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# Framing Land Governance Issues in Indigenous and Settler Media within Canada

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# Framing Land Governance Issues in Indigenous and Settler Media: Discourses of Containment and Emancipation

**Abstract**
This comparative study examines how the framing of Indigenous land governance issues—such as resource extraction activities on Indigenous territory and treaty negotiation—in Indigenous media differs from that in corporate news. Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis were applied to 66 news texts published in 2018 in large corporate newspapers, such as the *National Post*, and small Indigenous news outlets, such as *Eagle Feather News*. Researchers found that Indigenous media connected land governance issues to contemporary issues, such as racism and control over child welfare, as well as historical colonialism and Indigenous-Settler relations, while corporate news generally excluded any discussion of these contextual factors. While the main news frame in the Indigenous press was *Indigenous people were not consulted*, the dominant frame in corporate news was *Indigenous peoples have already been adequately consulted*. Corporate news discourse valorized Indigenous traditional territory solely based on its presumed "economic value." By contrast, Indigenous publications offered a counternarrative, one that positioned land and the rest of the natural environment as something that has absolute value, and as indivisible from all living things, including people.

**Keywords**
Critical Discourse Analysis, Indigenous Media, Corporate Media, Land governance, News Frame, Child Welfare

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## Framing Land Governance Issues in Indigenous and Settler Media within Canada

According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), "reframing" of settler representations of Indigenous issues is both a vital research project and an act of resistance. The latter involves Indigenous people resisting "being boxed and labelled according to categories that do not fit," taking control over how issues are defined, and determining how best to proceed in resolving them (p. 154). Indeed, unpacking and challenging settler representations of Indigenous governance issues in the news is an essential step in defending Indigenous governance rights, especially considering the media's "powerful influence on public opinion and policy direction" on Indigenous issues (Proudfoot & Habbis, 2015, p. 173). Previous research has found that corporate news media "directly" influence Indigenous governance issues such as treaty negotiation (Price, 2009, p. 142), and impact government policy agendas "particularly in regard to environmental issues . . . such as climate change" (Dusyk, 2017, p. 14).

Indigenous media, on the other hand, have the potential to offer distinctive perspectives on Indigenous land governance issues (Harding, 2017, p. 87). While a growing body of research into corporate media portrayals of Indigenous governance issues is emerging, there is a dearth of research into how Indigenous publications frame these matters or how those representations compare with corporate news discourse. While corporate news outlets such as the *National Post* or *Province* are engaged in the large-scale production, distribution, and sale of print news products to vast Canadian audiences, Indigenous publications such as *Anishinabek News* and *Windspeaker* represent alternative media in that they are independent from corporate interests and the state, have relatively small audiences, and subsist on very limited budgets.

This study examined how Indigenous land governance issues—such as treaty negotiation and resource extraction activities on traditional territory—were framed in 66 news texts published in corporate and Indigenous news outlets in 2018. First, we sought to unmask dominant frames about Indigenous governance in corporate media and differentiate these from those found in news discourse in Indigenous publications. Then, we examined how these dominant discourses were buttressed through argumentation strategies, lexical choices, and rhetorical devices. The research also sought to elucidate whose voices were included, and whose were excluded, from news discourse. Finally, we assessed how much context was included in news stories, especially stories about complex events and topics that have important historical antecedents.

The restoration of Indigenous peoples' governance of their territories will be a defining feature of Indigenous-settler relationships for years to come. On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which affirms that Indigenous Peoples must have "control . . . over developments affecting them and their lands, territories, and resources" (United Nations, 2008, p. 2). Eight years later, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) released *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, signaling the beginning of a new relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples, in which Indigenous governance of traditional territories is central to reconciliation.

## News representations of Indigenous peoples and issues

Scrutiny of corporate media[1] coverage of Indigenous issues in Canada spiked after the 1990 events at Oka, Québec. A major flashpoint in modern Indigenous-settler relations, the stand-off between Mohawk Warriors and the Canadian Army at the small Québec town attracted intense news coverage in the local, national, and international press. Communications researchers found evidence that the Prime Minister's office colluded with corporate media organizations during the crisis "in accomplishing the government goal of public opinion management" (Winter, 1992, p. 249). Roth et al. (1995) concluded that corporate news media uncritically adopted "government discourses of thuggery and terrorism," which conflated all Mohawk people as perpetrators of violence (p. 77). Rather than inform audiences about the context and history of the complex land governance issues at stake, media outlets cast the story in terms of familiar, marketable stereotypes (Harding, 2005).

Partly in response to criticism of its handling of the Oka situation, the federal government set up a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which conducted a comprehensive review of Canada's communication sector. The commission concluded that settler media routinely relied on stereotypes of Indigenous peoples that served to reinforce "deeply imbedded notions of 'Indians' as alien, unknowable, and ultimately a threat to civil order" (RCAP, 1996, p. 581).

Several notable studies exploring the role of news media in settler-Indigenous relations emerged in the wake of RCAP's report. Denis (1997) observed that news media constructed Indigenous claims in binary terms such as "civilized vs. barbarian, modern vs. traditional, individual rights vs. collective rights" (p. 13). Furniss (2001) found that dominant news frames about Indigenous peoples had the effect of suppressing Indigenous concerns and containing their political aspirations, while Lambertus (2004) warned that binary reporting of land claims and conflicts over natural resources could incite settlers to be unsympathetic or hostile to much-needed Indigenous claims and initiatives (p. 201).

More recently, Wilkes et al. (2010) found that corporate media typically associate collective action by Indigenous Peoples in Canada with "larger discourses about nationalism and citizenship" that emphasize "individual citizenship responsibilities" (p. 42). They also found that news frames about Indigenous people engaged in collective action encompass a binary opposition that pits "criminals" (Indigenous people) who make "threats to peaceful race relations" against "model citizens" (settlers) who are "law-abiding, supportive of multi-culturalism and tax paying" (p. 54). Harding (2017) found evidence of highly racialized news discourse about treaties and land claims organized around a dominant news frame—the *threat that Indigenous peoples pose to Euro-Canadian values*. Furthermore, news discourse privileged post-colonial notions of land use, ownership, and governance.

[1] We use the term, "Corporate Media" to refer to the private corporations, often international in scope, engaged in the large-scale production, distribution, and sale of print news products to vast Canadian audiences. The use of this term has supplanted "mass media," which sometimes has been used interchangeably with "mainstream media."

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In comparing mainstream and Indigenous media discourse, it is important to consider the role that sourcing plays in the "production of meaning" in the news (Williams, 2003, p. 159). In a 2003 study, LaFever and Neal found that the *Navajo Times* used "more quotes from non-elite sources (persons who are not labeled by positions of power) and placed more of these non-elite sources on the front page" (p. 10) than the local settler publication, *The Gallup Independent*. Indeed, the authors concluded that the *Navajo Times* offered an "alternative forum" for Indigenous voices as compared to the privately-owned settler newspaper serving the same area (p. 1).

There have been few studies comparing news coverage in Indigenous publications with that of corporate media. This lacuna in the research represents an opportunity for communications researchers to identify and assess similarities and differences in the framing of Indigenous issues. Indeed, while corporate news media has afforded only limited space for Indigenous and/or alternative viewpoints, Indigenous media may offer distinctive representations and definitions of land and self-governance issues.

One of the few recent studies comparing corporate news representations with those found in Indigenous media involves Indigenous peoples in Australia. Drawing on a comparison between mainstream and "Aboriginal populist media," Proudfoot and Habibis (2013) examine the framing of Aboriginal people in news coverage of Australia's Northern Territory Emergency Response (p. 170). They found evidence of a racialized divide between the two forms of media. These researchers concluded that mainstream media "consistently constructed all Aboriginal communities as places of violence and abuse, with the cause located in the deficits of Aboriginal culture" (p. 171), while Aboriginal media framed issues in their historical context and recognized a broader range of realities that Aboriginal communities experience.

Harding (2017) concluded that Indigenous news stories feature diverse non-elite sources absent from settler news representations of the same events and issues, and that the Indigenous press mobilized rhetorical arguments distinct from those associated with dominant news frames. Furthermore, Indigenous news coverage of land governance matters was "grounded in history, referenced Canada's legacy of colonialism, and also connected treaty issues to the experiences of international Indigenous peoples such as the Maori in Aotearoa" (Harding, 2017, p. 87). In our study, we found evidence of a news frame absent from corporate news discourse—one emphasizing the *necessity of Indigenous people defending their rights and contesting the status quo.*

Finally, in a study of corporate news coverage of sustainable energy initiatives involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Walker et al. (2019) found that Indigenous voices were left out of news discourse about Indigenous Peoples and renewable energy, and that "their absence is likely indicative of larger, systemic discrimination in the media more generally" (p. 9). Furthermore, reporters structured news texts in ways that privileged the "perspectives of Settler-Canadians who are often in positions of power," and frequently began with "stories of Indigenous Peoples opposed to hydro projects and close with the views of industry or government representatives" (p. 9).

## Methods

This study applied techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 2008) and Frame Analysis (Gitlin, 1980; Fairclough, 1989) to 2018 news texts about Indigenous land governance issues in selected corporate outlets as well as Indigenous news outlets. Furniss (2001) observes that Critical Discourse Analysis is superior to traditional forms of textual analysis in assessing how Indigenous peoples and other people of colour are treated in news media due to its "finer-grained analysis of the subtle manipulation of images and the variations in meanings that result" (p. 33). Using a postcolonial lens, we unpacked corporate news discourse and compared it with framing in Indigenous publications. Our focus was twofold: unmasking and challenging how a colonizing agenda is framed and advanced through the corporate press, and exploring decolonizing frames offered in Indigenous media.

Both news stories and opinion pieces were included in the research. News reporting is ostensibly an "objective" process, and reports are usually written in a factual style, where the most important information is presented first. On the other hand, opinion writing is a genre based on argumentation in which writers attempt to convince audiences to embrace specific readings or interpretations of events and issues. Opinion writing offers a rich source of data for researchers examining colonial discourse about Indigenous peoples and issues because they are highly ideological and may reveal evidence of colonizing agendas, racist logics, longstanding tropes about Indigenous peoples, as well as implicit support for settler interests.

Before collecting the corporate news data sample, we conducted a pilot study to determine which search terms were most effective at generating news content about the subject of our investigation, namely, Indigenous land governance. We carried out sample key word searches using Canadian Major Dailies, a ProQuest database available through the University of the Fraser Valley library, which comprises full-text versions of news stories published in the targeted corporate publications. The news stories generated by these searches were vetted by both researchers to ensure that their focus was on some aspect of Indigenous land governance. This led to the enumeration of a preliminary list of search terms, which was subsequently tested and refined through a trial-and-error process to ensure that they generated news texts focussed on Indigenous land governance. Ultimately, the following search terms were established: Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, land, self-government, consent, consultation, pipeline, and treaty. Thus, for the corporate data searches, the ProQuest command line read:

> Indigenous OR Aboriginal OR Native + Land OR Self-government OR Consent OR Consultation OR Pipeline OR Treaty

After completing the pilot study, we began the formal data collection process. Corporate news texts were generated using the ProQuest database search process outlined above. After the corporate data was collected, the data set was narrowed down through the elimination of duplicate news texts (something that occurred frequently with the 7 Postmedia publications studied), news texts that were too short (articles with a word count of less than 100), and those where Indigenous land governance was not a main topic. To strengthen reliability, both researchers re-read the two sets of data to ensure that research criteria were met.

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Since full-text versions of news texts from targeted Indigenous publications were not available through a database, these were gathered through a more labour-intensive process. Both researchers reviewed all news texts published on the 12 Indigenous news websites during the research period, selecting those that mentioned Indigenous land governance issues. After further review of the 46 articles identified in the initial search, 20 news texts were eliminated as they did not focus on the research topic.

One researcher conducted discourse analysis on all data from Indigenous media, while the other examined corporate media data. Researchers noted lexical choices used to represent key actors and their agency; descriptors used to characterize harm caused by proponents and opponents of natural resource development; argumentative strategies; and the use of a variety of rhetorical techniques/devices such as binary oppositions, straw targets, and the ideological construction of common sense. To strengthen reliability, each researcher read the other set of data and reviewed the other's findings, which led to additional features of discourse being identified. Next, researchers identified several broad themes running through the data, primarily "self-governance," "land," and "consultation." An analysis of these themes led to the elaboration of dominant news frames in Indigenous and corporate news texts. Finally, corporate news frames were compared with those found in Indigenous media.

## Data

The researchers analyzed 66 news texts published in Indigenous and corporate publications and issues from January 1 to December 31, 2018. The data comprised 47 news stories and 19 opinion pieces. Out of the 10 corporate publications studied, the newspapers with the most news texts on Indigenous land governance issues were the *Calgary Herald* (10) and *The Province* (6). Since most of the news texts studied concern resource development activities taking place in British Columbia or Alberta, it is unsurprising that two Western Canadian major dailies, both owned by Postmedia, generated the most data. Out of the twelve Indigenous publications data was collected from, no relevant news texts were found in 3 Indigenous newspapers, all of which are based outside of Canada's two westernmost provinces—the *Eastern Door* (Quebec), *Eagle Feather News* (Saskatchewan), and *Wawatay News* (Ontario).

Of the 41 news texts published in corporate publications (see Appendix B), 19 were opinion pieces (including one editorial), while 26 news stories appeared in Indigenous publications (see Appendix A). The high number of opinion pieces in corporate newspapers may indicate that mainstream editors and commentators have identified Indigenous resistance to resource development activities as an issue of regional and national importance. That Indigenous media focused exclusively on news reporting may reflect a perception in Indigenous communities that there is little need to persuade their Indigenous audiences of the importance of resource development activities affecting their traditional territories as it is assumed that their readers share a common perspective.[2]

[2] It may also be related to budgetary constraints experienced by small Indigenous publications, as opinion writing can be quite costly, and these publications rarely feature op/eds on any topic.

**Table 1: Data Collected between January 1, 2018 & December 31, 2018**

| PUBLICATION | Audience | Ownership | News | Op/ Ed | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Corporate Newspapers* | | | | | |
| Calgary Herald | Calgary | Postmedia (PM) | 5 | 5 | **10** |
| Globe and Mail | National | Globe & Mail | 4 | 1 | **5** |
| Montreal Gazette | Montreal | PM | 2 | 2 | **4** |
| National Post | National | PM | 0 | 1 | **1** |
| Ottawa Citizen | Ottawa | PM | 2 | 0 | **2** |
| Province | BC | PM | 5 | 1 | **6** |
| Star Phoenix | SK | PM | 0 | 1 | **1** |
| Telegraph-Journal | NB | PM | 1 | 3 | **4** |
| Toronto Star | Toronto | Torstar | 0 | 2 | **2** |
| Winnipeg Free Press | Winnipeg | FP Canadian Newspapers | 2 | 3 | **5** |
| **Total Corp. News Texts** | | | **21** | **19** | **40** |
| | | | | | |
| *Indigenous Newspapers* | | | | | |
| Alberta Native News | AB | Alberta Native News | 3 | 0 | **3** |
| Anishinabek News | ON | Union of Ontario Indians | 2 | 0 | **2** |
| Eagle Feather News | SK | Eagle Feather News | 0 | 0 | **0** |
| Eastern Door | Kahnawake | Eastern Door | 0 | 0 | **0** |
| First Nations Drum | National | First Nations Drum | 6 | 0 | **6** |
| Ha-Shilth-Sa | Van. Isl. | Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council | 3 | 0 | **3** |
| Ku'ku'kwes | Atlantic Can. | Ku'ku'kwes | 3 | 0 | **3** |
| Lexey'em | N. Shuswap | N. Shuswap Tribal Council | 2 | 0 | **2** |
| Nunatsiaq News | NU, N. QC | Nortext Publishing Corp. | 3 | 0 | **3** |
| Two Row Times | N. ON | Garlow Media | 1 | 0 | **1** |
| Wawatay News | ON | Nishnawbe Aski Nation | 0 | 0 | **0** |
| Windspeaker | AB | Aboriginal Multi-Media Society | 3 | 0 | **3** |
| *Total Indig. News Texts* | | | **26** | **0** | **26** |
| **TOTAL NEWS TEXTS** | | | **47** | **19** | **66** |

The data comprised all news texts with a primary focus on Indigenous governance of traditional territories appearing in the identified corporate and Indigenous publications between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2018. A closer examination of the data resulted in the exclusion of news texts that did not have one of these topic areas as a primary focus. As well, researchers found that several corporate news texts containing key search terms were not within the scope of the research. For example, in several opinion pieces, "sympathy" for the "predicaments" of Indigenous peoples served as a pretext for political critiques of Prime Minister Trudeau and his government, the Federal Liberal Party, or other political attacks.

The preeminent Canadian corporate media organization is Postmedia Network Canada Corporation, which publishes 6 of the 10 newspapers studied in this project. In addition to the *National Post*, Postmedia's holdings include eight broadsheet dailies, six tabloid dailies, *24 Hours* (a free daily

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distributed in Toronto and Vancouver), and dozens of community newspapers as well as several magazines. Postmedia is owned by a consortium of investment and asset-management companies, including two U.S. hedge funds, Silver Point Capital and GoldenTree Asset Management, that together own 54% of the company (McSheffrey, 2015, October 16).

On the other hand, the 12 Indigenous publications selected for this study represent an alternative medium to corporate media. These newspapers meet the criteria for alternative media outlined by Hackett and Carroll (2006) in *Remaking Media*. To begin with, they are independent from corporate interests and the state, and subsist on shoe-string budgets in comparison to major daily newspapers. While corporate newspapers are typically published 6 or 7 days per week, Indigenous newspapers are published far less frequently, in some cases as infrequently as four times per year, produce far less volume of news, and often target audiences from communities associated with a specific First Nation. The limited scope of Indigenous news outlets relates to financial challenges faced by small independent publications, which were exacerbated in the early 1990s when the federal government eliminated a program designed to subsidize some of their costs. Many of the scaled-down Indigenous publications that survived these cutbacks are confined to "areas where Aboriginal people are populous enough to form a viable consumer audience that can be sold to advertisers" (Big Canoe & Rupert, 2002, p. 15). Each one of these publications meets the definition of Indigenous publication: "[one that] is owned, controlled and produced mainly by Aboriginal people with content specifically for and about Aboriginal people. It is free of undue external influence or control and is published quarterly or more frequently" (p. 5). In the new millennium, many more of these small independent Indigenous publications have emerged online.

Most of the Indigenous news outlets studied in this project are privately owned by Indigenous people. Some, such as *Ha-Shilth-Sa News, Lexey'em,* and *Anishinabek News* are operated by local tribal councils or Indigenous organizations. *Windspeaker* is owned by a national Indigenous communications organization, the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society, which focuses its efforts on providing communication for and among Indigenous groups in Canada. Some independently owned newspapers, such as *Ku'ku'kwes,* use crowdfunding through their websites to help finance their publications.

The Indigenous news texts studied in this project covered a wide range of issues. While 12 focused on resource development, the other 14 news items explored a variety of other topics, including the federal government's framework on the Recognition and Implementation of Rights, treaty rights, gaming revenue, First Nations' participation in setting sustainable development goals, self-government, consultation, and reconciliation talks.

There was far less topic diversity in corporate news. Eighty percent (32 of 40) of corporate news items focused on resource development on or affecting Indigenous land. Only eight articles had a main topic other than resource development: four were related to treaties, two were about the need for greater consultation with Indigenous peoples, another discussed a Manitoba First Nation's lawsuit against the Saskatchewan government, and one focussed on the transfer of land formerly occupied by the Canadian Army to Treaty One First Nations.

## Framing of land issues in Indigenous media

Indigenous news outlets are an important source of representation of Indigenous voices on issues of land use and Indigenous rights. In news discourse, land was framed as intricately connected to culture and tradition, and as something Indigenous people have personal relationships with. In news texts, land was rarely viewed in isolation of its connections to people, tradition, and culture. Land itself was personified and constructed as having rights of its own, and was characterized as under threat in modern society and in need of advocacy and protection, for the sake of both traditional cultures and the land itself. Indigenous media emphasized Indigenous people's deeply held cultural values related to land and the need to protect it. In news texts, treaties were constructed as the gold standard of Indigenous rights that must be recognized for reconciliation and collaboration to take place. Reporters assumed that their readers shared this understanding of land, and the need to advocate for treaty rights. Indigenous communities were portrayed as having diverse cultures, languages, and needs, and distinct Indigenous groups are not conflated. Specific First Nations, reserves, languages, leaders, activists, and community members were mentioned by name. Indigenous reporters cited sources that represented multiple Indigenous perspectives on land governance issues.

The inclusion and exclusion of certain sources is a factor that shapes news narratives. Indigenous news media included a wide variety of sources, both elite and non-elite. Elite sources included persons and organizations that hold power both within and outside the community. Non-elite sources cited included community members and others who do not have institutional authority or hold official positions of power. Indigenous publications featured a diverse range of sources that represent voices within their own communities and readership, as well as those of politicians, leaders, and other elite sources outside their communities. These sources were beyond the scope of those referenced in corporate news stories on similar topics.

Indigenous news media emphasized connections between land issues and specific Indigenous cultures. In news stories, issues involving land were tied to tradition, and drew on sources that referenced relationships between land and local traditional knowledge. News texts emphasized the inherent value of land because of its connection to tradition, history, language, and culture. In a story about old growth logging in the Nahmint Valley, a *Ha-Shilth-Sa News* reporter quoted a local resident's views on the environmental degradation of his people's territory:

> I travelled out there quite often when I first moved home. I brought my nieces and nephews to get them acquainted with different parts of our traditional territory," she said. "I haven't been out there in a while actually, because it breaks my heart. I don't know that I could handle seeing the state of the way things are (Plummer, 2018, para. 16).

The word "land" was used interchangeably with "traditional territory" in Indigenous news (Plummer, 2018, pp. 3-4). Indigenous sources valorized land in relation to Indigenous culture, history, and tradition. News writers highlighted ways that protecting land could preserve culture, language, and tradition, and acknowledged that those concepts are inextricably connected to the land itself.

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The personification of land and nature was a feature of discourse about land and environmental issues in Indigenous media. News texts frequently included emotional language that attributed personal feelings to land and emphasized spiritual connections to it. Possessive pronouns, such as "our" were used to describe Indigenous connections to the land (Narine, 2018b, para. 18). Also, land was denoted as "Mother Earth," situating it as a living thing with which people have a close relationship—that is, it is not simply a resource for potential consumption or exploitation (Narine, 2018a, para. 21). This relational view of land was expressed using highly emotive language. Indigenous reporters compared the devastation of land with violent crimes against people and animals. For example, Ancient Forest Alliance (AFA) Executive Director Ken Wu, described the old growth logging taking place in Nahmint Valley as tantamount to "coming across a herd of elephants and slaughtering them all, they're so rare these days, these monumental stands" (Plummer, 2018, para. 5).

Indigenous news stories emphasized the need to protect land, especially the traditional territories of First Nations. The land itself was constructed as possessing natural rights that must be respected. Writing in *Anishinabek News*, Becking (2018a) cited Nipissing First Nation Chief Scott McLeod who asserted that nature holds the same right to exist as humans, and this right must be honoured for the rights of people to also be meaningful. An assumption inherent in Indigenous news stories was that readers understood the inherent value and rights of the Earth itself. Nature was portrayed as having value, regardless of its usefulness to people or its potential for consumption. At the same time, Indigenous news discourse affirmed the value that land provides for people in terms of food, spiritual connections, and traditional meaning.

Actors promoting logging, pipelines, and other corporate resource development initiatives were described as infringing upon those inherent rights and causing harm to Indigenous people as well as their traditional land bases and local ecologies. For example, a news story about the impact of old growth logging on the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations' territories gave voice to the concerns of a local community member who argued that the "province [of British Columbia] has once again failed our Indigenous people," and that BC "needs to recognize First Nations as the original right holders to the land" (Plummer, para. 19). Other Indigenous sources cited in the Indigenous press emphasized the corporate sector's influence over government. One elder noted the federal government's failure to obtain "free, prior and informed consent" before entering Indigenous territory and argued that "corporations that want to do business and develop in Indigenous territories . . . 'seem to rule the governments'" (Steel, 2018, para. 8).

Indigenous reporters frequently cited resource development opponents' conviction that Indigenous peoples cannot rely on settler governments to enforce their own laws, but instead should be proactive in fighting protect their land, resources, and rights. For example, in an article on a Supreme Court decision that undermined Indigenous rights in *Windspeaker*, the reporter cited a Cree Chief who argued that "Canada's justice system has failed First Nations once more [and that] First Nations will have to take the fight to protect their treaty and inherent rights international" (Narine, 2018b, para. 14). Some Indigenous sources stressed that stewardship of Indigenous land and natural resources involves more than simply asserting Indigenous legal rights, arguing that protecting these resources requires a fight for the very survival of Indigenous peoples, communities, and cultures. In an article on the need for

Indigenous consent, one elder put it bluntly: "our people will never survive without the air, earth and water." He pointed out that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their land is a two-way street, in that Indigenous people need to take care of the land, and in turn: "The trees teach us. The animals teach us. The water teaches us, the fish. All these things in our environment that we have to look after" (Steel, October 28, 2018, para. 7).

Underlying many Indigenous news texts was an assumption that both reporters and their readers valued treaty rights and shared an understanding that Indigenous governments have authority and legitimacy. Communications between Indigenous groups and settler government were described as "nation to nation" (*Lexey'em*, 2018, para. 9). Some news texts sketched in the historical context of land issues and treaty rights, and connected current issues with the enduring trauma experienced by Indigenous communities because of colonization. News texts furnished examples of communities not feeling "heard" or respected (Becking, 2018b, para. 7), as well as instances where they were not consulted in decisions about their land. Indigenous news discourse featured an implicit consensus among reporters and readers about the importance of Indigenous people being heard, and having their perspectives honoured and acted upon.

Finally, Indigenous news texts framed land as under an immediate threat, and in need of protection from corporate interests and the federal government. That land still belongs to Indigenous communities was emphasized through lexical choices describing land such as "unceded" (Narine, 2018, para. 8). Indigenous reporters often referenced sources who expressed feelings of injustice and stressed the need to act as stewards of the land. For example, Becking (2018a) quoted a chief who argued that Indigenous people must "make it a priority to protect our lands and ways, embed our cultural understandings and language into our everyday being" (para. 4).

Based on the Indigenous news texts analyzed in this study, it is evident that land holds deep value and meaning to Indigenous groups for cultural, traditional, and linguistic reasons. Indigenous scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred (2017) described Indigenous people as *defined by* this relationship to the land:

> The voices of our ancestors continue to call out to us, telling us that it is all about the land: always has been and always will be . . . get it back, go back to it. We have fought for the land and for our connection to it. For five hundred years, it is this struggle to restore the living relationship between our ancestors, our land and ourselves that has defined us as Indigenous people, and it is this struggle that has ensured our survival in the face of ignorance and violence. (p. 11)

Evident in the data was a belief that the land itself holds a value that is separate from potential resource use. Indigenous media depicted this belief and value as under threat due to the actions of corporations and settler governments, a threat exacerbated by the settler public's lack of understanding of the complexities, context, and history of issues involving Indigenous traditional territories.

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## Framing of land issues in Corporate Media

### "Heroes" and "Villains"

Much opinion writing studied in this project orbited a simple opposition of heroes vs. villains, with Indigenous land protectors often being cast in the latter role. Corporate news reporting reflected a similar binary. Indeed, 17 of the 22 corporate news stories studied, including every one published in the seven Postmedia-owned newspapers, reflected the standard binary approach to reporting by referencing actors and sources representing "both sides" of land governance issues. Thus, reporters and opinion writers cited corporate representatives and supporters of resource industries as well as Indigenous leaders and their allies associated with traditional territories affected by resource development activities. In most news items, actors favouring resource development were referred to as proponents or supporters, while Indigenous people and their allies supporting environmental protection and/or Indigenous sovereignty perspectives were described as opponents. A variety of negative descriptors were applied to Indigenous actors and their supporters, such as "activists" (Cattaneo, 2018b, para. 6), "anti-pipeline activists" (Eagland & Behdad, 2018, para. 7), "implacable opposition" (McCarthy et al., 2018, para. 5), "protestors" (Ivison, 2018b, para. 11) and "adamant" opponents (Hoekstra, 2018a, para. 19).

Generally, actors promoting resource development were associated with positive actions and behaviours, and linked as subjects with verbs with *positive* connotations such as "open" [as in to open a market] (Hoekstra, 2018e, para. 6), "provides" (Ivison, 2018a, para. 16), "allow" (Quan & Forrest, 2018, para. 18), and "increase" (Keep pressure on pipeline question, 2018, para. 9). For example, one news story about the Trans Mountain pipeline in the *Calgary Herald* emphasized the benefits that would accrue to settlers and Indigenous peoples because the pipeline would "significantly increase ocean-going shipment capacity," open "up new markets for Alberta oilsands in Asia," and support Indigenous peoples as they have "signed benefit agreements for the project valued at $400 million" (Hoekstra, 2018d, para. 8 & 12). Other corporate new stories portrayed corporate resource development actors as "victims" of Indigenous adversaries and government.

One news story invokes the metaphor of an infected cut or sore to represent the harm caused to corporations by uncertainty about the extent of Indigenous rights and title, described as "festering more than 35 years" (Hunter, 2018, para. 6). Implicit in the headline of a *Montreal Gazette* article is a criticism of the federal government's decision not to appeal judicial rulings supporting Indigenous peoples' right to have more consultation about the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion: "Feds opt for Indigenous consultations instead of appealing quashed approvals" (Morgan, 2018b). The victim of the federal government's decision is the "frustrated" energy industry, because without a government appeal "there is no end in sight to the oilpatch's crippling pipeline capacity issues" (Morgan, 2018b, para.1).

In corporate news discourse, the most extreme language was reserved for opponents of resource development. Destructive actions and behaviours were attributed to Indigenous actors and their allies, using verbs such as complain, kill, excoriate, allege, challenge, fight, slam, refuse, argue, shout, holler, and resist. Opponents of resource development were portrayed as unreasonable, inflexible, and causing harm, or as combative, argumentative, and complaining. For example, Indigenous peoples and settlers opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline were constructed in a *Province* news story as "protesters" and

"activists" who "shouted to hollering and drums" in "their efforts to kill the project" (Eagland & Behdad, 2018, para. 4 & 1). In an opinion piece in the *Globe and Mail*, Margaret Wente (2018) criticized First Nations for "complaining they weren't adequately consulted" (para. 7) as if this were a spurious claim, even though the Federal Court of Appeal ruled that this was in fact the case. She mocked pipeline opponents who "believe that the only good pipelines are no pipelines at all, and they're ready to throw themselves in front of bulldozers to stop them" (para. 5), and described Stó:lō Chief Ernie Crey as someone "for whom no money is enough" (Wente, para. 10), implying that Indigenous opponents of the pipeline are motivated by financial opportunism.

In corporate news discourse, the actions of those advocating resource development initiatives were associated with *beneficial outcomes* for Indigenous peoples and settlers, such as benefit agreements with First Nations, a stronger economy, additional jobs, higher pipeline capacity, and access to expanded and new international markets. However, many reporters and opinion writers referenced the harmful consequences of measures taken by Indigenous peoples and their allies in opposing resource development. Their actions "cost the government" (Forrest, 2018, para. 2), led to "crippling capacity issues" (Morgan, 2018b, para. 1), exposed "public lands . . . to unresolved land claims" (Hunter, 2018, para. 6), prevented "better access to markets in the US" (Hoekstra, 2018b, para. 5), and triggered "intense angst in Alberta" (Snyder, 2018, para. 6). Corporate news coverage of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion was steeped in the language of moral panic about the economic toll caused by Indigenous peoples' opposition to the project. Delays to the pipeline expansion not only "block[ed] oil tanker traffic" (Quan, 2018, para. 13), they also resulted in Canada "losing [$80 million] every day the pipeline expansion isn't completed" (Quan & Forrest, 2018, para. 25), and caused Canadian oil to sell "at a massive discount to US barrels" (Morgan, 2018b, para. 6).

Some attention was also paid to the harms caused by resource development. In a *Province* article about the Alberta oilsands, reporters quoted a Cree "activist" who stated that her "community has been devastated by the Alberta oilsands," and that residents were "unable to drink water from local streams or pick medicine and berries" (Eagland & Behdad, para. 7). In the *Winnipeg Free Press*, an Indigenous columnist pointed out the potentially fatal consequences of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion on Indigenous people: "Indigenous Peoples are not anti-economy, but anti-death. Pipeline protesters are land and water protectors. Projects in the national interest should produce life, not end it" (Sinclair, 2018a, para. 18). Conceiving of pipeline opponents as protectors of natural resources rather than "protesters" is a position not advanced in any other corporate news text, a fact underlining the importance of incorporating the voices of Indigenous journalists into corporate news coverage.

### Settler Argumentation in Opinion Writing

The overarching discourse found in corporate opinion writing is that proponents of resource development involving Indigenous territory are reasonable and fair people promoting the economic interests of us all. Implicit in this dominant discourse is the supposition that resource development opponents are a small, unprincipled, and unlawful special interest group.

Several rhetorical arguments in support of the dominant narrative recurred in the 14 opinion pieces. First, resource development proponents have legitimacy because they operated within the rule of law.

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Second, opponents of resource development, particularly environmental activists and some Indigenous peoples (i.e., those groups contesting development), were illegitimate because they broke the law and refused to abide by the rules. Third, environmental activists, operating on behalf of rich foreign interests, duped or bribed Indigenous peoples into opposing resource development.

These rhetorical arguments relied on the linguistic strategy of over-lexicalization.[3] Those resisting pipelines and other resource development activities were often portrayed with folksy, common sense language, as unreasonable extremists and dangerous radicals. Settlers challenging resource development initiatives were constructed as activists, and ascribed agency using action verbs that result in negative consequences for others. Montreal Gazette columnist Claudia Cattaneo (2018a) argued that these Indigenous activists were harming other Indigenous leaders by causing them to "be permanently frozen out of the mainstream economy" (para. 5), "sowing mistrust and conflict" (para. 6), using "hardline tactics" (para. 6), and "celebrat[ing] cancellations and obstacles" (para. 12) that resulted in "jobs and revenue for First Nations" being "wiped out" (para. 12). Columnists for the National Post and Globe and Mail characterized Indigenous people as engaging in "environmentalist stunts" (Francis, 2018, para. 12) and "threaten[ing]" (Mason, 2018, para. 10) anyone who stood in their way.

In addition to the use of pejorative and highly emotive language, opinion writers relied on a variety of rhetorical strategies. Binary oppositions such as the "silent majority" or "rightthinking people from coast to coast to coast" vs. a "vocal minority" of activists (Ivison, 2018a, para. 19, 20 & 8) were routinely deployed. An abundance of similes and metaphors for "war" were employed. For example, Francis (2018) wrote that the NDP government in BC "flouts the law" (para. 2) and had been "declaring war" on Kinder Morgan" (para. 7), a company that was "bombarded with nasty headlines and government threats." Mason (2018) opined that Kinder Morgan could "win the battle, but still lose the war" (para. 16). Opinion writers took the Public Voice ("Albertans have every right to feel besieged"), and writers sometimes personified resource development corporations and empathized with their "plight" (Coyne, 2018, para 15). These corporations were portrayed as "victims" (Francis, 2018, para. 14) who experienced "anxiety" (Mason, 2018, para. 14), suffered from "abusive . . . attacks" (Francis, 2018, para. 8) and put up with "harassment" (Francis, 2018, para. 12).

A significant finding was that a wide range of perspectives, values, and contextual factors were left out of news coverage. This is what Hackett, Gruneau, Gutstein, and Gibson (2000), refer to as the "missing news," that is, "systemic blind spots" (p. 160) in the news. While corporate media coverage valorized resource development, corporate profit, and "the economy," no value was attached to protecting land, water, and air, or respecting the traditional territories and inherent rights of Indigenous peoples, even those rights enshrined in the Constitution. Indeed, there was very little discussion of why people would be opposed to pipelines and other resource development activities, or the science behind environmental concerns. Instead of citing scientists' assessments of environmental risks or the views of Indigenous

[3] British linguist Roger Fowler (1991) describes over-lexicalization as the "existence of an excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities and ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the culture's discourse," citing the "proliferation of (often pejorative) words for designating women" (p. 85) as a common example of this linguistic strategy.

elders and knowledge keepers living on lands affected by resource development, commentators proffered their own common-sense assessments. For example, regarding a possible ban on BC Coastal tanker traffic, the Globe and Mail's Margaret Wente wrote: "What's an acceptable risk for the odds of a dilbit [diluted bitumen] spill in the Salish Sea? Once every 75 years? Once every 2000? Never?" (2018, para. 8).

However, coverage of Indigenous land governance issues in two non-Postmedia owned newspapers diverged from that of other corporate publications studied. Five opinion pieces and five news stories published in the Toronto Star and the Winnipeg Free Press stood out because they did not reflect the dominant framing in corporate news. These news texts furnished greater detail about the negative impacts of resource development activities on Indigenous peoples rather than simply referring to unspecified environmental concerns and provided Indigenous sources with significant space to speak to the consequences on their communities, local ecologies, and economies. Some of the harms to Indigenous peoples mentioned included damage to their "homes and culture," loss of "clean water, killer whales, and salmon" (Meissner, 2018, para. 9), "breathing issues for workers and citizens, water contamination and run off pollution" (Sinclair, 2018b, para. 6), and destruction of "heritage, traditional and cultural resources" (Rollason, 2018, para. 12). Opinion pieces included a critical perspective on colonialism and settler resource development and framed the role of Indigenous peoples in a positive light—as stewards of the environment and defenders of their inherent rights.

## Discussion

Indigenous and corporate news stories featured contrasting news frames. The Indigenous press framed stories about governance as *Indigenous people were not consulted about resource development activities*, while corporate media offered a contrasting frame: *Indigenous peoples have already been adequately consulted.* Not surprisingly, the necessity of securing Indigenous consent prior to beginning resource extraction activities, a major theme in Indigenous news discourse, was absent from corporate media. Another prominent frame in Indigenous news discourse was *treaties must be considered in discussions about Indigenous land governance issues.* As with the issue of Indigenous consent, corporate news left out any discussion of treaties or the need to honour them, except for one article which highlighted the expense of treaty talks to the federal government.

Indigenous news texts connected land governance issues to specific historical events and processes of colonialism and racism, such as residential schools. On the other hand, corporate media proceeded as if racism never existed, and glossed over historical issues. Perhaps the most insidious form of racism is that which is characterized by denial of its contemporary manifestations. Indeed, corporate news coverage of Indigenous peoples' governance of their territories did not acknowledge the role played by racism in settler conflict with Indigenous peoples over land claims. Discourse about Indigenous land-related grievances and claims was detached from historical antecedents going back centuries. This form of deeply entrenched racism is based on "colour-blind formal conceptions of equality" requiring treatment that "is the same across the board" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).

The few news texts that mentioned "history" or "colonialism" did so in the context of the need for everyone—both Indigenous non-Indigenous people—to *move on* from the past (Shaw & Chan, 2018,

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para. 10; Shaw, 2018, para. 7; & McCarthy, Cryderman & Stueck, 2018, para. 14). Contemporary coverage of Indigenous issues has much in common with historical colonial news writing. Indeed, Alfred (2009) pointed out that when it comes to reporting on control over Indigenous land and resource development, corporate media, much like early colonial newspapers, promote the "destruction or dispersal of Indigenous populations from their homelands to ensure access for industrial exploitation enterprises and concomitant nonindigenous settlements" (p. 44).

**Discourse and Values**

The dominant discourse in corporate media was that proponents of resource development involving Indigenous territory are reasonable, fair people promoting everyone's economic interests. This discourse is anchored in three "common sense" assumptions. First, since resource development is championed by reasonable, fair-minded people, it follows that such initiatives are beneficial for everyone. In the same way that demonizing Indigenous and settler opponents of resource development discredits their cause, venerating proponents of development serves to legitimize and validate their endeavors. Second, the economic interests of Indigenous peoples are coterminous with those of settlers and corporations. As with settlers, the interests of Indigenous people are best served by growing the economy through corporate resource extraction activities, creating economic opportunities, and maximizing jobs. Third, most rational Canadians, whether Indigenous or settler, valorize financial benefits above all else as it is central to our survival.

The construction of common sense about resource development on Indigenous territory in corporate media is at once ideological and strategic. Nesbitt-Larking (2001) defines common sense as a "closed form of thought, resistant to curiosity, challenge or change," one that "gives a particular and partial reading of the world, while appearing to be universal and uncontroversial" (2001, p. 87). These assumptions represent an example of priming—that is, the process by which news media influence the criteria the public use to evaluate matters of public policy.[4] If audiences uncritically accept the evaluative criteria about resource development advanced in corporate media, it is unlikely they will be receptive to alternative positions taken by Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous representations of resource development affecting their territories did not reflect these assumptions. The principal discourse in the Indigenous press was Resource development activities must have Indigenous consent and not negatively affect the physical environment of Indigenous territories. Indeed, while Indigenous peoples may appreciate the economic benefits of resource development, they must not come at the expense of the environment. As such, the rhetorical arguments in support of this discourse were centred around the value that Indigenous people place on the quality of their air, land, and water or their spiritual relationship with Mother Earth. While these values were constructed as non-negotiable in Indigenous media, in corporate news the value of resource development initiatives was

[4] Communications researcher Kevin Williams writes that "priming presumes that when evaluating political phenomena, people do not take into account all that they know – even if they wanted to, time often prevents them. Instead, people rely on what comes to mind, 'those bits and pieces of political memory that are accessible'" (p. 182).

assessed solely through cost-benefit analyses. In order to have economic benefit, something must be given up in return. Corporate media implicitly defined benefits and costs in financial terms; that is, if a resource initiative has an environmental cost to Indigenous peoples, it's only a matter of determining how much —in dollar terms —their benefit or fair compensation ought to be.

**Environmental Stewardship vs. Victimhood**

Two rhetorical arguments underpinned much news discourse in the Indigenous press: first, Indigenous peoples need to defend and protect their land, water, and air, and second, they have a familial relationship with the earth, which is a living entity. Land itself has an inherent right to flourish, and resource development initiatives that threaten it represent an injustice. Yet the corporate press portrayed corporations themselves as experiencing injustice at the hands of Indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and others who unfairly blocked resource development. This theme of corporate victimhood has been found in research on corporate reportage of resource development. A 2014 study of the Calgary Herald found that the newspaper portrayed the multi-billion-dollar petroleum industry as "a naively and largely helpless victim (at least in the battle for global public opinion) of the 'Goliath' of the environmental movement" (Gunster & Saurette, 2014, p. 344).

Evidence of a corporate victimhood discourse was also found in our research. Environmental activists were depicted as duping Indigenous people into taking positions that not only harmed settlers and corporations, but that also undermined their own interests. This portrayal played into old tropes about the inferiority of Indigenous peoples, namely, that they are incapable of taking care of themselves and must rely on White men to decide what is in their best interests (Harding, 2006). The myth that Indigenous peoples don't know what's best for them, and are simple people easily taken advantage of, is of strategic value to proponents of resource development. Invoking familiar stereotypes of Indigenous peoples is a way of rendering their views and interests irrelevant. If audiences are swayed by this racist logic, then a key countervailing narrative can be discounted without having to consider evidence or engage with opposing arguments.

Indeed, in corporate opinion pieces, counterarguments to development on Indigenous territory, when presented at all, were rejected without any detailed analysis. The main rhetorical strategy was one of debasement and derogation. While Indigenous opponents of resource development on their territories were dismissed as being naïve and easily duped, their settler allies were derogated as a tiny minority of dangerous radical activists, some of whom were directed and financed by foreign agents (i.e., wealthy US-based environmental groups). As was the case with Indigenous opponents of resource development, the corporate press never seriously engaged with the case made by settler opponents —since they had been constructed as unreasonable, untrustworthy, and unpatriotic, the positions they embraced were invalidated by mere association. Thus, audiences were never furnished with details about settler objections to resource development initiatives; in effect, a straw target was created to stand in for them, and their positions and arguments were refuted by opinion writers. Hajer (1995) pointed out that much environmental discourse in mainstream news discourse involves not only persuading others to see problems according to their views, but also "seeking to position other actors in a specific way" (p. 53, quoted in Gunster & Saurette, 2014).

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The construction of Indigenous people and their allies as a straw target was partially achieved through the selection, contextualization, and use of sources. Research into journalists' choice and use of sources has found that they "can be introduced and contextualized in ways that make them sound naive or expert, and can be "used to praise, condemn, discredit, etc., the events or people involved in such events" (Jullian, 2011, p. 769). In corporate news, Indigenous and settler opponents of resource development were rarely quoted directly; at best, they were paraphrased, and at worst, their positions were subject to the surmise of journalists or sources. In the absence of verbatim quotations, journalists' attribution of words, ideas, and actions to key resource development opponents tended to present them and their perspectives in a negative light. In contrast, proponents of resource development, especially Indigenous supporters, were extensively quoted.

## Conclusion

A genuine reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples will only be achieved when governance of traditional territories is restored to Indigenous peoples. For this to happen, the public must be well-informed about contemporary racism, Canada's legacy of colonialism, and complex issues that have long historical antecedents such as land claims, treaties, and legal and constitutional issues. Unfortunately, Canada's corporate news media furnished Canadians with an incomplete picture of Indigenous land governance issues, generally failing to sketch in a meaningful historical context for these matters. Some Indigenous sources were incorporated—albeit selectively —into news coverage. However, their voices were given more prominence and accorded more credibility when what they had to say lined up with corporate interests, especially when it came to resource development initiatives on or affecting Indigenous land.

On the other hand, Indigenous media offered new ways of seeing land, resource development, and the natural environment. A counternarrative to the dominant corporate discourse emerged, one that positioned land and the natural environment as something having absolute value, and as indivisible from all living things, including people. An implicit assumption in Indigenous news discourse was that harm caused by pollution and other forms of environmental degradation could neither be negotiated nor compensated for, or resolved, through a simple cost-benefit analysis. The Indigenous press represented Indigenous peoples as having an inherent right to the land, as well as a responsibility for its stewardship.

While Indigenous news outlets presented an alternative discourse to that found in corporate publications, these tiny, independently owned and operated newspapers have very limited circulation, are consumed almost exclusively by local Indigenous communities, and are unable to reach large settler audiences. The federal government could introduce policy changes that assist these publications broaden their circulation to include non-Indigenous audiences. For example, it could restore a modernized version of the 1990s Publications Assistance Program that used to significantly subsidize the costs of Indigenous publications (Big Canoe & Rupert, 2002).

Some settlers may view the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples simply in terms of the opportunities their lands offer to grow the economy and create well-paying jobs. However, in the face of the deteriorating condition of the environment and the threat posed by climate change, it is important

that Indigenous concerns are heeded by settlers, and their vast knowledge of local ecology on their traditional territories reflected in decision-making about resource development.

If corporate newspapers are to furnish more balanced, contextualized, and informative coverage of Indigenous land governance issues, they need to begin Indigenizing their newsrooms. Settler governments could implement policies that encourage or require the hiring of Indigenous editors and journalists. One newspaper studied in this project, the *Winnipeg Free Press,* published opinion pieces written by an Indigenous staff writer that furnished contextual elements and perspectives largely absent from corporate news discourse. Future research needs to explore how innovative government policy could induce corporate media to include Indigenous voices and perspectives in the news.

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