

The role of legacy media: An examination of coverage during the  
Coastal GasLink conflict

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines three legacy media outlets' (the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*) digital coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict between January 1 and March 15, 2020. This thesis aims to understand how Canada's largest daily newspapers portray Indigenous communities in Canada, particularly during times of conflict with the government. Through a content analysis, a review of past coverage as examined in existing academic literature, as well as through interviews with academics, experts and critics, this thesis uncovers minimal change in coverage patterns over the past several decades. Legacy media still relies on stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous communities and often does not present the larger context of a conflict that would provide better information for readers to interpret. Ultimately the thesis addresses some of the questions about how legacy journalism is built and conducted overall and argues that it does not work to best portray Indigenous issues and communities.

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## **Introduction**

In early 2020, media coverage across Canada was largely dominated by what has become known as the Wet'suwet'en conflict, alternatively the Coastal GasLink conflict, in reference to the Indigenous nation and the pipeline project at the heart of the conflict, respectively. This country is no stranger to contentious development projects that face opposition from both Indigenous communities and environmental advocates. The Oka crisis, the Idle No More movement and many other protests have all resisted the exploitation of Indigenous communities and land without prior consent, as well as the transportation of fossil fuels over Indigenous territory, harmful logging practices and the exclusion of Indigenous voices from groups making decisions relating to land use.

Coastal GasLink's goal is to transport natural gas via a 670-kilometre pipeline running from Dawson Creek to Kitimat in British Columbia passing through the unceded territory of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The pipeline's stakeholders include multiple private entities alongside the federal government, all who have invested money and expect to see the project completed. TC Energy, the company behind the pipeline project, claim they obtained approval to use Wet'suwet'en land from the band council. The band council is a form of democratic governance based on the 1876 Indian Act. Opponents of the pipeline argue band councils do not have authority to approve the use of off-reserve land for the project, as authority for this remains with the hereditary form of governance that preceded the Indian Act.

While many communities do recognize the authority of elected individuals to govern reserve land, there are various other respected methods of governance. Wet'suwet'en territory, which includes more than just reserve land, is governed by

hereditary chiefs, who are the rights and title holders of the land. Hereditary governance has been legally recognized as valid in previous court decisions regarding Wet'suwet'en territory (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 2001). Hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation say they did not provide "free, prior, and informed consent" for the project to move forward. According to the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has received Royal Assent in Canada and came into force on June 21, 2021, countries should consult the party that governs the land, which in this case, is arguably the hereditary chiefs (United Nations, 2007). In addition to the action being taken on Wet'suwet'en land, early 2020 saw supporting rail blockades across the country, with a media focusing on those happening in Ontario involving the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) supporters of the hereditary chiefs.

In early 2020, a legal dispute was underway between the two distinct forms of government. While hereditary chiefs and their supporters cited *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* as a clear legal decision that validated hereditary government under the eyes of Canadian law, as well as international law like UNDRIP, opponents argued that an injunction issued by the courts for an end to blockades was clearly the prevailing decision. Essentially, hereditary law was backed by a previous legal decision and international law, while the right for band councils to approve land use off-reserve was being backed the subsequent injunction against British Columbia's Supreme Court.

While the overall issue of governance is much broader than this one conflict, a key question was embodied by the Coastal GasLink conflict: Who has authority to approve a pipeline? British Columbia's Supreme Court issued an injunction against the Wet'suwet'en Nation for blocking construction of the pipeline. The Royal Canadian

Mounted Police (RCMP) enforced the injunction in early February 2020. They removed and arrested dozens of Wet'suwet'en supporters of the hereditary chiefs from their encampments along the planned route of the pipeline – where individuals were attempting to block it – and arrested them. The news media reported on the events in B.C. as well as the subsequent solidarity protests that arose across Canada. This coverage of the topic began in late winter 2019 and increased in frequency during the blockades in late January 2020. The coverage lasted until mid-March, when talks between the hereditary chiefs and the federal government reached a tentative agreement. Ultimately, coverage drastically lowered after mid-March when COVID-19 struck North America. In early February 2020, RCMP officers stationed at camps on Wet'suwet'en land began threatening to arrest journalists reporting on the ground. After pressure from mainly new media outlets such as *The Narwhal* and *Canadaland*, Indigenous-led outlets and the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), the RCMP reversed their decision to block journalists trying to report on the ground.

The reporting on the conflict was widely criticized and discussed in the media as a contributing factor to the Canadian public's negative perception of Indigenous communities across the country. Karyn Pugliese, a journalism professor at Ryerson University, as well as former editorial director of news and current affairs at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), criticized the media's inability to cover Indigenous topics with nuance and referred to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action as a reference point. This included calls 84 to 86, which focus on CBC and APTN's coverage of Indigenous topics, as well as education in journalism schools across the country. In particular, Pugliese suggests that journalists

should be educated on Indigenous history and contemporary issues as a part of the industry's role in reconciliation (Mesley, 2020). In an article for *Toronto Now*, Enzo DiMatteo criticized the mainstream media for using the word protestors rather than land defenders when speaking of Indigenous people and their supporters participating in blockades. He also slammed the media's unwillingness to cover core issues such as the RCMP blocking journalists from reporting in Wet'suwet'en territory, and viewed the skewed coverage as fuel for the internet harassment toward Indigenous people at the time (2020). *Canadaland*, a news website and podcast network which often features media critiques, also published a story by Robert Jago about how the RCMP's arrests of land defenders and interference with journalists trying to cover the events from the ground was left largely unreported in legacy news at the time (Jago, 2020).

In light of these criticisms, particularly that which was directed at 'legacy' or 'established' news institutions, my research aims to take a closer look at how the Coastal GasLink conflict was covered by mainstream outlets. To do this, I conducted a content analysis of stories produced by three major media institutions that were the main focus of critique. This includes the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post*, and the *Globe and Mail*. My research builds on previous content analyses conducted on topics relating to Indigenous communities, including the media's portrayal of water insecurity (Lam et al., 2017) and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (Gilchrist, 2010).

My research leans heavily on existing scholarly work, as well as four interviews post-analysis with experts and critics established in the field of media criticism and media and journalism studies. Through my research, I aim to contribute to an ongoing discussion about the media's role in shaping public perceptions of Indigenous

communities and people. I will look at how traditional media contributes to and benefits from a long legacy of colonialism in Canada that contributes to disenfranchise Indigenous communities to this day. Robert Harding most aptly summarizes the idea of colonialism's history in this country and how it continues to benefit white Canadians and institutions today:

This discourse effectively sanctions racism towards aboriginal people since white Canadians have historically enjoyed, and continue to hold, decisive advantages over aboriginal people in all forms of institutional power. Today, these power relations are strongly supported not only by the mass media, but by other institutions such as education and the criminal justice system, and are reflected in laws and policies, such as the Indian Act, that ascribe aboriginal people differential and lesser status under the law. Racist discourses help sustain, and are themselves reinforced by, official state policy regarding aboriginal people as well as Canadian society's general amnesia about the country's colonial history and its connection to the starkly unequal relations that exist between aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people today. (Harding, 2006, pp. 205-206)

It's important to understand that settler colonialism (the process of European people coming to settle Canada and take control of the land away from Indigenous people) is not only a historical reality but also deeply affected the way institutions and policies were formed to continue this process of oppression today.

## **Research questions**

The guiding question central to my thesis is to ask, “Over the past few decades, how has reporting by legacy media portrayed conflict with Indigenous communities?” I focus on a content analysis of the framing of news reporting of the Coastal GasLink conflict. I compare the findings of the content analysis with previously analyzed reporting of events such as the Idle No More movement and the Oka Crisis.

Coverage of Indigenous communities and the issues that affect them has been widely critiqued as insufficient, and in many instances, as encouraging discrimination against these communities. As a journalist and student highly invested in conversations surrounding equity and diversity in my field, I have spent much time reading and learning about the role journalism plays to simultaneously uphold and dismantle societal standards. I began my research not with the assumption that there has been no change in representation for Indigenous communities in reporting, but rather aimed to critically examine one period of time and consult with Indigenous experts to understand what has evolved and what has not.

## **Subsidiary questions**

Through a content analysis focused on three major national news outlets (*Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and *National Post*) I aim to answer the question, “How did legacy news outlets frame stories about Indigenous communities during the Coastal GasLink conflict?”

Through a literature review, I will use previous content analyses to help contextualize my findings and aim to answer, “How do these findings correspond with

(or deviate from) other analyses and literature written on news coverage during times of conflict with Indigenous communities, and what do these findings say about coverage of Indigenous communities as a whole?”

Finally, inspired by Indigenous research methodologies, I aim to consult with the community of experts and critics within the field of media criticism and scholarship to ask for their input on the findings and answer the question, “In light of my findings, how should journalists understand their reporting and what methods should evolve or change?”

### **Significance**

There has been no content analysis yet conducted on the media coverage during the period of winter 2020, likely because it happened relatively recently, and typically academic research takes an extended period to publish and be available for citation. That is not to say that no academic work has been published on the conflict. Rather, what is already published mainly originates from the fields of environmental studies or justice studies, and appeared prior to the time period of my thesis, winter 2020, when the Wet’suwet’en Nation and other nationwide supporters were still protesting but had not yet received widespread media attention (Karp & Meira, 2020; Temper, 2019).

Thus, I believe my work will add to a broader perspective and understanding of the Coastal GasLink conflict as well as our overall body of knowledge on how journalists represent Indigenous communities. Additionally, I aim for this research to add the general body of analyses within the past 30 years regarding Indigenous communities in Canada

and how they are covered in the media. My thesis aims to understand how coverage has evolved, or not evolved.

In 2020, journalism faced a worldwide, and more specifically, a North American reckoning surrounding race and diversity. Journalists around the world are coming to understand how the decisions they make in their reporting may have far-reaching consequences. The importance of understanding the content written during the Coastal GasLink conflict means understanding who was represented, what viewpoints were heard, and what topics were most reported. Then, by consulting experts, critics, and previously published literature, these journalistic decisions can be further explained through existing work. Rather than faulting individual journalists, a content analysis looks at reportage as a whole and discovers what has evolved and what has not, and then looks to academic perspectives to ask, ‘What now?’ In this way, my research relies on evidence to contribute to the larger conversation about equity and representation.

### **Limitations**

The first piece of my research, through content analysis, only looks at what was reported and not the factors that may have affected the coverage. Those factors could include whether the journalist was reporting from the ground, time limits placed on the reporter’s work, and other journalist- and editor-influenced constraints. These factors can contribute to the resulting coverage, but ultimately the stories that were published and how they could potentially shape public perception is the focus of my research.

Additionally, I have chosen to focus on legacy (also defined as longstanding institutions or traditional journalism) outlets and three national publications online. This

excludes new digital media outlets, Indigenous-led publications, broadcast news, and more. The rationale for focusing on legacy media is to have a basis for comparison against past coverage. Only legacy outlets have been in existence long enough to appear in multiple content analyses and academic research published on similar topics. Legacy outlets are also an excellent vehicle to compare historical coverage patterns and contemporary coverage patterns because they have a lengthy journalistic history in ways that newer media outlets do not.

Through interviewing, I will provide a deeper understanding of my findings from the perspective of others who have embarked on similar research, experts in the field and critics of coverage at the time.

### **Methodology and theoretical framework**

My research is qualitative and inductive. While my content analysis ultimately provides quantitative numbers, the content analysis sample is too narrow in scope to draw overarching conclusions about reporting methods. In this way, my original research and interviews are ultimately interpreted using existing research and interviews with experts in the field. I aim to conduct inductive research, meaning that while I have presumptions about what the results of my research will be, I cannot fully assume the conclusions without analyzing the reporting and discussing my findings with experts and comparing against existing research. Much of the existing literature concludes that reporting on Indigenous issues is overall poor, contributes to negative stereotypes about these communities and ultimately upholds colonial systems rather than challenging them (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006; Pierro et al., 2013). The purpose of my

research is to analyze and evaluate in what ways the reporting on the Coastal GasLink conflict has evolved from the findings of past research and/or in what ways it has stayed the same.

I identify multiple areas that I will evaluate in chapter three's content analysis. First, I searched each online news media platform for stories relevant to my topic and selected the stories that fit the area I analyze, which include stories from the National Post, Globe and Mail, and Toronto Star. Then, I coded the articles and evaluated them for the following: topic of article (for example, do they address economic implications or Indigenous concerns with the project); what sources were used (for example, protest or Indigenous organizers or government official); how they provide context (for example, does the article address past conflict or future implications); tone (is the article addressing a negative implication, positive/solutions focused outcome, or neutrally reporting an event); terminology (use of the term protestor versus land defender); and overall word count of the story. Due to the nature of a content analysis, some additional themes arose during the process, which will be further discussed in chapter three.

In evaluating my findings and conducting interviews, I found inspiration in the framework described by Callison and Young (2020) in their book, *Reckoning: Journalism's limits and possibilities*. The authors explain the following concepts that guided my research throughout my thesis. Their research approaches journalism studies through a multidisciplinary lens, including feminist and gender studies, science and technology studies, media studies and Indigenous studies. Each field contributes to a wider, intersecting understanding of journalism and reporting to provide the full picture and not one, narrow view. I consulted with multiple individuals to help analyze my

findings and provide an expansive view of, in the words of the Callison and Young, “the limits and possibilities of journalism” (2020, p. 1).

To some, it may be an obvious conclusion that news media overall can have the potential to affect the public’s view on an issue, topic or community. We’ve seen this widely discussed in recent years with major distrust in the media growing for several reasons (Bricker, 2021). As an evolving body of work is produced on the effects of journalism on the public, we can definitively say that the way we share stories, and what we as journalists say, as well as how we prioritize voices, terminology and other contents of our articles may have implications. The news is an authoritative voice – for example, if it portrays Indigenous communities in a negative light, then this perspective may contribute to the further marginalization of Indigenous peoples. While this might not be the intent of any one journalist, or even one organization, it’s our responsibility as journalists to ensure that we produce the news with some forethought around how our work could influence the communities we serve. This is not a new revelation in other fields of study – spanning science and arts, academics understand their work contributes to a wider and richer body of knowledge that ultimately makes up society’s understanding of a field of study (Callison & Young, 2020; Wilson, 2001). Each article published on a topic adds to how the public may perceive that topic, and ultimately affects the community being reported on – for example, how DiMatteo (2020) shared the opinion that some individuals said the skewed coverage led to the harassment of Indigenous people.

The goal then, in most cases, is to leave an overall positive imprint (or at the very least, a neutral one) on the communities we write about, rather than a negative one. That

is why this research is important to conduct and discuss the findings to understand how journalism, as it is currently operating, has the potential to change or improve.

## **Chapter Outline**

### *Chapter One: Defining poor coverage*

Through this chapter, I provide historical context for the media coverage of conflicts that have arisen between Indigenous communities and Canadian authorities/governments. This will serve me later in the thesis when I seek to compare my findings alongside previous analyses. Some of these analyses will cover issues that are not directly linked to a conflict but rather a longstanding issue that has been a source of tension for Indigenous communities, such as water insecurity and missing and murdered Indigenous women (Gilchrist, 2010; Lam et al., 2017). In this chapter, I also look at the criticisms that already exist about the media's coverage of Indigenous communities and issues as well as what the criticisms were at the time of the Coastal GasLink conflict. This will provide a foundation for the subsequent content analysis and interviews. Ultimately, this chapter aims to answer, "What does the existing literature say about coverage of Indigenous communities in the news, and why is the coverage this way?"

### *Chapter Two: Surveying coverage of conflict with Indigenous communities*

In chapter two, I use some of the information gleaned from the literature review to establish how content analyses on similar topics have been conducted and explain their findings. Additionally, I present what specific criticisms have been made of the news coverage involving the Wet'suwet'en Nation, both through media articles and where it

has been mentioned in other academic research, focusing mainly on the three outlets I will be analyzing. This chapter answers, “How has conflict between Indigenous communities and government been historically represented, and what criticism exists of the Coastal GasLink conflict?”

*Chapter Three: Content analysis of the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict*

In this chapter, I describe the findings from my content analysis on the legacy media coverage of the pipeline conflict. I focus on the three outlets previously mentioned: the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Toronto Star*. Only digital coverage on the outlet’s online platforms between January and March of 2020 will be analyzed, with the purpose of analyzing just one platform (digital) rather than multiple (such as print and broadcast). This will be a limitation of the thesis due to time and research constraints, but other platforms are mentioned as areas where further research can take place. The coverage includes mentions of one or more of the following: The Wet’suwet’en Nation and their relating tribes, the Coastal GasLink pipeline, or other land defenders and protestors whose action spanned across Canada, not just in British Columbia, but still in relation to the pipeline. This is because a major part of coverage at the time was of blockades across the country. The analysis will code the articles that fall into this category as previously described. This chapter aims to answer, “How was the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict represented by these three legacy outlets?”

#### *Chapter Four: Drawing historical comparisons*

Based on the research of the previous chapters, chapter four directly links the findings of chapter two to chapter three. Here, I can see what trends have persisted over the past few decades and what has changed or improved in news coverage of conflict between Indigenous communities and government. This comparative chapter will set up the findings to be analyzed in chapter five, partially answering the main thesis question, “How has the news reporting of conflicts between Indigenous communities and Canadian authorities/governments evolved over the past few decades?”

#### *Chapter Five: Community input*

In this chapter, I interview four academics and experienced media critics in the field of journalism studies, with an aim to talk to people who have previously written about conflict between Indigenous communities and government being represented in news media. The choice to not interview the journalists behind the coverage is intentional, as this thesis focuses on questions relating to perception and interpretation of the reader rather than the intention or limitations of the journalist. I ask questions about the findings of my content analysis and aim to identify major themes between each interview and looking for where the discussions intersected. This will help strengthen the discussion about how the media represents Indigenous communities and what, if anything, needs to change. The aim of this research is to answer the question, “In light of my findings, how should journalists understand their reporting of conflicts involving Indigenous communities and what methods should evolve or change?”

## *Chapter Six: Conclusion*

This chapter addresses the conclusion to my thesis question and subsidiary questions. Through evidence presented in previous chapters, I examine how representation of conflict between Indigenous communities and the government in the media has changed, evolved, or remained the same over time. Overall, the findings include a critique of how traditional reporting is practiced at legacy outlets, and how some techniques used assist in misrepresenting Indigenous people in journalistic work. Throughout this thesis, the research finds a shifting of stereotypes rather than an improvement on their use, still frequently lacking elements like context, authoritative Indigenous sources, and a colonial framing that all ultimately lead to misrepresentation and poor portrayals. The conclusion further looks at these findings and discusses possible solutions and how these patterns are currently being repeated in legacy media.

## **Chapter 1: Defining poor coverage**

When it comes to understanding why coverage of Indigenous communities and issues are lacking in Canada, both in quantity and in quality according to many sources, existing literature points to different reasons. This includes a lack of resources such as money, staff and time, which can lead to poor coverage (Elliot, 2016). For example, one might argue that less money means fewer journalists are able to travel to the sight of a conflict, which in turn means a less thorough understanding of the issue and poorer coverage. Another reason can be summarized as an ideological problem – journalism was first founded during the time of colonization and thus serves to paint colonialism in a positive light, reinforcing (either intentionally or unintentionally) Canadian law, governance and land use while disregarding Indigenous issues (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Finally, we will look at the argument that poor coverage of Indigenous communities stems from a lack of Indigenous voices in newsrooms, both as journalists and in editor and executive roles (Clark, 2014b).

Thanks to the work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its Calls to Action, the public has access to information about how to educate people about the history and legacy of the residential school system, and how to share and honour the experiences of former attendees and their families (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The Calls to Action include a section calling on the media as an institution and how it can play a part in reconciliation (2015). In particular, the Calls to Action address the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), APTN, and journalism schools as primary stakeholders in decolonizing the media and subsequently contributing to an improved livelihood for Indigenous communities.

While the Calls to Action are an excellent jumping-off point to understanding how media plays a part in this reconciliation, there has been a plethora of other work discussing how media can change to better represent Indigenous communities and ultimately contribute to reconciliation in the process, some of which we will discuss here in this thesis.

### **1.1 A well-established history of Indigenous coverage in Canadian media**

Nearly all the existing literature about the coverage of Indigenous communities concludes that legacy outlets have produced limited and poor coverage of Indigenous people and the issues they face. One great example is a report from the Journalists for Human Rights written by six prominent Indigenous scholars and journalists, with the aim of quantifying Indigenous news coverage in Ontario. It showed from June 2012 to May 2013 only 0.43% of Ontario's news coverage was on Indigenous topics (Pierro et al., 2013). This period's coverage actually increased from the previous period by 61% because of stories relating to the Idle No More movement, suggesting that, at least in Ontario, Indigenous coverage increases during times of conflict (Pierro et al., 2013).

Canada's 2016 census showed that Indigenous people made up 4.9% of the population in Canada, which means coverage was significantly lower in proportion to the population (Statistics Canada, 2017). An additional argument could be made that coverage should be proportionally higher than the Indigenous population in Canada as land, water, and other resources share a direct link to Indigenous communities in the country. However, for the purpose of this chapter, population can be used as a yardstick

for the amount of coverage. The focus of this chapter is to understand why poor coverage occurs.

## **1.2 Ideological problem with media's standpoint**

The most common argument found in the existing literature, and perhaps the most difficult for a reporter to hear because of our longstanding commitment to objectivity (in short, the idea that both sides of the story should be told, and a journalist should not take a stance on the issue themselves), is that both the poor quantity and quality of articles on Indigenous communities, people and issues are a result of an ideological problem. There is a lengthy history of Indigenous representation in news media, from 1869 to the present, in which Canadian media uses negative stereotypes of Indigenous people, representing them as the 'other,' separating their interests from dominant society, and promoting the idea of colonization as good and Indigeneity as 'savage' or bad (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

This practice of 'othering' in the media helps to justify violence against Indigenous peoples and normalizes the idea of colonization as part of mainstream Canadian society (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Callison & Young, 2020). News media have historically, and more recently, acted as the voice of colonialism for the public. Decades of coverage skewed against Indigenous communities exists in which Indigenous people are portrayed as anti-progress, unable to take care of themselves, a burden to society and much more (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). If these narratives persist in contemporary society, such portrayals could cause the public to view Indigenous interests as counter to those of the mainstream society, which is otherwise defined as non-

Indigenous. In this way, the lack of coverage or misrepresentation of Indigenous communities and issues is a result of non-Indigenous reporters' ideological bias – believing that the colonial existence is the norm, and anything that threatens that existence should be criticized (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

News stories have used a multitude of negative stereotypes of Indigenous people, including that they are incompetent financial managers, they are taking advantage of the system, they are dependent or incapable of self-governance and living outside of social norms (Harding, 2005, p. 322). The news media has historically worked to enforce the colonial state, and that stereotyping of Indigenous peoples is used to perform this function (Harding, 2005). This form of reporting is not monolithic, and in some cases, there was space in stories that provided room for dissenting views (Harding, 2006). In general, the media can't tell readers what conclusions they should draw, but it certainly is able to provide a basis for stereotypes and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. The author Robert Harding, who is consulted in chapter five, summarizes his overall conclusion aptly:

The press may not be able to tell us what to think, but it is frequently successful in telling us what to think about. In the future, one of the greatest challenges for aboriginal people and proponents of a social justice is ensuring that everyone's story is told and that the historical context of important issues is sketched in. (Harding, 2006, p. 231)

As mentioned earlier, most literature explains the poor Indigenous portrayals in media occurring for a variety of reasons. One likely answer is that stereotypes are relied on by journalists because they are an easy tool from which to draw simple conclusions

when the pressure of daily news production makes it difficult to dive any deeper into a topic (Harding, 2005). Most of the information journalists acquire about Indigenous communities and people comes from secondary sources, and while stereotyping or painting an entire community with a single stroke may be easy to do, for Indigenous people, it's destructive. A lack of context means the reader isn't being given the entire background on a topic, and this can be harmful because it leaves the reader with less of an understanding about an issue (Callison & Young, 2020; Harding, 2005). If, for example, an article is written about a pipeline conflict such as Coastal GasLink, but it does not provide any information about how the territory the pipeline will be built on is unceded territory (meaning it is not under a treaty agreement), or how the framework of governance for Indigenous land isn't completely under the jurisdiction of the Canadian government, but rather also includes hereditary law, then readers are left to draw their own, potentially flawed conclusions. These conclusions could be harmful. If the reader doesn't understand the complex legal framework, one could incorrectly assume that blocking a pipeline from being built is without a doubt illegal, which simplifies a complicated topic and could lead to malice or harassment towards Indigenous peoples (Harding, 2005). We can't assume how every reader of every story will act based on the information provided, but a story that lacks context leaves more room for misdirected assumptions.

Many academic works have examined framing and representation as it pertains to a variety of Indigenous-related topics. An analysis of news coverage on the Idle No More movement was conducted in which editorial and commentary content in newspapers enforce the dominant narrative, cast Indigenous people as good or bad, and enforce the

idea of Indigenous peoples as ‘other’ (Baker & Verrelli, 2017, p. 46). An analysis of local press coverage of missing and murdered women compared the stories of missing and murdered white women to those on Indigenous women. The findings were similar in that there was a lack of sympathetic coverage towards Indigenous women and a lack of coverage in general (Gilchrist, 2010). These findings are relevant not only in arguing that there is an ideological problem facing media, who often enforce harmful stereotypes and the dominant colonial narrative, but also that this coverage has real-life consequences for Indigenous communities. Examined narratives of the Idle No More movement typically didn’t positively contribute to discourse or inform the public, but rather, aligned with the colonial state by justifying the actions harming Indigenous peoples (Baker & Verrelli, 2017). News not only holds the possibility of contributing to the public’s perception of a topic, but in the case of missing and murdered Indigenous women it also directly impacts how robustly police may investigate a crime (Gilchrist, 2010).

Many academic sources have also mentioned other framing issues as obstacles to improving coverage. The analysis conducted by Clark looks at broadcast news coverage between APTN, Global Television, and CBC on key topics relating to Indigenous communities (Clark, 2014a). Its findings include how mainstream national television tends to favour Eurocentric discourse – meaning European and North American dominant perspectives – which ultimately frame Indigenous peoples negatively. It also showed how editorial choices could play into this finding, especially when top editors themselves were not Indigenous (Clark, 2014a). While the academic article still suggests a colonial ideology at play, it does recognize practical factors as well, such as the availability of sources or time constraints (Clark, 2014a).

It can be argued that journalism contributes to a grander idea of what is normal (typically a colonial, white, male viewpoint) and what is not normal (a stance that is shown to include Indigenous peoples) (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). It is not necessarily individual journalists that contribute to the ideology of journalism as a force of colonialism, but rather it's history and as discussed below, it's format.

### **1.3 Format problem and a lack of resources**

When discussing format, it is important to have a full understanding of what this term means. There are a few things that define how journalism is formatted. First are the basic elements of a story, which include a headline, the lede of a story (essentially, the first sentence or paragraph that explains what the story is about and why it's important), the sourcing of a story (who is interviewed for the story), what terminology is used in the story and the word count of a story.

Format can also refer to the ways in which the news is formed. In journalism school, we are taught how news is typically created and what is considered 'newsworthy.' While the definition of a newsworthy story is highly subjective in many cases, large legacy media would aim to publish stories that would be of interest to the main readers of their articles.

Format also refers to the way a news story is constructed before it is even written. How long did the reporter have to write the story? What sources did they have access to? Where is the reporter located? Above all, journalists and journalism students are told they should be objective. We are supposed to inhabit the view from nowhere and tell all sides of a story. That doesn't necessarily mean every viewpoint is included in a story, and all

viewpoints can sometimes be presented through multiple articles published in a day or a week.

There is an argument against objectivity. Other professional fields understand that the idea of objectivity is limited, and thus acknowledge their subjective standpoint in conducting any piece of work (Callison & Young, 2020). Because objectivity is so engrained in the way journalism is traditionally done, this argument ties into the idea that poor coverage about Indigenous communities and their issues is a problem with how reporting is currently formatted. Objectivity, or the view from nowhere, implies that the life experiences of journalists, editors and producers ultimately do not affect the stories they create, from what stories get selected to publish to the sources included in a story, or even the framing of a topic (Callison & Young, 2020). But these decisions aren't made from thin air – there are factors that contribute to why a certain story is selected, and some argue that having newsrooms that are mostly non-Indigenous and white contribute to the ways in which these decisions are made.

Another criticism that has arisen is the idea that legacy journalism institutions are facing financial pressures. Thus, 'beat' reporting, in which a reporter can focus on one topic is becoming rare. Journalists are expected to do more for their jobs, and outlets have less money for expenses like travel to send reporters to the sight of an event. There has been an abundance of public media discourse about how journalism has faced financial pressures as the years have progressed. However, Indigenous outlets and reporters, who are often not prioritized for funding assistance through government grants and public funding, bear the brunt of this issue. They're often the first reporting section to be eliminated, the last to receive public funding, and not seen as mainstream thus not

warranting as much attention – in particular, APTN (Elliot, 2016). For this reason, it's difficult for outlets like APTN to meet the expectations placed on it by the Calls to Action. A report on the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action for media by Elliott (2016) shares the basis for the argument that a lack of Indigenous representation in media is a format problem:

Contrary to popular myth, APTN is neither heavily subsidized nor gifted with any special advantages in advertising sales. While working to develop original made-in-Canada Indigenous programming, APTN must also juggle its survival in an increasingly precarious open marketplace. The TRC's call for APTN to "develop media initiatives that inform and educate the Canadian Public" is therefore a tall order. This is not an unusual situation. Whether the task is delivering diversity programming or serving local communications needs, the societal expectations placed on North America's nonprofit media sector have grown greatly in the past decade, with few corresponding supports. (p. 12)

An examination of the coverage of Indigenous communities and water insecurity found that overall the stories were limited in scope compared to stories about non-Indigenous water insecurity (Lam et al., 2017). It also found that most of the articles relied on government sources and approached the topic from a government accountability angle, rather than through an Indigenous lens (Lam et al., 2017). The study directly addressed the imbalance in coverage and noted it could impact the timeliness of response for public inquiry.

Another academic examination in a master's thesis looked at the use of Indigenous academics as sources in reporting, ultimately asking who the media considers

to be an expert (Ronson, 2008). The findings show that while there has been some improvement historically, ultimately factors such as story selection, a lack of context in writing, agency of the source and access to a journalist are all formatting problems that hinder the ability to fully share the story of a source (Ronson, 2008).

The overall lack of Indigenous representation in story sources is mentioned as a format problem, and this lack of representation is additionally seen in the journalists and editors at many publications. Walker et al. (2019) conducted a study on media representations of Indigenous peoples in relation to renewable energy and included a section that directly pertains to the argument for more diversity. In their study, the authors concluded that negative stereotypes are still perpetuated in this type of story coverage:

Following his intensive search and analysis of *Toronto Star* articles covering Indigenous issues in Canada, Couchi writes part of the solution is to have more First Nation, Inuit and Metis Peoples ‘holding the pens, writing the stories and contributing to how our communities are represented in the press’. We fully agree and add other proposed solutions include rethinking the structure of argumentation in articles covering two or more perspectives, providing appropriate context that can allow readers to understand the full story, and as King points out, the ‘brave’ hiring of Canada’s first Indigenous editor in mainstream media. As the media has shown enormous power to introduce or perpetuate stereotypes and racist ideas about Indigenous Peoples, they must take responsibility and use their platform to help in truth and reconciliation efforts. (Walker et al., 2019, p. 9)

The reasons for the poor formatting and framing can be linked back to funding, a lack of representation in sources and a storytelling style that does not leave room for context or nuance.

#### **1.4 Overall lack of diversity**

If journalists do approach their work with a point of view, or the view from somewhere (Callison & Young, 2020), then it should follow that Indigenous reporters, editors and other staff must be in the newsroom to provide a variety of life experience to produce a wider range of stories. There has been much academic work that shows how the way news is produced at traditional or legacy outlets enforces a “discourse dominated by elites,” which essentially means those who populate newsrooms in the highest quantity (historically, older white men) are best represented by the media (Clark, 2014b, p. 14).

Diversity throughout a newsroom including journalists, editors and publishers, can potentially circumvent, or at least provide new insight into format problems like story selection and editorial decisions (Clark, 2014b). Everyone’s life experience affects how they view the practice of journalism, not just the stories they select or report on, or the sources they use. These concerns are highlighted in a study where the experiences of 42 Indigenous media producers from Canada and other countries are shared (Burrows, 2018). These documented experiences show that Indigenous producers understand how their background influences their job, their commitment to their community as a tension point in their work as a producer, and a connectedness to their audience (Burrows, 2018).

The year 2020 brought along with it a critical look at diversity in a multiplicity of industries and how a lack of diversity affects them. The view from nowhere has

experienced some pushback. The notion of objectivity would lead us to believe that journalists of colour or LGBTQ+ journalists cannot intrinsically be separated from the issues they cover (Childers, 2020). If objectivity says the journalist must approach their work without connection to the issue at hand, then often, journalists belonging to a marginalized group are seen as having a preconceived bias. Instead, some point to the benefit of hiring non-white journalists as it can contribute to a greater diversity of thought in the newsroom, a better understanding of the issues facing a wider range of communities and an ability to connect and represent audiences better than if a newsroom was majority white journalists (Childers, 2020).

This doesn't mean journalists should only report on issues that affect them, but would instead draw a wider range of story pitches, viewpoints, and connections that otherwise wouldn't be available or offered. Most legacy outlets do not provide employee workforce representation statistics, particularly those who are private businesses. CBC's hiring practices have been previously lauded as progressive, with higher representation in their newsrooms. However, CBC/Radio-Canada still employs Indigenous peoples as only 2.2 per cent of their workforce, which is a 46 per cent increase from 2016 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). More recently, the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) produced a comprehensive survey of diversity in the newsroom, and the results are unsurprising. Seventy-five per cent of journalists across 209 Canadian newsrooms identify as white (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021). If we recognize journalism as approaching stories with a view from somewhere, it makes more sense that coverage of Indigenous communities has been less diverse when the newsroom itself is equally unrepresentative.

## **1.5 What is the Canadian public being told?**

While all arguments presented in this chapter make excellent points regarding the poor quantity and quality of news coverage on Indigenous communities, it is likely that not one individual reason is true, but rather a combination of all. Journalism can certainly enforce colonialism and disenfranchise Indigenous peoples. A newsroom's lack of diversity can also play into skewed story coverage, which can be linked back to ideology and epistemological standpoints of journalists. Format, such as a lack of funding, story selection, source availability and more can also affect coverage, but can also be argued as an ideological problem – what stories get prioritized and why are certain sources readily consulted? All these issues are interwoven with one another. Not one can be easily separated from the next.

Regardless of the reasoning behind the poor coverage, the result is the same. Readers and audiences have the potential to draw flawed conclusions, and this can harm Indigenous communities. Ultimately, understanding the discourse around Indigenous representation in the media will contribute to an understanding of how the Wet'suwet'en conflict, to be examined in subsequent chapters, fits into these coverage patterns.

## **Chapter 2: Surveying coverage of conflict with Indigenous communities in Canada**

It's valuable to reflect on how the media has historically presented Indigenous people. By doing this we can gain a holistic view of how press coverage has changed over time, or if a pattern of coverage has persisted over decades. This chapter will also look at how the coverage and portrayal of the Wet'suwet'en peoples has been criticized by the public and voices in the press. These criticisms, along with a historical understanding of how the media has covered conflicts involving Indigenous communities in the past, can help to contextualize the content analysis findings (presented in chapter three) and to provide a sense of any changes in coverage that might have occurred over time (presented in chapter four).

The main question to be answered here is, "How has conflict involving Indigenous communities been historically represented, and what criticism exists of the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict?"

### **2.1 Historical representations of Indigenous communities in Canada**

#### *2.1.1 The original conflict*

To begin this process, the best place to start would be to look at Anderson & Robertson's *Seeing red: A history of Natives in Canadian newspapers*. Covering the period from the purchase of Rupert's Land in 1869 to the Prairies' Centennial of 2005, the book surveys Canada's media coverage of Indigenous peoples from the early days of the Dominion of Canada. The authors detail how Canadian media acted in the interests of colonization. The news media certainly had an interest in an increased population of

settlers that would justify their occupation of the land they now lived on (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The purchase of Rupert's Land was the beginning of Canada's expansion into the west, allowing land for all settlers who came. The problem, of course, was that the land Canada was being built on was occupied prior to British settlement. All parties were well aware of Indigenous people living on the lands, including the Hudson's Bay Company who had sold Rupert's Land to the Canadian government, despite having strong relationships and understandings of Indigenous involvement in – and benefitted from Indigenous knowledge and expertise – the fur trade prior to the sale of the land (Gismondi, 2020). Even Prime Minister John A. MacDonald understood the implications of the sale of Rupert's Land:

No explanation it appears has been made of the arrangement by which the country is to be handed over," Macdonald told political ally George-Etienne Cartier. "All these poor people know is that Canada has bought the country from the Hudson's Bay Company and that they are handed over like a flock of sheep to us. (CBC, n.d., para. 9)

Perhaps it is not surprising that *Seeing Red* reveals negative stereotyping and poor portrayals of Indigenous people by the media at the time. The two leading newspapers in 1869 included the *Toronto Globe* and the *Montreal Gazette*, who referred to Rupert's Land as the "path of empire and the garden of the world" (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 24). Notably, Indigenous people in Canada were portrayed differently to their counterparts in the United States, although portrayals still relied on the stereotype of 'savages' who were not 'civilized' (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). This stereotype aimed to distance Canada from the United States' colonization agenda towards Cuba, but

ultimately failed to recognize Canada's methods of colonization as similar to those in southern regions (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). 'Indians' were savages, Métis people were characterized as 'half-breeds.' Smugglers, alcoholics, gambling addicts, and polygamists were all common stereotypes of the time, aiming to paint an overall picture of Indigenous people as the other (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

To distance Canada from the 'Indians' was to establish a dichotomy of good versus bad. If Indigenous people are unable to take care of themselves, how can they possibly be responsible for the land? How can they be self-governing, or have any established connection to Rupert's Land? Media portrayals aren't always a reflection of public opinion, but the media at the time was priming its readers to accept the judgments of the press as their own:

In 1873, the *Montreal Gazette* boldly championed the agenda-setting power of the press. In an article endorsing a view printed first in the *New York Tribune*, it recorded: Newspapers are getting to be much more than mere transcripts of the news and gossip of the day. They are pioneers in learned explorations; they are foremost in geographical and historical discovery; they are the teachers of social science... The reporter of today is the adventurer who penetrates the desert and the jungle, who researches for relics of the forgotten past, the courier who bears the news of victory...across a wilderness and through hostile armies...we can hardly doubt that it is destined in a very short time to be the foremost of all the secular professions—the most powerful in its operations, the most brilliant in its reward, and the most useful to mankind. (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 38)

The purchase of Rupert's Land is one of the first examples of the news media playing an active role in attempting to shape the public's perception of Indigenous communities. Here, the portrayal is one of Indigenous people actively working against the Canadian state. It certainly set the tone for future coverage, and perhaps for the public perception of Indigenous peoples and their subsequent mistreatment.

### *2.1.2 Treaties, Residential Schools, and Cultural Assimilation*

As indicated by many historical resources as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's Calls to Action, treaties being ignored or initiated dishonestly, as well as residential schools, were part of the formation of the country that aimed to culturally assimilate Indigenous communities into colonial Canada. Not all of Canada is covered by treaties – as noted, Wet'suwet'en land itself is unceded, meaning the nation is the rightful title holder of the land to this day. For the state, Indigenous peoples existing and thriving on the lands long before settlers arrived, was not a part of the narrative that Canada wanted to portray to make their purchase of Rupert's Land legitimate (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). If the news media was aiming to contribute to the narrative of Canada as a legitimate country, treaties being ignored or initiated dishonestly as well as residential schools may not have been portrayed as cultural assimilation, but rather as a solution to the 'issue of Indigenous peoples' as first laid out by the media during the coverage of Rupert's Land (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). While some level of conflict can be defined in instances of some treaties and residential schools, there is a clear lack of opposing narratives in the media pushing back against Canada's actions towards Indigenous communities. However, because of their role in cementing stereotypes against

Indigenous peoples, it's important to discuss how these events were portrayed by the media.

During the period of time in which treaties were being signed, Indigenous people as stereotypes were so solidified in news portrayals that Indigenous communities were frequently referred to as the "Indian Problem" (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 42). Treaties were portrayed as arrangements sought out by Indigenous people rather than imposed on them, and news organizations of the time heavily implied that one could not be both a hunter and a farmer, implying that Indigenous people could not make good use of the land whilst travelling around it, unsettled (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). More often than not, treaties were left out of news coverage which gave the impression that they weren't of much importance, although Treaty 3 did warrant 56 words in the *Globe* for a signing off of 14 million hectares of land in central Canada (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Similar stereotypes emerged in coverage similar to the period of coverage during the sale of Rupert's Land – Indigenous people were savage, needed the assistance of the government, and were unable to take care of themselves (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). What went unsaid perhaps portrayed the media's position more than what was said. Treaties were of little consequence to settler Canada, but a major turning point in the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Residential school coverage stands out because it continues to be covered in media today, particularly after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. The conclusion of one academic article summarizes the stereotypical coverage of residential schools, which saw brief, recent improvement:

In 1995, Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young argued that the “standard account” of residential schools was one that pathologized survivors, ignored the systemic contexts of colonialism and racism, and used the language of “mistakes,” not “genocide.” Our findings indicate improvement over the last eighteen years regarding what passes as “truth.” But newspaper coverage still falls quite short of challenging Canadians to think about Indian residential schools in expansive terms that frame reconciliation as requiring decolonization and systemic change. (Nagy & Gillespie, 2015, p. 38)

While newspapers may have improved in the way they cover residential schools, there has been little acknowledgment of their lasting impact told through Indigenous sources, and little explanation for readers to learn and understand this impact (Nagy & Gillespie, 2015). There is a lack of context in stories that would provide readers with a more thorough level of knowledge about colonialism, which leaves them with little understanding of the wider impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities today.

### *2.1.3 The Oka Crisis and emerging counter-narratives*

Fittingly, and perhaps a bit ironically, the second last topic addressed by Anderson and Robertson is the ‘letters to the editor’ produced during The Oka Crisis. Reflecting on the coverage of the purchase of Rupert’s Land, the press had set an agenda as a figure of authority, and the examination of letters to the editor certainly paint a picture of the public’s acceptance of the media viewpoint that Indigenous people are both savage and reliant on government (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The Oka Crisis refers

to events that unfolded in the summer of 1990 in which the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) people of Kanesatake (west of Montreal) claimed land that was used as a sacred burial ground, while the community of Oka sought to use the land for expansion of a golf course. The development of the conflict followed a nearly identical path to the Wet'suwet'en and Coastal GasLink conflict thirty years later. First, the Mohawk peoples barricaded access to this land, followed by a court injunction that they refused to abide by. The provincial police went on to enforce the injunction, shots were fired, and a police officer died (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The situation also saw a large domestic deployment of the military. A 78-day standoff occurred where allied communities erected bridge and rail blockades in support, while counter-protests and riots also ensued (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The conflict ended in late September when the Kanesatake-Mohawk defenders laid down their defenses and walked out.

Letters to the editors mainly portrayed Indigenous peoples as savages, relying on the same stereotypes – though perhaps in different words – that had been used in 1869. This included Indigenous people dependent on government and allegations of ‘reverse racism’ from Indigenous people. Furthermore, that they have violent, murderous, greedy and primitive tendencies, that they don’t contribute to Canadian society and are alcoholics (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). In the conclusion of this chapter, the sentiment is summarized:

Ultimately, these letters correspond to general press coverage of Oka, which has been seen as reinforcing Aboriginal stereotypes such as proclivity for violence and lack of control, which in turn fit neatly within historical patterns of press colonialism in Canada. (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 239)

The Oka Crisis coverage also brought a quiet surge of counter-narratives. These letters to the editor condemned Canadians' contempt for Indigenous people and attacked the government for their role in harming Indigenous peoples. Although the coverage partially relied on stereotypes, the coverage implied Indigenous people were dependent on the government and thus should not be blamed for their actions against these authorities (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). While these counter-narratives sometimes relied on stereotypes as mentioned, it was the first notable instance of a slight change in public opinion and a realization of the harm Canada has inflicted on Indigenous peoples. Since 1869, Canadians were told by the media that the colonial occupation of Rupert's Land and other land where Indigenous people existed was justifiable. This instance of conflict shows the first time in which the media allowed room for push back on this topic, nearly 100 years after the purchase of Rupert's Land.

#### *2.1.4 Other topics of interest*

Academic works analyzing how media represents Indigenous communities in their coverage focused on a number of additional areas that can't be explicitly defined as 'conflict,' but do incorporate dispute in some ways. This includes social movements, calls for justice, and topics addressing the quality of living conditions such as Idle No More, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), drinking water quality on reserves, renewable energy and protest in general. Some elements are re-occurring in the findings of these analyses that can also be found in conflict related coverage about Indigenous peoples, such as stereotypes and the 'us versus them' narrative that contribute to a larger image of Canadian media's idea of who Indigenous

peoples are (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006). These analyses can also help to reveal if the media's stance is different when covering Indigenous specific non-conflict situations, or if the media consistently covers news from a colonial perspective (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

The media provides a heightened level of coverage to Indigenous communities during times of conflict (Pierro et al., 2013). Coverage of MMIWG is arguably the same, with brief, intense coverage often called the 'searchlight phenomenon' (Drache et al., 2016). MMIWG coverage was often not prioritized over other stories (as it was not featured as a front page story) and Indigenous voices were present in more than half the stories – although it was less clear if their comments would translate understanding of the issue to non-Indigenous individuals (Drache et al., 2016). Indigenous news sources – unlike legacy outlets – were found to clearly place blame and more likely to frame a story positively, focusing on mobilizing change (Drache et al., 2016).

A comparative analysis found that missing and murdered Indigenous women were much less likely to be the topic of a news story compared to their white counterparts (Gilchrist, 2010). The newsworthiness of a story can often be decided by majority non-Indigenous reporters, and problems that Indigenous communities face (such as high rates of suicide, addictions, disproportionate incarceration) are typically not addressed as wider, systemic problems in the coverage, often stripping down Indigenous victims to stereotypes (Gilchrist, 2010). A lack of context, or not including important details relevant to a story, can lead to a misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples (Gilchrist, 2010).

The Idle No More movement was similarly framed to other Indigenous news topics, sparking one academic article title “How to discredit a social movement” (Chen, 2019). The Postmedia Network (which includes the *National Post*, examined later as part of the Coastal GasLink conflict) framed colonialism as a thing of the past, with many harsh criticisms of Idle No More claiming any harm felt by Indigenous communities was in the interest of Canada’s national prosperity and economic benefit (Chen, 2019). Examining only Postmedia, which is generally perceived to have a particularly right-leaning media viewpoint, may skew the results of these findings. However, Postmedia is considered legacy news even if it is just a fraction of the overall media landscape (Chen, 2019).

While times of conflict and social movements have seemed to gain momentum in the press, even if for a short amount of time, other topics such as water insecurity are covered far less. All three of the outlets used for the content analysis in this thesis (*Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and *National Post*) were also examined for water related coverage. In a span of 15 years, they and one other outlet produced approximately the same amount of stories about water insecurity as they did in three months for the Coastal GasLink conflict (Lam et al., 2017). These stories were disproportionally focused on governmental responses, with many having a neutral or negative emotional tone to them (Lam et al., 2017).

## **2.2 Examining the Coastal GasLink and Wet'suwet'en conflict**

### *2.2.1 The basis of the conflict*

The best way to summarize the conflict between Coastal GasLink, the government and the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, may be to call it a pivotal dispute regarding who is able to make decisions over an area of land in northern British Columbia. Wet'suwet'en land is considered unceded, meaning that the nation never signed a treaty to give their land to the Canadian government, and is one justification used when arguing Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs have the decision-making power over their land (Kestler-D'Amours, 2020). One case made it to the Supreme Court in 1997, in which the court found Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs were the rightful title holders of the land (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 2001).

Along with the hereditary chiefs, the band council members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation also claim they have the right to be consulted and approve of projects on the Wet'suwet'en land, and did approve the Coastal GasLink project (Kestler-D'Amours, 2020). However, the hereditary chiefs and some opponents of the pipeline project claim the band council only has the right to approve projects on reserve land, and not the greater unceded territory land outside of reserves. Many point to the fact that band councils are themselves a colonial institution, and thus aren't necessarily the body that is most representative of Indigenous values and law on unceded land, even though they are elected (George-Kanentiio, 2020). Band councils were created by the Canadian government's Indian Act of 1876 and aim to replace centuries of traditional Indigenous governance systems.

Two standpoints emerge in the conflict which fit the ‘us versus them’ framing. The first is that the Coastal GasLink pipeline is beneficial for Canadians and the economy, and is supported by the government and the band councils along the route of the proposed pipeline. It would create jobs for Indigenous peoples in the areas of construction, and ultimately return money to the communities in northern BC. The second is that the Coastal GasLink pipeline goes against Indigenous values of protecting the land as expressed by the hereditary chiefs, who claim to be the main authority in deciding what happens on Wet’suwet’en land (Kestler-D’Amours, 2020). In the criticisms made by academics, Indigenous activists and journalists during the three-month period that the conflict was receiving its highest news coverage, it’s clear that some historically presented stereotypes emerge, as well as some of the counter-narratives that were present during the Oka Crisis.

### *2.2.2 Criticisms of the Coastal GasLink conflict coverage*

Periods of conflict typically lead to far higher coverage of Indigenous communities according to a report titled “Buried Voices” (Pierro et al., 2013). With a high increase in coverage, reporting gaps and issues are likely to bubble to the surface in ways that don’t when conflict isn’t being highlighted by the media.

One article produced by *Canadaland* raises some larger issues with coverage of Indigenous communities that extend beyond the Wet’suwet’en people. The main criticism lays with the fact that there was very little reporting coming from the ground on Wet’suwet’en territory. Much of the coverage was speculative – what could happen, rather than what has happened – and lacked data to back up the claims being made by

news articles (Jago, 2020). First, articles contradicted themselves over how many hereditary chiefs were in support or against the pipeline. For example, one *Vancouver Province* article claimed there are five chiefs, a *Globe and Mail* article says eight hereditary chiefs are against the pipeline and another article named Theresa Tait-Day as a hereditary chief, although she is not officially (her position was much debated in news coverage, as she claimed she had her title stripped for supporting the pipeline) (Jago, 2020). Additionally, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney stated 85 per cent of the Wet'suwet'en support the pipeline, and a First Nations Alliance group claims the number to be 80 per cent. While these numbers do appear in articles, this information isn't corroborated by any poll or report (Jago, 2020). The author also mentions multiple community meetings on Wet'suwet'en land that went largely unreported at the time of the conflict. In summary, a lack of reporting on the ground from Wet'suwet'en land has led to much speculation from the media, including around the debate between hereditary chief or band council authority (Jago, 2020). Media also speculated how many Wet'suwet'en individuals actually support the pipeline, and what the potential, not actual, effects the blockades may present with little knowledge about what's really happening in the Wet'suwet'en community, mainly gained through data or first-hand accounts (Jago, 2020).

Overall, the conflict led to higher coverage of a community that journalists have little access to, with few people on the ground to understand the situation, and headlines that ask, "what if?" rather than explaining what's really going on (Jago, 2020).

*Canadaland* isn't the only outlet that has pointed out larger issues with Indigenous media coverage. In an article for *Now Toronto*, the author claims the media is reliant on

sensationalism and grandiose statements that could potentially contribute – such as past conflicts like Oka, Ipperwash and Gustafsen Lake – to escalating tensions and violent conflict (DiMatteo, 2020). The author also criticizes the characterizations of the blockades through word choices made in mainstream media, including describing blockades as ‘illegal,’ people taking part in solidarity rallies as ‘radical activists,’ and a general sentiment that Indigenous issues only make headlines in Canada when issues reach a boiling point (DiMatteo, 2020). This selective coverage means readers are typically presented with a lack of context about the issues as hand. For example, what does it mean for a blockade to be characterized as ‘illegal’ when the Wet’suwet’en land is unceded and therefore the community is self-governing?

The CBC examined the media’s coverage of the conflict on the broadcast show *The Weekly*, with guests critical of the Coastal GasLink conflict coverage. The guests and host brought up both the terminology and the media’s failure to cover Indigenous topics outside of conflict, pointing to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s Calls to Action for guidance (Mesley, 2020).

A preliminary survey of the period of coverage from January to March of 2020 reveals numerous criticisms from two main perspectives. The first addresses the ‘rule of law’ with some arguing that Canada’s law must prevail, while the other perspective argues that Indigenous law is equally as valid – with an emphasis on whether Indigenous peoples ever agreed to live under Canada’s legal framework. In one editorial article, the *Toronto Star* argues that the law says Indigenous groups only have the right to consultation rather than a right to veto projects on their land (Star Editorial Board, 2020).

The authors argue that Indigenous groups only adhere to the law when it clearly benefits them:

If the Federal Court rules in their favour, they are sure to hail it as a victory and demand that the company and the B.C. government scrap the project. But if they lose, odds are they will fight on, and their supporters will dismiss the court's decision as irrelevant to their battle against pipelines and resource projects in general. In other words, they seem to be operating under the rule of "heads I win, tails you lose." I get to use the legal system when convenient, and ignore it when it doesn't give the results I like. (Star Editorial Board, 2020, paras. 5-6)

Other articles though, argue against this stance claiming that this viewpoint is far too simplistic for such a nuanced issue. One *Globe and Mail* article says it's political leaders who cherry-pick Indigenous leaders who agree with their stance (in this case, band council leaders), rather than Indigenous people cherry-picking the legal frameworks that work for them:

There is a body of political theory and jurisprudence that indicates that those traditional laws continue despite the imposition of the Canadian state and its legal regime. For many years, Canada asserted its law over and above Indigenous legal systems, but the importance of engaging Indigenous laws has been emphasized by the Supreme Court of Canada over the last three decades, in cases including *Delgamuukw*, *Van der Peet* (1996) and *Mitchell* (2011). Canada and B.C. are legally bound to take account of those laws and protocols in interpreting their own responsibilities under section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982. (Starblanket & Green, 2020, para. 6)

In a column, a *Globe and Mail* author argues that “the only voices that matter in this dispute, are the voices of those in the Wet’suwet’en Nation, where, we should remind people again, there is widespread support for this project, and the voices of Indigenous leaders elsewhere along the route of the pipeline.” (Mason, 2020, para. 11) However, the columnist does not provide data to support how many Wet’suwet’en people support the pipeline project, nor is there data that shows how much the media highlighted voices of those who do not support the pipeline project – there was no data available to say one or the other was more ‘heard.’ This statement by Mason will be further discussed in chapter five, with a particular focus on how legacy media provided a space for those opposed to the hereditary chief’s stance.

A major criticism from the period between January and March of 2020 was that the media had a fundamental misunderstanding of who speaks for Indigenous communities and how colonialism plays a part in this conflict – whether intentional or not. A *Globe and Mail* article by Jody Wilson-Raybould at the time explained this issue. She highlights the need for Indigenous communities to decide who speaks for them, rather than the government or the media, and that while band councils are the most realistic leaders to be consulted for a pipeline project, hereditary law is also inherently a part of the Wet’suwet’en community as well (Wilson-Raybould, 2020). For this reason, the Coastal GasLink conflict was not necessarily the opportunity for media or politicians to sort out who speaks for the Wet’suwet’en people, but the beginning of a process of Indigenous people deciding who speaks for them (Wilson-Raybould, 2020). Other articles more directly placed blame on the government and media for their lack of understanding as it relates to colonization, and that they were unable to address issues

such as land ownership and claims regarding Wet'suwet'en territory prior to the conflict. While the Liberal government claimed the Coastal GasLink conflict, and the removal of Tyendinaga Mohawk individuals from the blockade areas in Ontario, did not compromise their reconciliation agenda, one Toronto Star columnist claimed otherwise:

Marc Garneau, Minister of Transport, was heading into a meeting of the prime minister's incident-response group Monday when he told media: "We're committed to sitting down and having a dialogue, but the barricades had to come down because of the profound effects it had on the economy." Does dialogue mean: my way or we don't speak? What about the profound effect the pipelines have on Wet'suwet'en rights? (Paradkar, 2020, para. 9)

Overall, the articles included in the content analysis of the next chapter show several assumptions and stereotypes that had also been included in the coverage of previous conflicts. There is also a noticeable increase of counter-narratives about media coverage that have emerged. These arguments will be examined further in chapter five in comparison to legacy media coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict.

### **2.3 How have Indigenous communities been represented?**

This chapter asks, "How has conflict involving Indigenous communities been historically represented, and what criticism exists of the Coastal GasLink conflict coverage?" The answer to this question is not as simple as one might assume. From the purchase of Rupert's Land and even far before this time, to the Coastal GasLink conflict, Canada has seemingly always been in conflict with Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities proved useful to those who crossed the ocean to 'discover' new land, and

much of Canada's early history was contingent on relationships with Indigenous peoples that were able to participate in the fur trade (Gismondi, 2020).

When Canada was being settled and the government purchased Rupert's Land, the country needed to portray a narrative of untouched land with room for unlimited settlers. Accounts in the media as early as this purchase show Indigenous people as helpless, people who were unable to take care of themselves, savages and dependent on the government (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). In reflecting on this period of Canadian history through media coverage, it becomes clear that the journalistic institutions of the time were setting themselves up to not only share negative portrayals of the Indigenous 'others' – needing help and guidance to integrate into 'normal' states like the settlers in Canada – but also as a source for trusted information or an authority (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

While this portrayal is prevalent throughout history, today's portrayals of Indigenous communities are criticized for another reason that has been discussed throughout this chapter – a lack of context. Historical media coverage has been characterized by negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, and little evidence exists that the news media has ever provided an accurate level of information upon which readers can draw reasonable conclusions. On top of this, coverage of Indigenous communities as a whole is under-representative, both historically and contemporarily, and yet consistently increases during times of conflict (Pierro et al., 2013). Readers are presented with stereotypes and a lack of context if they are presented with anything at all.

## **Chapter 3: Content analysis of the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict**

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question, “How was the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict represented by three mainstream legacy outlets?” To be more precise, this chapter is concerned with understanding how information about the conflict is being presented to public audiences through mainstream media outlets. Thus, a secondary question to address in this chapter is, “How is the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict presented to the reader based on the stories published on the topic?” To do this, the chapter examines coverage through a content analysis, looking at the articles published in the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* on the subject between January 1, 2020 and March 15, 2020. In this regard, the content analysis is only analyzing what would be readily available to the audience reading these stories, and not examining journalistic constraints such as available time until publication, newsroom location, sources available to the reporter and more.

A qualitative analysis of texts is necessary to understand the potential interpretations by audiences (Macnamara, 2005). The goal is to draw themes from the data collected and, in subsequent chapters, compare these themes with those in other analyses and consult with experts and critics on their relevancy and meaning.

### **3.1 Methodology**

This content analysis focuses on three mainstream digital platforms in Canada – the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Toronto Star*. As this research aims to understand how Indigenous peoples are represented by the media and thus, presented to the public, these outlets were chosen because they are the three English-language,

national and digital outlets with the highest circulation rates, meaning they were likely read by the highest number of people during the Coastal GasLink conflict in early 2020 (News Media Canada, 2020). Together, all three outlets span the political spectrum in terms of their perceived bias, with the *Toronto Star* on the left, the *National Post* on the right, and the *Globe and Mail* somewhere in the middle (*Media Bias/Fact Check News*, n.d.).

The research questions entail conducting a qualitative and inductive content analysis. This means capturing the meanings, emphasis, and themes of the messages in the coverage to understand how they are presented to the audience (White & Marsh, 2006). While some themes used to analyze the content were identified prior to conducting the analysis in chapter two, inductive methodology means that the research questions guided the data gathering and other categories for coding emerged during the process of analysis (White & Marsh, 2006). While quantitative content analyses can be considered objective because they are not contextual, qualitative analyses are subjective (White & Marsh, 2006). To offset any bias, each coding category is carefully explained below, and in chapter five of this thesis, experts offer feedback on the coding.

A manual search was conducted on each digital platform for stories that included the search terms “Wet’suwet’en,” “Wetsuweten” and “Coastal GasLink.” The story had to be published between the dates of January 1, 2020 to March 15, 2020. This timeframe encompasses the period in which national blockades were taking place in support of the Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs, and ends around the time COVID-19 placed much of Canada into lockdown, ultimately skewing the frequency of coverage towards this major event (Umar et al., 2021).

After these searches were conducted, some additional restrictions were placed on the stories that appeared. The first was to exclude all content by a wire service such as Reuters or the Canadian Press, because these stories cannot fully reflect the outlet's editorial choices as they only decide which stories to run, rather than how the story is formulated, which could disrupt the data set and skew the results for expert comment in chapter five (The Canadian Press, n.d.). Secondly, because wire services are used by all three news outlets in this analysis, there could be some stories that are duplicated between them. Articles that cite files from a wire service were still included if they were written, at least in part, by a reporter for the outlet.

As mentioned, the purpose of this chapter is to understand how the audience is presented news (specifically digital news) on the topic. With this in mind, opinion and editorial articles were also included. Opinion articles can still influence public perception. However, letters to the editor were excluded as these can be perceived as representing public perception, rather than directly influencing public perception for the most part. Finally, the article's main focus had to be about the Coastal GasLink conflict or the relating parties involved, such as the Wet'suwet'en Nation. In some cases, either or both Coastal GasLink and Wet'suwet'en were mentioned in articles about other resource extraction projects or in criticism about governments, but they weren't the main focus, and so were excluded from the selection of articles.

After everything detailed above, the content analysis is comprised of 255 stories, including 60 by the *National Post*, 81 by the *Toronto Star* and 114 by the *Globe and Mail* (see Appendix A for the entire list of articles). A total of 12 categorizations of content from the article were used, which were either pre-determined or emerged during the

analysis. These include headline, location, article category, article topic, how many sources were used, type of source, whether or not a press release or statement was mentioned, the context provided, the tone of the article, terminology used (protester or land defender), whether colonialism was mentioned in the story, and word count. While some of these categories have a quantitative dimension, such as word count, the conclusions drawn about each category are ultimately qualitative.

## **3.2 Coding**

The purpose of the qualitative analysis is to show the general presentation by three outlets on the subject and answer the research questions through a wealth of detailed observations (White & Marsh, 2006). The categories detailed below took queues from previously mentioned qualitative content analyses' methodologies, including Clark (2014), Gilchrist (2010), Chen (2019) and Walker et al. (2019). To evaluate how Indigenous communities were presented to the audience during the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict, the following categories were analyzed of the 255 articles.

### *3.2.1 Headline*

The full headline was included in this category as it was written on the page for the article. The headlines are analyzed in results to understand the words that are occurring the most for each outlet and each article.

### *3.2.2 Category*

This section refers to how the outlet has categorized the article. This includes news, politics, opinion/editorial, analysis and business. These categories fit all three outlets in the analysis (as all three outlets' stories fit into these categories according to the

organization of their websites) and indicate how the outlets communicate the topic of the article to its readers, as well as the importance of one area of coverage over another. For example, if an outlet's coverage of the conflict was featured in a higher percentage of political articles than business articles, it could signal to readers that finding a government solution was more important than the impact on business.

### 3.2.3 *Topic*

Taking inspiration from Ronson (2008) and Chen (2019), the topic is analyzed to understand the general storyline of each article, and to ultimately understand what topics were mainly covered by each outlet. Topics emerged as the content was read, and a complete list was compiled as follows.

#### **Disagreement between hereditary chiefs and band council or other**

**Wet'suwet'en members:** The article focuses on how some band council members, or other Wet'suwet'en members, disagreed with the hereditary chief's stance that Coastal GasLink needed to stop construction on their land.

**Analysis article on CGL or related conflict:** An analysis article goes deeper than hard news. It's typically longer in length and is focused on breaking down and contextualizing pieces of information. For example, it could be an article about the main parties involved in the resolution talks (Ballingall, 2020), or a deeper dive on an issue such as how the blockades have affected the country (Mcclearn, 2020).

**Analysis article focused on specific solutions:** Similar to the topic above but focused on a specific solution and analyzing how this might work in the context of the conflict. For example, if a referendum process might work for future disputes (Hunter, 2020).

**Historical article to provide context to conflict:** A category that includes articles focused on providing a historical perspective to the conflict.

**Legal contextual article provided to the conflict:** Another self-explanatory category that includes articles focused on providing legal context to the conflict.

**Hard news updates on the latest development in conflict:** Articles providing shorter, to-the-point updates about the latest developments in the conflict. Articles are categorized in this way when they don't fit into other hard news categories, such as the police response or the results of the blockades.

**Political news looking at governmental response to conflict:** Articles providing updates on the governmental response to the conflict, such as comment from officials or reporting on house debates.

**Results of the blockades and how it's affecting the country:** These types of articles speak with businesses, unions, ports and rail company representatives and others, who feel they've been affected by the blockades that are in support of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

**Profile on land defenders:** These are articles focused on profiling land defenders or otherwise identified protesters.

**Profile on Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs:** These are articles focused on profiling Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

**Coverage relating to response from advocacy groups:** News articles that highlight the response from advocacy groups or human rights and civil liberties associations.

**RCMP/police response news:** Another category of news articles in which the topic is focused on the RCMP or other police and how they're responding to the conflict.

**Protesters are outsiders, not supporting Indigenous people:** Another emerging category was detailing who protesters actually are and framing them as mainly non-Indigenous individuals who are derailing the movement.

**Opinion categories:** Unless an opinion article explicitly fell into one of the above categories, it was categorized as either pro-Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, against the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, neutral, or commenting on other issues related to the conflict and/or critical of the government response.

#### *3.2.4 Type of source*

Each source is categorized by type as they are identified in the story. Thus, the same person could be categorized in multiple ways because they were identified differently depending on the article.

**Government official:** Anyone identified as a member of federal, provincial, or municipal government, former government, or running for a governmental position.

**Police/law enforcement:** Any spokesperson or officer identified in relation to the RCMP or other police forces.

**Land defender/protestor (off of Wet'suwet'en land):** Any individual identified as associated with blockades or other protests or actions in support of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs outside of Wet'suwet'en land.

**Land defender/protestor (on Wet'suwet'en land):** This includes any neighbouring nations (such as Gitksan), or allies who are assisting with Wet'suwet'en land but are not identified as Wet'suwet'en themselves.

**Counter-protester:** Any individual solely identified as someone counter-protesting against blockades or against those in support of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

**CGL/company representative:** A representative for Coastal GasLink, Via Rail, CN Rail, or other companies. This does not include small businesses or unions, as these are mostly identified as sources affected by the protest.

**Source affected by protests:** Individuals, unions, or small businesses including ports, that are not directly being affected by blockades (such as CN Rail or Via Rail), but are identified by the outlet as being potentially affected if the blockades were to continue. For example, a source from a small business being asked how their supply chain would be affected if the blockades continued and stopped a certain material from being shipped to them.

**Source affected by pipeline:** An individual who is identifying how they or their environment would be affected by the pipeline, not including those explicitly identified in another way such as a Wet'suwet'en clan member.

**Hereditary Chief/Clan member:** Any individual identified as a hereditary chief or member of the Wet'suwet'en clans or houses. This includes those who are identified as such and disagree with the actions of the hereditary chiefs who are against the pipeline.

**Band Council member:** Alternatively to the above option, any individual identified as a band council member in Wet'suwet'en territory, rather than identified with a clan or house.

**Indigenous individual/community in favour of the pipeline:** Any Indigenous individual or community identified as in favour of the pipeline, outside of Wet'suwet'en territory.

**Indigenous expert/academic:** An expert or academic who is identifiably Indigenous.

**Non-Indigenous expert/academic:** An expert or academic who is identifiably non-Indigenous.

**Human rights/advocacy organization:** A human rights or advocacy organization or spokesperson.

### *3.2.5 Press release or statement mentioned*

Media release journalism has been critiqued in North America for relying on official accounts of events rather than questioning those accounts (Spence & Simmons, 2006). In reporting on conflict, how heavily do mainstream outlets rely on press releases for important and potentially perception altering information (Gandy, 1982)? This category also contributes to a greater understanding of how integral information is transmitted to the public from parties like the RCMP, companies and others involved in the conflict.

### *3.2.6 Context provided*

As discussed by Callison & Young, mainstream reporting format often does not include a wide array of context (for example, a broader background and history about a story) to a situation, which runs the risk of a lack of overall understanding about the conflict at hand (2020). Most of the time, reporters are taught to include context as a

paragraph or two in the story. This category refers specifically to context about the overall conflict.

Paragraph(s) in the story: This is the categorization for the standards one or two paragraphs in the article that provide background on the conflict.

Graphics or other multimedia: Instead of providing written context, charts, infographics or other multimedia are used to provide context.

Both paragraphs and graphics: Both of the above categories are used.

Entire story provides context to the conflict: The entire story is providing context. For example, legal or historical context on the conflict would be considered ‘entire story’ context.

No context: None of the above categories are used in the article.

### 3.2.7 *Tone*

The tone is categorized as either positive, negative, or neutral. Taking cues from Callison & Young (2020), positive and negative aren’t reflective of whether the actual word choice reflects a positive or negative tone, but rather whether the story is focusing on the negative implications of an event or conflict, or if it is solutions-focused. Neutral is typically used to categorize news stories that are strictly updates.

### 3.2.8 *Terminology*

This categorizes whether the article describes those involved in the blockades or other acts of defiance against Coastal GasLink, RCMP, or other opposing parties such as ‘land defenders’ or ‘protesters.’ This, along with other terminology that appeared less in the articles analyzed, was a point of contention between those in support of Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs and those opposing their position (Mesley, 2020).

### *3.2.9 Mention of colonialism*

As discussed in previous chapters, understanding the colonial history of band councils, how they clash with hereditary law and how colonization has affected and influenced Indigenous peoples plays a major part in the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict. This category is to analyze whether mainstream outlets make any mention whatsoever of this.

### *3.2.10 Word count*

Finally, how many words were afforded to stories about the Coastal GasLink pipeline? This category partially ties into Callison & Young's (2020) idea that most reporting lacks context to provide a full picture of Indigenous communities and the intricacies that come into play in a conflict such as this. This category will be used to analyze word counts per outlet on average.

## **3.3 Results**

The most frequent overall coverage topics included hard news updates (17%), news regarding the results of the blockades and their effects on the country (14%), political news about government's response to the conflict (11%) and opinion pieces that take a stance against the position of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs (11%). Overall, government officials were used as sources by almost (35%), followed by Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs or clan members (16%), land defenders or protesters outside of Wet'suwet'en land (15%) and Coastal GasLink or other company representatives (13%). The results were mainly analyzed through the spreadsheet data and pivot tables, with only the category 'Headline' using an online word frequency tool titled WriteWords, in which

the tool scans for common phrases and words used in a group of words. In this case, the headlines were scanned for one-to-three-word combinations that appeared commonly in all the headlines.

Using a reliability measure, a sample of my analysis was tested by a third party to ensure the results were acceptably or highly replicable, which means they were greater than 0.66 (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 144). In every category, with the exception of topic and tone, the result was  $r > 0.80$ , which can be defined as high reliability (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Both topic and tone were  $r > 0.70$ , indicating these categories are considered within an acceptable range of reliability (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). These two categories were the most difficult to code with a high amount of options to choose from as well as being likely the most difficult to interpret, which explains why they measured lower on reliability than other categories, although still within the acceptable range.

### 3.3.1 *Headline*

Using a word frequency counter online, the most frequently occurring words and phrases include Wet’suwet’en (108 times), rail blockades (49 times), Coastal GasLink (35 times) and pipeline (35 times). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Indigenous, chiefs and RCMP also show up multiple times.

### 3.3.2 *Category*

The most frequently used categories are news, opinion/editorial and politics, except for the *Globe and Mail*, which published significantly less political news on the conflict than the other two outlets.

<b>What is the article category?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
Analysis	1.8%	0%	3.7%
Business	9.6%	0%	1.2%

News	49.1%	33.3%	46.9%
Opinion/Editorial	36%	46.7%	21%
Politics	3.5%	20%	27.2%

Table 1: Percentage of article categories per outlet

### 3.3.3 Topic

The *Globe and Mail*'s highest topic category was hard news, followed by news on the results of the blockades. The *National Post* contributed far more opinion articles against the stance of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, almost double its hard news coverage. The *Toronto Star*'s most frequent categories were how the blockades are affecting the country followed closely by political news and hard news updates. Overall, each outlet's opinion coverage reflects their perceived political bias as previously mentioned, except for the *Toronto Star*, which produced an equal number of articles for and against the stance of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

<b>What is the topic of the article?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
Analysis article focused on specific solutions	0.9%	0%	2.5%
Analysis article on CGL or related conflict	3.5%	3.3%	6.2%
Coverage relating to response from advocacy groups	3.5%	1.7%	1.2%
Disagreement between hereditary chiefs and band council or other Wet'suwet'en members	7.0%	5.0%	1.2%
Hard news updating on the latest development in conflict	20.2%	11.7%	17.3%
Historical article to provide context to conflict	2.6%	3.3%	7.4%
Legal contextual article provided to the conflict	0.9%	0%	0%
Opinion: Against Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief stance	9.6%	21.7%	4.9%
Opinion: Critical of government response	4.4%	10.0%	7.4%

Opinion: Neutral in conflict, debating other issues	10.5%	10.0%	1.2%
Opinion: Pro-Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief stance	9.6%	0%	4.9%
Political news looking at governmental response to conflict	7.0%	8.3%	18.5%
Profile on land defenders	0.9%	0%	3.7%
Profile on Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs	0%	1.7%	0%
Protesters are outsiders, not supporting Indigenous people	0%	5.0%	0%
RCMP/police response news	7.0%	8.3%	2.5%
Results of the blockades and how it's affecting the country	12.3%	8.3%	21.0%

Table 2: Percentage of article topics per outlet

### 3.3.4 Type of source

Both the *National Post* and *Toronto Star* most frequently included government officials as a source, while the *Globe and Mail* was most likely to include a Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief or clan member in its coverage. In all three outlets, a government official was most likely to be the first person quoted or referenced as a source in a story.

Type of source	Globe and Mail	National Post	Toronto Star
Band Council member	0%	9.4%	1.4%
CGL/company representative	4.1%	1.7%	16%
Government official	13.5%	48.7%	35.9%
Hereditary Chief/Clan member	29.8%	12.8%	11.1%
Human rights/advocacy organization	22.3%	0%	0%
Indigenous individual/community for pipeline	1.9%	0%	0.3%
Land defender/protestor (inside Wet'suwet'en land)	3.4%	0%	1%
Land defender/protestor (outside Wet'suwet'en land)	1.9%	9.4%	24.4%
non-Indigenous expert/academic	8.8%	0%	4.9%
Indigenous expert/academic	0%	0%	1%
Police/law enforcement	0.6%	11.1%	0%
Source affected by pipeline	6.3%	0%	0%
Source affected by protests	2.5%	6.8%	3.8%

Table 3: Percentage of source type per outlet

### 3.3.5 Press release or statement mentioned

All three outlets were equally as likely to quote or mention a press release or statement as a source of information in the story.

<b>Did the story quote/mention a press release or statement?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
No	63.2%	63.3%	61.7%
Yes	36.8%	36.7%	38.3%

Table 4: Percentage of press release use per outlet

### 3.3.6 Context provided

All three outlets were likely to provide minimal context (one or two short paragraphs), with around 60 to 65 per cent of context provided in paragraphs within a story. The *Globe and Mail* was most likely to publish entire stories that provide context to the conflict.

<b>What type of context does the story provide?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
Both paragraphs and graphics	1.8%	1.7%	4.9%
Entire story provides context to the conflict	19.3%	8.3%	11.1%
Graphics or other multimedia	0%	0%	19.8%
No context	14.0%	26.7%	3.7%
Paragraph(s) in the story	64.9%	63.3%	60.5%

Table 5: Percentage of context type per outlet

### 3.3.7 Tone

All three outlets were equally as likely to publish a story that was neutral or negative in tone. The *Toronto Star* was most likely to publish a solutions-focused story.

<b>What is the tone?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
Negative (negative implications)	35.1%	43.3%	34.6%
Neutral (reporting events)	63.2%	53.3%	54.3%

Positive (future/solutions focus)	1.8%	3.3%	11.1%
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Table 6: Percentage of tone per outlet

### 3.3.8 Terminology

All three outlets were most likely to use the terms ‘protesters’ or ‘protestors.’

<b>Terminology: Protestors or land defenders</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
Both	0%	0%	6.2%
Land Defenders	2.6%	0%	3.7%
No use of either term	34.2%	25.0%	23.5%
Other terminology	0.9%	1.7%	4.9%
Protestors	62.3%	73.3%	61.7%

Table 7: Percentage of terminology use per outlet

### 3.3.9 Mention of colonialism

The majority of coverage across all three outlets did not mention colonialism or any variation whatsoever.

<b>Does the article use the word colonial, colonialism, or another variation anywhere?</b>	<b>Globe and Mail</b>	<b>National Post</b>	<b>Toronto Star</b>
In a direct quote	3.5%	10.0%	9.9%
No	83.3%	78.3%	70.4%
Yes	13.2%	11.7%	19.8%

Table 8: Percentage of use of the word colonialism per outlet

### 3.3.10 Word count

All three outlets were likely to average around 800 to 900 words, with the *Toronto Star* having the highest word count.

<b>Outlet</b>	<b>AVERAGE of Word count</b>
Globe and Mail	899.56
National Post	883.82
Toronto Star	928.41

Table 9: Average word count per outlet

### **3.4 Discussion**

The following are the emergent themes based on the qualitative (and partially quantitative) data collected and detailed above. In subsequent chapters, these themes will be explored in relation to past academic work on Indigenous communities presented in the media (chapter four), and discussed with Indigenous experts who've engaged in similar media analysis (chapter five).

*3.4.1 Readers are presented with little information on how colonialism contributed to this conflict, and not much context in general.*

The topics often raised in stories covering the conflict included how the band councils approved the route for Coastal GasLink, how Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs faced pushback from their own community for opposing the pipeline, and the legal precedent for denying Wet'suwet'en land claims or implementing injunctions to remove land defenders. However, most articles fail to provide any detailed information about colonial history or the legal structures in place that would ultimately lead to a more thorough understanding of the conflict. As detailed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, educating Canadians about colonial and Indigenous history is a major step towards reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and one effort that would be worthwhile in this respect is to provide more information on the topic of colonization in the context of news articles. In these stories, readers are presented little or no background information on the Wet'suwet'en people's relationship between

band councils and hereditary chiefs, or how the Coastal GasLink conflict has amplified discussions around governance.

*3.4.2 Readers were more likely to be told how the blockades affected the country than what a solution would look like.*

Audiences are more likely to read stories about how the solidarity blockades have affected the country than they are about most other topics, particularly if they read the *Toronto Star*. Analysis articles or any context-providing articles, such as those that provide historical or legal background on the conflict, are less common than most other topics. News consumers would be far more likely to understand how the blockades affected ports, railways, small businesses, unions, and other parties, than why or how the hereditary chiefs came to oppose Coastal GasLink, or how the project received approval from 20 band councils before hereditary chiefs voiced their opposition.

*3.4.3 Readers were far more likely to see the opinions of columnists than they were to see an analysis or contextual article on the conflict.*

Opinion and editorial articles were the first, second and third highest article category at the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, respectively. Considering that readers are also less likely to be presented with the context and history of the conflict, opinion articles may contribute to a significant part of their understanding of the Coastal GasLink pipeline. Among the opinion articles published, there is generally a balance between those that are pro-Wet'suwet'en, anti-Wet'suwet'en, neutral or critical of the government, with the exception of the *National Post* which did not provide a single opinion piece supporting the position of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

*3.4.4 Readers were frequently told the rule of law must prevail over the blockades and hereditary law.*

A particularly frequent argument used in editorials, by politicians and other actors in the conflict is that ultimately, the rule of law must be upheld. Little context is provided as to how colonial systems of law have affected Indigenous communities, or why hereditary law is not seen as a valid legal defense in this conflict. This rule of law argument has come up in previous coverage of Indigenous topics throughout history and is often used to discredit their stance or actions (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The *National Post* most frequently utilized this argument, and the *Globe and Mail* also used this multiple times. It appeared in the *Toronto Star* as well, with one notable entry by the Star Editorial Board titled, “In the end, the courts must prevail over protests” (Star Editorial Board, 2020). This phenomenon will be further examined in chapter four.

*3.4.5 It is suggested to readers that the most important voice in the conflict was that of the government.*

Whose voices are most important to hear from in articles about the conflict? Who has the opportunity to share their side of the story through an interview or otherwise? One opinion piece states that coverage has been skewed in favour of the ‘minority’ Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs, while the opinions of those in favour of the pipeline have not been heard. This is verifiably untrue – the only voice who is heard more than others is government officials. This source type was highly quoted across all three outlets, with the *Globe and Mail* being the only outlet that did not prioritize government officials as sources overall. However, all three outlets had government officials ranked as the highest percentage of first sources in a story.

Now that the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict has been analyzed, and themes have emerged, the following chapter will compare the findings with past analyses on similar topics to understand how mainstream media's portrayal of Indigenous communities has changed or stayed the same, from past to present.

## **Chapter 4: Drawing historical comparisons**

In chapter two we explored the history of media coverage of Indigenous communities and the issues they face, particularly in moments of conflict with the government. More specifically, we looked at conflict between the government and Indigenous communities as represented by the news media. Two main topics arose from this: First, that Indigenous communities have often been represented by the media as the ‘other,’ existing outside of ‘mainstream’ societal interests and working only to benefit themselves. This representation is a by-product of colonization. Some argue that legacy media ultimately contributed to the colonization of what we now know as Canada. Traditional media first came to exist and represent the interests of settlers, as well as setting themselves up as a trusted source of information as early as the purchase of Rupert’s Land in 1869 (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Second, the ‘us versus them’ narrative very clearly arose because of colonization and persisted in some form or another for more than a century in news coverage. This was in part because of the very real conflict happening at the inception of Canada between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. One way to advance colonial interests was to portray Indigenous people as stereotypes including irresponsible, savage, reliant on government and more (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

Exploring how framing and representation shifted and evolved over more than 150 years led to chapter three, in which we examined one of the most recent conflicts with one Indigenous community and the government – the Coastal GasLink conflict. Here, we see the multitude of ways three legacy outlets represented Indigenous people over the three months of January to March 2020 in which the conflict reached peak

coverage. While stereotypes about Indigenous people are no longer explicitly communicated by these news outlets, similar misrepresentations certainly occur in the coverage, which we will discuss in detail in this chapter. I will also look further into the lack of context within journalistic articles discussed throughout this thesis and how it contributes to the poor portrayal of Indigenous communities.

This chapter aims to make connections between past analysis and literature about Indigenous representation in the media, specifically as it relates to conflict. While chapter two surveyed the overall progression of media representation, this chapter will look more specifically at the past 30 years as well as the outlets we analyzed in chapter three (*Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*), with the purpose of understanding how representations have evolved or remained the same. We will be able to see what trends have persisted over the past few decades and what has changed or improved in news coverage of conflict with Indigenous communities. The main question that will be answered in this chapter is, “How has established media organizations’ reporting evolved over the past few decades to reflect instances of Indigenous conflict in the news?”

#### **4.1 Prioritizing voices**

Chapter three concluded that the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict suggested to readers that the voice of the government was the most important. That is because of all source types, on average, government sources were quoted higher than any other type. In learning and conducting journalism, reporters are typically taught whose comments would be more valuable for a contribution to an article. This can include a wide range of individuals, such as experts who can comment on an issue from a distance,

those affected by the issue at hand and those responsible for what's happening, are often the most likely to be found in a story. But there are other factors that affect who journalists speak to, which can range from whether a reporter has a connection with a source and can reach out to them in a moment's notice, to how easy it is to get an interview with a person. In the case of the Coastal GasLink conflict, government representatives from federal to municipal levels, were commenting frequently and publicly about the situation in British Columbia from across the nation. This included provincial premiers, the prime minister and government sources who were appointed as the spokesperson on conversations with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

With highly publicized communication from government officials during the conflict, it's no surprise that these sources were the most highly quoted and consulted in a story. If we look at other instances of analysis on government conflict with Indigenous communities, it can be observed that reliance on government sources has become even more commonplace. These types of sources were the most highly quoted in coverage about drinking water security (Lam et al., 2017) and other resource development (Walker et al., 2019). The response from the government was a topic highlighted frequently in media coverage not directly related to conflict with Indigenous communities and government as well, such as Idle No More, which was a social justice movement rather than explicit conflict (Chen, 2019) and the topic of missing and murdered Indigenous women (Drache et al., 2016; Gilchrist, 2010).

Content analyses conducted in recent history about media coverage of Indigenous communities suggest that government sources are consulted as authoritative voices who can speak and act on the issue at hand. Often these sources are being asked what action

they will take to resolve the conflict or issue. This creates the perception that the government is the active participant in the conflict who has the power to fix the situation. Indigenous land defenders and their supporters were often reported on but are often not consulted on the same points the government is consulted on – for example, what their stance is, what is best for their community, and how they might work towards a resolution.

As we saw in chapter two and confirmed in chapter three, the Canadian government is situated not only as a source of official knowledge, but also as the highest and most authoritative source. They can right wrongs and take action when the non-Indigenous Canadian public is unhappy with the actions of Indigenous communities in times of conflict. However, in a conflict such as the one surrounding the Coastal GasLink pipeline, the idea that Canadian officials are the most relevant source of information also reinforces the idea that this form of government is the most valid. The Coastal GasLink conflict at its most basic, was a conflict regarding who held ownership over the land and who could make decisions about how it gets used. Consulting Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and their supporters, as well as the long history of colonization in Canada, we could find an opposing point of view – that hereditary law is the prevailing form of governance. By consulting Canadian officials over all other source types, readers are presented with the message that these sources have the correct information, that only they can take action to correct the situation and most importantly, to understand the conflict from the perspective of the Canadian government. In chapter five, we will explore this idea further with experts, academics and critics.

## 4.2 The rule of law

There is nothing more important than being lawful, according to the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict. The three legacy outlets examined were very likely to tell readers that ultimately, the rule of law (that is, Canadian law) must prevail. This acts as an excellent example of the simplification of a complex issue. At the very heart of the conflict was a struggle between Canadian law and hereditary law, in which Canadian law almost always intrinsically assumed the superior rule. One article by the *Toronto Star* editorial board communicates this message better than most, titled “In the end, the courts must prevail over protests” (Star Editorial Board, 2020).

Interestingly, the framing of the rule of law often did not consider the long history of colonialism in Canada, opting instead to, in many cases, imply that Canada’s legal system was the prevailing authority. However, other segments of coverage were focused on hereditary law, band councils, and Canadian law contradicting one another. These two types of coverage – one part that assumes Canadian law prevails, and the other that dissects the complex legal debates around land use – contradict one another. Within the coverage itself we can point out how assuming Canadian rule of law prevails over all else is flawed, because the outlets themselves have pointed out this is not true in the case of the Coastal GasLink conflict. Canadian law is intrinsically linked to the founding of Canada (the process of colonization), and we can see examples of this as far back as 1866. Indigenous people were denied the right to pre-empt land in 1866 (also known as homesteading) unless they received written consent from the Governor of the colony (Harding, 2006). There is much proof and a lengthy history of, for lack of a better word, forcing Canadian law onto Indigenous communities in Canada. This also includes the

legacy of treaties in which Indigenous people were forced, in some cases, to give over their land to the Canadian government (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Even in Wet'suwet'en territory, where the land is considered unceded, the company behind Coastal GasLink as well as the Canadian government, and the band council itself, assumed that band councils, a group of Indigenous individuals elected under the format of The Indian Act to represent their communities, had the authority over all Wet'suwet'en territory (George-Kanentiio, 2020).

During the Oka Crisis, mainstream media also positioned Indigenous people in conflict with the government as lawbreakers and nuisances who had no legal rights to defend their position (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Again, we see patterns displayed through media coverage of a superior colonial perspective – that the Canadian government is right to set the rules and that there is no room for debate, regardless of what history says on the issue. Only in some opinion articles was this notion ever deconstructed (Starblanket & Green, 2020; Wilson-Raybould, 2020).

### **4.3 Opinion and analysis**

We also saw in chapter three that through categorization on the websites of the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, opinion and editorial coverage was produced in nearly equal amounts to news coverage, and far more frequently than any analysis coverage. This shows that contexts – also known as background and historical links to wider issues such as colonization (Callison & Young, 2020) – are very limited in the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict. Analysis articles typically provided far more context, background, history and discussion around the issue at hand

than opinion or news articles. Opinion articles are a popular category throughout recent analyses of media coverage, including during Idle No More (Chen, 2019), recent coverage of renewable energy (Walker et al., 2019), general Indigenous protest (Baker & Verrelli, 2017) and the topic of missing and murdered Indigenous women (Drache et al., 2016).

Most notable is the way in which facts were presented in opinion articles. One article in the *Globe and Mail* claims that we aren't hearing from the "voices that really matter" (Mason, 2020). In the opinion of the author, these voices are Indigenous people who support the pipeline, whose economic future depends on money generated from the Coastal GasLink pipeline (Mason, 2020). While sources who were either members of the band council from Wet'suwet'en territory or general Indigenous supporters of the pipeline were quoted less than most other source types – opinion articles against the stance of the hereditary chiefs far outnumber those in support. Additionally, significant space was given to stories that fit into article topics that focused on the disagreement between band council and hereditary chiefs, as well as the effects and potential future effects the blockades could have on the country. So, the idea that this perspective isn't being presented isn't entirely true. One article in particular from the same outlet exemplifies the economic opportunity being presented to the band council, and why hereditary chiefs would oppose this influx of money (Jang & Stueck, 2020).

Opinion articles can sometimes reflect the opinions of the public in the same way that letters to the editor do, although there are key differences. Opinion articles are typically written by individuals with vested interests in the topic they are writing about, or by people with some level of expertise on a subject. Letters to the editor can be written

by anyone, although editorial decisions still play a part in which letters get published in a newspaper or on a digital platform, but they are not edited. In either case, they would fall into the opinion category. We see themes emerging in reflecting on the analysis here as we saw in letters to the editor regarding the Oka Crisis: That Indigenous peoples are acting for themselves, are breaking the law and are seen as a nuisance (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Tying into the past two sections, robust amounts of opinion articles against the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief standpoint, reflect what settler-Canada believes to be 'normal life.' This refers to the status quo – the institutionalization, repetition and constant practice of colonialism (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

The status quo includes the idea that there is no other valid form of law or governance, that settler Canadians are of the opinion that activists are breaking the law by preventing the pipeline project from moving forward and that the most important voice is those Indigenous people who show support for 'normal life' (otherwise not disrupted by conflict) (Harding, 2006). One particularly notable observation on opinion articles is that they reinforce the 'us versus them' narrative – there is no other solution or perspective than this one viewpoint with two sides – either Indigenous people are lifted out of poverty by investing in projects like Coastal GasLink, or they defend the environment and do not advocate for the monetary wealth of their community. Coverage, particularly that included in opinion articles, can lack nuance and focus on only this single viewpoint and its two sides.

Canadians may be “surprised, even shocked” to discover that journalism’s representation of Indigenous peoples has not changed much since as early as 1869 (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 267; Ronson, 2008). Colonialism did, and still does to

this day contribute to the issues and conflicts of Indigenous people and the government, yet legacy media has made very little improvement to how well it links coverage back to this reality – back to this context.

#### **4.4 Whose struggle is most prioritized?**

The content analysis concluded that there was more coverage on how the blockades in support of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs would affect the Canadian economy than there was about the point of view of the hereditary chiefs themselves, along with their supporters. This raises a wider, more difficult question to answer. Whose point of view, as portrayed through legacy media coverage, mattered? Stories about things that had not yet happened, such as the breaking down of supply chains because of the blockades, or the halting of the construction of the pipeline costing thousands of dollars and jobs lost (Simmons, 2021), appeared to be more important than analysis and context. The content analysis demonstrated this as outlets produced 8 to 21 per cent of stories about how blockades could affect the country, versus far less on historical or analysis articles. These types of in-depth contextual stories could have provided readers with a better understanding of the complex situation. To understand why, we must look beyond just who was included in the story, but the actual topic of the story.

While Indigenous voices could be included in some coverage, inclusion alone does not necessarily mean the viewpoint of any Indigenous community as a whole is being presented (Ronson, 2008). The coverage overwhelmingly presumed to understand why the hereditary chiefs and their supporters took the action they did but did little to consult these sources in the process. Contextual legal and historical articles, analyses,

profiles on Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and land defenders, and editorial opinion pieces were not produced in high quantities.

In a similar fashion to coverage in previous decades, Indigenous voices in the Coastal GasLink conflict were incorporated in articles through the methods highlighted by Harding: deflection, decontextualization, misrepresentation and tokenization (Harding, 2006, p. 225). These sources often commented on an issue and were used to elicit doubt over the legitimacy of the hereditary chiefs. They were usually found through voices opposed to the hereditary chiefs – for example, band council members who supported the pipeline. Similarly to coverage of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Indigenous voices were featured when there was emotional resonance, such as financial or environmental loss (Drache et al., 2016). Indigenous media producers have previously raised concern with the idea that representation within an article does not necessarily mean that a diverse range of viewpoints from Indigenous people in Canada are portrayed, and that often in hard news stories which make up a large portion of Coastal GasLink coverage, Indigenous voices are lost to official sources (Burrows, 2018).

This examination demonstrated that Indigenous peoples' current issues and struggles were less prioritized than those perceived problems for Canada as a whole. Sensationalism of the news has been highly critiqued by the public and often accused of a tactic to sell papers and more recently, digital platform subscriptions or clicks, by feeding into a culture of fear (Martin, 2018). While news creation does in some cases warrant an examination of what's to come, we see coverage during the Coastal GasLink conflict telling stories of potential backed up ports with supplies, diminished oil transportation, commuters unable to reach their destinations and even profiles on small businesses whose

profits may be affected in the future. This level of sensationalized coverage is the impetus for further discussion in chapter five.

#### **4.5 Colonialism, colonization**

All three outlets mentioned colonialism or another variation of the word less than 20 per cent of the time in an article. Colonialism is of particular interest when it comes to the Coastal GasLink conflict because it is deeply linked to the struggle at hand.

Reflecting on Canada's history as well as contemporary discourse around Indigenous issues, colonialism can almost always be linked to conflict. The country's colonization situated Indigenous people as a problem to be dealt with – as we've discussed in this chapter, the 'other.' Through dispossession of Indigenous land by treaties, excluding them from land pre-emption as previously mentioned, as well as cultural assimilation in the form of residential schools and other institutions, the history of colonization contributes to much of Indigenous issues today (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006). This is through systemic oppression, meaning that Canada as a country has always aimed to make sure Indigenous peoples did not have the same rights as settler Canadians, and this history of oppression has continued to affect Indigenous peoples today. One such issue is their rights over the land, as treaties play a major part in land claims. In cases like Coastal GasLink which wanted to use unceded land (an area in which a treaty was not signed), the legality of this use becomes even more unclear without one singular guiding document. The legacy of colonization also imposed the band council system as a form of government for Indigenous communities through the Indian Act. The Coastal GasLink conflict was inextricably linked to colonization, and yet the analysis of the

previous chapter found the outlets did not mention even the word colonialism, or some form of the word, in most articles.

Similarly, Idle No More represented more than just a flashpoint in Indigenous contemporary activism and was equally, if not more, explicitly linked to a broader push back against colonial structures in Canada:

While Idle No More clearly represents an important inflection point in the history of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian setting, it is crucial to situate the protest in the broader context of ongoing Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism.

Indeed, as Adam Barker (2015, 49) argues, “Idle No More should not be dismissed as a name or as a movement but rather should be discussed as one particularly effective set of efforts to innovate and revitalize Indigenous traditions of resistance in Canada.” Similarly, for Wotherspoon and Hansen (2013, 23), Idle No More represents “an awakening to re-engage in the ages-old resistance against colonialism and imperialism.” (Baker & Verrelli, 2017, p.41)

With little mention of colonialism, how are readers of legacy news otherwise presented with the broader issues or specific context about the reality of Indigenous communities? A structural flaw of journalism emerges: talking about what happens only as it happens, rather than deconstructing history and the factors that contribute to the conflict outside of the events of the day, is misrepresentation by omission (Callison & Young, 2020).

When discussing missing and murdered Indigenous women, we can see that Indigenous media actually does bring up colonization more frequently as one of the root causes of the issues faced by Indigenous people today. In the conclusion of this thesis, we

will further discuss the possibilities presented by Indigenous and new media (Drache et al., 2016). In the same discussions, the mainstream media was more likely to separate Indigenous issues from colonialism as a whole, making no mention of the ways in which the history of colonization has led to the contemporary issues Indigenous people face today (Drache et al., 2016).

#### **4.6 Counter narratives**

Perhaps the brightest beacon of hope for evolving coverage is the counter narrative. This form of coverage, most often expressed outside of mainstream media, has slowly made its way into an institution that has historically excluded the perspective of Indigenous people. Counter narratives, or opposing views to the mainstream, emerged in several ways, showing slow progress in the way Canadian news consumers are representing Indigenous communities.

Counter narratives first show up in opinion articles. While the *National Post* produced no opinion articles that could be classified as supportive of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, the *Globe and Mail* produced nearly twice as many opinion pieces, and the *Toronto Star* produced an equal amount compared to articles against the hereditary chief's stance. This perspective was allowed some space in the editorial section of these three news outlets and signifies small change when it comes to deciding who gets to voice their opinion in the debate around the pipeline conflict.

Explanatory coverage and a focus on providing more context (legal, historical and cultural explanation) within a story could be considered a sign of outlets hoping to provide readers with a better understanding of the story overall. This took up a relatively

significant chunk of overall coverage, with analysis, legal and historical articles making up 7 per cent to 15 per cent of coverage. This number is still significantly lower than other areas of coverage, and these differences are greater discussed through interviews in chapter five.

Considering what is excluded from the coverage is perhaps just as significant as considering what was included, and can certainly signify what is deemed newsworthy by mainstream media (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). In this regard, not only is there no commentary on certain subjects within the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict, but there were also no counter narratives being formed in these areas. For example, both the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* produced little or no articles in the business or analysis sections. The categorization of articles demonstrates how these outlets classify the conflict and what angles they approach it from. It's interesting then, that a conflict so widely discussed as having the potential to affect Canada's economy would not in any way qualify as business news, or that with such complex legal arguments being discussed, it would not warrant a deeper analysis.

Finally, while the topic of this research focuses solely on one conflict from one moment in time, counter narratives can emerge from outside of this analysis. For example, if colonialism and its contemporary effect on Indigenous people is a topic that is covered in some legacy media articles, that could be considered pushing back against some of the narratives seen in this analysis. However, an article like that would not have appeared in this analysis because it does not specifically mention Coastal GasLink or the Wet'suwet'en people. However, we know that Indigenous communities are often underrepresented in the media outside of conflict in general. One report in Ontario alone

showed a 61 per cent increase in Indigenous-related content during Idle No More, while coverage outside of this time from the previous year reached only 0.23 per cent of overall news stories (Pierro et al., 2013). So, while we may see a select few articles pushing back on the narratives perpetuated in the Coastal GasLink coverage, it isn't an overwhelming amount and would still only be a small percentage of what we can consider a 'counter narrative' to the themes of the coverage during the Coastal GasLink conflict.

#### **4.7 The Bad Indian**

One final observation was the concept of the 'Bad Indian.' If one concept were to permeate all analyses of media coverage on Indigenous peoples, the 'Bad Indian' would be it (Baker & Verrelli, 2017; Drache et al., 2016; Harding, 2006). This concept includes, but also moves beyond, traditional stereotypes. The 'Bad Indian' is negatively framed in a story and is portrayed as causing problems. As we've already seen, the negative framing of a large portion of stories in the Coastal GasLink pipeline, as well as historical stereotypes, has demonstrated that this framing of Indigenous stories has persisted throughout history. The concept of the 'Bad Indian' also implies the existence of the 'Good Indian' (Harding, 2006). In understanding the good versus bad narrative implied by this concept, we can look to the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* for further insight. Both outlets included a relatively significant number of sources from the band council in Wet'suwet'en territory and dedicated seven per cent of their overall coverage to the disagreement between band council members and hereditary chiefs regarding whether they should allow the pipeline to be built (band council members were portrayed as in support of this notion) or not (hereditary chiefs opposed). This idea of the 'Bad

Indian' permeates the public conscience through not only news media coverage but also popular culture. We can see portrayals of historically stereotypical Indigenous people in Hollywood movies and Blockbuster flicks that additionally contribute to the greater concept of Indigenous people as 'other' (King, 2012). Thus, the news media is simultaneously influenced by, and contributing to societal misconceptions of Indigenous people.

In a conflict which already included confusion about the governance structures of Indigenous communities, as well as little to no context about how colonialism contributes to these governance structures or land claims, both outlets chose a portion of their coverage to dedicate to disagreement from within the Wet'suwet'en community. This coverage trickled through into opinion articles claiming that it was the Wet'suwet'en people who would be most significantly harmed by the loss of money and jobs that would result from the construction. Again, we can revisit the idea of only one point of view with two arguments: two sides of the coin (in support or against) and two opposing groups on either side of the argument. The band council members, most explicitly in opinion articles, were portrayed as the 'Good Indian' and the hereditary chiefs the 'Bad Indian.' It appears there are only two options presented in the coverage: that either the Wet'suwet'en people can be provided with a level of economic security through a pipeline project, or that they can deny this security and advocate for the protection of their land. There is a third way to tell this story, and it focuses on a wider, contextual topic that factors in the history of colonization. Why can Indigenous people not want both the protection of their land and their communities to experience prosperity? Why are those mutually exclusive?

#### **4.8 What has changed?**

Unfortunately, we can see many similar patterns in coverage over the past few decades. Not only that but looking back to the beginning of Canada's media landscape as early as 1863, we can observe how stereotypes and narratives have not necessarily changed, but shifted. The media early in its inception portrayed Indigenous people as weak, reliant on government and savage (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). These stereotypes, some may argue, assisted in the following 300 years of Indigenous oppression through colonization – justifying treaties, assimilation, residential schools, the child welfare system and mass incarceration. Contemporary Canadian mainstream media, at least in the context of the Coastal GasLink conflict, ignores these past transgressions, provides no context to how colonization has contributed to Canada's past actions. It also does not provide nuanced discussions surrounding the economic conditions of Indigenous communities or how treaties and Canadian law ultimately contributed to the complex debate surrounding governance of land, and rarely allows space for counter narratives to take root.

Positioning Canadian law as superior, those who call themselves activists and land defenders as protestors taking illegal action and portraying hereditary governance as lesser than democratic governance only works to continue to perpetuate these stereotypes, although the phrasing may have changed. Perhaps through many years these stereotypes have become a reality in the unconscious minds of Canadian journalists and institutions. In the following chapter, four media academics and critics will discuss why these

viewpoints are so deeply ingrained in news, what the solutions might be, and how the findings of this analysis align with their own work.

## **Chapter 5: Community input**

In previous chapters, I set out to evaluate how Indigenous communities and their issues have been historically represented by the media. Following this survey of literature, we analyzed the Coastal GasLink conflict to better understand how the Wet'suwet'en community, and to some extent the greater population of Indigenous peoples in Canada, were represented in the three-month period of coverage from January to March of 2020. Many connections surfaced between how Indigenous communities have been portrayed previously and how they were portrayed during the Coastal GasLink conflict. We highlighted the stereotypes and common arguments that have led to an overall poor and misrepresentative picture of Indigenous communities both generally and in mainstream news media coverage during conflict with the government.

In this chapter, experts, academics and news media critics are presented with the findings of chapter three's content analysis, in order to gain their professional perspective and to hopefully connect it back to their own professional work and personal experiences. This chapter also explores with interviewees how journalism should aim to evolve or change to produce better portrayals of Indigenous communities and the issues they face in mainstream news media. Therefore, the overall aim of this chapter is to answer the question, "In light of the findings, how should journalists understand their reporting and what methods should evolve or change?" This question focuses on journalists overall, but the comments in this chapter focus mainly on journalism as it is practiced in mainstream legacy newsrooms, and the conventions of journalism taught in journalism schools across Canada.

## **5.1 Methodology**

Like in journalism, interviewees in research can provide comment on findings, ask questions about professional and personal experiences and sharing numerous opinions to draw conclusions on a topic. For that purpose, interviewing here adapts a similar model. The four individuals are academics, journalists and critics on the topic of mainstream news and Indigenous portrayals. These individuals will be identified further in the chapter. After they agreed to be interviewed, they were sent a brief on the findings of the content analysis and asked to read it through prior to their interview time.

Most interviewing done in reporting as well as the interview process used for this chapter, is a type of qualitative research interview called the semi-structured, in-depth interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview typically consists of several pre-planned questions (see Appendix B for the entire list of questions), but leaves room for the interviewer to follow up on answers and ask questions that were prompted during the interview. This method of interviewing also leaves room for more discussion between both parties, the sharing of additional information about the research findings and constructive conversations about topics that weren't thought of before the interview. The nature of these interviews means there is rarely quantitative measure of how many times something was repeated in response to a question, but rather its purpose is to connect the overarching themes of the interview responses and provide space for knowledgeable voices to share greater understandings of the research presented in previous chapters.

The four interviewees all agreed to share their knowledge and expertise for the purpose of this research and agreed to be identified by their name and associations as many of their comments stem from their personal and professional backgrounds. The first

interviewee was Karyn Pugliese, who at the time of the Coastal GasLink conflict had just left her role as the executive director of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) national news. She was a Neiman Fellow at Harvard University, where she conducted research on the media's role in reconciliation. Currently, Pugliese is a visiting professor at Ryerson University, and is an Algonquin citizen of the Pikwàkanagàn First Nation.

The second interview was conducted with Robert Harding, who has been doing research relating to global Indigenous communities for decades, and some of his work has aided my analysis. He first got involved in this type of research when he noticed a disconnect between the reality of Indigenous communities living in Quebec, and the public perception versus the reality of their living conditions. These two ideas were deeply misaligned, and he began examining the media's role in perpetuating damaging and divisible myths about Indigenous peoples. He is currently a professor at the School of Social Work and Human Services at the University of the Fraser Valley.

Carmen Robertson, co-author of *Seeing Red*, a book that has been a foundational text in the formation of this thesis, also agreed to be interviewed. In 2018, she joined Carleton University as the Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in North American Indigenous Art History and Visual Culture. She is a Scottish-Lakota art historian, and first began examining representations of Indigenous people in popular culture during her time writing her dissertation. When she realized there was no substantial book written on Canadian media and its representation of Indigenous communities, her and Mark Cronlund Anderson decided to write *Seeing Red*.

Taiaiake Alfred was the final interview conducted for this chapter, and is an internationally recognized Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) professor and scholar. He is currently working as a political consultant and advisor to First Nations leaders. When we spoke he shared his new mandate for the next few years, which was to focus on community engagement and issues surrounding restoring traditional governance in Indigenous communities he works with.

## **5.2 Identifying common problems in coverage**

Multiple sources identified the overall structure, the perceived ideology and representation within the mainstream media as issues leading to poor portrayals of Indigenous communities and the issues they face. With me, they discussed the conclusions of chapter three's content analysis, and the interviewees spoke about how the topics identified in the analysis are echoed in overall mainstream media coverage. Many of the findings about the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict resonated with the interviewees. They noted most areas of the findings were unsurprising, and typically appeared in coverage of conflict with Indigenous communities and government, and in some cases overall mainstream media coverage of Indigenous peoples. The points made by the interviewees aim to increase the understanding of how and why positive portrayals are lacking in traditional news coverage.

## **5.3 Key issues in mainstream media coverage**

The major takeaway from speaking with the interviewees about how Indigenous people were represented in mainstream news media was that poor coverage is mainly a

result of the lack of context and how Indigenous stories are framed. Mainstream news rarely makes connections between conflicts, meaning that the audience is presented with little information about how one affects the other, or the purpose of Indigenous activism is not explained in depth if at all. Additionally, coverage generally does not explain the historical, colonial background of a conflict. It leaves audiences with the impression that the Coastal GasLink conflict was an isolated dispute, detached from larger issues – for example, a Canadian history of not respecting Indigenous land title, rights and treaties. Pugliese summarizes this idea:

“You look at the rights that Indigenous people should have resolving land claims...It's really not covered as though people actually believe that Indigenous people own the land that they're on. So, you do still get a lot of what I think is a false balance.”

False balance is a term often discussed in journalism spheres. It relates back to the structure of journalism, and the idea that there are always two sides to every story. Reporting often operates by asking one side for their stance on an issue, and then asking the other side for their opposing stance. When this format is followed, no context is provided in the story to suggest any other potential cause or solution outside of what those two parties have said. This creates a false balance by presenting two opinions as equally correct and reduces an issue to a conflict between two sides. A classic example of this relates to climate change. We know from scientific research that climate change is undebatable and that it is objectively happening. But if we follow the two-sided format, we see that asking two opposing parties about their point of view creates a debate about environmental issues when the fact that climate change is happening is not debatable.

Pugliese is drawing a similar comparison to Indigenous rights in Canada, which are often underplayed in mainstream coverage because the audience is not presented with the reality of what Indigenous rights are in Canada – for example, that they have legal rights in the country under treaty agreements.

Carmen Robertson says poor coverage sometimes falls to editorial teams who make decisions about what and how something can be covered rather than individual journalists writing the stories. Editorial decisions about what stories to cover, their length and the angle are decided at an editorial level, and these decisions set the tone for how the article will turn out. They also may pitch stories that would otherwise turn out to be an excellent representation of Indigenous peoples, but the editorial decisions may not allow it the length or time it would need:

“Journalists are sent off on very particular stories and they're not getting the really meaty, high-end stories. They're getting pigeonholed into where they may create some really good stories, but they're not profiled at the highest levels necessarily.”

In the case of the Coastal GasLink conflict, the media question always seemed to be about whether the pipeline would get built, ultimately separating the story into one of two viewpoints. These two viewpoints were either for or against the pipeline, and ultimately meant that other points of view were ignored and not covered. Long-form, deeply historical or contextual articles don't often appear in mainstream news. To include multiple sources, look at documents and explain treaties would create more room to portray Indigenous communities and the issues they face in a factual manner. A longer, more contextualized story would minimize the chances that Indigenous people are misrepresented in the media (Callison & Young, 2020).

Robert Harding shares another binary he notices – it wasn't just for or against the pipeline (Indigenous people versus the government), but also the environmental protection versus economic stimulation argument, again splitting the conversation into two sides:

“[The coverage of Coastal GasLink meant] Canadians kind of have to decide whether we want to support people who are engaged in ‘illegal protest activities’ – basically they are breaking the law and putting our economy in danger. Or do we want to throw our weight behind responsible corporations who have really good environmental plans?”

This dichotomy is created at the highest level of news operations, and then trickles down into the stories that are assigned to journalists, as Robertson previously mentioned. It then presents itself through story selection – such as stories asking about what could happen if the blockades continue, how Canadians will be affected overall, looking at what it would mean for the pipeline to not be built and even into the terminology that was used to represent Indigenous activists and their supporters, like protestor rather than land defender, advocate or activist, according Pugliese and Harding.

But who is making these decisions? At the highest level, we know there is very little diversity among executives and senior editorial staff within newsrooms. 81.9 per cent of supervisory roles are held by white individuals (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021). Pugliese explains why this is a problem:

“You've got media that is thinking of its audience as people like itself. And we know that there's very little diversity in the decision-making. So you still have a lot of sort of boomer, white males looking out and saying, ‘how does this affect

my audience of boomer, white males? What will they want to know about the story?' And not thinking about serving the actual community that they're covering.”

When it comes to a solution though, most interviewees agreed that diversity alone is not enough to shift legacy newsrooms to think differently about the way they cover communities. Taiaiake Alfred specified that hiring Indigenous journalists means hiring individuals typically living in the cities where outlets are located and can generally already fit into the institution and meet expectations that are also assigned to non-Indigenous individuals. This doesn't mean that those journalists can't have a uniquely Indigenous perspective on the way they approach newsgathering, but a handful of individuals can't represent the extremely diverse range of experiences Indigenous peoples in Canada have.

Ultimately, digital mainstream media aims to attract wide audiences and increase the amount of people who view a story. The three outlets we looked at in the content analysis are all for-profit businesses (which we will discuss further later in the chapter), and Robertson mentions that mainstream news likely realizes, or assumes, that long context-heavy stories aren't the best way to achieve this goal:

“That's really connected to the discourse of fear that mainstream media evokes and provokes, and it uses it to sell news because if it isn't edgy, if it doesn't scare you, then you're probably not going to continue to pay for that new service because you'll go to deeper contextual, more thoughtful sources of news. The discourse of fear is very much present and has always been present in mainstream media.”

Ultimately, Robertson is saying that readers are more likely to click on articles that provoke an instant emotion in them and to consciously seek out less provocative articles that provide more detail. In this way, legacy media plays on emotion to garner clicks rather than providing more thoughtful, longform articles that readers may seek elsewhere.

Another argument is based on the lack of context and coverage as it relates to fear-based articles, particularly in the case of Indigenous issues being covered in mainstream news. As we know from the content analysis, colonialism is rarely even mentioned in the coverage of the Coastal GasLink conflict. The idea that outlets want to reach the widest audience and appeal to their interests means writing for a group of people that in some ways, fundamentally disagree with the goal of Indigenous resistance. Alfred explains:

“It shows that the journalists are still rooted in a perspective that colonial – or whether or not you call it colonial, sort of liberal capitalism – is at its centre point. They're not doing really objective journalism. They're looking at it from the perspective of a Canadian who values the current flows of power and money and goods and all that. In effect, they're coming at it from the mainstream that's concerned about disruptions [railroad blockades].”

In addition to the way context is (or isn't) presented in a story, the reader is also presented with a variety of sources in stories that are able to comment on the issue at hand. In the Coastal GasLink conflict, we saw government sources as the most quoted within mainstream news coverage. There are a variety of reasons that government sources could have been consulted the most. This could include a public duty to

communicate with reporters and the public, to having a wider availability to press conferences. But one can also see that Indigenous sources are often not given the same authority to comment within a story as other sources are. We hear far more authoritative updates on the situation from government sources than we do from Wet'suwet'en representatives. Yet Indigenous people are often not given the authority to comment on a topic that affects them in the same way journalists give authority to government, according to Pugliese:

“Are we talking to Indigenous people? Are we giving them equal authority? Have we mentioned them in the way that puts them on equal footing so that we're not saying, ‘The prime minister stated First Nations people claim...’”

This brings us back to the format of journalism. Reporting on the daily news and updates typically happens within a day. Indigenous communities and their representatives are often not required in the same way government sources are to operate within that time frame, and sometimes do not have the same motivations to speak with the press. With small communities and limited resources, a team of public relations staff typically don't exist for Indigenous communities in the same way they do for government offices, Alfred explains:

“When I can tell you from previous involvements and on the ground, when a journalist calls, a lot of times, that's the last thing on their mind, returning that call. Because of the news cycle and the way [reporting] jobs are done, the government person will be right on it because they have a staff of 50 to be able to respond to requests. Then the one [Indigenous] person on the ground is not going to get to it. So that is the issue, where the perspective, just on the basis of

capacity, the government perspective and the corporate perspective get put out front.”

The belief that reporters should adapt to the needs of the people they’re reporting on is not new, and is echoed in other available resources on reporting in Indigenous communities (McCue, n.d.). The problem for mainstream news reporting is that providing more time to hear back from sources on a specific story breaks the daily news cycle that traditional news relies on. Again, we see another fundamental disagreement between what mainstream outlets must do to better report on Indigenous communities and how the model of journalism itself does not allow for this to happen.

Early in this research, we discussed the ways in which the legal framework – including the difference between recent injunctions as well as Supreme Court decisions and international law like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – of governance was up for debate. From international law, Canadian law, hereditary law, previous Supreme Court decisions and injunctions, the legality of the use of Wet’suwet’en land was highly complex. Yet in 500 words or less, in most cases, the legality was not a major focus of coverage relating to the Coastal GasLink pipeline. We see a simplification of a complex issue, but with more alarming implications as the interviewees describe. The outlets often assumed that Canadian law was the prevailing law. Through the coverage and its content, like sources, framings and editorial decisions, we saw examples of how the media perceived Canadian law as the only law (especially if it was a more recent decision, like prioritizing the mention of an injunction over a decades-old Supreme Court decision) (Star Editorial Board, 2020; *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 2001). Alfred elaborated on this idea:

“It’s a selective indication of the law. Looking purely at the law in terms of the criminal code and police action. Rather than ever emphasizing a broad picture of the fact that for example, organizations like the United Nations have said that Canada's in violation of international law and the way that it's treating Indigenous peoples in these types of disputes taking place on traditional territory. No mention of that kind of law, right? No mention of the fact that some of these things might be unconstitutional even with our own Constitution, even with the very limited protections for Indigenous peoples that we mentioned at the outset, even those are being violated.”

There might be an answer as to why these context and framing issues come up again and again in instances of coverage over Indigenous conflict, and the public and journalists alike may not want to hear the answer. All interviewees brought up how deeply ingrained colonialism is in Canadian culture, impacting every institution in the country. Mainstream media is an institution and it was founded as a result of the colonization of Canada (Anderson & Robertson, 2011). The Coastal GasLink conflict coverage demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding, which is the prevailing belief that colonialism is a thing of the past – that it does not affect decisions today. Yet, we know colonialism influences land claims such as the dispute during Coastal GasLink, from treaties to the Indian Act and band councils. Colonialism is rarely discussed as a contemporary issue when we reflect on how journalists and journalism institutions conduct their reporting. Harding calls this a “denial of racism”:

“The perspective is if we did anything bad, but so long ago, it doesn't matter anymore...that really is what characterized a lot of coverage now that, if there was racism, it's a historical artifact and not relevant today.”

Unlearning the assumptions Canadians have culturally adopted may be one key to improving coverage of Indigenous-government conflict and better representing Indigenous communities. Figuring out how we got to this place, and implying what can be done to untangle this web, is thoroughly explained by Robertson:

“I believe that there is a systemic culture that reproduces this imagery and representations again and again, and it's not something that is new to Canada. It's something that is actually a European construct that, as art historians, we look back and we see these images that were at the kernel of what we have here in Canada today being used to represent the ‘other’ – people of colour, the somebody, that is outside of your own cultural norm. Those applications of very stereotypical tropes are found in literature. They're found in film, they're found in fine art and they're found in popular culture. When Hollywood started to create film in the early 20th century, we saw this rampant uptake of stereotypical imagery, especially of Indigenous peoples.

“That quickly infiltrates people's understanding. And we see that then multiplied through Canadian discourse more recently. It just doesn't seem to go away, sadly. If you think about the way these colonial structures have been built and reproduced through education, public relations, through [public health], through, as you say, legacy newspapers, the National Film Board of Canada, which has really stepped away from that kind of representation but was very key in the early

20th century and creating a sense of what Canada was. So all of those things continue. We haven't gotten to the heart of that. So when a journalist from a mainstream media news outlet that does not have connections to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous communities writes a story, they bring all of that baggage that they learned in schools, that they saw in movies, that's all around them, and bring that to their stories. It's very difficult to extricate without education.”

#### **5.4 Finding solutions and improving representation**

The Truth and Reconciliation’s Calls to Action include a short section on the media’s role in addressing colonization and contributing to reconciliation. Call to action number 86 says,

We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. (2015, p.14)

As Robertson described, stereotypes about Indigenous peoples in Canada are so engrained in popular culture to the point where they are inextricably linked to how settler-Canadians identify Indigenous communities. Being uneducated does not act as an excuse for reporters and institutions to produce poor coverage regarding Indigenous conflict and resistance, but it certainly points to a fundamental problem with journalism overall.

I shared a personal anecdote with all interviewees while speaking with them. I've been a student of journalism, a reporter and a freelancer for nearly a decade. At the time of the interviews, I was approaching the end of my seventh year as a journalism student. It was only in my first semester of my master's degree that I was able to take a course relating to journalism to race and diversity, and the course was optional. Throughout my education I have never once been required, or even offered a course on Indigenous history or contemporary issues. All I have learned about Indigenous communities in Canada up until this point has been of my own volition, and most often done outside of university and media institutions. Yet Indigenous history and culture, as well as the misinterpretation and stereotyping of these communities is so deeply engrained within Canada. Pugliese, as a journalism professor herself, agreed that my experience was the norm at journalism schools across the country, with both journalism students and reporters alike never being taught about Canada's violent history and how it relates to Indigenous culture, contemporary issues and law:

“Canadian history, like most histories, is built on citizenship. That's the first reason that they want people to study history, so that they're good citizens. They believe in their country, they go out and vote and it reinforces the country. So Indigenous people are part of history only when they're contributing to that narrative of the great building of the great country of Canada. You will have those moments where Louis Riel gets mentioned, because he kind of represented Manitoba and the French. You have the fur trade mentioned because that was nation building, but you don't have any of the other stories of what's happening to Indigenous people over the years as part of that narrative, because it wouldn't be a

story of nation building. If you did, it would be of extortion or exploitation, right? People grow up with that narrative, and I think that's how it gets into the newspapers, because they're taught this way of thinking about their country and not taught of any of the facts that would counteract that narrative. And that narrative is not a true one. It's a nice story. It's a nice dream, but it's not what happened.”

Even when we are students of history, that history can often be a warped perception of what Canada's past really was. Learning how Indigenous people have been affected by colonization is key to understanding the issues they currently face, including the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict. When we look at Indigenous history since Canada's inception, we can see that colonialism has had a long and sordid history of disenfranchising Indigenous peoples to build the nation (Morin, 2020). Alfred observes that even saying the word colonialism undermines not only mainstream media as a trusted authority to disseminate information, but also the country of Canada as a whole – it completely disassembles everything we think to be true:

“The whole idea of Canada being called a colonial country, or even having a colonial history of course, is something that has been resisted in academics and media and government. It's still at the early stages. In 1996, there was a conference in Victoria and it was a public policy conference. They did a panel on what was called Aboriginal issues then. I was one of the speakers and after the conference, one of the other speakers said, ‘you're the only person who used the word colonialism and this whole conference.’ And that was in 1996. It's changed somewhat since then, but if you can think about it, it's been 20-something years,

almost 30 years. It's just started then where people started to kind of reckon with the idea, but until then it was just complete denial and just counterfactual positions on the part of Canadians, journalism, academia and in government. It's a trigger word for Canadians, you know? The journalists themselves might have a hard time accepting that they're colonial, that they're a colonizer because Canada's a colonial country and you're Canadian; you're a colonizer. Then maybe in the way they write the stories, they don't want to turn the reader off of turning the page, they want them to stay engaged and they don't want to get themselves labelled as a radical or a left-wing journalist by using the word colonizer.”

Returning to the idea that mainstream journalism outlets want eyes on the page (or digital page), one could reason that they don't want to say anything that isn't already normalized, and it's certainly true that the words colonial or colonizer are something that Canadian's may not want to be associated with. Diving even further into the idea that mainstream media outlets are nearly always owned by a corporate entity – and in the case of this analysis, all three outlets are owned by a corporation – and they have both business interests and editorial interests (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). While we may not be able to definitively say any mainstream outlet influences editorial decisions because they are a business who has its own monetary interests, Harding makes a similar observation:

“I would say that we're talking about huge corporations. And these huge corporations, especially when you're talking hedge funds, they have a lot of money invested in the petroleum industry. So this is not a conspiratorial analysis...In the grand scheme of things, in terms of the total output, you would

expect that output would tend to support resource development, such as petroleum industry activities and other types of resource development and basically creating an environment that makes it easy for corporations to maximize their profits. So low social programs and social services, low taxes, minimal government regulation. Everything that they write I see in that context. Each individual article of course can be different, can reflect something else, but in the grand scheme of things...what I've seen is that they tend to move in lock step with other huge corporations as they're connected to in the same world. In some cases they are actually profiting from the petroleum industry.”

Alfred also agrees with this observation:

“The increased corporate ownership of media and the consolidation of media into basically one daily newspaper in Canada now. That’s a huge factor, not only for obvious reasons of lack of diversity of opinion or political perspective, but the actual ties of these corporate entities to the projects to reporting on.”

One of the major limitations of this research so far has been a lack of analysis regarding how new media and Indigenous media, or any outlets that fall outside of the mainstream, have reported on the Coastal GasLink conflict. With different ownership and the ability to bend the format and structure of journalism, these changes have led to some progress in the way Indigenous communities are represented in their reporting, according to some of the interviewees. Whether a different model of journalism can contribute to different reporting outcomes will be further discussed in the next chapter, the conclusion to this thesis. Other literature so far has shown that ownership does play a part in how

well Indigenous communities can be portrayed in news coverage (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006).

## **5.5 Taking steps forward**

Envisioning journalism as a house, we can see the bricks that are used to build the institution of mainstream journalism. They include objectivity, story balance, authority, reporting for a wide audience, sharing breaking news and addressing issues that affect Canadians. Brick by brick, mainstream media is formed, but there are also holes that are not being filled. Indigenous history and culture are not being properly presented. Journalism as it exists now leaves little room to draw connections from story to story about how Indigenous conflicts are related. In discussion with interviewees, a major issue is that the people who build the house are coming with their own understanding of what it should look like and did not include some pieces that would allow Indigenous communities to live in the house. Not only that, but some of the building blocks deter Indigenous peoples from ever living there in the first place. Yet the house was built on their land. They have been there before the house was even built, and before the builders ever even arrived.

It might be a convoluted metaphor for media institutions in Canada, but the overall takeaway from the academics, experts and critics consulted in this chapter is that the institution of mainstream media does not typically create positive and thorough portrayals of Indigenous people. The impression is that the institution itself is thoroughly flawed, and to create something that would also properly contribute to the general public's understanding of Indigenous issues would mean, in many ways, going against

some of the ways media has been operating for decades, even centuries. It might seem like a bleak message, but there are some new media institutions and Indigenous outlets that are already revisioning what journalism can be.

Much of what individuals said here is reflective of the findings of chapter three and four's content analysis. With just three outlets examined, we can see only a snapshot of how Indigenous conflict is represented by mainstream media, but in almost every case, Pugliese, Harding, Robertson and Alfred echoed the sentiment that the findings were representative of a greater issue with mainstream media.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The media is a key contributor to the general public's understanding of the intricacies of a conflict. They interview opponents and collect thoughts and opinions and present the information how they believe is best, aiming to inform their audiences on the topic. The media is supposed to be an impartial third party able to gather all the facts and share them concisely. Yet with the Coastal GasLink conflict, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* all shared a very narrow, limited picture of what was actually happening, and neglected to explore how this conflict connected to the larger issues of colonialism in Canada and its long-lasting effect on Indigenous communities.

Nearly two years after the flurry of media coverage peaked in February 2020, in December 2021, the Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their supporters appeared again in articles. If you didn't notice the date, you might feel a bit of déjà-vu. Arrests on Wet'suwet'en land by RCMP sparked a new uptick in coverage from media outlets about the conflict (Partridge, 2021). The *National Post* started publishing opinion columns, mainly in opposition to hereditary chiefs and land defenders (National Post, 2021). Perhaps for one of the first times, a legacy media outlet (not one analyzed in this thesis, but rather CBC) published an article documenting Coastal GasLink's failure to fix environmental violations along the route of the pipeline (Trumpener, 2021).

What do the Indigenous peoples involved in this conflict want? Understanding their position is far less difficult than the results of the content analysis show it to be. If we opened up a couple books, we may be able to see their position. Perhaps "A future," which would be "predicated, in large part, on [Indigenous] sovereignty" (King, 2012, p. 193). In other words, the ability to make decisions for themselves and their futures, which

includes the future of their land. Indigenous resistance to the government is perhaps because of this lack of sovereignty, and the (largely settler-run) media pushes back because “the power of Indigenous lifeways and resistance has always surrounded settlers in North America, along with their tenuous claims to land and ownership” (Estes, 2019, p. 248).

Indigenous voices were hardly ever positioned as the voice of authority during the 2020 coverage – perhaps because if Indigenous peoples were seen as authoritative, the authority of settler Canada is fundamentally challenged, and is no longer the prevailing party over the land. Instead, we saw the government as the main source of authority and the most frequently quoted. The two perspectives presented in coverage weren’t really very different at all, but rather stemmed from a single question – why should, or shouldn’t, the pipeline be built? Even in this regard, there were few articles explaining why the Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs opposed the pipeline. If journalists and outlets made a more concerted effort to seek out Indigenous sources and educate themselves about Canada’s colonial history, we would hear more about the viewpoints readily available on the Unist’ot’en camp website:

Our people’s belief is that we are part of the land. The land is not separate from us. The land sustains us. And if we don’t take care of her, she won’t be able to sustain us, and we as a generation of people will die. (Huson, n.d., para. 1)

With a bit of hindsight, journalists everywhere can see environmental damage is well within the realm of possibility. Ultimately Indigenous people were framed as the opposition, the ‘them’ in the ‘us versus them.’ The aggressor – a stance legacy media has frequently used over the past century when covering Indigenous peoples (Anderson &

Robertson, 2011). While accusing Indigenous people of being savage is no longer something practiced in mainstream media, the stereotypes used have not necessarily changed, but only shifted. Only one party in the conflict was consistently labelled as taking illegal action, as working against something, and that was the Wet'suwet'en people and their supporters against the pipeline. Why was it not the government or the private interests behind Coastal GasLink being framed as 'against the environment?'

At best, legacy media outlets simply failed to provide an accurate portrayal of Indigenous communities and the issues they face because the reporting does not include context (Callison & Young, 2020). Context would mean sharing with readers the bigger picture. In the case of the Coastal GasLink conflict, that picture would include several missing components. First, the legal debate regarding who had the right to decide whether Wet'suwet'en land was used for the pipeline project – was it the band council, the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, the Canadian government or some combination of all these parties? The three outlets examined rarely dissected or even mentioned this aspect of the conflict in their news coverage, and when it was mentioned it appeared in opinion articles that often took an individual stance on who the deciding party should be. Articles often operated on the assumption that Canadian law was the most valid law. However, coverage outside of the legacy media outlets examined the legal frameworks in more detail, which is why we know the landmark Supreme Court case, *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, essentially recognized Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership jurisdiction over their traditional territory (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 2001; Woodside, 2021).

Second, almost all the coverage revolved around whether or not the pipeline should get built. After reading all the articles, I was left with one remaining thought. Why

did legacy media present only two options for the Wet'suwet'en people – either support the pipeline and gain economic prosperity, or resolve to protect their land, and in doing so forfeit that prosperity? There is a potential reality in which both environmental protection and economic prosperity can be realized. Canada's colonial history has left the greater public indoctrinated in such a way that it takes conscious effort to unlearn how our society speaks about Indigenous peoples and ignores the legacy of intergenerational trauma and policy that remains in place, leaving Indigenous communities at a continuous disadvantage. The Indian Act, residential schools and even as far back as homesteading, in which Indigenous peoples were denied citizenship and denied land (even though they were here first), all still contribute to contemporary Indigenous rights and issues. If legacy media fails to link conflicts such as the Coastal GasLink to Canada's history of ignoring and oppressing Indigenous peoples, or even fails to link it to other conflicts to share how Indigenous people continue to be environmental stewards and defend land that we all benefit from, how can readers possibly understand the current conflict?

Multiple academic and journalistic works have been produced to figure out how Indigenous people have been portrayed by legacy media over the past several decades. The overarching answer is that portrayals have ultimately been poor, and this assessment has not improved much in the present day. Rather, the portrayals have shifted from stereotyping to perhaps something more conspicuous, implying Indigenous people are responsible for their own misfortune and acting against Canadian law. It matters how Indigenous people are portrayed in the legacy outlets because it contributes to something greater than itself. As Carmen Robertson detailed in chapter five, Canadians have long seen poor and stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples through film, television,

books, popular culture and the media. These misrepresentations are absorbed unconsciously, and without interacting with Indigenous communities they remain the prevailing view of Indigenous peoples. These viewpoints and stereotypes are reproduced through our roles in society – even journalists themselves suffer from this cycle, internalizing the incorrect portrayals of Indigenous peoples and then reproducing them in journalistic work to recreate more misrepresentative works (and on and on). But media also contributes to the views of non-journalists. How much did these works impact the ways in which hospital staff in British Columbia treat Indigenous patients poorly and without primary health services (Government of British Columbia, 2020)? The ways in which poor media portrayals impact individual perception of Indigenous peoples warrants further research.

There is perhaps a feeling of helplessness as a journalist reflecting on how traditional methods of reporting have failed to properly represent Indigenous peoples, especially when the stories being produced today seem to have changed very little from those of a year ago. Many, like myself, began in journalism with big ambitions. I wanted to share people's stories, learn about something new each day and uncover the wrongdoings of those in power. It's a difficult pill to swallow when you realize that the institution of journalism itself can be the wrongdoer. Yet there is hope. While start-ups as a type of news media are not inherently better at representing Indigenous communities, we do see some start-ups that are increasingly identifying their approach to journalism, both as individual reporters and as entire outlets. This is also referred to as the view from somewhere, forgoing the assumption of objectivity and instead recognizing that the decisions they make are sometimes based on the assumptions (such as those we

unconsciously learn about Indigenous peoples) and making an effort to unlearn them (Callison & Young, 2020). Take for example, British Columbia-based outlet *the Discourse*. The outlet built decolonization into the framework of how it operates, asking questions about how media (including themselves) contribute to reconciliation, understanding the tools that can be used to better portray Indigenous people and build relationships with Indigenous sources. Calgary-based outlet *The Sprawl* also identifies the values it bases its reporting on including reporting with depth on topics rather than breadth, providing context rather than aiming to draw attention through clicks and trying to find common ground rather than writing stories that would be divisive (The Sprawl, n.d.).

There is also the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), Media Indigena, Windspeaker and Indigenous journalism practices that are turning traditional reporting on its head. Understanding that APTN has both Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists, they still approach the news from a uniquely Indigenous perspective and thus would likely differ in their coverage of the conflict compared to legacy outlets. Understanding how Indigenous journalists approach the practice of journalism is also far different from what we know as traditional methods of journalism, and could also contribute to better representation of Indigenous communities overall:

[Indigenous journalists are] negotiating and experimenting with journalism methods in order to arrive at culturally appropriate ways of telling stories, dealing with sources, and deciding which contexts matter and when, and in the process decolonizing journalism. In so doing, they are actively transforming the expectations for what stories and representations about Indigenous people should

look and sound like, turning to Indigenous experts for insight into Indigenous lifeways, histories, and experiences, advocating for Indigenous audiences to be considered as active engaged publics of all media, and recognizing the deep historical and structural presence of settler-colonialism in the United States and Canada. (Callison & Young, 2020, p. 197)

The journalistic concept of objectivity tells us that journalists must approach a story with no preconceptions – be willing to adapt, tell the story that emerges even if it varies from the one we thought was there and not to make assumptions. Get the opinions of all parties and make sure their voices are heard. This idea is fundamental to reporting and is taught in journalism schools and underlined in the newsroom. Yet it is clear that legacy outlets and their journalists are reporting from somewhere (Callison & Young, 2020). Journalists and outlets have marginalized and delegitimized Indigenous peoples and their rights in Canada.

The Canadian journalism community has only recently begun to examine how mainstream media and schools contribute to misinformation and misrepresentation about Indigenous communities. It's important that individual journalists continue to question what is being taught (or not taught), what our assumptions are and why we are assigned certain stories about Indigenous peoples. It's also important to educate ourselves around the history of colonization in Canada, even if courses are not provided in schools or by our employers. Journalism aims to represent the facts and portray stories to audiences accurately. But the record of how mainstream media covers Indigenous communities suggests that legacy media has failed to achieve this objective. From institutions to individuals, every journalistic practice and approach should be questioned, examined and

broken down until we understand the impact our work has on Indigenous peoples and the public at large.

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## APPENDIX A: List of articles included in Chapter 3 content analysis

### Toronto Star

As sequel to Wet'suwet'en pipeline showdown looms, does B.C.'s UN pledge point the way forward?  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/01/06/as-sequel-to-wetsuweten-pipeline-showdown-looms-does-bcs-un-pledge-point-the-way-forward.html>

Wet'suwet'en allies halting B.C.'s busiest ferry route latest PR nightmare for fading star of LNG  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/01/20/a-ferry-protest-shows-how-story-of-natural-gas-is-being-rewritten-in-bc-and-canada.html>

Should B.C. build a new natural gas pipeline? Don't ask Jagmeet Singh  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/01/23/should-bc-build-a-new-natural-gas-pipeline-dont-ask-jagmeet-singh.html>

Protests shut down Ontario rail lines in support of Wet'suwet'en Nation  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/08/protests-shut-down-ontario-rail-lines-in-support-of-wetsuweten-nation.html>

VIA Rail, GO Transit, CP freight service all impacted by protest in support of Wet'suwet'en  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/08/more-via-rail-cancellations-between-toronto-and-montreal-ottawa-due-to-protest-near-belleville.html>

From blockades to rail stoppages: Wet'suwet'en protests grab spotlight nationwide  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/09/from-blockades-to-rail-stoppages-wetsuweten-protests-grab-spotlight-nationwide.html>

Protests continue along Ontario rail lines in support of Wet'suwet'en  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/10/cancellations-continue-along-ontario-rail-lines-in-support-of-wetsuweten.html>

RCMP's dastardly defiling of reconciliation on Wet'suwet'en lands cannot be undone  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/02/10/rcmps-dastardly-defiling-of-reconciliation-on-wetsuweten-lands-cannot-be-undone.html>

Putting the RCMP raid on the Wet'suwet'en in historical perspective  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/02/11/putting-the-rcmp-raid-on-the-wetsuweten-in-historical-perspective.html>

'Reconciliation is dead and we will shut down Canada,' Wet'suwet'en supporters say  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/11/reconciliation-is-dead-and-we-will-shut-down-canada-wetsuweten-supporters-say.html>

Via Rail extends cancellations of Toronto trains to and from Montreal and Ottawa until Thursday as blockade continues  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/11/via-rail-extends-cancellations-of-toronto-trains-to-and-from-montreal-and-ottawa-until-thursday-as-blockade-continues.html>

Inside a protest movement: How climate activists are taking Wet'suwet'en fight from B.C. to Yonge Street  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/11/wetsuweten-shutcanadadown-supporters-vow-to-block-bc-throne-speech.html>

Frustration and some sympathy from travellers forced to change plans due to blockades in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en

Toronto Star: [https://www.thestar.com/news/city\\_hall/2020/02/12/frustration-and-some-sympathy-from-travellers-forced-to-change-plans-due-to-blockades-in-solidarity-with-wetsuweten.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2020/02/12/frustration-and-some-sympathy-from-travellers-forced-to-change-plans-due-to-blockades-in-solidarity-with-wetsuweten.html)

Indigenous protests put Justin Trudeau's good intentions on a collision course with reality

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2020/02/12/indigenous-protests-put-justin-trudeaus-good-intentions-on-a-collision-course-with-reality.html>

In their own words: What the #WetsuwetenStrong allies are fighting for

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/12/in-their-own-words-what-the-wetsuwetenstrong-allies-are-fighting-for.html>

Ottawa says it won't interfere in the dispute between Wet'suwet'en chiefs and Coastal GasLink. So, what's next?

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/12/ottawa-says-it-wont-interfere-in-the-dispute-between-wetsuweten-chiefs-and-coastal-gaslink-so-whats-next.html>

B.C.'s John Horgan faces a Wet'suwet'en firestorm sparked by some very national issues

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/analysis/2020/02/12/bcs-john-horgan-faces-a-wetsuweten-firestorm-sparked-by-some-very-national-issues.html>

Via Rail extends train cancellations in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal due to blockade

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/12/via-rail-extends-train-cancellations-in-toronto-ottawa-and-montreal-until-feb-14.html>

In the end, the courts must prevail over protests

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2020/02/13/in-the-end-the-courts-must-prevail-over-protests.html>

Via Rail and CN suspend service amid Wet'suwet'en blockades

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/13/via-rail-and-cn-suspend-service-amid-wetsuweten-protest-blockades.html>

'We're home, and we're not going anywhere' — no end in sight to Ontario rail blockade

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/13/were-home-and-were-not-going-anywhere-no-end-in-sight-to-ontario-rail-blockade.html>

With billions of dollars at stake, Canada can't afford to fail at Indigenous reconciliation

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2020/02/13/with-billions-of-dollars-at-stake-canada-cant-afford-to-fail-at-indigenous-reconciliation.html>

As confrontation edges toward crisis, where is the prime minister?

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/02/13/as-confrontation-edges-toward-crisis-where-is-the-prime-minister.html>

Here's what government can — and can't — do to end the Wet'suwet'en standoff

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/13/heres-what-government-can-and-cant-do-to-end-the-wetsuweten-standoff.html>

It's no coincidence that Wet'suwet'en protesters are targeting railways. Here's why

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/14/why-wetsuweten-protesters-and-blockades-are-targeting-canadas-railways.html>

Trudeau pushes back against pressure to use the police to end Wet'suwet'en blockades urging instead to let talks resolve the crisis

Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/14/ottawa-insists-talks-are-key-to-ending-rail-blockade-while-scheer-pushes-for-police-action.html>

Kenney calls Wet'suwet'en rail shutdown 'national economic crisis' — blames 'some angry fringe groups'  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/14/kenney-calls-wetsuweten-rail-shutdown-national-economic-crisis-blames-some-angry-fringe-groups.html>

Wet'suwet'en solidarity gains steam: What's led to this 'watershed moment' in Indigenous resistance  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/15/wetsuweten-solidarity-gains-steam-whats-led-to-this-watershed-moment-in-indigenous-resistance.html>

War of words: Experts say the Wet'suwet'en actions are being mangled with loaded vocabulary  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/15/war-of-words-experts-say-the-wetsuweten-actions-are-being-mangled-with-loaded-vocabulary.html>

Wet'suwet'en protest blocking trains in Vaughan a call 'to protect everyone's rights to a healthy environment'  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/15/supporters-of-wetsuweten-block-trains-at-macmillan-yard-in-vaughan.html>

Here's how the Wet'suwet'en dispute breaks down in graphics  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/17/heres-how-the-wetsuweten-dispute-breaks-down-in-graphics.html>

'When justice fails block the rails' — Wet'suwet'en solidarity protest weaves through Toronto  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/17/wetsuweten-solidarity-protest-weaves-through-toronto.html>

Via Rail expected to resume service between Ottawa and Quebec City Thursday  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/18/via-rail-expected-to-resume-service-between-ottawa-and-quebec-city-thursday.html>

Andrew Scheer ramps up calls to use police to end the Wet'suwet'en protests  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/18/scheer-ramps-up-calls-to-use-police-to-end-the-wetsuweten-protests.html>

Here's what Wet'suwet'en rail blockades could mean for farmers, retailers and consumers  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/18/cn-layoffs-hit-450-amid-wetsuweten-protests-rail-blockades.html>

Locked out of his office by his own people, one grand chief calls for end to the Wet'suwet'en blockades  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/18/first-nations-leaders-call-for-peaceful-talks-not-force-to-find-a-way-to-end-wetsuweten-blockades.html>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urges patience as cabinet ministers seek negotiated end to rail blockades  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/18/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-urges-patience-as-cabinet-ministers-seek-negotiated-end-to-rail-blockades.html>

Wilson-Raybould blasts Trudeau and offers four proposals to help resolve the Wet'suwet'en blockades crisis  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/19/wilson-raybould-blasts-trudeau-and-offers-four-proposals-to-help-resolve-the-wetsuweten-blockades-crisis.html>

Justin Trudeau floats replacing RCMP with Indigenous force. Wet'suwet'en chief says that's not good enough  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/19/chiefs-say-rcmp-and-pipeline-firm-must-leave-before-they-meet-with-government.html>

Could the Wet'suwet'en blockades shape Justin Trudeau's decision on the Teck Frontier oilsands project?  
Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/19/could-the-wetsuweten-blockades-impact-the-teck-frontier-oilsands-project.html>

'Not in our backyard': Alberta Wet'suwet'en rail blockade meets stiff opposition and shuts down after injunction granted

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## **APPENDIX B: Interview process and questions**

1. Review consent form and confirm they agree with everything. Ask: Do you have any questions or need me to clarify anything before we begin?
2. Explain the purpose of the research and purpose of the interview. Ask: Do you have any questions or need me to clarify anything before we begin?
3. Are you comfortable using your real name and title, or would you prefer to stay pseudonymous? As indicated in the consent form, you are able to change this at any time prior to the submission of the thesis.

Say: I'm going to begin audio recording now. Is that okay with you?

### Interview questions

1. Introduce yourself. What is your name and title?
2. One of the reasons I identified you as a source to speak with is because you are Indigenous. Could you tell me if there is a specific nation or community you would like me to identify you with in the published research?
3. Another reason I identified you as a source to speak with is because you are an expert. (Have done academic or journalistic work in this area). Would you explain your professional background for me?
4. In your opinion, how well does legacy media represent Indigenous communities and people in their work?
5. In your opinion, do you think this is an institutional problem (falls on the structure of journalism) or an individual problem (falls on the journalist themselves) or a combination? Why?
6. Can you describe your research expertise/background with regard to Indigenous representation in the media?
7. Have you reviewed the content analysis?
8. What did you think of the results?
9. Did you have any feedback about how the analysis was conducted?
10. Was there anything surprising to you? Or expected? If so, please explain.

### Content analysis questions added:

11. There were some parts of the content analysis that stayed consistent across outlets, such as top source type being a government official, level of context provided in the story, tone being primarily neutral or negative, using the word "protesters" frequently, and little or no mention of colonialism. What do you think of this?
12. There were also some parts of the content analysis that varied between outlets, such as the National Post producing significantly more opinion articles than the

other outlets, The Globe being more likely to include a Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief as a source, and The Globe being more likely to provide a backgrounder or contextual story on the conflict. What do you think of this?

13. From the information I've gathered, I've written down some points for my discussion and I'd like to share them with you to get your opinion.
  - a. These three legacy outlets present their audience with little context about how colonization factors into the conflict.
  - b. The legacy outlets are more likely to tell audiences how the blockades affect Canada than they are to present solutions (or, additionally, how the pipeline might affect Indigenous people or their land).
  - c. These outlets are more likely to present readers with opinion articles than they are to present an analysis or contextual article on the conflict.
  - d. These outlets often present the standpoint that the Canadian rule of law must prevail over the blockades and hereditary law (with an article in the Toronto Star by the editorial board which has a similar title – "In the end, the courts must prevail over protests").
  - e. The outlets prioritize the perspective of government officials over any other source.
  - f. Is there anything else you'd highlight here?
14. According to my research, previous content analyses on similar topics show that portrayals of Indigenous communities and people have been poor at best and intentionally harmful at worst. Would you agree with this?
15. Why is it important that Indigenous communities are well represented and portrayed in the media?
16. When there is poor portrayals of Indigenous communities and individuals, research often points to problems with funding or resources at legacy outlets. Do you believe this contributes to poor representation of Indigenous communities?
17. What practices need to be adapted to better portray Indigenous communities in journalism by both a) individual journalists and b) media outlets?
18. How does training, or level of knowledge about Indigenous communities, affect coverage?
19. A major point that has been made in previous work and research is that the media focuses too much on conflict with Indigenous communities. Would you agree with this statement?
20. Do you think increased representation from within the newsroom would change how Indigenous stories are told?
21. Do you think journalism needs to be restructured or changed in a major way for better Indigenous portrayals in published work?
22. As a (journalist; expert) in the field, what has your personal experience been with Indigenous portrayals in stories?
23. Are there any other individuals that you think I should interview or speak with for this research?

24. Thank you for answering my questions. Is there anything you would like to add, or any questions I didn't ask that you think I should as I move forward with other interviews/revisit previous interviews?

Complete interview.

Say: Thank you again. The next step is to complete interviews and write this chapter. I may contact you once more with any follow up questions. At the time I've written the chapter, I will reach out to you to review your inclusion in the thesis. At that time, you can ask that I revise, remove, or add any information you think is necessary. Contact me with any questions or concerns. Now that the interview is complete, I will be additionally following up to provide you with the honorarium. It was a pleasure to speak with you and we will talk again soon.

## APPENDIX C: Research Ethics Board approval for interviews



Office of Research Ethics  
4500 ARISE Building | 1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
613-520-2600 Ext: 2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

### CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The following research has been granted clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A). CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2).

**Ethics Clearance ID:** Project # 115807

**Project Team Members: Ms. Amber McLinden (Primary Investigator)**

Jennifer Ditchburn (Research Supervisor)

Allan M Thompson (Research Supervisor)

**Study Title:** The role of legacy media: A content analysis of coverage during the Coastal GasLink conflict

**Funding Source:** (If applicable):

**Effective:** July 20, 2021

**Expires:** July 31, 2022

#### **This certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal or closure of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form.

5. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their supervisor of any adverse events, changes to their application, or requests to renew/close the protocol.
6. Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

**IMPORTANT: Special requirements for COVID-19:**

If this study involves **in-person research interactions with human participants**, whether on- or off-campus, the following rules apply:

1. Upon receiving clearance from CUREB, please seek the approval of the relevant Dean for your research. Provide a copy of your CUREB clearance to the Dean for their records. Please contact your Dean's Office for more information about obtaining their approval. See [Principles and Procedures for On-campus Research at Carleton University](#) and note that this document applies both to on- and off-campus research that involves human participants.
2. Provide a copy of the Dean's approval to the Office of Research Ethics prior to starting any in-person research activities.
3. If the Dean's approval requires any significant change(s) to any element of the study, you must notify the Office of Research Ethics of such change(s).

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please email the Research Compliance Coordinators at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca) if you have any questions.

**CLEARED BY:**

**Date: July 20, 2021**



Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A



e

Kathryn Dupré, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A

## **APPENDIX D: List of interviewees**

Robert Harding

Signed consent form September 20, 2021

Interview conducted October 8, 2021

Approved final inclusion and use of name in thesis December 7, 2021 (via email)

Karyn Pugliese

Signed consent form September 27, 2021

Interview conducted October 17, 2021

Approved final inclusion and use of name in thesis December 1, 2021 (via phone)

Carmen Robertson

Signed consent form September 1, 2021

Interview conducted November 1, 2021

Approved final inclusion and use of name in thesis December 1, 2021 (via phone)

Taiiaike Alfred

Signed consent form October 24, 2021

Interview conducted November 2, 2021

Approved final inclusion and use of name in thesis December 7, 2021 (via email)