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Assessing the Corrib gas controversy: Beyond ‘David and Goliath’ analyses of a resource conflict

Abstract

Since its discovery offshore Ireland in 1996, Corrib gas has become synonymous with controversy and social-ecological upheaval. Drawing on original data, this case study of the Corrib gas conflict illuminates social, economic environmental and political impacts of oil companies’ activities in northwest Ireland and demonstrates how opposition to the Corrib project was not due to NIMBYism or a case of a small rural community fighting a ‘David and Goliath’ type battle against one of the world’s largest multinational oil companies. Rather the community of resistance focused attention on multi-level issues of power, politics and flawed policy formation which resulted in myriad socio-economic and environmental impacts. This article interprets the Corrib gas conflict as a microcosm of Irish state hydrocarbon management, illuminating fundamental issues of society-environment interactions, Ireland’s socio-economic composition, the functioning of the Irish state and its ‘structural interdependence’ with multinational corporations (Harman, 2009; Slevin, 2016). The article argues that forces driving the dispute are simultaneously practical and ideological, local, national and global, extending beyond fractious dynamics of oil company and community interactions to encompass state institutions and Ireland’s place in a globalized world.

Highlights

- The 1996 discovery of Corrib gas was regarded as ‘a milestone in Irish offshore exploration and production’ (DMNR, 2001) yet Corrib gas became synonymous with conflict and controversy.
- Article draws on original data to illuminate social, economic, environmental and political impacts of oil companies’ activities in northwest Ireland.
- The emergence of a community of resistance opposed to the Corrib gas project was not due to NIMBYism or a ‘David and Goliath’ type battle of a rural community against multinational oil companies; conflict can be interpreted as a microcosm of Irish state hydrocarbon management.
- Raises fundamental issues of society-environment interactions, the functioning of the Irish state and its ‘structural interdependence’ with multinational corporations.
- Concludes that forces driving the Corrib conflict are simultaneously practical and ideological, local, national and global, extending beyond fractious dynamics of oil company and community interactions to encompass state institutions and Ireland’s place in a globalized world.

Keywords

Corrib gas, hydrocarbon management, community resistance, resource conflict, structural interdependence of state and capital

1. Introduction

The 1996 discovery of Corrib gas was heralded as ‘a milestone in Irish offshore exploration and production’ (DMNR, 2001). Estimated to contain 870 billion cubic feet of recoverable (sales) gas (Dancer *et al.* in Wood Mackenzie, 2014, p. 21), a petroleum lease to permit production of Corrib gas was granted in 2001 – the first lease granted by the Irish state in over 30 years (Slevin, 2016, p. 9). However, the gas remained unproduced until 2015 amidst much controversy and conflict. Drawing on primary and secondary data, this article presents a case study of the Corrib gas conflict to assess its evolution and elucidate social, ecological, economic and political impacts of oil companies’ activities in Ireland.

Involving interviews, documentary research and observations at key events, the main body of research was conducted between 2009 – 2013; subsequent research encompassed observations and documentary research (2014 – 2018). To develop deep understanding of diverse viewpoints and experiences related to the Corrib project, the author interviewed 30 people from the spectrum of interests surrounding Irish hydrocarbons (decision-makers, members of civil society groups (including people who opposed and supported the project), oil industry representatives, civil servants, politicians, journalists and academics). Interviewees were invited to participate due to their experience or knowledge of the Corrib gas project and/or Irish hydrocarbon management generally and the author used semi-structured interviews to enable participants to answer on their own terms (May, 2002, p. 123). As agreed during data collection, pseudonyms are used in lieu of interviewees’ names to maintain anonymity with basic descriptors given to illustrate varying stakeholder perspectives.

Documentary research was key to developing knowledge of the socio-economic, political and policy contexts influencing extraction of Corrib gas and the author examined policy, fiscal and legal frameworks underpinning indigenous hydrocarbon exploitation in tandem with relevant authentic documents such as government publications, records of parliamentary debates, planning documents, reports and press releases. Secondary analysis included comparisons of international fiscal regimes for hydrocarbon exploitation in tandem with a review of audio, visual, electronic and printed resources relating to Corrib. Additional data was gathered through observations at public events including protests against the Corrib gas project, political debates, the 2010 Oral Hearing and open meetings. Undertaking comprehensive documentary research facilitated analysis of the Corrib gas project as a microcosm of Irish state hydrocarbon management and, when combined with other methods of data collection, enabled a multi-level analysis of the Corrib gas conflict.

Gathering and thematically analyzing such extensive data served to trace the trajectory of the conflict and the breadth of issues underpinning resistance which ranged from environmental, health and safety risks at micro and meso levels to macro-level policies and connections between the Irish state and multinational corporations. The article uses original data to illustrate impacts on people with diverse views and experiences; this study also epitomizes impacts of macro level structures and ideology at a local level, notably those surrounding state hydrocarbon management. Micro level issues are inseparable from larger contexts and broader social forces which not only impact on local level settings but also shape how micro-level issues are manifested (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 67).

Section two of this article traces the origins of the Corrib gas conflict and the community of resistance which mobilized against extractive activities. Using empirical data as the foundation for an analysis of the Corrib resource conflict, the article argues the dispute was not due to NIMBYism or a rural community fighting a ‘David and Goliath’ type battle against multinational oil companies. Rather, as outlined in section three, the contested nature of Corrib gas arose from the interplay of social, economic, environmental, political and ideological forces which transcend a local community. In section four, the article adopts a critical political economy perspective to reveal how the Corrib gas conflict raises fundamental issues of society-environment interactions, the functioning of the Irish state and its ‘structural interdependence’ with multinational corporations (Harman, 2009; Slevin, 2016).

2. Origins of the Corrib gas conflict

Following their discovery of Corrib gas over 80km from the North Mayo coast, the license-holding consortium prepared for development and production. Holding a 45% share, Enterprise Oil was the original operator via its subsidiary Enterprise Energy Ireland (EEI). The other consortium partners were Saga¹ (21.5%), Marathon² (18.5%)

¹ By 2006 Statoil had acquired Saga’s share (DCMNR, 2006).

² Vermilion bought Marathon’s 18.5% share in 2009, resulting in an ownership structure of Shell (45%), Statoil (36.5%) and Vermilion (18.5%).

and Statoil (15%) (O’Sullivan, 1999). Shell became operator in 2002 when Enterprise Oil was bought by Royal Dutch Shell; EEI became Shell E & P [Exploration and Production] Ireland Limited (SEPI) in November 2003 (SEPI, 2003, p. 2). The consortium planned to use subsea technology to develop the Corrib field with an offshore pipeline connecting offshore infrastructure to an onshore pipeline (McGrath, 2001; EEI, 2001). The initial pipeline route involved the transportation of the unprocessed odorless gas from the seabed to Broadhaven Bay (Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Area (SPA)³) where it would come ashore at Glengad (SAC) (the foot of Dooncarton Mountain). Once the raw gas was brought ashore, the consortium intended piping it through Sruwaddacon Bay (part of Broadhaven Bay SAC and SPA) to the inhabited area of Rosspoint where the pipeline would again make landfall. From Rosspoint, the onshore pipeline would run parallel to Sruwaddacon until it reached the terminal in Ballinaboy⁴ where the gas would be processed, odorized and transported to customers through the Gas Networks Ireland⁵ network of pipelines. The terminal location was close to Carrowmore Lake (SPA), the water supply for the region, and the onshore pipeline route would impact on the Glengad Bog Complex (SAC) (Shell, 2010).

Figure 1: Map of area

2.1 Lack of consultation

Subsea production and onshore processing were central to the Corrib consortium’s Plan of Development (POD) created without consulting people living near the proposed pipeline and terminal; the Petroleum Affairs Division⁶ (PAD, the Departmental⁷ section responsible for managing Irish hydrocarbons) did not oblige the consortium to undertake consultation activities. Aidan (senior civil servant in the PAD) outlined the consents and planning process for hydrocarbon production and highlighted how ‘before you [the developer] get to development, before you get to make your application [for planning permission] ... then that’s an opportunity, if you like, to informally or, from a developer’s point of view, *to voluntarily be influenced*.’ In other words, companies can choose whether or not to engage with communities about location and form of a development prior to applying for planning permission to

³ Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are selected and designated under the *EU Habitats Directive* (92/43/EEC) which lists certain habitats and species that must be protected (National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2018). Under the *EU Birds Directive* (2009/147/EC), Ireland is required to designate Special Protection Areas (SPA) for the protection of endangered species of wild birds (*ibid.*).

⁴ Ballinaboy is also known as Bellanaboy.

⁵ Previously known as Bord Gáis Éireann (BGE, Gas Board of Ireland), Gas Networks Ireland is the semi-state company responsible for building and operating the gas network in Ireland. BGE was privatized in 2014 when Bord Gáis sold its energy division to a consortium made up of Centrica, Brookfield Renewable Energy Partners and Icon Infrastructure; the state retained ownership of the national gas network (O’Hora, 2014).

⁶ Holding multiple conflictual roles, the PAD acts as resource owner, promoter of hydrocarbon activities, transfers control and ownership of public resources to private companies, and also regulates exploration and production activities (Slevin, 2013; 2016).

⁷ The state department responsible for Irish hydrocarbon management has changed names numerous times, often following a General Election. Currently known as the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCAE), it has previously been titled: Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR); Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR); Department of Marine and Natural Resources (DMNR).

build infrastructure. According to Charles, an industry consultant engaged by the Petroleum Affairs Division to review the Corrib POD, Enterprise ‘definitely weren’t for talking to the locals about what was going on.’

Fr Adam (supports the project) felt Enterprise ‘sought to rush the project ahead without proper consultation with the community.’ Failures to create mechanisms for community participation in the design and implementation of projects can ‘often marginalize local people and needs’ (Conde and Le Billon, 2017, p. 684) and when local people began to hear about the Corrib gas project in an *ad hoc* way, it created fears the project was already a *fait accompli*. Several interviewees conveyed a sense of a foreign entity being imposed on the area; Ted (retired teacher) described summer 2000 as the start of the ‘invasion’ when ‘the suits [Enterprise staff] were in the pubs buying booze for people and coming on with their models [of the project infrastructure] ... the invasion has started.’

2.2 Community concerns

Environmental, health and safety worries arose as residents learned about the consortium’s plans. Salter and Sullivan (2008, p. 4) summarize concerns as: pipeline risks; toxic waste issues; risk of accident in a rural area without emergency services; human rights abuses which included compulsory acquisitions orders against residents, low tax terms and Shell’s poor track record in Nigeria and other countries. Residents were concerned about the high pressure proposed for the onshore gas pipeline (345 bar⁸) in a route close to houses (70 m in places), passing through ‘unstable peat bog with a history of landslides’ (*ibid.*). The pipeline’s proximity to Dooncarton was a source of unease as more than forty separate landslides occurred on the Dooncarton and Barnachuille (Barr na Coilleadh) mountains in September 2003. Forty families in the Pollatomish area were evacuated from their homes amidst widespread damage to roads, bridges, the old and new graveyards, and private property (Creighton and Verbruggen, 2003, p. 4; Tobin Consulting, 2003, p. 1). Toxic waste concerns included waste water being discharged into the sea, runoff from the processing terminal into Carrowmore Lake (the water supply for over 10,000 people (Garavan *et al.*, 2006) and release of toxic gases (Salter and Sullivan, 2008). Joe, a fisherman for over 35 years, was concerned about the project’s offshore Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): ‘I went through a bit of it and it was very complicated so I sent it over to a marine biologist in the University of Southampton. This biologist produced an independent report on the EIS which stated there was a cocktail of chemicals from the outfall pipe going into Broadhaven Bay.’

Garavan (2007, pp. 858-859) suggests the proposal for the gas project obliged the community to enter into an ‘unusually deep reflection on the nature and values of their place and community’, subsequently many people ‘commenced a critical reflection on the refinery [gas processing terminal] and became mobilized to resist it.’ Niamh, a retired school principal, shared a visceral element of her opposition ‘at the beginning, the very beginning, through the middle and at the end, is place. It’s the tenet of place.’ This concern for, and connection to, her physical environment influenced Niamh’s response to the project and she highlighted how the choice of location for the terminal and pipeline was problematic: ‘It was first of all that the oil companies could consider that Sruwaddacon was the place to put a gas pipeline and secondly that the government could even begin to consider considering it ... after that then came the insult to the people who are currently living here, that we were obviously considered so worthless or so undeserving of any consideration whatsoever, that we didn’t feature in it [decision-making about the project].’ Jim, an educational psychologist living beside Broadhaven Bay, emphasized interconnected socio-economic and environmental concerns:

The issues for the people were ... safety ... the safety of the project, the safety of the pipeline, the safety of the terminal ... and it is adjacent to Carrowmore Lake which is the source of all our water in Erris and certainly there have been scares already in the early days with mercury and so forth. And I think the risk to our water supply is probably the biggest risk we have ... so safety was one issue, the other issue was damage to the environment and I think the third issue was what benefit would it be to either this community or to Ireland as a whole? And it certainly wasn’t apparent because it became quite clear that whatever gas was found would be sold on the international market anyway at market prices and I certainly don’t believe that it in any way enhances the security of supply for Ireland.

By outlining some of the macro level issues surrounding the Irish state’s approach to hydrocarbon management, Jim’s analysis is similar to activists who questioned the development of the Corrib gas project on the basis of limited socio-economic benefits (including uniquely low revenues to the state from gas production, outlined in section 3).

⁸ The anticipated gas pressure was over four times the gas pressure in the national distribution network (approx. 80 bar) (Allen, 2007).

Such critical perspectives shared a multi-level focus that included attention to national energy policy and consequences of hydrocarbon extraction at meso and micro levels of communities, families and individuals.

In stark contrast, other people viewed the project positively due to potential benefits for the isolated Erris region. Three interviewees from Co. Mayo, who did not live in the vicinity of the onshore pipeline and terminal, became outspoken supporters of the project: Seamus (a Shell employee) 'campaign[ed] to ensure that the gas ... came ashore in Mayo' as he felt there 'would be spin-off benefits from it.' Andrew (businessman from a town over 50 km east of Ballinaboy) said he was 'very supportive of any project that would help job creation.' Fr Adam (priest in a parish approximately 20km from the terminal) endorsed the project as it had 'the potential to help social and economic development of this region.' There was a 'feeling this is good for the economy of the area [among some people] ... business people who had employees whose responsibility was to, and the businesses who supported the project for economic reasons' (Paul, director of a film on the Corrib gas controversy). Jim (resident opposed to the project) suggested 'a section of the community would have thought 'what can we get out of this?' A section of the community would have thought this will provide employment for the area and development and money being pumped into the economy. Others spotted the dangers I think early on.'

Diverse standpoints on the project began to develop at an early juncture, creating tensions among people living in the Erris region. Being cognizant of varying impacts of the Corrib gas conflict, using Wilmott's classification of types of 'community' (1989) can help distinguish between contrasting perspectives and social groups. Community can be regarded as: a territory or locality; a communality of interest or an interest group; or a group sharing a common condition or problem (Wilmott, 1989, p. 2). Wilmott's categorization helps reveal distinctive communities associated with the Corrib project: those who live in the area surrounding the pipeline and terminal; groups of people self-described as a community based on their interests, whether in support of, or opposition to, Corrib gas; or those sharing a common condition or problem, for example, those who experienced state/ private actor coercion or people who were snubbed because they supported the project. Recognizing the complexity, diversity and interrelationships inherent to 'community' (Ledwith, 2007, p. 32) and how 'community' is immersed in values and differing descriptions (Galbraith, 1990, p. 3), this article uses proximity to the Corrib gas pipeline and terminal as a mechanism for identifying the community most affected by the Corrib gas project⁹. The rationale for this stance arose from interviews and study visits through which the researcher became aware of implicit understandings of community membership shared by those living near the project infrastructure. Mackenzie and Dalby's (2003) elucidation of 'complex articulations of community, nature, resistance and identity' in relation to two struggles against a superquarry share similarities with the Corrib gas conflict, with a strong sense of collective identity manifest in resistance to the different projects. Commonalities based on a shared geographical location can form the basis of 'new or renewed conceptions of community' arising from the mobilization of people with a 'particular conception of community' around the defense of what they hold in common (Kuecker *et al.*, 2011, pp. 250-3). From this view, perceptions of being part of a community can encourage people to mobilize around a shared threat and while existing 'fault lines' surrounding class, ethnicity or traditional divisions and potential for conflict remain, these can contribute to that community's resilience as they negotiate norms which hold the community together, even in times of crisis (*ibid.*).

In their research on community resistance towards mining projects, Conde and Le Billon (2017) use 'community' to signify groups of people with links to areas surrounding mining projects, advising that the terminology of community does not mean those groups are 'immutable, geographically-confined, homogenous and cohesive'. Community, with its 'warm and comforting' symbolism (Robson, 2001), does not adequately convey heterogeneous perspectives on the Corrib gas project, for example, individuals and groups from the wider Erris region who were vocal supporters and described themselves as members of 'the community' when discussing the project in the mainstream media. In addition, people living nearer the project who did not participate in collective action and/or availed of compensatory payments or funding from the gas consortium are unlikely to regard themselves as part of the community who resisted Corrib gas. Local or regional proximity to the development appears as an incomplete basis for a conceptualization of community, therefore, 'community of resistance' more accurately signifies a reconfiguration of an existing community within a defined area, encompassing those who mobilized against the Corrib gas project on a variety of grounds (Slevin, 2013). Viewing opposition as a community of resistance also enables inclusion of those

⁹ 'Those living closest to terminal and proposed pipeline routes appear to have suffered most through disruptions to their lives caused by the project to date, and would be most affected by potential occurrences such as pollution, contamination of other resources (i.e. local water supply), fire, explosions, or rupture of the pipeline' (Slevin, 2013, p. xviii).

from a wider geographical and ideological spectrum who became part of the struggle against Corrib gas and wider issues of Irish state hydrocarbon management, for example activists in Dublin, Cork, Galway, London and other areas where 'Shell to Sea'¹⁰ groups were established. Baker and Doran (2009), Garavan (2007) and Leonard (2006) situate the campaign against the Corrib project as part of the broader environmental movement in Ireland and Cox (2015) views such resistance as part of 'social movement alliances against toxic hegemony'; these analyses recognize the coming together of local, national and international activists around a struggle that is geographically bound yet multi-level in causes and consequences. Conceptualizing opposition as a community of resistance attempts to foreground the origins of a local struggle as the basis for the mobilization of diverse activists sharing common ideals, concerns and a collective identity within a social movement.

Considerations of community demonstrate how viewpoints and forms of collective action in relation to the Corrib gas project were not unitary. Identification of a specific community of resistance is necessary given some interpretations which regarded growing opposition as a David versus Goliath¹¹ battle (Keohane and Kuhling, 2010) or NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), a claim repeatedly directed at but dismissed by protestors (Garavan, 2007). David versus Goliath analyses suggest a tenacious underdog bravely standing up to one of the world's largest oil companies while NIMBYism was frequently used as a 'catchall term to label opposition' and imply 'citizens have illegitimate or irrational selfish' reasons for opposing facilities (Hunter and Leyden, 1995). Barry and Doran (2009) emphasize how allegations of NIMBYism are 'part of a deliberative effort to portray protest mobilizations as irrational, anti-progress, selfish and endangering the economic competitiveness of the national or local economy.' Detractors applied the term to protestors to 'de-legitimize and dismiss opposition' (Cass *et al.* 2010, p. 256), yet labelling opposition as NIMBYism fails 'to reflect the complexity of human motives and their interaction with social and political institutions' (Bell *et al.*, 2005, p. 460) and misses 'the multitude of underlying motivations ... and different roots of opposition' (Wolsink, 2000, p. 57). NIMBYist critiques also ignore matters of resource ownership, control and wealth distribution (Slevin, 2013), clearly problematized by Shell to Sea.

As the Corrib gas controversy unfolded, it became clear that David and Goliath or NIMBYist analyses fail to capture complex multi-level issues and dynamics fuelling the resource conflict.

3. Contested Corrib gas

Enterprise submitted its application for planning permission for the gas processing terminal to Mayo County Council (MCC) on 30 April 2001 and the issue of project-splitting arose at that early juncture. Project-splitting involves the separate examination of individual parts of a project, rather than thorough investigation of an entire project and its cumulative impacts. The Corrib offshore infrastructure, offshore gas pipeline, onshore pipeline and the onshore processing terminal would be examined separately, by different bodies in some cases, meaning the collective socio-ecological consequences of the Corrib gas project were not scrutinized. Although objections to planning permission were submitted, MCC's Senior Executive Planner granted permission and stated the development would not be 'contrary to the proper planning and development of the area' if the proper mitigation measures and conditions attached to planning permission were followed (Gannon, 2001, p. 3). MCC granted permission for the gas terminal subject to sixty-six conditions but residents immediately appealed this decision to the national authority An Bord Pleanála (ABP, The Planning Board). A two-week oral hearing ensued, chaired by ABP Senior Planning Inspector Kevin Moore.

3.1 Oral Hearing on gas processing terminal (2002 – 2003)

The first oral hearing (18 February to 1 March 2002) involved submissions from Enterprise, residents and other observers. In his decisive report on the hearing, Inspector Moore (2002) outlined socio-economic, ecological, cultural, health and safety, visual, public safety, tourism and traffic impacts of the project and critiqued MCC's granting of planning permission, stating there was no immediate need for Corrib gas as Ireland's energy needs were

¹⁰ Established in 2005, Shell to Sea became the main driver of opposition to the Corrib gas project. Shell to Sea had three key aims: '(1) Any exploitation of the Corrib gas field be done in a safe way that will not expose the local community in Erris to unnecessary health, safety and environmental risks; 2) To renegotiate the terms of the Great Oil and Gas Giveaway, which sees Ireland's 10 billion barrels of oil equivalent off the West Coast go directly to the oil companies, with the Irish State retaining a 0% share, no energy security of supply and only 25% tax on profits against which all costs can be deducted; 3) To seek justice for the human rights abuses suffered by Shell to Sea campaigners due to their opposition to Shell's proposed inland refinery' (Shell to Sea, N.D).

¹¹ David versus Goliath is a biblical story in which a young shepherd fights and kills a giant warrior. A parable for an underdog fighting a powerful aggressor, a David versus Goliath analogy was often used in public discourse to describe local opposition to Shell (for example, McKittrick, 2005; Horan, 2009; Petzinger, 2011; Laffey, 2013; McKiernan, 2016).

met by production from Kinsale¹² and supplies from the UK (*ibid.*). He questioned projected gains and argued the project would bring limited benefits to the 'disadvantaged region' as Corrib gas would 'be wholly used outside' the area while the state bore the cost of laying the distribution pipeline from the terminal to the national gas network. Moore problematized project-splitting which meant ABP were unable to assess other components of the project, specifically the method of gas production, offshore and onshore pipeline, and environmental risks which require an Integrated Pollution Control License. Critical of the project's 'development concept' (subsea technology for gas production and onshore processing), Moore sought investigation of other options, specifically gas processing on a shallow water platform with gas piped to an onshore reception terminal. As transportation of processed gas poses fewer health, safety and environmental risks, locations other than Ballinaboy could be chosen for a reception terminal (*ibid.*).

Arguing the Corrib project 'defies any rational understanding of the term 'sustainability'', Moore stressed the development was not of 'national strategic importance' and recommended that planning permission be refused (2002, pp. 167-8). ABP subsequently sought further information from Enterprise on alternatives, peat stability, visual impact, health and safety and requested the developer examine shallow water processing and an onshore receiving terminal elsewhere in Co. Mayo, suggesting urban areas with existing industrialized sites. The Board's request led to the re-opening of the oral hearing (25 November to 10 December 2002), chaired by Inspector Moore. In response to ABP's requirement for a comparison of alternatives, Andy Pyle (Enterprise's new Managing Director¹³) argued alternatives were not economically viable, suggesting capital costs for other options could cost an additional €360 million and a 40% increase in annual operating costs (Moore, 2003, pp. 197-208). Moore was critical of Enterprise's response, stating the company did not investigate locations other than Ballinaboy for a processing or reception terminal: 'the applicant's response completely avoided this comparison ... the context of the shallow water option was clearly avoided ... the dismissive response on the non-viability of the alternative [without in-depth study] was issued as the reason for a total avoidance of the Board's actual request' (*ibid.*).

Moore (2003) highlighted how the proposed subsea tie-back would be the second longest in the world (92 km) and he focused on the applicant's own evidence which illustrated that in projects similar to Corrib, the pipelines were all tied back to offshore processing platforms, not land-based terminals. Moore concluded: 'from a strategic planning perspective, this is the *wrong site*; from the perspective of government policy which seeks to foster balanced regional development, this is the *wrong site*; from the perspective of minimizing environmental impact, this is the *wrong site*; and consequently from the perspective of sustainable development, this is the *wrong site*.' Informed by Moore's reports, ABP refused planning permission for the gas terminal due to problems posed by peat excavation, movement and storage onsite (2003a). ABP ruled the proposed peat repositories, necessary to store 650,000 square cubic meters of peat removed during terminal construction, had a high risk of failure and constituted unacceptable risks to the local community, general public and environment (ABP, 2003b); ABP also noted alternatives were available for Corrib gas development. Local people viewed the refusal of planning permission as a victory (Siggins, 2010a), yet the Corrib consortium did not let the decision stop its plans, nor did arms of the Irish state halt endeavors to progress the project.

3.2 Project advances, without planning permission for the terminal

Some developers might have terminated a development when refused permission for a vital component yet Shell persevered, aided by some important politicians and PAD staff. Referring to Shell's Committee of Managing Directors' questioning of delays, Barrister Brian Barrington discusses their 2002 recorded queries around whether they had 'sufficiently well placed contacts with the Irish government and regulators'; he concludes 'it is disconcerting that the recorded reaction of the Committee of Directors was to query whether they had appropriate contacts with the Irish regulatory authorities, rather than appropriate compliance with Irish regulatory requirements' (2010, pp. 15-6). In 2003, Shell representatives met with politicians including then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern (CPI, 2005). Four days after Shell met with the Taoiseach, an Irish Offshore Operators' Association (IOOA) delegation, including senior executives from Shell, Statoil and Marathon, met with members of An Bord Pleanála (Siggins, 2010a, p. 175). Although ABP chairman John O'Conner stated it was 'wrong' to infer that the meeting resulted in special treatment for the Corrib consortium (*ibid.*), the issue attracted much concern and arose unprompted in several interviews.

¹² Discovered in 1971, the Kinsale gas field was the first commercial hydrocarbon project in Ireland. Located off the South coast, production started in 1978 and the gas is processed offshore and piped to a receiving terminal in Inch, Co. Cork for connection to the national gas pipeline.

¹³ Andy Pyle became the new Managing Director when Shell acquired Enterprise.

Stephen (an investigative journalist) described the meetings as ‘sinister’, suggesting that when planning permission was refused Shell demanded meetings with the Taoiseach and ABP with the purpose of discussing ‘how to get around the obstacle of this inspector’s refusal.’ Ken, a Minister in that Government, viewed the meetings between ABP and Shell as ‘a very serious issue’ yet surmised his colleague ‘Bertie Ahern ... [was] told that under no circumstances could they go and interfere with ABP.’ Ken thought that when the companies asked if they could meet with ABP, they were told ‘ok ... but whatever happens between you and Bord Pleanála is your business.’ Ken, however, did not rule out improper behavior and if there is: ‘any allegation made in all of this ... you follow it up, unless it runs into the sand or is substantiated ... if it is substantiated, fine then a serious thing will follow further.’ O’Donnell (2011, p. 73) recognized any suggestion of ‘governmental corruption and state collusion with Shell’ amounts to a serious allegation, yet cannot be easily dismissed. Political intervention in the Corrib project has not been the subject of a public investigation.

Despite some claims of NIMBYism and interpretations of a David-versus-Goliath-esque struggle of a rural community against ‘big oil’, the Irish state’s role in the dispute was becoming clearer. Legislative changes signify state efforts to progress the project, for example, amendments to the *Gas Act* in 2000 allowed construction of gas pipelines by private companies (previously only Bord Gáis was permitted to construct pipelines). New Statutory Instruments (SI) benefitted the project: SI 100 of 2000 enabled Frank Fahey (Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources) to approve construction of the Corrib pipeline; SI 517 (2001) allowed Fahey to grant Compulsory Acquisition Orders (CAO) to permit private companies to occupy land and construct a pipeline even if the landowners objected. Furthermore, in 2001 Enterprise bought 400 acres of Coillte (state forestry service) owned land in Ballinaboy as a site for the gas processing terminal.

By 2004 approval had been granted for various elements of the project, including: the petroleum lease to produce Corrib gas (*Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960*; granted November 2001); construction of subsea structures (*Continental Shelf Act, 1968*; 2001); export pipeline (Section 8 of the *Gas Act, 1976*, as amended; 28 February 2002); and pipeline construction (section 40 of the *Gas Act, 1976*, as amended; 15 April 2002) (Johnson, 2004, p. 60). Although the consortium did not have planning permission for the terminal, Minister Fahey approved construction of the pipeline to transport gas to the contested site, exempt from planning permission (Siggins, 2010d). Approval for the overall plan of development (*Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960*) was granted 15 April 2002 and, a month later, a Foreshore License for the pipeline, umbilical and outfall pipe was granted (Section 3 of the *Foreshore Act, 1933*; 17 May) (Johnson, 2004, p. 60).

Challenging such occurrences, the community of resistance also centered attention on the licensing terms underpinning extraction of Corrib gas, described by Shell to Sea as the ‘great oil and gas giveaway’ (n.d.). State ownership of Irish hydrocarbons is embedded in Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution) and the *Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960*, however, licensing terms permitting hydrocarbon exploitation entail the transfer of control and ownership of common resources to private interests. In a neoliberal state such as Ireland’s (Allen, 2007), the environment and natural resources are seen as free objects or ‘gifts of nature to man’ rather than valuable publicly owned resources which collectively benefit society (Bellamy Foster and Clark, 2009, p. 8). The ‘market fundamentalism’ inherent to neoliberal ideology prioritizes a ‘free market’ above states’ claims to resources (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 74), apparent in the absence of requirements for companies to use Irish workers, goods or services during extractive activities or sell indigenous hydrocarbons to the Irish energy market upon production (requirements of *1975 Ireland: Exclusive Offshore Licensing Terms*) (Slevin, 2016). Hence, in an island dependent on imported gas and oil, offshore hydrocarbon extraction does not guarantee security of supply as companies can choose whether or not to sell produced resources back to the country; if companies choose to do so, sales are at full market prices (*ibid.*).

In addition, the Corrib petroleum lease was granted under the *1992 Licensing Terms for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Development* and the consortium are only liable to pay a 25% corporate tax rate, against which costs accrued over a 25-year period are offset. ‘Government take’ can be understood as the total percentage of revenue from production, accrued through fiscal tools such as tax, royalties or bonuses (US Government Accountability Office, 2007). The maximum ‘government take’ the Irish state could receive from Corrib is 25%, yet Johnston (2010) estimated average government take globally to be around 70% - nearly three times the rate of government take under the Irish *1992 Licensing Terms*. Numerous studies have emphasized the uniquely low returns to the state, for example, Khelil (1995) refers to Ireland’s ‘very low government take at 25%’ and state sponsored reports reach

similar conclusions: the Irish regime 'yields among the lowest government take in the world' (Indecon, 2007); 'Ireland has the most generous tax and royalty regime' (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2011). Privatization of indigenous hydrocarbons occurs as part of a pro-corporate licensing regime that reflects the neoliberal agenda advanced by the Irish state whereby 'corporate interests' have come to dominate 'Irish social and economic policy' (Allen, 2007, p. 83).

3.3 Intensification and incarcerations (2004 – 2009)

In 2004 Shell reapplied for planning permission for the processing terminal in Ballinaboy, proposing the storage of 450,000 sq. m of excavated peat on a separate site at Srahmore, 11km from the terminal. Planning permission was granted by Mayo County Council on 30 April 2004, subject to seventy conditions. Local people promptly appealed the decision to An Bord Pleanála yet ABP declined to hold an oral hearing, stating their decision was due to 'to the planning history in relation to this proposed gas terminal and to the amount of background information available arising from the two previous extensive oral hearings already held and the information provided in the planning application and the EIS' (Johnson, 2004, p. 4). Senior Planning Inspector Moore did not adjudicate, instead a Deputy Planning Officer (Inspector Johnson) oversaw the appeal and, taking a very different perspective, recommended planning permission. ABP granted permission for the processing terminal in October 2004, enabling Shell to commence work.

Resistance to the Corrib gas project intensified in April 2005 when Shell was granted a High Court injunction against named residents to prevent them obstructing pipeline construction on the residents' lands, to which Shell was granted access through CAOs. On 29 June 2005, five men (the Rosspoint Five) were jailed indefinitely for contempt of court for refusing to obey the High Court ruling. Their imprisonment heightened opposition to the project which progressed from informal alliances (Ballinaboy/Leenamore Concerned Citizens Group, Friends of the Irish Environment) to two key groups established in 2005: 'Shell to Sea' explicitly sought offshore location of the project and renegotiation of tax terms of the 'great oil and gas giveaway' (Shell to Sea, N.D.); Rosspoint Solidarity Camp encompassed activists from outside the area who came to express solidarity with the community. Niamh (a member of Shell to Sea) said it was reasonable to lobby for the gas to be processed offshore, after all 'we knew that Kinsale was processed offshore and came ashore odorized and de-pressurized.' Due to the national public outcry over the Rosspoint Five's jailing, Shell announced suspension of work at Ballinaboy in August 2005. The terminal's entrance became a protest site as regular rallies were held there and across the country, including national marches in Dublin attended by thousands of people. The jailing of the Rosspoint Five 'widened the mobilization of support for the men and their families from around the nation and beyond' (Leonard, 2006, p. 197) and opposition grew from a 'loose network' within the local community to national and international levels (Garavan, 2007, p. 857) as Shell to Sea groups were formed in different towns, cities and countries (for example, Dublin Shell to Sea, Shell to Sea groups in London and Germany) (Slevin, 2010). The Rosspoint Five were incarcerated for 94 days until Shell dropped their injunction in September 2005.

The Rosspoint Five's jailing provoked two occurrences: mediation; and formation of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Noel Dempsey (Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources) appointed Peter Cassells as a mediator between the parties and Cassells began mediation attempts in early 2006. Following 'intensive discussions and detailed consultation with the local community', Cassells confirmed mediation had failed (Siggins, 2010a, p. 194-5). Cassells concluded 'no agreement was likely in the foreseeable future' and recommended modifying the onshore pipeline route to avoid homes in Rosspoint (*ibid.*). He also recommended a review of compensation for landowners and the introduction of financial incentives like an investment fund for the region. The TAG's establishment led to the commissioning of the Advantica report which made recommendations on risk, safety, engineering standards, monitoring of pipeline construction and maintenance. Advantica advised the 'very high design pressure (345 bar) much higher than conventional onshore gas transmission pipelines' be reduced to 144 bar (2006, p. 1). However, as Fr Donal points out 'nobody came up with any solution really to the actual problems that the community were facing. They found different ways of talking around the thing.' These strategies failed to address key issues – the onshore location of the terminal, pipeline, associated health, safety and environmental risks, and limited socio-economic benefits for the area and wider society.

In September 2006 Shell announced plans to resume work on the terminal. Several interviewees emphasized how the failure of planning and political systems to respond to their concerns left them with no option other than to take direct action. Joe, a local fisherman, stressed that when 'democracy failed us and putting in submissions and objections and all that, and yet all the arms of the state then ... going hand in glove with the developer, with Shell.

We hadn't a hope in hell of getting anywhere with them so we were left with no option other than to protest.' After years of articulating their resistance through formal systems, groups opposed to the project deployed a varied repertoire of tools and actions, including blocking roads with their bodies to prevent access to the construction site. Signifying the 'brute force' to which "problem' communities' can be subjected when threatening perceived 'national interest' of extractive activities (Arsel *et al.*, 2016, p. 885), the Irish state's response was quick and firm – over 150 members of the Irish police force An Garda Síochána¹⁴ were deployed to this area previously acknowledged for having a low crime rate (Garda Review, 2006). 3 October 2006 marked the first physical stand-off between protestors and Gardaí as police officers lifted people from their sit-down positions on the road to facilitate entry of company vehicles to the terminal. Acts of non-violent civil disobedience continued in a similar vein until 10 November 2006 when policing tactics changed dramatically. Designated as a national peaceful demonstration, hundreds of Shell to Sea supporters from across the country arrived in Ballinaboy to express solidarity with local people. Gardaí responded by baton-charging protestors; Mark, a member of Rosspoint Solidarity Camp, recalled his experience:

We ... got battered [beaten with batons] off the road ... there's supposed to be law in the country and that was my first real taste of how far the state would be willing to go ... I got kned in the face by X, Sergeant X and I would have been limping for about a week after it because I got kned [in the groin] by X as well. I remember two girls who were walking behind me and he just threw them in [to the ditch], one of them hit a barbed wire fence and just flipped over. So it was just eye-opening, the level of violence that would be allowed to happen for this and like again, it goes back to when you see that there's no benefit, no benefit to the state that I can see, you're just wondering why would they do that?

When the jailing of the Rosspoint Five failed to discourage opposition to the Corrib gas project, violent policing replaced arrests as the chosen form of state coercive force against resistance. The Garda Superintendent for the region referred to a policy of 'no arrests' as the police 'did not want to facilitate anybody down there with a route to martyrdom' (Ward, 2006, p. 10). Growing incidences of police violence triggered appalled responses on all sides of the dispute, including people who worked on the project – '[I have] been out of it for years but I was pretty horrified ... at the images of the guards beating people up, that was horrific, but that's a totally different question, that's about ... Irish policing policy' (Peter, former CEO of Enterprise). While Garda coercion is part of broader policing policies, it also reflects the state's wider support of the Corrib gas project.

Since 2006, Dublin Shell to Sea has recorded Gardaí 'breaking up ... peaceful protests, throwing residents into ditches, beating them, verbally abusing them and threatening them' (2009). Human rights organizations such as Frontline, Afri and Global Community Monitor, elements of the mainstream media, social media (notably activists' articles on Indymedia.ie), and documentaries have illuminated Gardaí violence during protests. Storey (2009) refers to human rights monitoring in the summer of 2009 which revealed continued 'Gardaí abuses, including intimidation, harassment and assaults of protestors' human rights.' When the twin strategy of 'no arrests' and physical coercion did not suppress opposition to the project, protestors encountered a new policing strategy of 'criminalization' and were arrested during demonstrations or direct actions. Criminalization of activists became the norm and protestors were arrested for public order and other offences. Four residents interviewed for this research were arrested between 2005 – 2012 and three served custodial sentences: one woman served approximately fifty days in prison on different occasions; one man was incarcerated for ninety-four days; another man spent five months and one week in prison.

State power was used in other ways against those opposed the project. A 2007 stand-off between residents, Shell and Gardaí at McGrath's pier in Pollatomish involved Garda force against protestors to facilitate Shell's entry onto private property, even though the company did not have permission from the landowner or the appropriate permissions to conduct work at that site. In 2008, Shell hired the *Solitaire*, one of the world's largest pipe-laying ships, to lay the gas pipeline from the offshore wellhead over 80 km through Broadhaven Bay to Glengad beach. Joe, a fisherman, refused to move fishing gear from his traditional fishing grounds and 'when the *Solitaire* arrived, I went out and I kept fishing my gear. The state moved three navy boats into Broadhaven, three warships and they were pointing guns at us there for ... a couple of weeks.' Images of a lone fishing boat juxtaposed against the massive *Solitaire* and state warships are sometimes used to position the Corrib conflict as a 'David versus Goliath' struggle, yet doing so ignores the deliberate policing and policy strategies implemented by the Irish state in support of the

¹⁴ An Garda Síochána means 'Guardian of the Peace.'

project. The sea-based confrontation occurred alongside an activist's ten-day hunger strike which occurred at the Glengad site where a heavy Garda presence was maintained. In September the *Solitaire* announced its withdrawal from Irish waters due to an engineering fault; Shell confirmed offshore pipe-laying work would be postponed until 2009.

Work on the project was not halted until the *Solitaire*'s return and events in 2009 illustrate how state authorities are not the only actors who can serve as repressive agents (Arsel *et al.* 2016; Earl, 2003). Barrington (2010), Flood (2009), Siggins (2010a), among others, have documented assaults on protestors perpetrated by Shell's private security company IRMS. In addition, a local fisherman's boat was boarded and sunk by masked men in June 2009. When the *Solitaire* returned in the summer of 2009 there was a 'complete and total lock-down of this place ... nobody could put a foot on the beach or they were just descended upon' (Niamh, Shell to Sea activist). Approximately 300 Gardaí, 160 IRMS staff, two navy ships and a police helicopter were deployed to the area, a parish of around 2000 citizens (Siggins, 2010a, p. 325). Through varied forms of state and private actor force, local resistance was repressed and the offshore pipeline was laid.

3.4 Oral hearing on the onshore pipeline (2009-2010)

By September 2009, terminal construction was near completion yet the company did not have permission for the onshore pipeline. Following Cassells' recommendation that Shell modify the pipeline route to reduce proximity to houses, Shell proposed a modified route. ABP opened an oral hearing on the onshore pipeline (May – July 2009) and ABP found that up to half of Shell's modified pipeline route was 'unacceptable' on safety grounds (November 2009). After ABP's rejection of the second route, the consortium submitted an application for a third route containing a unique proposal for a 4.9 km section of pipeline to be laid within a tunnel, under Sruwaddacon Bay (SPA and SAC). A pipeline through Sruwaddacon Bay was initially ruled out on environmental grounds and 'engineering challenges due to the deep and shifting nature of the sand in the bay' (Advantica, 2006, p. 9). Shell's new application meant the gas pressure would be reduced to 100 bar at the Landfall Valve Installation (LVI) in Glengad and gas would be piped through Sruwaddacon Bay to Aughooose. Reaching land in Aughooose, the pipeline would come ashore and pass through Leenamore River, blanket bog and forestry to the terminal at Ballinaboy.

The application led to the reopening of ABP's oral hearing on the onshore pipeline in August 2010, chaired by Inspector Martin Nolan who said the hearing was limited to 'the onshore upstream gas pipeline facility relating to the Corrib gas field development' and not other aspects of the project (field notes). Nevertheless, throughout the six week hearing residents made submissions on pipeline design, tunnel construction, health and safety risks of the overall project, environmental impacts, and consequences for the community. Threatened by environmental, health and safety risks, and pitted against the gas consortium's 'expert witnesses' and their 'scientific judgment' with its 'monopoly of truth,' members of the community were forced to 'make use of all the methods and means of scientific analysis in order to succeed with their claims' (Beck, 2005, p.71). Storey (2010, p. 7) suggests the community refused to bow its knee to the state or Shell, breeding 'innumerable 'rebel scientists' – ordinary citizens who ... turned themselves into experts on gas pipelines and every other aspect of resource extraction.' 'Radical clashes of culture, knowledge, ways of being and meanings' were evident in different frames of reference displayed by participants in the hearing (Slevin, 2016, p. 37). The 'professional' emotionally detached approach of oil company and legal team personnel, who were regarded as 'experts' due to qualifications, scientific and industrial experience, was in stark contrast to the diverse lay expertise, knowledge, experiences and human emotions expressed by the community of resistance (*ibid.*). Referring to Friedmann (1973), Sandercock highlights how planning processes can reveal 'growing polarity' between experts and actors (people or planners), with 'experts confident in their science-based, professional knowledge' while actors 'possess a great deal of experiential knowledge which ... is not acknowledged as having any validity in the planning process' (1998, p. 63). As one local woman pointed out, the consortium's legal team and witnesses were recognized as 'experts' and although local people 'keep asking questions', Shell 'won't give clear answers' (field notes, August 2010). She added how the attitude of Shell's experts 'makes local people feel like they are stupid because the experts give the impression that people aren't asking the right questions ... that people are a nuisance'.

Despite limitations to the scope of the hearing, health, safety and environmental risks were strongly emphasized, including Shell's 2009 acknowledgement that residents would only have thirty seconds to escape thermal radiation caused by a rupture in the pipeline if gas was at full pressure; houses within 230 meters could 'burn spontaneously' (Siggins, 2010c). The new onshore pipeline route was only four meters outside that zone. Although impassioned pleas were made for planning permission to be refused, on 20 January 2011 ABP announced its decision to grant

planning permission for the onshore pipeline, subject to fifty-eight conditions. ABP's decision came ten years after the Corrib gas petroleum lease was granted and seven years after permission was granted for the terminal. Inspector Nolan recognized that relations between Shell and the local community had 'broken down to ... such a serious extent ... the impacts to date of the project have been severe on this community's spirit (2011, p. 263). Referring to ABP's recommendation that Shell create a €8.5 million community fund, a Shell to Sea spokesperson said ABP 'still seems to think our community can be bribed into accepting a project that places us in danger. This bribery fund would also be fully tax deductible for Shell under Ireland's current oil and gas exploration licensing terms' (Shell to Sea, 2011).

3.5 Continuance of the Corrib gas conflict (2011+)

Resistance to the Corrib gas project continued and dubious policing tactics remained a serious issue, for example, a 2011 video recording exposed some male Gardaí joking about raping female Corrib protestors (Cox, 2015; Hederman, 2012). Widespread condemnation of the Gardaí's behavior led to a public interest investigation by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC). Following GSOC's investigation 'an officer was found to be in breach of discipline in relation to this by the Garda Commissioner and received advice' (GSOC, 17 August 2015). 124 complaints of alleged police misconduct were made to GSOC by 2015; 37 were deemed inadmissible; 87 were admissible and investigated (*ibid.*). GSOC forwarded seven files to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions which directed no prosecution; GSOC also recommended disciplinary proceedings in fifteen cases yet the Garda Commissioner 'found no breach of discipline in all cases' (*ibid.*). In 2011 Alan Shatter (Minister for Justice and Equality) revealed the policing of Corrib protests cost the state €14.245 million in overtime alone (Dáil Éireann, 7 April 2011); by 2014 the cost had risen to €16.3 million (Baker, 2015).

The summer of 2012 was a controversial period with many incidences of direct action and arrests. Illustrating the inappropriateness of a rural environment and narrow country roads for a large industrial development, headlines were made in July when a specially modified lorry carrying a section of Shell's 160-ton tunnel boring machine (necessary to create a tunnel through Sruwaddacon Bay) came off a road in Glenamoy and remained stuck in boggy land for several days. Drilling in Sruwaddacon attracted international media attention in September 2013 when a young worker was killed by a pipe that collapsed in the tunnel boring machine; the inquest into the death of German contractor Lars Wagner 'returned a verdict of death due to a work place accident' (Mayo News, 2018).

By August 2015, Corrib gas remained unproduced – twelve years after the consortium hoped to commence production. Shell applied for an application to operate the Corrib gas pipeline while awaiting a final decision from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on a revised emissions license (Siggins, 2015). Despite requests for an oral hearing from over 1,160 people, the EPA refused and recommended a license in April 2015 on a preliminary basis (*ibid.*). The EPA granted Shell an industrial emissions license on 8 October 2015 and on 29 December 2015 Alex White (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources) granted Shell permission to operate the Corrib gas pipeline.

Corrib's wells were opened on 30 December, leading to the commencement of gas production and processing. Instead of fireworks lighting up the night sky on New Year's Eve 2015, intense gas flaring at the terminal marked the advent of the new year. Gas was first exported from the terminal on 1 January 2016, 20 years after discovery; excessive noise and prolonged gas flaring prompted local people to lodge complaints with the EPA (sixteen complaints were submitted by 24 March 2016 (Shell, 2016)). Gas flaring at the terminal became a prominent issue again in September 2017 following an IT error which resulted in the entry of non-odorized gas to the transmission network (CRU, 2018). Days of high pressure gas flaring ensued as non-odorized gas was burned off to remove it from the gas network; approximately 10,000 customers in counties Galway and Mayo went without a gas supply for three days due to the error (*ibid.*). A 15 m flame was 'visible and audible for several miles' and an estimated '€400,000 worth of fuel – equivalent to a fifth of the national daily demand – had to be pushed back through the system and burned off' (Siggins, 2017).

Coming into production nearly twenty years after discovery, Corrib gas is estimated to necessitated expenditure of €1 billion (Baker, 2015) in a tumultuous process that has impacted deeply on people and place.

3.6 'Butchery of the community'

Alluding to the pipeline and terminal as foreign entities 'implanted' in the area, Fr Donal emphasized how the conflict:

Has caused division and it's real...sometimes I recall it like a form of butchery of the community or of the

whole place. The approach, like the introduction of a whole array, an army of security personnel and Gardaí, the deployment, the fact that they are there is an indication of the opposition that there is to the thing. And its impact on people's lives and you know the whole social side of things and the environmental degradation that's involved. It has been a natural, authentic environment, now there's an artificial element being implanted into it ... people cannot trust the combination that has brought about this whole situation. The combination of politicians and developers, big business, and it's really been highlighted in recent times.

Mark (resident of Rosspoint Solidarity Camp) referred to psychological and medical consequences: 'it's caused so much I'd say heartache, trauma ... a belief in the state [has been damaged] ... there's a lot of bitterness towards people who sold out and took money ... that's obviously bad.' During the 2010 Oral Hearing local people made powerful pleas to the Planning Inspector, begging him to refuse planning permission to prevent the project becoming operational. One resident argued their 'community is being destroyed' and there is 'a breakdown of trust in the bodies and agencies that are supposed to defend the community...it's about the people in this community' (field notes, August 2010). A local woman stressed that if the project goes ahead, it 'will only create further divisions in a community which has been shattered by the methodology employed to date.' In his submission, a local man stressed that 'what we have is a community falling apart. Locals have lost their quality of life, their pristine environment' (*ibid.*).

It is not only people opposed to the project who have experienced negative impacts: 'it's been a horribly difficult, desperate ... damaging sort of project for the whole community up there. For people from both sides and there's all sorts of perspectives up there, all sorts of different views' (Thomas, former Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources). 'Corrib is a disaster ... for everybody ... the people involved on all sides. It's no good for anybody the way it's been dealt with badly' (Andrew, businessman who supports the Corrib gas project). Fr Adam alluded to a feeling of hatred towards him from some people as he publicly supports the project. Other research participants referred to boycotts of businesses which supported Shell, resulting in fewer customers for businesses struggling during the economic recession.

Subsequent visits to the area during 2016-17 revealed a damaged community with deep rifts between those who opposed the project and those who availed of funding from the gas consortium and/or supported the project. The upheaval and stresses of maintaining a lengthy protest campaign also created tensions within the community of resistance. Kuecker *et al.* (2011) highlight how existing fault lines within communities can manifest in times of crisis and a split occurred in the Shell to Sea campaign in 2007, leading to the formation of Pobal Chill Chomáin (Community of Kilcommon) and Pobal Le Cheile (Community Together)¹⁵. The newer groups continued to resist the project, albeit through different strategies than those used by Shell to Sea, focusing more on localized issues of health, safety and the environment instead of macro-level issues of energy policy and limited socio-economic benefits from hydrocarbon extraction.

These are just a small selection of the kaleidoscope of social-ecological consequences of the Corrib conflict which include deployment of ideological and state coercive resources, violent actions undertaken by Shell's private security company (Barrington, 2010; Flood, 2009), ecological destruction caused by pipeline and terminal construction, and myriad physical, psychological and financial damage inflicted on people living in the region (Garavan *et al.* 2006; Dublin Shell to Sea, 2009; Storey 2009; Siggins, 2010a; Slevin, 2016).

4. Beyond 'David and Goliath' interpretations: Corrib and the structural interdependence of state and capital

Examining the evolution of the Corrib gas conflict uncovers the interplay of social, environmental, economic, political and ideological forces. 'The pejorative inaccuracy of the NIMBY categorization' (Garavan, 2007, p. 855) entails disregard of a wide range of established environmental, health and safety risks, yet subsequent amendments to the project¹⁶ offer some vindication for the community of resistance. Allegations of NIMBYism also ignores rational proposals for alternatives to onshore processing, for example, Shell to Sea and ABP Senior Planning Inspector Moore

¹⁵ Pobal Chill Chomáin's 'concerns are solely to do with risks to life and health and to the environment' and they have repeatedly lobbied for the gas processing terminal to be located at Glinsk, a remote, sparsely populated area east of Ballinaboy; Pobal Le Cheile is a group of business people in the North Mayo area who support the Glinsk option (Barrington, 2010, pp. 24 - 5).

¹⁶ Including requirements to substantially reduce gas pressure from 345 to 100 bar and the rerouting of the onshore pipeline from a distance of 70m proximity to homes to 234m; conversely, gas flaring events in 2016-17 reinforce unsuitability of processing terminal near homes.

(2002-3) advocated offshore gas processing, a precedent established in the Kinsale gas project. The portrayal of a rebellious rural community ('David') standing up to a corporate giant (Shell as 'Goliath') may be striking yet absolves the Irish state of its involvement in the conflict through poor policies, planning and policing strategies. Therefore, neither interpretation (NIMBYism or David versus Goliath) offers an adequate explanation of the foundation and maintenance of the Corrib dispute.

To analyze the Corrib resource conflict, it is necessary to consider how the controversy raises multi-level issues surrounding Irish state hydrocarbon management, including impacts on micro and meso levels of individuals, families and communities, and macro level matters of fragmented planning and permissions systems, the use of state coercive force against protestors, privatization of natural resources and very low rates of 'government take'. Accordingly, analyses of the Corrib dispute must consider ideologies, forces and processes that transcend local communities or energy policies of a nation-state.

Signifying a form of society-environment interactions, nearly every country in the world has asserted ownership over hydrocarbons within its territory (Easo, 2009), a process central to the commodification of those resources. The transformation of nature, whether oil, gas or other minerals, into tradable commodities is a deeply political process which involves the definition of property rights, the organization of labor and allocation of profits (Le Billon, 2001, p. 568). Le Billon suggests this pattern of social relations can increase the risk of conflict and deployment of violence associated with resource commodification. Drawing on Marx's theory of primitive accumulation, Harvey describes such processes as 'accumulation by dispossession', highlighting how common property resources have been privatized and brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation, often by force with the state playing a key role in such processes (2003, pp. 145-6). As outlined in Conde and Le Billon's extensive literature review of community resistance to mining projects (2017), states can generate resistance through 'pro-industry state policies' which involve issues of resource ownership, policies of economic liberalization focused on investment, decision-making, facilitation of activities, and enforcement of regulatory processes; such conflictual roles are clear in the Corrib gas conflict as a microcosm of Irish hydrocarbon management (detailed in Slevin, 2016). Arsel *et al.* (2016, p. 883) also concentrate on the centrality of states in resource extraction, associating the dynamics of resistance and extractive industries with conflicts that are often associated with 'the integrity of indigenous territories and the violations of indigenous rights.'

Furthermore, conflict and 'confusions over ideology' are frequently beneath the surface of most issues surrounding energy policy (Olien and Davids Olien, 2000) and in the Irish context, the privatization of hydrocarbons is indicative of neoliberal ideology and a desire to maintain a 'free market', however, the use of state coercive force to repress resistance indicates an interventionist state. These seemingly contradictory features can be understood through Ulrich Beck's articulation of a central paradox in a neoliberal model of state and politics which involves the minimization and maximization of state power (2008). The paradox of a neoliberal state means that on one hand, the state seeks to orientate itself towards 'the ideal image of a minimalist state ... tailored to the enforcement of global economic norms' (Beck, 2008, p. 797). The state becomes adjusted to the global market and is 'expected to have institutionally internalized the neoliberal regime' to the extent it views itself in competition with a large number of similar states (*ibid.*), thus the pro-corporate nature of the 1992 *Licensing Terms*. Nevertheless, market deregulation and privatization of public assets do not signify a weak state; rather the state, through its institutions of control and coercion becomes stronger in terms of repression, as demonstrated through the state's response to protestors. Thus, state power is simultaneously minimized and maximized' (*ibid.*) and the functioning of a neoliberal state entails paradoxical actions. Beck's analysis helps to clarify the Irish state's incongruous actions in relation to Corrib yet doesn't explain the dynamics of the state's relationship with corporations. Following Di John (2010), Dunning (2009) and Karl (1997), examining interactions between political institutions and the economy is necessary to understand how states manage their resources and a brief overview of trends in Irish political economy reveals a state responsive to multinational corporations.

Irish economic policy underwent dramatic changes from 1958 and the Irish state concentrated on attracting investment by foreign companies (O'Toole, 1999, pp. 225-6), instead of seeking 'economic self-sufficiency' through protectionism which had failed to produce a vibrant economy (Collins and Cradden, 2001, p. 9). Irish political economy experienced a distinct shift from a strategy of industrial protectionism towards foreign-dominated, export-led industrialization (Mjøset, 1992, p. 262; O'Hearn, 2001, p. 130). The state's close relationship with capital is evident in key phases in economic policy formation as the state sought to stimulate economic expansion: from import-substitution and protectionism, to growth premised on foreign direct investment in the late 1950s, to the

enthusiastic embrace of the global economy, most signified by the Celtic Tiger boom of the mid 1990s to circa 2008 (Allen 2007; Slevin, 2016). From the late 1980s Irish economic policy was influenced by neoliberalism; natural resources became targets of privatization and liberalization as state ownership and control were regarded as contorting the 'free market' (Stevens, 2002; 2008). A neoliberal perspective held that state owned resources should be made available for 'investment' by private companies as these were seen as more efficient. It was during this 'neoliberal counter-wave' (Ryggvik, 2010, p. 49) that Ireland's licensing regime shifted from a concern with maximizing benefits for citizens (*1975 Licensing Terms*) to one that prioritized the interests of multinational capital (*1992 Licensing Terms*).

The fiscal and licensing regime surrounding Corrib gas illustrate the determined focus of Irish state bodies to be 'globally competitive' with other nations for 'internationally mobile investment funds' (*1992 Licensing Terms*) with 'economic growth an end in itself' (Kirby, 2002). Ireland's approach to the management of its gas and oil was shaped by occurrences in the capitalist system, internally and globally as the state became further integrated into the global economy. However, as Harman points out, a state is a 'powerful economic agent in its own right' (2003, p. 28) and not simply subservient to capital; rather there is a relationship of 'structural interdependence' in which states and individual capitals are intertwined and feed off each other (Harman, 2009, p. 110). As Harman (2009) explains, responding to the needs of capital can include incentives to attract investment (for example grants, educated workforce, tax holidays) and supportive legal and policy frameworks (involving recognition and protection of property rights, low corporate taxation, labor mediation systems, etc.). This structural interdependence makes it easier for particular capitals to operate within a specific state as the companies would have to profoundly restructure both their internal organization and relations with other capitals if they moved their operations to another state (*ibid.*). The state, in turn, adjusts to the requirements of particular capitals as the state is dependent on them for resources (access to hydrocarbons, revenue from taxation) that it needs to keep going (*ibid.*); states may also fear that if they go against the interests of a particular capital, companies could move assets elsewhere.

States and capital have a symbiotic relationship determined by the strength of each entity and in the case of Ireland, a weaker state (due to colonization, its particular path of state formation, and its embrace of neoliberalism) means industry enjoys more privileges than in other countries, helping to clarify why the Irish state has one of the most generous pro-corporate regimes for hydrocarbon exploitation (Slevin, 2016). Beck's articulation of a central paradox in neoliberal states (2008) explains minimal restrictions for capital and the maximization of state power to repress resistance. Attention to the structural interdependence of state and capital helps explain the Irish state's efforts to progress the Corrib gas project via different interventions (including political decisions, planning and permission systems) and state coercive force, even when those actions occur at the expense of its own citizens. Of course, the Irish state is not unique in this regard as evident in research by Arsel *et al.* (2016), Conde and Le Billion (2017), Silva Ontiveros *et al.* (2018), among others. For example, Faruque's account of a mining company-host community conflict in Bangladesh highlights how the Phulbari coal mine was framed as vital for energy security; a narrative fitting a neoliberal policy agenda premised on 'privatizing resource extraction and creating a favorable environment for export-oriented foreign investment projects' (2018, p. 177).

To understand and assess the Corrib gas conflict, one must go beyond simplistic interpretations of 'David versus Goliath' battles or NIMBYism to examine the interactions between communities, corporations and states within a global capitalist economy where free trade and profit-making is often prioritized above the wellbeing of communities, societies and the environment. From this perspective, forces driving the Corrib gas conflict can be understood as being simultaneously practical and ideological, local, national and global, extending beyond fractious dynamics of oil company and community interactions to encompass state institutions and Ireland's place in a globalized world.

The dynamics and contradictions inherent to Irish state hydrocarbon management remain problematic as arms of the state (notably the PAD) remain influenced by an 'extractive imperative' (Arsel *et al.* 2016), keen to 'attract' multinational corporations to extract indigenous hydrocarbons on existing licensing terms. However, civil society groups and some politicians have learned lessons from the Corrib conflict, culminating in increased resistance to extractive activities. Widespread opposition to potential 'fracking' onshore Ireland resulted in the introduction of the *Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Prohibition of Onshore Hydraulic Fracturing) Act 2017* which bans onshore hydrocarbon production via hydraulic fracturing. Growing awareness of the contribution of fossil fuel production and consumption to climate change has mobilized various actors and organizations, including independent and Green Party members of parliament who seek to affect change at a macro level. The *Fossil Fuel*

Divestment Bill 2016 was passed by Dáil Éireann (the lower house of parliament) in July 2018 and is before the Seanad (Senate, upper house). When enacted, the National Treasury Management Agency will have five years to divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund of its assets in fossil fuel companies, as part of the country's decarbonization. In doing so, Ireland will become the first country to sell off its investments in fossil fuel companies. Also concerned with climate change and decarbonization, the *Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Amendment) (Climate Emergency Measures) Bill 2018*, currently before Dáil Éireann, seeks to prohibit future exploration, development and production activities when the monthly mean level of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂), as measured at the Mauna Lao Observatory, exceeds 350 parts per million (ppm). Considering the monthly mean level of CO₂ was 406 ppm in October 2018 (up from 403.63 ppm in October 2017) (NOAA, 2018), the enactment of this bill would effectively ban further hydrocarbon extraction and, in doing so, would minimize the likelihood of extractive controversies similar to the Corrib gas conflict. Considering the neoliberal agenda of the Irish state and its structural interdependence with capital, it is perhaps unsurprising that the oil industry and some state bodies heavily contest the *Climate Emergency Measures Bill*. Its passing would require fundamental shifts in resource management and a radical reorientation towards sustainability as part of broader social, ecological, economic and political transformations; processes strongly resisted by those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

5. Conclusion

The Corrib gas conflict brings into stark relief the dynamics of state – capital interdependencies and socio-economic, environmental and political consequences of hydrocarbon exploitation for communities and wider society. Social consequences of the Corrib conflict span multiple levels of analysis and include deployment of ideological and state coercive resources against protestors, violent actions undertaken by Shell's private security company (Barrington, 2010; Flood, 2009), and wide-ranging physical, psychological and financial damage inflicted on people living in the region (Garavan *et al.* 2006; Slevin, 2016). Ecological impacts include some contamination of the regional water supply, imposition of a large industrial development in a rural area, damage to Special Protected Areas and Special Areas of Conservation (Siggins, 2010a; Slevin, 2016), and a recent 'technical' error which resulted in €400,000 worth of gas being flared (Siggins, 2017).

Rather than serve as an example of NIMBYism or a localized struggle against the oil industry, the Corrib gas conflict is a phenomenon that raises pressing questions about Ireland's socio-economic composition, our relationship with the environment, the state and its 'structural interdependence' with multinational corporations (Harman, 2009, p. 110).

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