

- Paul Anthony Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil Sands: From Karl Clark to Kyoto*, University of Calgary Press, 2004, 320 p.

Debra J. Davidson and Mike Gismondı, *Challenging Legitimacy at the Precipice of Energy Calamity*, New York: Springer, 2011, XV, 232 p.

Reviewed by: Tahir Nakıp*

Two Different Images of Tar Sands**

In this article, I review two books about Alberta's oil sands or tarsands, a very popular issue in Canadian politics, society, newspapers and universities: Paul Chastko's *Developing Alberta's Oil Sands: From Karl Clark to Kyoto* (2004) and Debra J. Davidson and Mike Gismondı's *Challenging Legitimacy at the Precipice of Energy Calamity* (2011).

Dr. Paul Chastko, a senior instructor in History at Calgary University, wrote on the oil sands developments from an interdisciplinary studies perspective, including history, political science, economics, oil recovery technology and international relations. He did not, however, include the environment, ethics, or the philosophy of the environment perspective. In contrast, the second book is more environmental in nature, for. Debra J. Davidson, a Professor in Environmental Sociology at the University of Alberta, specializes in the social dimensions of climate change, oil-based economic development and urban agriculture. Mike Gismondı, a Professor at Athabasca University, conducts research on environmental sociology, globalization and sustainable development.

Chastko focuses on the early history of oil sands development thorough 1945, whereas Davidson & Gismondı discusses the challenging relationship between the scientific community and commercial investment. Furthermore, Chastko does not focus on the meaning of development; rather, he analyses the oil sands from the viewpoint of such domestic stresses as those between the provincial and federal governments, as well as international relations between Canada and the U.S. regarding crude oil exports. In addition, he explores the interaction between four different entities: the political community, the oil industry, scientific institutions such as universities and research centers, and international corporations.

In contrast, Davidson & Gismondı's (2011) more critical book deals with the "development of bitumen" rather than with the "development of oil sands." They emphasise the terminological contrasts between tar sands -bitumen- dirty oil and oil sands- ethical oil. They claim that journalists, politicians and NGOs have focused on the Athabaskan tar sands, but that relatively few social scientists have. In contrast to Chastko, who is a proponent of oil sands development, Davidson & Gismondı argue that the tar sands are an industrial development

* M.A. Student, Marmara University, Faculty of Art and Sciences, Department of History.

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with “harsh environmental consequences”. For, Chastko, the issue of oil sands development is primarily an economic matter rather than an environmental problem, whereas, Davidson & Gismondi who frame the tar sands as an environmental issue and natural resource politics, use sociological language regarding power. They seek to show how the modern social system deforms the environment in order to reach easy energy in northern Alberta.

While both books use scientific terminology, their worldviews and ideologies are markedly different. First of all, while all authors accept that Alberta does not need to produce oil because it has enough oil for the next 475 years. Chastko claims that the international oil market needs Canadian oil “after world supplies of conventional crude oil began decline” (p. xiii). In contrast, Davidson & Gismondi question this oil production and imply that Alberta should not produce oil to fill the tanks of American cars, for “the ecological and social costs of development surpass the benefits received by humanity. (pp. 2-3). They label the tar sands a twenty-first century Titanic.

Chastko as a member of mainstream Albertan society, neither critique the development of oil sands nor questions the meaning of development and the modern social system. Ignoring the negative environmental aspects, he constructs a story based on Alberta’s growing its economy from the rational economic approach. In contrast, Davidson & Gismondi present scientific data about tar sands, the amount of bitumen production, and the social and environmental costs by using the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board’s own estimates. They examine scientific data and the modern social system on a macro scale. They use Bauman’s theory of liquid modernity to analyse the relationship between political power and control mechanisms regarding the fluidity of communications, materials, digital media, flows of ideas and information. They argue that liquid modernity consumes all options regarding alternative energy. Davidson & Gismondi claim that “the development of Athabasca tar sands and the legitimation of that development are deeply integrated into a global network of flows” (p. 9), which includes the relationship between Canada and the U.S., the global oil industry, the Second World War and the Kyoto Accord, which refers to environmental degradation, and economic growth.

Davidson & Gismondi assert that as a neo-liberal petro-state, Alberta aggressively encourages tarsands development. They add that many scientific treatments of development support the utilization of the nation-state, but that Alberta leads in this field because it has jurisdiction over the land and the environment (p. 10). Davidson & Gismondi, who examine the modern rational approach to development, attack this developmental model, while; Chastko uses terminology that confirms it. Chastko argues that the state has an interest in developing the oil sands, for they aid the western portion of the country’s economic growth. After all, that region lacks a large alternative domestic industry (p. 22). He does not critique the relationship between political community and this model’s understanding of the notion of development, and confirms the importance of development for economic growth alone. Developing the oil sands encourages western economic development, in line with the meaning of development as understood by the western concept of progress. This Eurocentric development model tortures the environment, and yet he says thing about the environmental tragedy occurring in northern Alberta.

Any visual information of environmental damage, such as satellite images of tailings ponds and open pit mines, is excluded from the global information flows in order to conceal the reality of Alberta's environmental stewardship. Naturally, the political community wants to create a positive image about the environment. Davidson & Gismondi claim that the Alberta government promotes the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, for example, to support its positive image of oil sands (p. 29). Thus, the tailings ponds and open mining sites are hidden from the visitor's view, because of the private field that belongs to the oil companies.

How, then, do Canadians truly 'discover' the oil sands? Although Davidson & Gismondi's approach is distinct from that of Chastko, all of them do apply scientific data and research that confirm the developmental process. Davidson & Gismondi emphasize the "white male" assault on the environment with the assistance of "shiftless Native labour". They extend the issue of oil sands development by citing Dr. Sydney Ells' comprehensive research about the size of this sands field, the band of bitumen deposits, the transportation of oil, cost and benefit analysis the oil, which differ those figures provided by the government surveyors and early pioneers (p. 47). Davidson & Gismondi assert that Ells combines physical masculinity with the technological domination of nature as a civilizing mission (p. 49). The Canadian government recognizes oil sands development as a civilizing mission by citing economic benefits, and the political community has no concerns about the Aboriginal people and their traditional life-style in that environment. The role of scientific knowledge, as a part of global information flows, confirms what political community operates in the development of tar sands.

In contrast, Chastko does not have a clear answer to the question how Canadians discover the oil sands that is embedded in the federal-provincial conflict. He states, "the tar sands remained undeveloped until after the Canadian government purchased the western territories known as Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869" (p. 2). Chastko recognizes the environment as "undeveloped" until the political community starts to operations for oil sands that presents the account of Chastko about the development of oil sands is formed in the Enlightenment sense of progress. In his perspective, an "empty" environment that provides no economic benefits is not valuable and accountable. He also, talks about how international events such as the First World War promoted development of the oil sands, which increased the amount of oil production, rather than of how international factors encouraged the Canadian political community to damage the environment with its macro oil sands projects. Until 1905, Alberta was a British dominion and London encouraged Ottawa to 'develop' its oil resources. In Chastko's account, Sydney Ells and Karl Clark's scientific researches contributed to these resources' development at a very convenient time: the global economic conditions in during the early beginning of the twentieth century.

The federal-provincial conflict is one of the main issues in this regard. All of the authors agree that this conflict, which concerns who will control natural resources, failed to develop the oil sands. The conflict continued until the post-war period. However, Chastko, who gives details about the conflict, asserts that only a single political community can precede 'development'. It seems to me, that the provincial government took sovereign authority

of the oil sands, and that the provincial government promoted the Abasand Oil Plant after 1930. Chastko claims that Ottawa desperately tried to sabotage the development of oil sands by mismanaging the facility (p. 45).

In contrast, Davidson & Gismondi present a different meaning of failure. They accept that the facility was mismanaged but that "bitumount success at last" (p. 57). The Alberta government funded the modern Bitumount pilot plant so that science and industrialization could tame nature. Davidson & Gismondi, who criticize the "normalization of mass destruction", contend that technology overwhelmed nature by science, private investors and government officials and emphasize "the visual power of political community about oil sand such as emblem on the stamp that is a political messenger" (p. 64). I think, that they believe that even though the political community failed to develop the oil sands in the facility, the state created visual materials such as a stamp to cover the failure, which might be unethical. Omnipresent visual materials produce oil sands proponents in Canadian public life. Although, visual images were meant to help offer the Canadians see the oil sand project in the macro-scale, a visual discourse in a democratic system is multiple that attracts attention to the negative aspects of developing the oil sands by pictures, environmental platforms and Greenpeace. Images enforce the people's "rational" view that mass environmental destruction is required to provide energy to survive that the people will survive.

Who benefits from such development, and what is the interest of Canadians in these projects? Political leaders claim that Canadians will benefit in terms of jobs and investment. Mainstream discourse tells us the national interest is more important than that of the private investor. Chastko emphasises that Canadian governments provide infrastructures and economic subsidies to get benefits for Canadians. The Canadian government also encourages private development of the oil sands by the Blair Report and the Borden Commission (pp. 81-83). Chastko clarifies how Canadians will benefit by asserting that "royalty payments from oil and gas producers gave the provincial government the highest per capita revenue in the country. In 1955-56, for example, Alberta took in \$225 per resident in taxes and royalties compared with a national average of \$125 per resident" (p.83).

Davidson & Gismondi who do not accept this claim, ask, "why royalties so low, after all, other oil regions of the world demand far higher royalties from the same companies, and tax breaks are unnecessary for a mature industry. Why Alberta's Heritage Fund ... is much smaller than those in Alaska or Norway?" (p. 71). Chastko does not mention about the interests of central Canadian economic elites and bankers in the development of oil sands. Davidson & Gismondi claim that the federal government provides free land grants to the Canadian elites and bankers in Ottawa, but does not respond to the grain farmers' complaints such as the "railway monopoly and its exorbitant transport rate to transfer grain to markets" (p. 72). I think, that this happens because the federal government, in a rational economic sense, sees oil as far more valuable than grain. The federal and provincial governments' opinion that this resource is by far Alberta's most valuable economic resource ignores social justice and equality. However, the aim of politics is to reach human goodness, not the elite's goodness. The government of Alberta and the federal government, however, are trying to reach the elite's goodness.

Davidson & Gismondi mention about "The First Boom: 1973-1984" and give the same amount of space for "The Bust" in their book (pp. 75-81). Chastko labels the first boom as "Flexibility and Paralysis: Oil Shocks, Government Policy and Intervention, 1970-1977 (pp. 133-165) and evaluates it in the framework of tension between the federal and provincial governments. Furthermore, he pays attention to how Canadian crude oil can be integrated into the post-1973 American market by discussing the issue of oil sands in international conflict in the Middle East after 1973. According to him, this crisis was a chance for Canadian crude oil to take an important place in the international oil market, especially in North America.

In contrast, Davidson & Gismondi explore the first boom in northern Alberta via some statistical data. They claim that the unemployment rate and the province's population fluctuated quite a bit for 15 or 20 years based upon this resource's development (pp.78-80). Boom and bust cycles can be seen as a sign of an unhealthy development process in Alberta. We also do not have just economic structure in the global economy.

Another issue in the book reveals how technology helps the development of oil sands. While talking about large trucks and electric shovels, Davidson & Gismondi claim that "technological shifts in the mining operations from bucket-wheel to large truck and electric shovels, and improved processing (decreasing the amount of overburden in the bitumen mix) reduced the input costs per barrel of oil [that cause] over 400 jobs were lost in the switch" (p. 83). It seems to me, that people develop technology that causes the adaptation of a new perspective in which people have more power over, and the right to operate on, nature. This materialistic perspective separates people from nature and organic life. City residents, who are interested in an easy life rather than using muscular power, view oil and gas as seen mandatory tools to accomplish this goal. This visual image of oil deeply affect residents who are addicted to using oil and gas and gives them a consciousness that requires them to live in a technological world.

From chapter five to the end of the book, Davidson & Gismondi focus on environmental issues and critique tar sands ideology regarding the development of the oil sands.

They analyse the nature of legitimacy regarding tar sands, claiming that "legitimacy is not only a social contract between the ruler and ruled, but also the legitimacy holds norms, values, beliefs, proper, and definitions. State legitimizes its political activities and takes support from citizens and financial investment" (pp. 171-172). They also emphasise the activities of such NGOs as Greenpeace. I contend that the activities of these NGOs are not enough to get Canadian society to protest tar sands development. Although some NGOs do protest this development, Albertans are very happy to benefit from the development of their oil sands. In addition, the global economic structure fully supports their development. How can right-minded people take the responsibility to change society in order to stop tar sands development? First, the oil sands problem is not economic. Tar sands is an ideological problem that guides people in how they can evaluate environment. I think that all secular principles cannot solve environmental problems, which includes the development of oil sands or tar sands. People should refer to religious values and principles to protect the

environment, because a secular system cannot produce real values (unlike religion) and morality. Science does not need to be replaced with religion; rather than secular systems need to recognize religion as a subject of scientific research in secular public universities. Secular civilization, which is dominated by Europeans spiritually has been disrupted by oil sands development that increase levels of drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, domestic violence and petty crimes in Fort McMurray. Former Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach claimed that the development of oil sands would benefit Canadians at the beginning his speech of the interdisciplinary conference held at the King's University on January 19-20, 2011. I disagree, based on the results of development or modernity so far. Anthony Giddens, who claims that people live in the period of the result of modernity, is right.

Consequently, Chastko's book contains a great deal of scientific data that is both boring and does not cover the results of development regarding oil sands, whereas Davidson & Gismondi analyse the meaning of development, the image of tar sands and citizenship and legitimacy. Chastko provides many valuable details, such as the international relationship regarding oil sands in the Middle East and the U.S., while Davidson & Gismondi focus on how the western concept of development damages people's lives in labour camps and public life. They try to present a big picture regarding the relationship between the global financial structure and financial investment in Alberta. I strongly advice undergraduate students, to read Davidson & Gismondi's book but not Chastko's which supports the ideology of Canada's mainstream society.