agreed to fast track the claims. This was just after significant deposits of nickel were found in Voisey's Bay, Labrador, and the mining company Inco (now Vale) indicated a desire to mine there (Alacantara 2007). To recognize the historical significance of the Voisey's Bay area for the Inuit, the land claim agreement confirmed the Inuit would receive 5 percent of provincial revenues from the Voisey's Bay nickel mine (Natcher et al. 2012). Voisey's Bay produces 30 percent of the nickel mined in Canada, and recent agreements allowed mining to move underground and continue until at least 2035.

The Innu Nation is the governing body of the Innu people, who are primarily settled in two communities in Labrador – Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. In 2011, the Innu Nation signed the Tshash Petapen, or New Dawn Agreements, with the federal and NL governments. The agreements include agreement in principle for a land claim in Labrador and self-government of the two Innu communities, similar to other First Nations communities in Canada, and benefits redress from the Churchill Falls and Muskrat Falls hydroelectric dam projects (NL Executive Council 2011).

The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) governs those who were known until recently as the Labrador Métis, or southern Inuit. In 1991, they submitted a land claim for parts of central and southern Labrador that has not yet been accepted by the federal government. However, two significant court decisions increased recognition of their rights. In April 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized for the first time that Métis rights are Aboriginal rights. Because the NCC represents Métis, this will ensure greater recognition of their rights (NunatuKavut 2014). In December 2014, the Supreme Court of NL overturned an injunction preventing the NCC from protesting the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development (CBC 2014a), upholding their right to protest use of what they call their traditional lands.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COLONIZATION

Historically, the Indigenous peoples of Labrador had particular lands they gathered on and many undertook seasonal migrations to hunt what they needed. The Moravians, who sent missionaries especially to the Inuit as early as the 1700s, encouraged the Inuit to live at the mission stations that the Moravians had established with land grants and permission from the British and colonial governments (Rankin et al. 2012), although the Inuit resisted this “containment” policy. For many, this is the first example of colonial governments, assisted by Christian missionaries, displacing the original peoples of Labrador.

After the British colony of NL became part of Canada in 1949, the federal government continued the colonial practice of settling Indigenous peoples in particular communities. These (re)settlement efforts were most often justified by enabling the Indigenous peoples' access to government programs and education, and were often carried out without their involvement in the decision making. In 1956 and 1959, the federal government relocated the communities of Nutak and Hebron. Evans (2012) argues that these relocations not only disrupted the Inuit's relationships with the northern environments but, by undermining Inuit political structures and practices, allowed the government to pose development, defined as modernization, as inevitable.

Dislocations continued for Indigenous peoples until very recently, often justified by the need for access to jobs, health care or other services, including education. In effect, these have been the means by which the Indigenous peoples have been corralled into more mainstream (southern) culture and practices. The Churchill River hydroelectric project, signed between the province of Quebec and the province of NL in 1967 without the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the negotiations, saw significant flooding of traplines and traditional lands as well as the first steps toward Indigenous peoples becoming part of a wage economy (Baikie 2014). The Innu were initially settled in two settlements in Davis Inlet and Shetshashiu. These communities have had significant problems with adult alcoholism and gas sniffing among the youth, issues recognized as a result of the communities' dislocation from their land and traditional way of life (Byrne and Fouillard 2000; Wadden 2001; Michelin 2014). After the gas sniffing made national headlines in the late 1990s, in 2002 the federal government moved Davis Inlet to a brand new community called Natuashish to start afresh (Burns 2006; Michelin 2014; Power 2015), but the community continues to address the legacies of displacement.

Displacement has also been a tool used with people with disabilities, both Indigenous and settler, who live in northern communities. Federal and provincial governments have consistently sent disabled girls, boys, women and men to southern Canada or large urban centers to get the services they need rather than assisting with the development of community-based support systems (Stienstra 2015). This has the effect of displacing the disabled people from their communities and rendering disability an invisible part of these communities.

NEWFOUNDLAND AS COLONIZED AND COLONIAL POWER

The historical role of Newfoundland in Canada is key to understanding the crises in Labrador. Until 1949 when Newfoundland, with Labrador, joined the Canadian confederation, it had been a British colony. Traditionally Newfoundland has been a poor part of Canada, reliant on fishing, although the military, mining and hydroelectricity propel economic development in Labrador.

Military relationships have been key in Labrador in the twentieth century. The military base in Goose Bay was established during World War II and by 1943 was the largest airfield in the western hemisphere (Higgins 2006). While run by the Canadians, the base also had troops from the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and Italy. With the presence of the base, and the large number of flights from the airfield, the town of Happy Valley was established in 1942 for Inuit and settler civilians from the coastal regions of Labrador. While the United States closed their part of the base in 1975, Goose Bay continued to play a strategic role in NATO operations with the agreement of Germany and other European countries to practice low-level flying in 1980. Low-level flying continued over Labrador until the late 1990s despite significant opposition from the Innu Nation, who believed it harmed the land and caribou (Lackenbauer 2007; Wadden 2001).

Meanwhile, mining has been a key part of the settler presence in Labrador since the mid-1950s, when iron ore mines were established. The town of Labrador West, located on traditional Innu lands, was created to house the miners and their families but has little Indigenous presence (LWSWC and FNN 2014). In 2014, as a result of changes in the international commodity prices, one of the mines closed and the primarily settler community saw significant job loss, a drop in housing prices and increased poverty.

The Voisey's Bay nickel mine provides an additional export commodity for NL. The further development of Voisey's Bay into an underground mine will secure the importance of nickel to the NL economy (Fitzpatrick 2013). The now-Brazilian-owned transnational, Vale, built a new processing facility in Long Harbour, on the mainland of Newfoundland, to process the nickel from Voisey's Bay and replace Vale's existing smelter in Thompson, Manitoba (Barker 2014). The NL government identifies the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project as critical to meeting the energy needs of this plant over the long term.

With the Churchill Falls agreement (1967 to 2041) with Quebec, the province of NL receives some benefits for the hydroelectricity of Labrador, albeit significantly less than does Quebec. Given this experience of inequality with Quebec, the NL government is determined to become master of its own resources through offshore oil and, in Labrador, hydroelectricity. With the hydroelectric development at Muskrat Falls in Labrador and a possible extension to Gull Island (Figure 2), NL's crown corporation, Nalcor Energy, is securing the province's own "mastery" of its resources. Indeed, the NL government website called "Power in Our Hands"¹ uses this argument to convince people of the benefits of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project:

The people of our province will be the owners of a valuable power-producing asset, rather than paying foreign companies for expensive oil. We know from jurisdictions around the world that by controlling our energy future, we'll control our economic future.

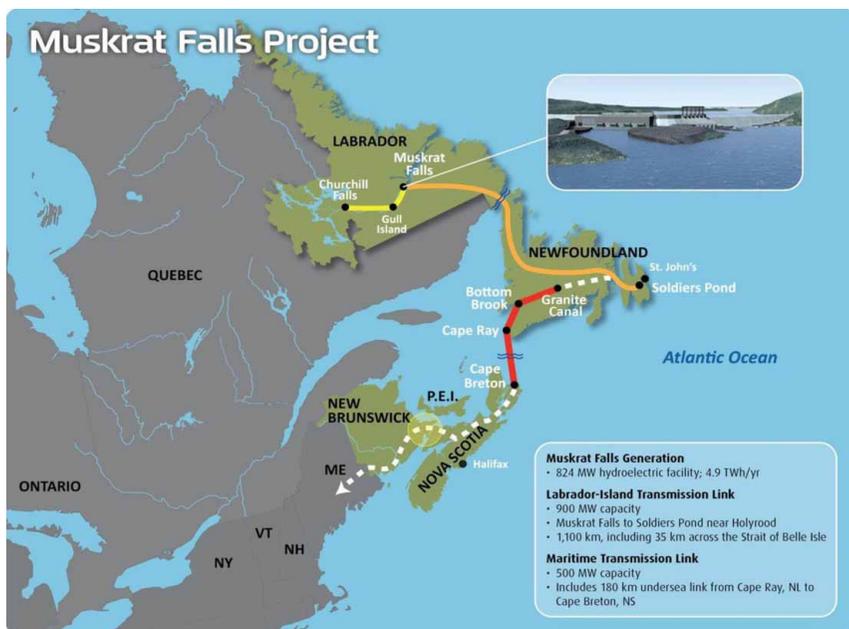


Figure 2: Muskrat Falls/Maritime Link Hydroelectric project

Source: Nalcor Energy, <http://www.nalcorenergy.com/lower-churchill-project.asp>.

Reproduced with permission

Labradorians have a different viewpoint and often argue that Newfoundland acts like a colonial power to Labrador. In April 2014, people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the town that will experience most of the negative effects of the Muskrat Falls development, called for more control of their own resources in Labrador (CBC 2014b) with many drawing on the tradition of Labrador independence as well as the Labrador flag.

WOMEN'S RESISTANCES

Women in Labrador have a long history of resisting colonial-driven economic and military development. With the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development they frame their resistance in relation to what they understand as a crisis, following decades of boom and bust economic development, colonial displacements and interventions. Indigenous women recognize that they will not be able to show their children and grandchildren what it means to live on the land. The women engaged in FemNorth-Net understand that the Muskrat Falls development will fundamentally alter their way of life.

They argue that the government has failed to ensure the health and social services required for both the existing needs of the community and the additional needs arising from the presence of transient workers. This weakens their community's capacity to provide support for those with complex health needs and impairments. New infrastructure in the town is targeted to the needs of the influx of temporary workers, and does not address the needs of those who require ramps or sidewalks to negotiate access to their community. Similarly, the government has not addressed the housing gap in the town and, with increasing numbers of transient workers and spiraling housing costs, the women have concerns about the affordability of housing and increased homelessness of community members. The women raised concerns that with the rising costs and the presence of temporary workers, there will be an increased pressure for women to enter sex work, reflecting their memory of the Goose Bay military base where local women became involved in sex work (Wadden 2001).

They understand that the development will provide benefits to some but will increase and intensify exclusion. They worry that, given the long history of crisis making in their communities, they will not easily survive this latest one. They ask: who benefits from these developments and why is their community paying the costs for hydroelectricity and mining that will mainly benefit other parts of the country and the world?

Over the past four decades, women in Labrador have led resistance efforts and developed community-based alternatives. In the 1980s and 1990s Innu women led much of the resistance and protests against NATO's low-level flying in Labrador and were able to connect with women across the world² to support their efforts (Byrne and Fouillard 2000). Women take on significant leadership roles in Labrador West (Dean and Stinson 2014). The Labrador West Status of Women Council reviewed the implications of mining for the health of their community (Mining Watch 2004) and more recently, as part of Fem-NorthNet, outlined significant housing and child care effects on their community (LWSWC and FNN 2014).

Inuit women were critical to ensuring that the Environmental Impact Assessment and Impact and Benefits Agreement related to Voisey's Bay mining addressed the needs and concerns of Indigenous women (Archibald and Crnkovich 1999; Cox 2013) because they understood that unless they were at the table, their concerns would be ignored. Their analysis illustrated how systemic gendered and colonial assumptions are embedded when women are not included in negotiations and assessments:

As long as the focus remains on land and resources and the primarily male, non-Aboriginal culture dominates the negotiation process and its outcomes, women and issues traditionally viewed as important to women, such as community development (as opposed to large-scale economic development), education, public and private safety, health and social issues are more easily overlooked in these negotiations. (Archibald and Crnkovich 1999, 12)

By excluding social and community matters from negotiations, both Indigenous worldviews and the concerns of women are disregarded or only included in an ad hoc manner “dependent on the willingness of those who have a formal role to play in these processes” (Archibald and Crnkovich 1999, 29).

The environmental review process for the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development illustrates a similar neglect of socioeconomic impacts, despite the NL government’s requirements for gender-based employment analysis and for Labrador and Indigenous people’s employment. Women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay used this disregard to raise their concerns about what they considered an emerging crisis. In 2011, the Environmental Assessment Panel on the Lower Churchill (Muskrat Falls) Hydro Development heard arguments from a group of women from Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Led by the Mokami Status of Women Council (MSWC) and supported by FemNorthNet, the women spoke of five key concerns arising from the development, which they saw as indicators that a crisis was in the making: violence against women; poverty; child care; housing; and mental health. Drawing from the experiences of other communities living with resource extraction industries (Mokami 2011), the women argued that the costs of the development resulted from the presence of temporary workers as well as the impacts of the influx of money from high-wage employment and are seen in skyrocketing housing prices, limited housing availability, an increase in violence against women and an increase in substance abuse among workers and the local community. In addition, they identified increased demands on already strained health and social support systems. They recognized that the town’s physical and social infrastructure could not accommodate the increased numbers of people, trucks and demands. Without deliberate attention to these challenges, some members of the community, including women who experienced violence, women with disabilities and women living in poverty, would experience greater exclusion within their own community. They argued that the MSWC “through its continuing work with diverse women and their families in the Upper Lake Melville over the past three decades, has seen the cycle of boom and bust first hand, and has dealt with its repeated and reverberating effects” (Mokami 2011, 2). The women argued that the review done by the proponent, Nalcor, failed to address key aspects of socioeconomic impacts on the community.

The Environmental Assessment Panel’s report (Joint Review Panel 2011) agreed with Mokami’s analysis, stating “that it is likely that there would be adverse effects in Happy Valley-Goose Bay resulting from high-wage employment, including increased substance abuse, sexual assault and violence against women and children” (219). They recommended

that, if the Project is approved, the provincial Department of Health and Community Services, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, and appropriate government and community agencies from the Upper Lake Melville area, conduct a social effects needs assessment, including an appropriately resourced participa-

tory research component, that would determine the parameters to monitor, collect baseline data, and provide recommendations for social effects mitigation measures and an approach to ongoing monitoring. (Joint Review Panel 2011, 220)

This recommendation was shunted between jurisdictions, with the federal government saying it was a provincial responsibility and the NL government agreeing with the intent, and willing to collect some data, but arguing that much of the recommendation was out of their purview. To date, no government has implemented this recommendation.

The women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay continue to resist and reframe the Muskrat Falls development as a crisis, despite arguments and actions from Nalcor and the government. One Innu elder, Elizabeth Penashue, has taken her family and others to the traditional lands of the Innu (Penashue 2013), giving her children and grandchildren time on the land to learn and experience traditional ways of being and doing. In February 2014, Elizabeth announced her final walk would include a trip to Muskrat Falls on the Grand/Mista-shipu/Churchill River³ that has deep significance to the Innu. With construction of the dam underway, she had to request permission from Nalcor Energy to be there. She was denied access, despite assurances from the NL government that the Indigenous peoples would have access to their traditional sacred lands (Brake 2014).

As part of FemNorthNet, diverse women in the community, who had often experienced exclusion and marginalization within their own communities, described their relationships with the land and rivers through words and other forms of creative expression. The women argued that:

natural resource development changes the environment and disrupts this vital relationship. Local women expressed fear about the future Women who don't participate in the development agenda are being positioned as no longer worthy of the generosity of "the land of the people." (Baikie et al. 2014)

In coming together through FemNorthNet, they have been able to resist this framing and embrace their diversity and working collectively:

Now women are finding strength and a sense of "possibility" by reconnecting and reaffirming their relationships with each other, and with the land and rivers. "We are not as alone as we feel we are – we are very diverse, but as women we are very similar – our experiences, our fears, our hopes." (Baikie et al. 2014)

FemNorthNet also initiated the participatory development of a community vitality index (CVI) in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Drawing from discussions with local women as well as representatives of community organizations and local governments, the CVI identifies five areas of well-being – mental, cultural, emotional, spiritual and physical – and asks a series of questions to monitor and track these areas of well-being (Levac et al. [forthcoming](#)).

The index reflects the uniqueness of living in a northern community, diversity in the community and cultural and spiritual approaches of the community. This initiative is one way to address the Joint Review Panel's recommendation on monitoring social effects (Levac et al. [forthcoming](#)) and has allowed women in the community to understand their own well-being in the face of the Muskrat Falls development. They argue that their well-being is integrally related to land, the environment and their own culture:

[W]e put how everything really does relate to everything else . . . if you don't have safe or affordable housing for your children, then how are you going to pass on your cultural knowledge if your kids are sick and you're being abused In order to have wellbeing, you have to have, you know, you want your kids to be safe and have a good education and to learn their culture and their traditions so they'll live off the land. And you know, they're our heart so it adds up emotionally. (Community Workshop Participant, 17 March 2013, quoted in Levac et al. [forthcoming](#))

The CVI has not yet been implemented by the town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, although it informs the development of a new wellness center. The NCC and Nunatsiavut government are involved in implementing the CVI and a follow-up project developing CVIs in multiple communities.

A final example of women's reframing of the crisis is the relationships of support and solidarity between women in Labrador and women in Nova Scotia who will be receiving the hydroelectricity from Muskrat Falls. In June 2014, twenty women joined the Building Links knowledge-sharing tour in Labrador. Women from Happy Valley-Goose Bay, northern Labrador, Nova Scotia, Indigenous nations and the FemNorthNet national team came together to share their knowledge and experiences. This knowledge-sharing tour disrupted the public narratives of job creation (including gendered job creation), "mastery" of the future, and "clean energy," in both Nova Scotia and Labrador regarding the Muskrat Falls development. The participants learned from each other about the effects of the development in Labrador as well as the resistances of women over the previous years. They drove through the town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay to see the now-empty military base housing and learned of the escalating costs and limited availability of housing. They went to grocery stores to find out the real costs and availability of quality food. They sat by the river and learned more about the sacredness of the land and water for the Indigenous peoples, and viewed the concrete foundations of the dam.

The tour was not only about sharing knowledge and experiences but also about building relationships of support and solidarity. Indigenous women from Nova Scotia shared their experiences with assessing environmental impacts of a pulp mill on Pictou Landing First Nations. Their method of "two-eyed seeing,"⁴ using both Indigenous and western knowledge as part of environmental health monitoring, gave a concrete tool to women from

Labrador. The CVI, a model from Labrador, may be useful in other communities. Women from Nova Scotia brought water from the Churchill River back to Nova Scotia to be part of water-based ceremonies recognizing their relationships with women in Labrador.

In response to colonial and economic interventions over the past decades, diverse women provided leadership in resisting and reframing the discourses and practices of economic prosperity and development. They have reminded decision makers of the importance of relationships among people in communities and with the land and rivers. They named the changes as part of a crisis that will reinforce and maintain exclusions and inequalities based in gender, Indigenouness, disability and location.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM LABRADOR ABOUT GENDER AND GLOBAL CRISIS?

From these different threads of crisis in Labrador and the voices of diverse women we learn more about how to understand global crises and gender. In particular, we are reminded that crises are at once both global and local. They reflect historical and cultural complexities of place and material realities of diverse women, men, girls and boys. They reflect power relationships and inequalities, created and maintained over time by governments, environmental assessment processes, land claim agreements and colonial and regional discourses and practices. Crises also illustrate opportunities for resisting and reframing power relationships and creating alternatives to address changes.

In the example of Labrador and the Muskrat Falls development we recognize how governments use crises to shape the behavior of women, as Cynthia Enloe suggests. As part of the environmental assessment process, the NL government required a gender-based analysis of employment. This measure is limited both in terms of understanding diverse women's experiences and the gendered impacts beyond job creation. Using this tool will not tell us how Indigenous women, disabled women or recent immigrant women benefit in terms of employment, although it suggests that employment is a critical and gendered tool. Moreover, the government has not monitored or addressed the effects of the project on diverse women in the affected communities. The high-paying jobs provided by this project require skills and training in areas where women are traditionally under-enrolled. Women are encouraged to apply for these jobs, but with limited supports, such as child care and low-cost housing, few within the communities can get the required skills and education in time to benefit. For most women, this means they will continue with low-paid or no work and have to live with the increased costs resulting from the development. For some this may come to a choice between living in poverty and leaving the community.

In terms of the Labrador example, we also ask: how are local communities a source of global crisis, and not only the victims? In part this question

encourages us to consider whether communities can reject resource extraction as a path to economic development. The Labrador example suggests that it is very difficult to reject resource extraction when communities are in a chronic state of crisis brought on by decades of displacement, exclusion, external military and economic interventions and international relations that make acquiescence to resource extraction appear inevitable. In Labrador Innu communities, support for the resource extraction has pitted family members against each other, but in the end, the Innu Nation believed that resource extraction was inevitable and at least they should derive some benefit from it. The Inuit appear to have made similar conclusions about the Voisey's Bay mining developments. NunatuKavut, which has no formal standing as an Aboriginal nation in Canada, continues to resist the Muskrat Falls development. Across Canada, Indigenous nations are claiming their own power and authority. The 26 June 2014 Supreme Court of Canada ruling granting broad Aboriginal title to the Tsilhqot'n First Nation in British Columbia will likely ensure stronger protections of traditional lands for Indigenous nations and provide an opportunity to resist and reject resource extraction projects. These changes may reflect a growing realization that local situations can become a source of global crisis related to resource extraction.

Local governments are also part of the structures that support and maintain global inequalities. Newfoundland has taken on a neocolonial stance in its relationships with Labrador. The federal and provincial governments have used environmental assessment processes to sidestep identifying, mitigating and monitoring social impacts of development on communities like Happy Valley-Goose Bay. As well, we see the longer-term constructed invisibility of people with disabilities in northern communities as a result of a service system that reflects disparities in access to resources between Canada's northern and southern communities.

FemNorthNet uses a feminist intersectional analysis to intentionally ask how diverse women, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, recent immigrant women and young women, are affected by the changes resulting from the Muskrat Falls development. This leads us to ask about interconnections between and among women – connections that may be intensified and disrupted in the contexts of crises.

From the women we learn many things including that Inuit and Innu women have been resisting the attempts to use Labrador land and water as resources for the global economy and military. Women's voices were not part of decision making until they insisted, as in the case of Voisey's Bay, or resisted, as in the case of NATO low-level flying. Women are afraid that their children will not have a chance to be on the land and will lose their sense of what it means to be Indigenous. Women and girls with disabilities are often invisible in northern communities such as Happy Valley-Goose Bay because the infrastructure to support their lives, whether it is ramps, sign language interpretation or home-support workers, is not available to them. In times of crisis brought on by resource development, the needs of and supports for women

with disabilities are put in conflict with those of temporary workers. Wages paid for serving coffee and donuts are significantly higher than those for providing care to people with disabilities. Governments, which pay for those care services, have not increased wages to redress this gap. We learn of homelessness, increased violence against women and girls and a lack of safety on the streets. From the women we learn of how their lives are being changed:

This group of women fondly recalled growing up on the land and along the rivers. They expressed grief regarding their increasing disconnection from the natural environment. Until recently, the natural environment was accessible within the boundaries of the community. They could easily take their children and “go off on the land” picking berries, hunting and fishing. However, with natural resource development came barriers that restrict their ability to access and interact with the land and water. Their berry picking spots have become housing developments People now need money to get out on the land and water. (Baikie et al. 2014)

By inviting women to come together and share their stories and concerns through initiatives in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, as well as the Building Links knowledge-sharing tour, FemNorthNet has begun to create space to identify key issues and networks of support. This network can be seen as a “community of practice” (Lawthom and Whelan 2012) where people are actively engaged in common activities and a collective process of learning.

This work is not without challenges, many of which reflect the nature of chronic crisis in Labrador as well as the local and global power relationships. These include increased marginalization within the community, threats to jobs and a lack of organizational support. For many within the community, raising concerns is seen to be against the promised wealth and prosperity. The women argue while they are against the Muskrat Falls development project, they are not against economic development. But they want development that is not at the expense of the lives of local peoples (Claiming Our Place 2013).

By beginning with the intention of listening to particular women’s voices, FemNorthNet has also begun to recognize silent and invisible voices, including women with disabilities. This reflects the structural inequalities in northern communities where it is difficult to get access to services in communities remote from urban settings. The Muskrat Falls development will intensify this inequality because resources and infrastructure are developed to meet the needs of incoming workers rather than those of marginalized community members. The Environment Assessment Review Panel report recognized that existing health and social services were already stretched and inadequate, and as a result of the hydroelectric project these services would become even more inadequate. The Panel argued that it was the responsibility of Nalcor, with the NL Department of Health and Social Services, to mitigate this gap (Joint Review Panel 2011, 225). The NL government made no commitment to do this. From the work of FemNorthNet in Labrador, we recognize that

women need to be at the decision-making table, have a voice, contribute to the processes of community development and act. When diverse women are not taken seriously in crises they can be marginalized and made invisible.

From the viewpoint of diverse women in local crises, we begin to recognize and create a capacity to respond to the complex crises at the local level. This vantage point reminds us that crises, like those in Labrador resulting from the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development, need to be understood in a historical context. In Labrador, the shaping of the crisis has been happening for fifty or more years, with initial displacement of Indigenous peoples and the agreement regarding the Churchill dam. This longer view of crisis helps us recognize that crises are shaped by colonial and neocolonial relations that sustain and perpetuate crises and can lead to situations of chronic crisis. Responses to crises also need to reflect long-standing situations and may require long-lasting changes.

This view of crisis illuminates how the local is intricately embedded into and reliant upon global political, economic and military relationships. It illustrates those included in and necessary for those global political, economic and military relationships (workers, miners, pilots, civilian staff, etc.) as well as those excluded from and seen as unnecessary to these relationships (women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, care providers, etc.). With a focus on the local and those often excluded we recognize that an important story is of agency and resistance in crises. With the persistent involvement of Indigenous nations, women and others who resist, alternatives are imagined and created.

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Notes

- 1 See <http://www.powerinourhands.ca/>
- 2 In a personal conversation with the author in May 2014, Cynthia Enloe noted that she was invited to Labrador to support the Innu women during this time.
- 3 The Innu call the river Mista-Shipu and others call it the Grand or Churchill River.
- 4 To learn more about their project "Our Ancestors Are in Our Land, Water, and Air: A 'Two-Eyed Seeing' Approach to Environmental Health Research", see <http://www.heclab.com/research/current/our-ancestors-are-in-our-land-water-and-air/>

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