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Michael Way¹

Abstract

This study acts as a multi-disciplinary contribution to existing research in discourses of news production practices, and representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) issues and protest. Specifically, quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed to explore FNMI representation across three mainstream Canadian dailies leading to and following the Idle No More (INM) movement from October 1, 2012 until February 28, 2013. In doing so, the study acts as a longitudinal confirmation of previous studies, revealing minimal FNMI salience during “everyday” news cycles, a narrow range of key topics, and a drastic increase in coverage during times of protest.

Keywords: protest coverage, FNMI media representation, media bias, agenda-setting, uses and gratifications theory, Idle No More, news framing

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to existing literature on the representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) peoples across news media in Canada. More specifically, a content analysis approach (both quantitative and qualitative) was undertaken of coverage provided among major Canadian daily newspapers and one Indigenous monthly publication. The study focuses on FNMI coverage surrounding the months leading up to and following the Idle No More movement which gained national momentum in late 2012 and early 2013, galvanizing the voices of FNMI and non-FNMI peoples in an alliance that acted as a key new self-presentation of FNMI identity.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) peoples in Canada represent one of the most marginalized groups in the country, with a recent report from the UN addressing numerous disparities and inequalities and describing their current situation as a “continuing crisis” (Human Rights Council, 2014, p. 23). As many non-Indigenous Canadians seem to be unaware of these unique challenges, and findings from an Ipsos-Reid survey during peak activity of Idle No More actually suggest a hardening of attitudes towards FNMI peoples (Ipsos, 2013, para. 5), it is important to explore how non-Indigenous Canadians interpret and understand the unique cultural identities and issues of FNMI peoples as represented through the news media. In doing so, this study employed a multi-disciplinary approach that explored the potential negative effects of news media representation on public opinion, drawing on methodologies from communications studies and news analysis. Additionally, discursive analysis from a cultural studies vantage point addressed contemporary positions on aspects of ‘Otherness’ stemming from dominant colonial and settler attitudes. By attempting to reveal the presence of continued disparities and inequalities within press coverage of FNMI issues, the study confirmed the findings of previous work within this discourse of FNMI representation in news media (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes, 2012; Harding, 2006; Harding, 2010; Wilkes, Corrigan-Brown, and Myers, 2010).

Furthermore, as previous studies of FNMI news representation have largely been focused on coverage of dramatic events - such as collective action (Wilkes & Ricard, 2007; Wilkes Corrigan-Brown, and Myers, 2010), armed protest coverage (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes, 2012; Valaskakis, 2005), and the death of a child in the care of a First Nations child-care agency (Harding, 2010) - this study explored coverage both leading to and following protest in an attempt to uncover dominant themes and attitudes in 'everyday' FNMI news coverage. Additionally, much of the existing literature on FNMI protest coverage is somewhat outdated; with the 1990 Oka and 1995 Ipperwash crises being the most contemporary events that have been the subject of scholarly new media research. Hence, this study also allowed a longitudinal contribution to the existing literature surrounding FNMI protest, in addition to an analysis of Idle No More movement coverage, which remains relatively unexplored by media scholars.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

A longitudinal contribution to existing research in FNMI news representation must address the findings from previous work in the discourse of news analysis, while maintaining a cultural sensitivity respective to the colonial history between First Peoples and settler society. In doing so, this study proposed the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of FNMI issues depicted in inter-provincial news sources, and what are the variations in coverage across the three newspapers, not only in terms of frequency, but context behind FNMI stories?
2. What are the main themes surrounding FNMI news within a discourse of news media production, and is so-called "journalistic impartiality" prevalent when exploring coverage of FNMI peoples and issues?
3. How can one categorize the context of FNMI stories as a result of this discourse, and where does sympathy lie within FNMI articles?

Additionally, a number of hypotheses were developed based on the existing literature:

H1: FNMI coverage will see a dramatic increase in December and January across all three mainstream news sources.

H2: Mainstream coverage will be framed within themes of Otherness, offering little cultural insight and reinforcing dominant Eurocentric views.

H3: An attempt at balanced journalism will see many FNMI voices overshadowed by non-FNMI authority, be they government or private sources.

Literature Review

McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting model (1972) acted as an initial guide for this study, as it addressed the capacity of mass media to determine and advance issues to

the public agenda and, more specifically, the capacity of news media to influence audience interpretation of what issues are important. Though their original study assessed the correlation between news coverage and voter perception of the leading issues surrounding the 1968 US presidential campaign (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), more recent research has found patterns of redundancy in reporting between both competing online news organizations (intermedia agenda-setting), as well as interorganizational channels, such as between an online platform and its existing parent company (McCombs, 2005, p. 545), all of which affect the salience of news items. McCombs (2005) wrote,

Both traditional agenda-setting effects and attribute agenda-setting effects involve the transfer of salience. The core proposition for these two stages, sometimes called the first and second levels of agenda setting, is that elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent over time on the public agenda. The media not only can be successful in telling us what to think about, they also can be successful in telling us how to think about it. (p. 546)

Thus, the importance of traditional and attribute agenda-setting effects in relation to the representation of FNMI peoples, surrounds the ways in which issues are depicted (news framing) and how often, as the frequency and salience of news coverage “have significant consequences for people’s attitudes and opinions” (McCombs, 2005, p. 549). This, in turn, can influence public policy, and contribute to a hardening of attitudes especially within the Canadian political climate, where relations between the federal government and FNMI peoples remain strained (Human Rights Council, 2014, p. 7).

The uses and gratifications theory also plays an important role in news analysis as it addresses the give-and-take relationship between media production and audiences and gains relevancy when analysing news media from a commodity perspective. To wit, a newspaper will not maintain economic viability for long if it does not provide its intended audience with news relevant to that audience. Studies employing a uses and gratifications approach to understanding audience selection of media have found that active audiences often seek political news that conforms to their predisposed beliefs, known to students of critical thinking as *confirmation bias* (Groarke & Tindale, 2013, p. 28). A 1983 study by Wenner commented on this ‘bending of media,’ concluding “it is not completely clear whether this type of orientation centers around a positive gratification seeking strategy which would tend to reinforce partisan beliefs and candidate leanings or is a selective avoidance strategy aimed at bypassing conflicting information” (p. 392). Wenner continued “the Selectivity factor demonstrates a more reasoned avoidance of political news by a type of person who is often more politically active, more partisan, and more strongly committed to a particular candidate” (p. 393). Thus, a uses and gratifications model can address salience, not of issues per se, but rather the specific channels audiences choose and for what purpose and the ways in which news organizations cater to these needs.

Research concerning news coverage of protest is also explored, much of which has established positive correlations between event coverage and levels of conflict, event intensity, and geographic proximity between protests and news organizations (Myers &

Caniglia, 2004; Oliver & Myers, 1999; Oliver & Maney, 2000; Boyle et al., 2005). More specifically, based on the hypothesis of the researcher that the current study will see a high saturation of INM coverage within the selected time frame, studies of FNMI protest coverage in Canada were given precedence. Research conducted by multiple scholars claimed that coverage of FNMI issues “favoured officials’ version of events, not only legitimating the latter’s use of force and violence but also leading to considerable anti-First Nation content” (Wilkes et al., 2010, p. 332). Furthermore, as Wilkes, Corrigan-Brown, and Myers (2010) noted of previous research on coverage of both Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash, this valuing of officials’ versions over those of First Peoples can devalue the opinion of those involved in protest while reaffirming the opinion of those in dominant power structures (p. 332).

Confirming the findings of previous studies that suggest news routines often opt for sensational stories (e.g. “if it bleeds, it leads”), such as those focusing on social deviance (Ericson et al., 1987; Bennett, 2007; Myers & Caniglia, 2004; Oliver & Myers, 1999; Oliver & Maney, 2000; Boyle et al., 2005), Wilkes, Corrigan-Brown, and Myers (2010) articulated that “while it is not surprising that some events generate more coverage than others, the imbalance in the coverage means that some events (the most dramatic and/or violent) are more likely to be seen as “representative” of these events in reader’s minds” (p. 344). This observation resonates with McCombs’s aforementioned statement of the media’s power in telling audiences how to think about issues.

Sociological research on the representation of FNMI issues in Canadian media has been undertaken by Robert Harding (2006), who analyzed news coverage from British Columbia during four “flashpoints” in history: the opening of BC’s first residential school in 1863, land disputes in 1866 and 1991, and a 1992 report on aboriginal child welfare. Through an analysis of the material in terms of article structuring and news framing, Harding (2006) found a focus on otherness, concluding:

news media simultaneously eschew any analysis of the socio-political context of these living conditions and the impact of Canada’s long history of colonialism on aboriginal people. By unhooking the present from the past in its coverage of contemporary aboriginal issues, the news media perpetuate damaging stereotypes of aboriginal people and create a supportive environment for state structures and practices that reproduce material and social inequality between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people (p. 206).

In addition, Harding (2006) employed a discourse analysis of news coverage concerning a specific case of a child’s death in the care of Xyolhemeylh, the Stó:lō Nation’s child and family services agency, finding that coverage was much more frequent than in similar cases of deaths occurring in BC’s Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) child welfare agency. Furthermore, Xyolhemeylh coverage provided less account of “systemic problems and structural issues, such as the availability of resources and the working conditions of child protection workers,” (Harding, 2006, p. 98) that were included in MCFD childcare articles, demonstrating skewed representations in the framing of the issue, and often inferring the incompetence of FNMI agencies as the cause of death. Harding’s attention to news framing addresses the ways in which non-Indigenous Canadians may interpret contemporary issues faced by FNMI peoples. As

a result of his studies, focusing on a specific instance with the Xyolhemeylh case, countered with a broad time frame of coverage extending as far back as 1863 (when structural racism was arguably entrenched within the legal system and journalism practices were still at an early stage), there is reason to believe that a more recent study of FNMI representation, and one which moves beyond the provincial limits of British Columbia would contribute to existing literature.

Methodology

Content and discourse analyses were employed to assess the frequency and context of newspaper coverage of FNMI issues from October 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013. Newspapers were the chosen news media text for this study due to reader confidence over other news sources, as well as the continued popularity of this format as a preferred news source.² The study was limited to a textual analysis for various reasons, such as: the availability of text-only articles through databases *LexisNexis* and *ProQuest*; time and personnel limitations within the study; and the researcher's preferred focus on what the texts themselves say with less attention to article framing such as placement in the newspaper, size of headlines, and accompanying visuals - all of which can significantly confer additional meaning on the importance of a specific article.

Three daily newspapers were chosen from three separate provinces in order to compare coverage inter-provincially, as FNMI populations and political climates vary and likely affect news coverage.³ Papers were chosen based on a report from *The Canadian Journalism Project* (j-source.ca) which listed the average circulation of newspapers from each province as follows: *The Toronto Star* with 357, 612 copies sold daily (also the highest national circulation); *The Vancouver Sun* with 164, 507 copies daily (seventh most circulated nationally), and; *The Saskatoon StarPhoenix* with 48, 107 copies daily (Baluja, 2013). Both *The Vancouver Sun* and *The StarPhoenix* are owned by Postmedia Network Inc., while *The Toronto Star* is owned by TorStar Corp. (Newspapers Canada, 2014). In addition to the three dailies, referred to as 'mainstream' news in this study, *Windspeaker Magazine*, a monthly publication owned and operated by the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society (AMMSA) was analyzed in order to determine if key differences in themes and attitudes exist between commercial and Indigenous journalism. It is important to note however that the analysis of *Windspeaker* was undertaken as a complement to the analysis of mainstream dailies due to the differences in publication types, such as deadlines and audiences. Thus the addition of *Windspeaker* to the study acts mostly as a comparison to daily coverage especially in terms of topics and themes, as topics become salient one month after daily publications, allowing much more time for critical reflection on behalf of *Windspeaker* contributors.

² An ongoing Gallup poll of American news audiences revealed that audiences had the most confidence in newspapers over other news media, a trend that has continued over time (Gallup, n.d.). Additionally, a 2008 Canadian Newspaper Association study found that "48 percent of Canadians over the age of eighteen read a newspaper daily and 73 percent read such a paper at least once per week" (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

³ Initially, the study proposed to analyze four Canadian dailies, including *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald* in order to address differences in publication ownership and provincial attitudes. However, *The Chronicle-Herald* was not available in either digital database, and was dropped from the study in order to maintain the research design, as it was felt that a microfilm search could skew results, in addition to requiring more time than the study allowed for.

Articles were retrieved from *LexisNexis* using a search pattern that required any headline or lead paragraph to contain the following words: First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal, Indigenous, or Indian. Though the term “Indian” is largely seen as derogatory and outdated, the researcher felt that articles pertaining to the Indian Act or Status Indians were necessary. The term could also help capture any possible articles authored by FNMI individuals who may use the term Indian within a context of identity reclamation, or in an ironic or sarcastic tone. Additionally, the researcher was interested to see if the term would be used by any non-FNMI authors, which could address concerns of a lack of cultural sensitivity in mainstream publications.

The search criteria were deemed appropriate as previous studies have focused on the importance of headlines to convey the meaning of a story to the reader. Harding (2010) addressed the importance of headlines and lead paragraphs in the conveyance of meaning, in addition to the reliance of similar search criteria by other scholars:

Headlines direct audiences’ attention to what are considered prominent semantic features of news texts. While headlines sometimes summarize a news story, they are more likely to highlight one aspect of the story above others. Lambertus (2004) points out that headlines, along with lead paragraphs, are the textual features that readers are “most likely” to remember when defining issues and events at a later date (p. 88).

Hence, the methodological utility of this search pattern allows that the appearance of any of the keywords within either the headline or lead paragraph would suggest that an article is relevant as a legitimate presentation of FNMI issues. It is important to note that this study did not analyze the headlines themselves. Rather, headlines were simply used to generate the articles and were paid little attention aside from the keyword matches as the researcher opined that they can be misleading in accurately summarizing a story; often reinterpreting the most dramatic elements in order to grab the reader’s attention.

The resulting number of articles coded based on this search criteria, after filtering out irrelevant articles (such as articles dealing with India, the Cleveland Indians, or fruit indigenous to a specific locale), was 688. The coding of *Windspeaker* did not require such search criteria, and instead each issue from October 2012 to February 2013 was analyzed, as one can assume that all articles should be pertinent FNMI issues. The resulting number of coded articles from *Windspeaker* was 84; though two monthly features, “News Briefs,” and “Sports,” were not coded, namely in the interests of available time, the inclusion of multiple news items in the “News Briefs” section, and an interest in exploring *Windspeaker’s* focus on more national issues. Sports coverage was also deemed by the researcher as representative of human interest or special interest stories. However, it is important to note that a brief review of both these sections during the coding process revealed that published articles are strictly focused on issues that affect FNMI peoples, such as a focus on FNMI athletes in the sports section.

Criteria for the coding schedule (see Appendix) were developed through an adherence to the aforementioned communication theories, news analysis, and previous research designs. Based on the previous literature concerning news framing and issue salience, seventeen categories of topics were developed, and ranked as primary,

secondary, and tertiary in order to assess not only what is discussed, but also how it is framed within other topics. For instance, sovereignty issues were often presented in conjunction with natural resources and Canadian economics. Similarly, Idle No More was often presented with a mention of Chief Theresa Spence and the January 11 meeting between members of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In this way, the current study attempted to broaden previous research designs, such as that of Alia (1999), who analyzed news stories focusing specifically on the Canadian North, but limited topics within single categories. This aforementioned tendency holds value in exposing the dominant topics, but does not address the stylistic and contextual framing of stories.

The seventeen categories developed in this study are as follows: Sovereignty, Natural Resources, Child Welfare, AFN/Harper Meeting, FNMI Empowerment, FNMI Awareness (largely in terms of issue awareness for non-FNMI peoples), Disparities, Canadian Economics, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Idle No More, Chief Theresa Spence, Attawapiskat, Residential/Day Schools, Culture and Community, Crime, Non-INM Protest, and Other. It is important to note that these categories are not meant as a definitive list of FNMI issues; rather, these topics can easily be refined into more nuanced and specified topics.

Other variables in the coding schedule included authority within an article, which reveals who had the most prominent voice and was categorized as FNMI, government official, private official, or indeterminate. Authority was deemed important in this study as it can have a tremendous impact on the overall objectivity within a story. In fact, Lance Bennett (2007) wrote:

the irony of trying to be balanced or objective is that, in practice, news organizations default to authorities and officials as surrogates for objectivity. If democracy works perfectly to represent all citizens, then this is probably a reasonable working standard. However, if there are any biases in politics...that skew representation either systematically or selectively on particular issues...then giving authorities the main role in defining the news may build these general and situational biases right into the news (p.187).

Articles were also coded for winners, tone, and whether or not there was conflict present, all of which aimed to determine common tropes used in the presentation of FNMI issues within standard news practices. The context of articles was also coded into five categories: full story, FNMI mention, informational piece, human interest, and opinion piece in order to further encapsulate the common framing used in presenting FNMI stories. Additionally, a variable for cultural specification was included which was a simple yes or no as to whether an actual Nation (e.g. Cree, Iroquois, Ojibway, Oneida, etc.) was mentioned, rather than the broader terms of First Nations, Natives, aboriginals, or Indigenous peoples. As many scholars have claimed that a long-standing problem in Canada-FNMI relations has been one-size-fits-all policies for all First Peoples with little regard to individual cultural needs, this category was included as it may reflect if there is a similar homogenization of FNMI issues in the press.

Three categories identified by Lance W. Bennett (2007) as common to news media were incorporated into the study as well, though it is important to note that Bennett's focus was mostly US television news. These categories were as follows: hard or soft news, episodic or thematic, and biases. Hard news is generally socially or politically relevant, such as government policy changes while soft news is more sensational, like crime reporting. Similarly, episodic news focuses on the present, isolating incidents from potential causal factors while thematic news attempts to explore and address reasons for causation, which was of great interest to the researcher who hypothesized that little coverage of FNMI issues would acknowledge an omnipresent theme of colonialism. Bennett (2007) presents four biases in news media as follows: personalization (focus on individual at centre of story); dramatization (focus on personalities at centre, or crisis over continuity); fragmentation (isolation of story from larger issues), and; authority/disorder bias (focus on disruption to order). A category was also added indicating no perceived bias (See Appendix).

Findings

The researcher was interested in uncovering both the frequency of FNMI coverage and the framing of coverage. In terms of the former, it was found that among the three mainstream dailies, only a small fraction of news concerned FNMI peoples, despite their accounting for 1.2 million Canadians and being the fastest growing demographic in the country (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010).

The following table (Table 1.1) illustrates FNMI article frequency by both month and publication; confirming a hypothesis of the researcher that FNMI coverage would increase dramatically during December 2012 and January 2013. This corresponds with the process by which INM reached peak activity, and Chief Theresa Spence staged a hunger strike in Ottawa to gain an audience with Stephen Harper and Governor General David Johnston.

Table 1.1

Total FNMI Articles by Month

Toronto Star	FNMI articles	Total articles	Percentage
October	13	3690	0.03%
November	7	3552	0.01%
December	27	3279	0.08%
January	83	3377	2.40%
February	23	3196	0.07%
Vancouver Sun			
October	39	2605	1.40%
November	20	2741	0.07%
December	41	2502	1.60%
January	95	2007	4.70%
February	39	2536	1.50%
StarPhoenix			
October	48	2198	2.20%
November	37	2057	1.80%
December	61	2036	3%
January	103	1966	5.20%
February	53	1873	3%

The Toronto Star accounted for the least amount of coverage of FNMI issues, not only in terms of number of articles published, but also between the number of FNMI articles published in contrast to the publication’s full number of articles, which was determined through a *LexisNexis* search pattern for articles that were greater than thirty words and not appearing in the Classifieds section. *The Saskatoon StarPhoenix* is the highest circulated newspaper in Saskatchewan, and the province with the second highest population percentage of FNMI peoples in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010), and boasted the most coverage. Additionally, the resulting articles from the *StarPhoenix* demonstrated the least amount of articles filtered out for irrelevance (i.e. stories concerning India or the Cleveland Indians), establishing it as the most comprehensive news daily for FNMI issues in this study.

Of further interest to the researcher was the way in which coverage was presented in terms of linguistic framing and rhetoric – stylistic nuances which have tremendous impact on how a story is told and, subsequently, interpreted by audiences. Of all mainstream daily coverage, 46.8% of articles were deemed hard news in contrast to 53.2% soft news; and it is important to note that the researcher felt criteria for hard news were often quite generous, meaning that an additional study would likely see a higher percentage of soft news (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

Frequency of Hard versus Soft News

Source	Hard	Soft
StarPhoenix	46.4	53.6
Vancouver Sun	51.9	48.1
Toronto Star	40.5	59.5
All Mainstream	46.8	53.2

Less than half of all news (41%) was thematic and attempted to explore reasons and causes for current situations, instead situating news within the present and ignoring long standing issues of colonial oppression and cultural imperialism; discourses that are critical to understanding the unique challenges faced by FNMI peoples. This confirms the findings of numerous studies, such as Harding (2006)'s longitudinal analysis of English-language news from British Columbia between 1863 and 1992, as well as Anderson and Robertson (2011), who conclude that "an examination of press content in Canada since the sale of Rupert's Land in 1869 through to 2009 illustrates that, with respect to Aboriginal peoples, the colonial imagery has thrived, even dominated, and continues to do so in mainstream English-language newspapers" (p. 3). Out of all 688 mainstream news articles, the word 'colonialism' appears only seven times: three times by *StarPhoenix* columnist Doug Cuthland (of Cree heritage), and once in the *Toronto Star* in relation to a book review of Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012). This is indicative of an oft-cited 'colonial amnesia' that Canadian policy makers and journalists fail to consider when addressing FNMI issues.

Across all three news dailies, sovereignty issues accounted for over ten percent of FNMI coverage, the third most popular primary topic after "other," and culture and community respectively. However, this is an overview of unweighted data, and it is important to note that the *StarPhoenix* accounts for almost half of all articles (43.8%), which likely accounts for the high rate of culture and community articles, as the publication seemed much more interested in FNMI issues than its counterparts, likely appealing to a broader audience of FNMI readers due to population dynamics of the province, which would adhere to Blumler and Katz (1974)'s uses and gratifications theory of communication. Similarly, the *StarPhoenix* features Community/Culture issues as the second-most primary topic. This finding adds further support to notions of audience uses and gratifications, as the province boasts a fifteen percent population of First Peoples, and Saskatoon nine percent – 89% of whom identified as being a Treaty Indian or a registered Indian (Statistics Canada, 2010).

Table 1.3 addresses the most popular primary, secondary and tertiary topics, excluding "other" (which accounted for 18.3% of primary topics across all three papers), in order to specify key themes. A clear pattern emerges in the salience of FNMI sovereignty issues; a category representing issues of self-governance, self-determination,

or decision-making in conjunction with non-FNMI interests. However, what becomes more interesting is how this topic is presented in relation to other topics. For instance, as the Harper government has made a priority of natural resource development in Northern Canada, news cycles saw articles pertaining to issues of FNMI sovereignty presented in connection with natural resources and Canadian economics. For instance, 37.4% of all *StarPhoenix* articles saw sovereignty as a key topic (appearing in any of Topic 1, 2, or 3). Of these, 37.2% also included economics as a key topic and 19.5% included natural resources. Furthermore, 9.7% of all articles pertaining to sovereignty included both natural resources and economics as key framing issues for FNMI sovereignty. December saw a shift towards sovereignty issues being framed in conjunction with the January 11, 2013 meeting between the AFN and Stephen Harper.

Table 1.3

Dominant Topic Themes by Newspaper

Source	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic3
Star	Sovereignty/Disparity (11.8%)	Sovereignty (11.8%)	Sovereignty (13.7%)
	INM/Chief Theresa Spence (10.5%)	INM (8.5%)	FNMI Awareness (9.8%)
Sun	Natural Resources (15.7%)	Sovereignty (19.1%)	Sovereignty (19.6%)
	Canadian Economics (10.2%)	Canadian Economics (13.2%)	Canadian Economics (18.3%)
StarPhoenix	Culture and Community (13.9%)	Sovereignty (16.2%)	Sovereignty (13.6%)
	Sovereignty (10.6%)	FNMI Empowerment (12.3%)	FNMI Empowerment (12.6%)

Similarly, the *Toronto Star* saw 36.6% of all coverage dealing with sovereignty as at least one major topic, of which 28.6% included economics, 14.3% natural resources, and 8.9% both natural resources and economics as key components. Lastly, the *Vancouver Sun* saw sovereignty occurring across any topic in 44.4% of all articles and of these, 53.8% included economic framing, 38.5% natural resources, and 30.8% both natural resources and economics as key topics in conjunction with sovereignty (see Figure 1.1). This would again support the uses and gratifications theory, demonstrating that provincial population and political dynamics appear to influence coverage, as the research found BC sees more issues pertaining to natural resources and economics than either Saskatoon or Toronto; not surprising considering the push toward running an oil pipeline through the province to the Pacific Ocean to export crude bitumen, and more stringent provincial regulations of duty to consult First Nation communities, many of whom live on unceded territory.

FNMI authority accounted for just over half of all *Sun* articles that see sovereignty, natural resources and economics as key topics (53.1%), with private officials accounting for one-quarter. Similar patterns emerged through an analysis of the context of these articles, where 56.3% were determined to be full stories, while one-quarter were a mere mention of FNMI, suggesting that non-FNMI authorities have a significant voice in conveying information on FNMI resource ownership (Table 1.2), while also homogenizing the issue of resource management beyond individual bands and nations. These patterns reflect news framing that Harding (2006) and Anderson & Robertson (2011) have identified as representation of FNMI peoples as being child-like. Though more sophisticated than the 19th century depiction of the child-like native in desperate need of white guidance (Francis, 1998), this focus on natural resources and sovereignty is reminiscent of Eurocentric values of ‘proper’ land use – the same Victorian notion that saw a lack of large-scale agricultural or mining operations as the equivalent of wasted opportunity. The current coverage seems indicative that the ‘child-like native’ trope has at best transformed into that of ‘natives as adolescents’ - while the parental non-FNMI population stands by in the hopes that they will make the right decision based on years of proper guidance.

Figure 1.1

Dominant Topic Percentage in Articles with Sovereignty as Topics 1, 2 or 3.

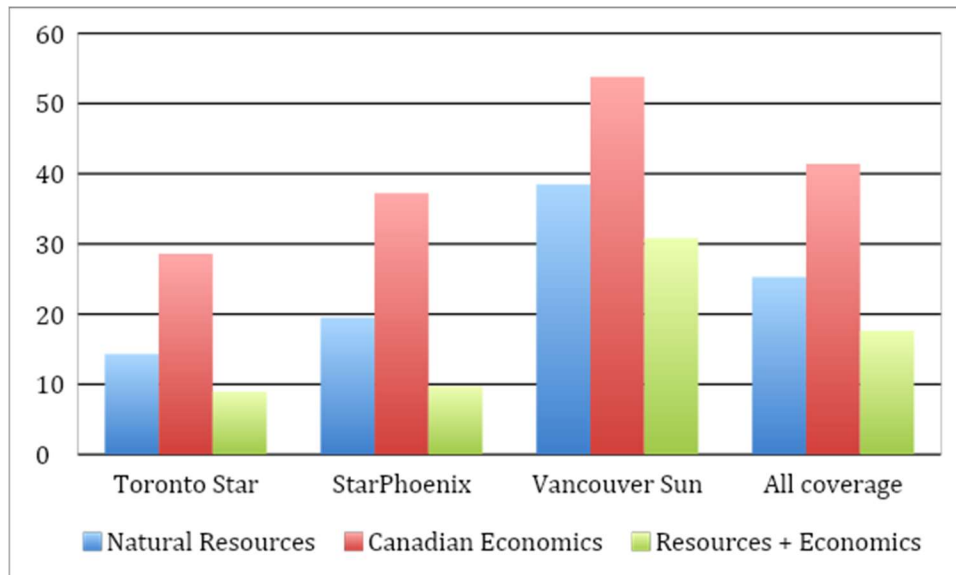


Table 1.4

Authority by Context in Sun Stories that see Sovereignty, Natural Resources and Canadian Economics within Topics 1, 2, and 3.

	Context			Total
	Direct Story	FNMI Mention	Opinion	
Authority FNMI	15	0	2	17
Government Official	0	4	0	4
Private Official	2	2	4	8
Indeterminate	1	2	0	3
Total	18	8	6	32

The rise in January activity confirmed the rather hypothesis that news coverage of FNMI issues would increase dramatically due to Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike and subsequent meeting between the AFN and Stephen Harper, as well as ensuing coverage of Attawapiskat and, of course, the national INM movement. However, further analysis demonstrated a similar news pattern of increased activity in almost all primary topics of FNMI issues, even with the exclusion of Chief Spence, INM, Attawapiskat, and the AFN/Harper meeting from the data (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). This reflects a pattern found in a study of US civil protest coverage in the late 1960s, whereby “media attention cycles affect coverage. As social issues move in and out of vogue, the coverage of related social movements ebbs and wanes” (Myers & Caniglia, 2004, p. 521). However, in this case there is demonstrable evidence that the opposite is also true, where social movements move in and out of vogue, in turn affecting coverage of social issues.

The category “other” accounted for the most dramatic increase in number of articles in January, while sovereignty and Canadian economics also saw a much higher number of articles compared to the monthly average. Hence, it would appear that the common news practice during times of FNMI protest of any sort, even peaceful protest such as INM or hunger strikes, is to increase coverage of all FNMI topics. It is important to note that increases in a primary topic such as Sovereignty in this study still allows that it may be reported with any one of the excluded topics, especially when considering that any kind of protest generally occurs within a context of sovereignty or self-determination.

For instance, sovereignty may have been the dominant topic while INM accounted for the secondary topic and the AFN/Harper Meeting the tertiary topic. However, filtering out INM, Chief Spence, Attawapiskat, and the AFN/Harper Meeting across all topics in January revealed that these variables accounted for 35.7% of all mainstream January coverage. Thus, overall coverage among all three news dailies still increased in January by slightly more than a quarter (26.2%) after excluding the aforementioned key topics (see Figure 1.4), suggesting that related coverage does in fact increase even if not considered the ‘hot topic’ of the month. However, it is important to

note that the aforementioned topics were only excluded from January coverage (despite the rise of INM and Chief Spence articles in December), which would actually contribute to a slight decrease in the monthly average, and create a greater gap between story count.

Figure 1.2

FNMI Full Coverage Frequency per Month

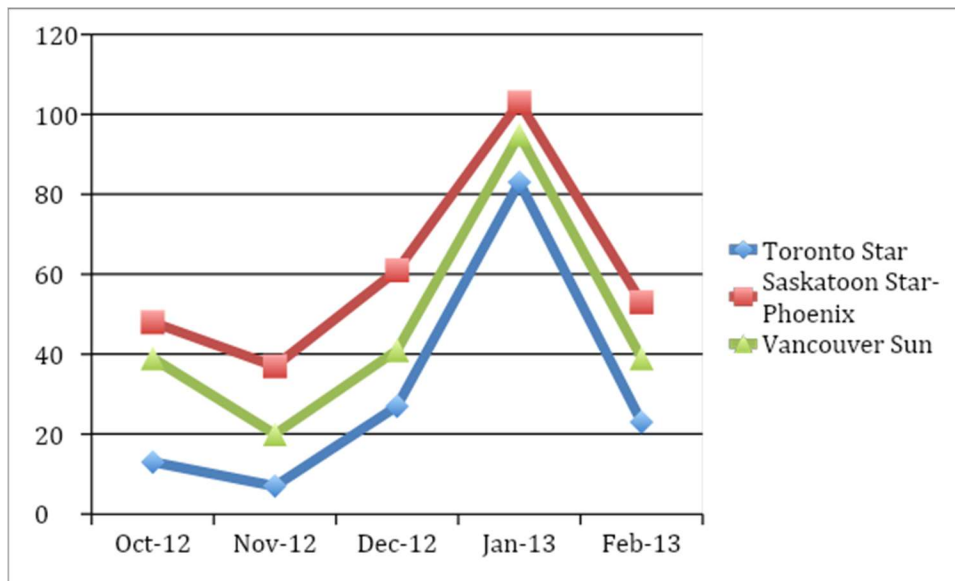


Figure 1.3

FNMI Coverage Frequency per Month excluding INM, Chief Theresa Spence, AFN/Harper Meeting and Attawapiskat as Primary Topics

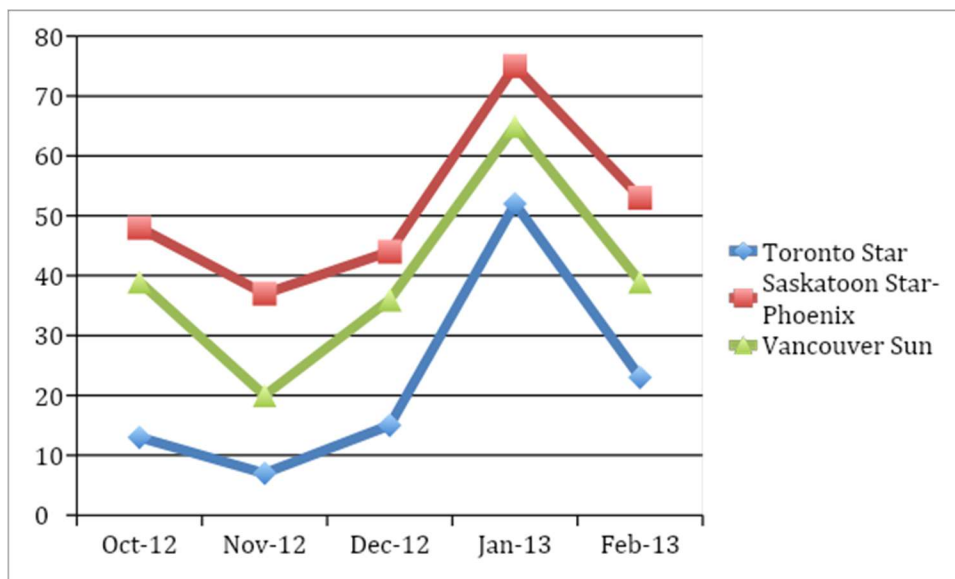
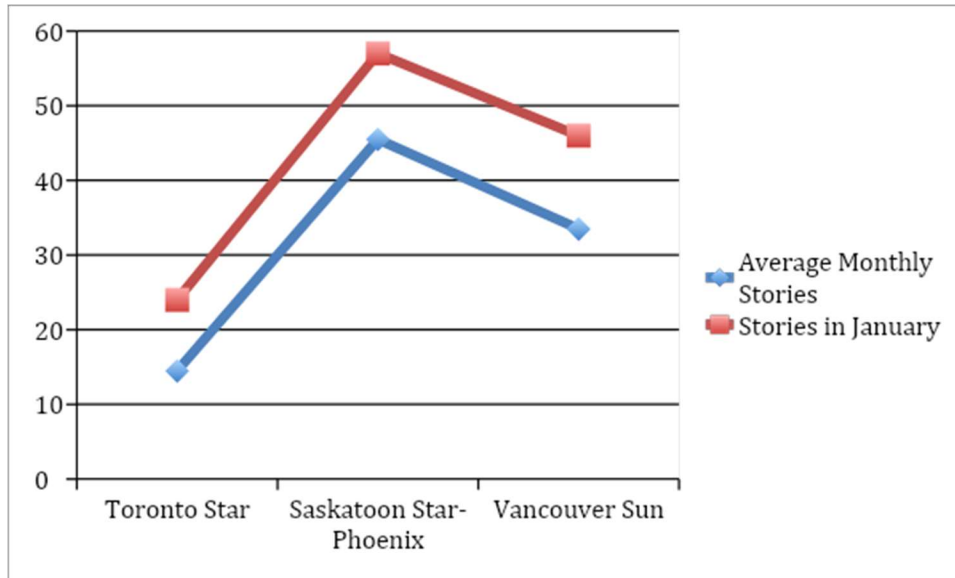


Figure 1.4

Average Monthly Number of Articles in relation to January (excluding INM, Chief Spence, Attawapiskat, and AFN/Harper meeting across all topics in January)



Across all three mainstream dailies, INM accounted for 17.3% of all coverage (appearing in any key topic), and FNMI authority accounted for 58% of all coverage, a better average than mainstream coverage of sovereignty as any key topic, which saw only 47.3% as FNMI authority. However, 57.1% of all INM stories were considered soft news, and only slightly more than half (52.9%) were direct stories, while 31.1% were opinion pieces.

Opinion pieces are an interesting part of news publications, be they from professional journalists, experts in the community, or ordinary readers, and this study chose to include it as a defining variable in order to add context to specific articles, as it can help to establish the tone of an article based on potential authorial conflicts of interest or pre-existing biases. For instance, articles penned by *StarPhoenix* columnist Doug Cuthland would likely be thematic and pro-FNMI interests, while Christie Blatchford, an opinion columnist, often writes strongly worded articles using rhetoric that appeals to emotion, and in many cases, insulting, if not outright racist commentary.⁴ For instance, a Blatchford (2012) comment published in both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *StarPhoenix* in regards to Chief Theresa Spence read: “So, while Spence, and others, may long for

⁴ Blatchford has been accused of cultural insensitivity and news sensationalism, especially in connection with her 2010 book that covered the 2006 land dispute between Six Nations and Caledonia. In a review of Blatchford’s book, Author Timothy C. Winegard (2015), commented, “Blatchford summarily ignores the background and history of the twenty-nine land claims (submitted between 1951 and 2006), and the land tenure of the Haldimand Tract and the Six Nations of the Grand River. In doing so, she produces an account of the events at Caledonia/Six Nations between 2006 and 2010 that provides little more than a series of sensationalized snapshots of select occurrences, completely removed from any historical framework” (p. 117).

“nation-to-nation” discussions, there is I think a genuine question as to whether there’s enough of aboriginal culture that has survived to even dream of that lofty status, or if the culture isn’t irreparably damaged already” (para. 6). Further lack of cultural sensitivity or historical fact in the same article sees Blatchford (2012) mention “the old native adage that “the chief’s driveway is always paved” (para.5). Of all opinion pieces surrounding INM, 45.9% were deemed negative in tone and 89.2% were soft news.

The dominance of soft news within these articles is strongly suggestive of aforementioned rhetoric, articles which rely on emotional and sensational framing to these stories, rather than addressing new or thematic issues that surround Indigenous protest, although a frequency analysis revealed that opinion pieces were almost 2:1 thematic to episodic, respectively. However, like coding hard and soft news, the researcher felt that qualifications for thematic coding could have been more stringent, as some information that was deemed thematic could also be considered common knowledge. In addition, thematic news can also be misrepresentative, as comparisons between INM and an event like Oka, though dramatically different, can be interpreted as being thematic, albeit though specious reasoning.

INM coverage also saw a pattern of framing with familiar topics, as with the affiliation of Chief Spence in 21% of all coverage, the AFN/Harper meeting accounting for 15.1%, and 10% that saw Chief Spence and the AFN/Harper meeting across all three key topics. Though these three topics are inter-related to some degree, the salience of topics in conjunction with each other may lead some to believe that they are dependent on each other, which is inaccurate. Chief Spence was declared by some as the spokesperson for INM, but such was not the case. Rather, Chief Spence’s hunger strike began in solidarity with the INM movement in opposition to continued abuses to nation-to-nation consultations between the federal government and First Nations. The sensationalization of Spence’s hunger strike, including an alternate headline of the aforementioned Blatchford (2012) article “Holding Ottawa hostage: Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike reduces complex issues and breeds stupidity”, adds more drama to coverage of a movement that demonstrated few instances of elevated levels of conflict.

In fact, a disconcerting 68.6% of all coverage contained some level of conflict, which was defined as any type of disagreement between players within a story. Conflict can often be attributed to a discourse within news production practices, and Bennett (2007) wrote:

Even though representations of authority and social order appear to have tipped toward the negative in recent years, the reason may have little to do with whether officials are really more venal, government is more corrupt, or levels of social disorder are objectively higher. Instead, the increasingly negative images of public authorities and social disorder can be traced at least partly to commercial news pressures for more sensationalism, emotion, and drama and to generate new story developments to feed the 24-hour news cycle. (p. 215)

Thus, though not necessarily conflict in terms of war or violent crime, issues such as land disputes, protest, Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike, and dissent within membership of the AFN can all be labelled within some form of news sensationalism, as conflict adds a level of excitement to a given story.

The most encouraging coverage was an additional 9.2% of all INM coverage that saw INM as each key topic and, more importantly, four-fifths of which saw FNMI as authority, almost three-quarters (72.7%) were thematic, and almost all (ten out of eleven stories) were deemed a full story. However, there is strong reason to believe that authority should have an effect on the context of a story, as FNMI authority should generally not result in a mere FNMI mention, and one would assume that there would be more details in a story. The application of *Cramer's V* confirmed a fairly strong relationship between authority and context at .440 across all coverage of mainstream dailies.

Discussion

As a single researcher conducted the current study, inter-coder reliability was not an issue during the coding process. However, the coding schedule could have been improved in a number of areas in order to more accurately quantify and categorize FNMI coverage in mainstream news. For instance, sovereignty could easily be further divided into more specific areas, such as treaty issues, duty-to-consult issues, and federal funding to name a few. Similarly, the category for child-welfare, which was included as a topic due to Harding's 2010 study, consisted of stories beyond child welfare agencies and also included stories pertaining to education reform up to the high school level, largely those concerned with more inclusion of FNMI historical and cultural subject matter within Canadian educational institutions. Disparities, FNMI empowerment, and FNMI awareness sought to categorize articles that aimed to expose inequalities faced by FNMI peoples, highlight successes, or act to educate non-FNMI populations of such issues. Though useful, these three categories act more as thematic elements within topic coverage, and not necessarily as topics themselves, especially when coding topics such as INM or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as these topics in themselves expose inequalities and empower FNMI peoples.

In addition, the researcher felt that authority, winners/losers, and the tone of articles would reflect how coverage would depict FNMI issues, but the coding was found not to be specific enough in doing so. For example, articles authored by FNMI writers may have often saw FNMI peoples as losers in a particular story whilst maintaining a negative tone. In contrast, articles authored by private individuals may have seen FNMI peoples as winners in a particular story and also maintained a negative tone. Additionally, the tone of an article was at times difficult to pinpoint, as not only did the researcher analyse language to determine this factor, but found it difficult to separate content matter as a key variable in establishing tone. In other words, authorial tone was often conflated with subject matter which, although relevant towards a generalized 'good news or bad news' categorization, does not address linguistic nuances that clearly denote authorial tone on an issue, such as sarcasm or underhanded remarks. The addition of a comment

section however allowed the researcher to capture such sentiment in order to earmark specific articles for later analysis.

As a pilot study seeking to uncover key themes in FNMI coverage, the results were a success, but the coding could be much improved in order to further isolate topics, attitudes, and discursive elements that surround mainstream coverage. In this respect, a quantitative approach to identify key themes falls short in comparison to a qualitative content analysis that explores linguistic nuances and article construction – that is, what’s left in and out of these stories, and what kind of descriptive elements are used. For instance, in addition to the aforementioned cultural insensitivity and, what some scholars have termed “Canadian society’s general amnesia about the country’s colonial history” (Harding, 2006, p. 206), the applied empirical approach to coding failed to capture some of the blatant insulting language of opinion columnists in categories such as ‘tone,’ and ‘conflict.’

In addition, there was at times what seemed as a hope among journalists that FNMI interests and leadership would fail in peaceful resolutions. For instance, six articles (appearing across both *Sun* and *StarPhoenix*) addressed concerns of INM “spiralling out of control,” based on a few isolated incidents of temporary blockades of transportation routes and the comments of individual Chiefs, such as Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs Grand Chief Stewart Phillip “warning...about the possibility of ‘an aboriginal uprising’” (Yaffe, 2013, para. 7), and Chief Wallace Fox stating, “If we have to shut down this economy, then we will” (Press & Woods, 2013, para. 7). Michael Den Tandt goes so far as to comment that “in the event the aboriginal population is further radicalized, and the only slightly less alarming prospect of blockades on the Trans-Canada Highway, which could devolve into another Oka crisis” (Den Tandt, 2013, para. 9), and Barbara Yaffe frames Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike within a similar framework of the most dramatic examples of contemporary Indigenous protest, stating, “The standoff is reminiscent of past confrontations related to land disputes and resource rights. Remember Oka, Ipperwash and Caledonia (in Ontario), Burnt Church (in New Brunswick) and Gustafson Lake (in B.C.)?” (Yaffe, 2013, para. 2). Comments such as these demonstrate a reliance on the past as a seemingly accurate analogy to be easily applied to new forms of FNMI protest and, despite the major differences between Idle No More and the Oka and Ipperwash Crises (of which most articles acknowledged), the focus on disorder within the narrative structure allows dramatic analogies to take the place of verifiable and critical insight. Such narrative structure also confirms the findings of scholars such as Gail Valaskakis (2005), whose analysis of Native protests such as Wounded Knee and Oka revealed that “in all the media coverage, one image emerged as salient: the image of the “warriors”—bandana-masked, khaki-clad, gun-toting Indians” (p. 38), as well as Robert Harding (2006), who identified several frames of Aboriginal coverage, with one variation being “Aboriginal people = people dominated by emotion” (p. 218).

Similarly, a number of articles framed the AFN/Harper meeting with a focus on disorder and dissention among AFN membership. In fact, out of all coverage of the meeting, two-fifths focused on the authority-disorder bias, a third on dramatization, and one-fifth on the personalities involved (see Table 1.4). The attention to disorder within

such coverage acts to highlight a polarization within FNMI leadership, and a focus on personalities often centers on those who disagree most dramatically, increasing a perception of a fractured and dissenting AFN leadership. For instance, in a January 12 *Sun* article, Peter O’Neil (2013) reports that “a B.C. aboriginal leader has denounced chiefs who questioned the leadership of Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo...Chiefs...had demanded Atleo and other AFN leaders boycott Friday’s meeting,” while degrading what is essentially a demonstration of democratic governance as “the bitter split in Canada’s aboriginal leadership” (para. 2). Additionally, coverage of Atleo’s brief medical leave after the January 11 meeting from *Toronto Star* columnist Tim Harper (2013) begins with “Canada’s fractured aboriginal leadership,” continuing, “the country’s chiefs appear bent on sabotaging the leadership of Shawn Atleo...an open question as to whether he [Atleo] will be at the table in just over a week when another meeting is scheduled” (para. 1), further focusing on a complete breakdown of leadership.

Table 1.4

Bias across all Coverage of AFN/Harper Meeting

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Personalization	15	19.0	19.0	19.0
Dramatization	23	29.1	29.1	48.1
Fragmentation	8	10.1	10.1	58.2
Authority/Disorder	31	39.2	39.2	97.5
None	2	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	79	100.0	100.0	

What such articles fail to acknowledge is such incidents are indicative of the democratic process, rather than a breakdown. More importantly, these articles seem to operate outside of the fact that disagreements among same-party candidates are commonplace – not a phenomenon that exists only among First Nations democratic processes. Furthermore, such articles are written from a dominant colonial viewpoint of Western democratic ideals, with no acknowledgement that the AFN is not a traditional form of FNMI governance. Rather, it inherits the Western form of governance whereby a single leader is elected to carry out a set term, unlike traditional forms of (what can be argued as true democratic governance) where all members of a group have a voice. Additionally, the AFN includes many Nations, and attempts to provide the best leadership for all Nations involved. This could perpetuate a stereotype among settler society that all First Nations are the same, with the same ideals, wants, and needs. As Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2011) wrote:

When leadership is defined as simple statesman or in terms of international politics, we are mirroring western styles of leadership rather than honouring our own traditions. Leadership within the Nishnaabeg nation and within our own clans was diffused, shared, and emergent arising out of need. It ensured

egalitarian social organization to a greater degree than the hierarchy that emerges when certain clans or certain individuals are placed in permanent positions of leadership and no other kinds of leaders or leadership are recognized. (p. 120-121)

A similar approach is taken through coverage pertaining to sovereignty and natural resources, reinforcing dominant western themes of capitalist enterprise while ignoring traditional cultural views on ecological preservation and use of land. Where traditional first peoples were largely communal societies with hunting and gathering and small-scale agricultural practices as key cultural economies, notions of commodity farming and natural resources as a capitalist enterprise arguably originate as settler ideologies. However, the media representation reviewed failed to report anything but this dominant western perspective, and as Anderson and Robertson (2011) wrote, “by superimposing a common enough white Canadian everyday idea about the innate greed of all human beings, inside every Indian, it was assumed, a capitalist struggled to get out” (p. 76). Concurrently, this study found that contemporary coverage of FNMI sovereignty and natural resource articles are still framed within a context of the *economic* value of natural resources while ignoring cultural and environmental values.

This ignorance of the history of FNMI colonial struggles is most demonstrable through another troubling finding that again favours the present over the past: the lack of articles concerning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Six out of all 688 mainstream articles (0.01%) were concerned with the progress of the TRC. This comes as a surprise when considering the amount of time and money that the federally mandated TRC has spent in recent years in order to uncover the mistreatment, abuse, and murders of FNMI children in Canadian residential schools. By focusing only on matters of economics and natural resources, mainstream coverage ignores the horrors of Canada’s colonial history – the types of stories that acknowledge the colonial past and reveal the deliberate destruction of generations of FNMI culture. In doing so, the historical victimization of FNMI peoples becomes lost in favour of a contemporary blame of FNMI peoples as abusers of, or unwilling partners toward, Canadian economic security.

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Appendix

Coding Schedule

Date
Headline
Author
Organization
1 - House Paper
2 - Canadian Press
3 - Postmedia News
4 - Other
Word Count
Keyword
Primary Location
Section
Players 1
Players 2
Players 3
Topic (1, 2, 3)
1 - FNMI sovereignty (decision making in conjunction with non-FNMI interests, self-governance)
2 - Natural Resources
3 - Child welfare
4 - Harper Meeting with AFN
5 - FNMI empowerment (cultural, community level, health, education)
6 - FNMI awareness (cultural, historical awareness for non FNMI people)
7 - Disparities (educational, economic, missing/murdered women, racism)
8 - Canadian Economics
9 - TRC
10 - INM
11 - Chief Theresa Spence
12 - Attawapiskat
13 - Residential Schools (and day schools)
14 - Culture and Community
15 - Crime
16 - Other
17 - Protest (Non-INM)
Authority
1 - FNMI official
2 - Government Official
3 - Private Official

4 - Indeterminate
Winners
1 - FNMI
2 - non-FNMI
3 - Indeterminate/None
Hard/Soft
1 - Hard (what people should know - policies, social problem, things that affect us)
2 - Soft (little social significance, get people talking, stir emotions)
Biases
1 - Personalization (focus on people involved rather than issues)
2 - Dramatization (crisis over continuity, present over past, personalities at centre)
3 - Fragmentation (isolate stories from larger context)
4 - Authority-Disorder (preoccupation with disruption to order)
5 - None
Episodic/Thematic
1 - Episodic (focus on immediate and people involved)
2 - Thematic (explores origins of problems)
Conflict
1 - Present
2 - Not Present
Tone
1 - Positive
2 - Negative
3 - Neutral
Context
1 - Direct Story
2 - FNMI or Indigenous People Mention
3 - Informational
4 - Human Interest
5 - Opinion
Cultural Specification
1- Yes
2 - No