

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canadian Media

*A critical discourse analysis of the representation of an Indigenous woman in
Canadian media*

Sanne Viliijn – 5529093

15-7-2018

BA English Language and Culture

Utrecht University

Under supervision of Dr. J.E.M. Hoorenman

Table of contents

0. Introduction	3
1. Theory	7
1.1 Historical Background of Indigenous People in Canada	7
1.2 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women	9
1.3 Media Theory	10
2. Analysis & Findings	13
2.1 What language is being used to describe Tina Fontaine and her murder?	13
2.2 What context is provided in the articles regarding Tina Fontaine's death?	14
2.3 What social norms and attitudes are reflected in the articles on the murder of Tina Fontaine?	16
3. Discussion & Conclusion	18
3.1 Discussion	18
3.2 Conclusion	20
4. Works Cited	21

0. Introduction

Canada celebrated the 150th anniversary of confederation in 2017. The government described it as “an important mark in Canadian history that was celebrated with a year full of with celebrations all around the world” (Government of Canada, 2017). The goal of these celebrations was to “give Canadians the opportunity to get involved in their communities and to celebrate together shared values, shared achievements, the majestic environment and the country’s place in the world” (Government of Canada, 2017). Major themes were diversity and inclusion and reconciliation with Indigenous people. These two themes are also ostensibly central to the Trudeau government. For example, government department buildings and parks have been renamed in order to stop the veneration of colonial heroes, the Truth and Reconciliation commission’s 94 calls to action and the initiated Indigenous Languages Act (Wyld, 2017).

Still, Indigenous people face structural discrimination. Often, this structural racism starts with political actions that reinforce this discrimination (Sears, Sidanius & Bobo, 2000). In Canada, for example, the reserve system causes Indigenous segregation and socio-economic differences; often there is not even clean drinking water available on the reserves. Also, the Canadian legal framework disadvantages Indigenous people in the sense that, according to prime minister Trudeau “federal governments have not been fully implementing Indigenous rights, forcing Indigenous Peoples to engage in long and costly battles to get the courts to enforce them” (Smith, 2018).

This discrimination is also fuelled by the many stereotypes about Indigenous people such as the myth of the drunk Indian, the myth that Indigenous people do not pay tax and the myth that Indigenous people receive free housing (Vowel, 2016). Vowel also states, “Men are still often seen as savages, uncivilised creatures without any values” (2016). Myths aimed at Indigenous women in particular criticise their motherhood and their sexuality. In her article on racialisation and sexualisation due to globalisation, Kuokkanen (2008) argues that it is often thought that these Indigenous women are bad mothers who neglect their children. They need to obey their savage husbands at any time. This is reflected in the myth of the squaw, a myth that pictures the Indigenous woman as a promiscuous woman with a lot of children. The squaw is lustful, dirty, and immoral and has no feelings (Kuokkanen, 2008).

These stereotypes about Indigenous women are one of the reasons that Indigenous women face more violence than other groups in Canada. Violence against these women is not only more frequent, but also more severe than violence done to women with a non-Indigenous background in Canada. They are at high risk of becoming victims of murder or rape. This high risk has recently been declared to be a human rights crisis by the United Nations and Amnesty International (OHCHR, 2018). This higher risk is not always recognised by the Canadian Government. A survey by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 2014 reported nearly 1200 missing and murdered Indigenous women from 1980 to 2012 (Government of Canada, 2014). Indigenous women's groups, however, reported the number to be a lot higher, over 4000 (Tasker, 2016). This discrepancy could be due to the fact that many of the disappearances of Indigenous women are not taken seriously and left out of the official numbers (Kuokkanen, 2008).

These mental images that people use as a simplified representation of reality (Whitaker, Ramsey & Smith, 2013), could be considered as devaluating the pain and legacy of abuse that has been and is still done to Indigenous people in history. According to Mahtani (2001), the media influences people's attitudes towards minorities. She establishes two main problems in media-minority relations in Canada namely, the underrepresentation and the misrepresentation of ethnic minorities. This misrepresentation causes the media to misrepresent reality, which can impede Indigenous women's emancipation.

Two elements of media representation that are big influences in the way Indigenous people are perceived by the public, are framing and status conferral. As elaborated by Whitaker et al. (2013) in *Mediawriting: print, broadcast, and public relations*, Framing focuses on the way in which a story is presented. The adopted frame can influence the way the audience receives a story. The theory of status conferral says, "mass media confer status and legitimacy on people, organisations and ideas" (Whitaker et al., 2013, p.9); once the media decides to confer status on certain people, this immediately disadvantages other groups that do not get attention in the media. When status is conferred to the ruling power, it confirms and reinforces the existing norms. It can also be a barometer of changing situations when status is given to minorities.

This paper will explore the representation of Indigenous women in articles on missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canadian newspapers in articles on the

murder of Sagkeeng Anicinabe girl Tina Fontaine. The murder of the 15-year old girl has gained a lot of media attention, which also evoked the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women to gain status as a human rights crisis. The paper revolves around the following question: How does Canadian national written news media represent Indigenous women in the news coverage of the case of Tina Fontaine, a murdered Indigenous woman?

Based upon the work of Mahtani (2001) on Indigenous people in the Canadian media landscape, Wilkes, Corrigan & Ricard (2010) on nationalism and media coverage of Indigenous people's collective action in Canada, Sikka (2010) on the trafficking of Indigenous women and girls and Harding (2006) on historical representations of Indigenous people in the Canadian media landscape, it is expected that the media's expressed opinions will often be damaging towards Indigenous women and their cases. There will be a strong focus on the "us versus them" dichotomy. Furthermore, it is anticipated that little historical context will be provided in the news articles. In order to answer this question, I will answer the following sub-questions:

- What language is being used to describe Tina Fontaine and her murder in the articles about the murder of an Indigenous woman?
- What context is provided in the articles regarding Tina Fontaine's death?
- What social norms and attitudes are reflected in the articles on the murder of Tina Fontaine?

In order to establish the current representation of Indigenous women in printed media articles on missing and murdered Indigenous women, this paper analyses the coverage on the matter of two Canadian newspapers with national reach. The articles that were analysed were articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. The *Globe and Mail* is one of the two national Canadian newspapers. The paper was founded in 1936 and has a left-centralist political stance. They have 6,5 million weekly readers in both print and digital editions (Globe and Mail Staff, 2017). The *Toronto Star* is a newspaper with national reach from the province of Ontario, the most populated province in Canada. They have a weekly audience of 3.622.000 readers most of them in the age group of 24 – 54. The *Star* is generally perceived as a social liberalist newspaper (Toronto Star Media Sheet, 2016).

The coverage that is analysed concerns articles from these two newspapers about the murder of Tina Fontaine, the event that took place at the same time as the

declaration of the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women as a national crisis and the RCMP national inquiry. One of the events is the missing and murder of Tina Fontaine, a 15 year-old Sagkeeng Anicinabe girl, who was found dead on August 17, 2014. Her death stressed the importance of the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and made the government start a National Inquiry. The data for this research was being retrieved through the *LexisNexis* newspaper database. In total, 9 articles were analysed extensively: 5 articles from the *Globe and Mail* and 4 from the *Toronto Star*.

The study deploys a qualitative method of analysis, namely a critical discourse analysis as elaborated by Wodak & Meyer in their manual *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (2009). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) considers language to be a social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2009): “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimised and so on, by language use or in discourse” (p.11). Therefore, it is particularly suitable to study the treatment of minorities (Harding, 2006). The articles will be analysed at three different levels as described by Fairclough (2013). The first level, a micro level, is the textual level: the choice of words and the connotations that come along with those words will be discussed. The next level, the meso level, is the discursive practice, an analysis of how phrases and the text are constituted. The largest level that the text is being looked upon is the macro level of social practice, which looks at how the text can represent social norms and acts in society. In the analysis, the concepts of intertextuality and contextualisation will have to be taken into account since they are inherently tied to the colonialist framework that is often employed in Indigenous representation. It is important to place the events described in the articles in their historical context to explain certain choices of words. Furthermore, a frame analysis will be applied in order to establish what assumptions are inherent to the choices that have been made by journalists in presentation, selection and emphasis of the events and issues at stake.

The first chapter outlines theories regarding the history of Indigenous people in Canada, the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and some media theory. The second chapter discusses the article analysis and the results of the study. The third chapter will conclude the paper with a discussion of the results and a conclusion. Throughout the paper, the words Indigenous and Aboriginal will be used

interchangeably in the sense that they both refer to the three groups that are recognized in the Canadian constitution: First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

1. Theory

1.1 Historical Background of Indigenous People in Canada

In the 16th century, Europeans established colonial settlements all over North America. In Canada, British and French settlers were driven by commercial interest whereas settlers coming to the United States often sought religious freedom. Alliances between First Nations and the European settlers were established and especially the fur trade thrived. After the Seven Year War between the French and the British (1756-1763), the British were the main European power in North America. In order to alleviate conflict, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was declared to redefine boundaries and jurisdictions between First Nations and the British Crown (Borrows, 1994). This also meant that from now on, Indigenous people who were not living on land that was said to be land of First Nations fell under British legislation and jurisdiction. A Western society with heteropatriarchal capitalist values and practices was imposed upon the Indigenous societies (Kubik, Bourassa & Hampton, 2009). In their article on the impact of racism, sexism and colonisation on Aboriginal women, Bourassa, McKay-McNabb & Hampton (2004) mention how “Colonization is recognized as having had a destructive effect on Indigenous gender relations which reached out across all spheres of Indigenous society” (p.24).

The Indian Act that was installed in 1876 reinforced this gender inequality in Indigenous societies. The Indian Act “defined Indian identity and prescribed what ‘Indianness’ meant” (Bourassa et al., 2004, p.25). The act created differences between “non-status Indians”, “status Indians”, Métis and Inuit and could be seen as an assimilation policy. A central element of act was the process of disenfranchisement by making people lose their Indian status. Because of the “sexist specification inherent in this legislation” (p.25), status Indian women who married non-Indian men lost their Indian status and their band membership. Women could not have property nor could they return to the reserve once they had lost their status as Indian (Kubik et al. 2009). The consequences of the Indian Act were more thus severe for Aboriginal women than men. Although for non-Indigenous people, enfranchisement “was often viewed as victory over exclusion, the recognition of full rights citizenship” (Vowel, 2016, p.15), for

Indigenous people, it was a way of losing federal recognition of Indians. Under the new law, especially women were forced to assimilate to the colonialist society and take more distance from Indigenous culture. The Indian Act thus affected Indigenous women differently and more severe than Indigenous men.

The traditional system of Indigenous education started to break down with the placement of children in residential schools in 1900. Missionaries used the education of children to assimilate the Indigenous population into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture and to delimit social and cultural Indigenous identities. According to Kuokkanen (2008), the implementation of residential schools is still a big influence on violence against Indigenous women: “the rampant levels of violence against Indigenous women in Canada are created by social and economic marginalization, which in turn are consequences of colonialism such as dispossession of lands and livelihoods and abuse experienced in residential schools” (p. 219). About 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities to attend the residential schools. Most of the 139 Indian Residential Schools were closed by the mid-1970s, the last federally-run school closed in 1996 (INAC, 2008). Residential schooling entailed “the deliberate suppression of language and culture, substandard living conditions and second-rate education, and widespread physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse” (Smith, Varcoe & Edwards, 2005).

The children who had spend time at residential schools experienced not only a loss of culture, language and traditional values, but also were cut off from their parents and family which resulted in a loss of family bonding, life and parenting skills, self respect and respect for others. Their parents were no longer caregivers, nurturers, teachers and family decision-makers, which caused the emotional bond between parent and child to become less strong (Elias et al., 2012). According to this study by Elias et al. (2012), this still has its repercussions on abuse rates amongst Indigenous women. For women survivors, the exposure to abuse in the residential schools also exposed them to other forms of systemic and structural discrimination, which had placed them at even greater risk for suicide and trauma. Their children, who have not attended residential school, were also more likely to experience abuse. Residential school survivors were often adopted or placed in foster care and even nowadays 52,2% of the children in foster care are First Nations children (INAC, 2016).

1.2 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

In early colonial writings, Aboriginal women were often portrayed as Indian Princesses (Valaskakis, 1999). The Indian Princess was proud, virtuous and beautiful. Resistance to colonisation led to the invention of Aboriginal women as “squaws”, dirty, lewd, uncivilised and sexually deviant. The idea of women as property and dirty was the image that was spread in history- and children’s books (Harper, 2006). As Razack (2000, p.99) notes: “Newspaper records of the 19th century indicate that there was a near universal conflation of Aboriginal woman and prostitute and an accompanying belief that when they encountered violence, Aboriginal women simply got what they deserved”. Because of the pass system that was in use from 1855 until the 1950’s, Aboriginal people that lived on the reserves could not leave the reserves. Therefore, there was an institutionalised segregation that caused the stereotypes to remain intact (Razack, 2000). The assertion of ownership over Aboriginal women was seen as a right for white male settlers to determine the value and use of these women (Sikka, 2010). These colonial, racist, sexist ideologies that gave rise to the damaging stereotype of the squaw not only increase Aboriginal women’s risks of violence but also immediately labels them as bad or unworthy victims (Gilchrist, 2010). This form of victim shaming impacts the perception of these crimes by the mainstream population, by the police, by legislation and even by the government since it increases the victim’s culpability. Racial violence faced by Indigenous women in Canada can thus not be separated from colonisation.

Razack (2002) illustrates this inseparability of colonialism and missing and murdered Indigenous women with the analysis of the murder on Pamela George by two young, middle-class white men that took place in 1955. The two men were convicted of manslaughter, but they were only given light sentences. This contact between the two white men and the Salteaux, Ojibwe woman was rooted in colonialism and can only be understood in the light of white settler history and strategies of domination. Being a prostitute with an Aboriginal background, Pamela George was not estimated worthy of a fair trial. However, there was a trial, but the severity of the charge and the sentence were strongly related to the perception of Indigenous women and of her profession as a prostitute. Razack argues that the encounter leading to George’s death was “a making of the white, masculine self as dominant through practices of violence directed at a

colonized woman” (2002, p.128). During the trial, the historical context of the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous people was not recognised.

In her paper *Trafficking of Aboriginal Women and Girls in Canada*, Sikka (2010) observes that many cases of trafficking that involve Aboriginal women and girls in Canada remain invisible because of this historical context of colonialism. Trafficking concerns kidnapping, rape and murder wherever sex work is involved. The victims do not fit in the stereotypical victim/perpetrator categories. Victims, as was already visible in the case of Pamela George and in many other cases of violence, are seen as perpetrators; they are the ones who provoke the assault. According to Sikka (2010) “the discourse on this problem has even further alienated the exploitation of Aboriginal women by the reinforcing the stereotypical ‘trafficked victim’” (p.202). Given the fact that trafficking of women is a crime that resembles slavery and the fact that slavery was abolished in Canada in 1833, the lack of attention given to this matter only intensifies the idea of the Aboriginal woman as inferior.

1.3 Media representation

Media influences public opinion by drawing attention to certain topics. As mentioned in Whitaker et al. (2013), the theory of Agenda Setting argues that mass media determine what is important by deciding what item gets placed on the front page and thus generates more attention. It explains how news media have the ability to influence the perceived importance of issues. When analysing media, it is important to also look at how stories are framed. The theory of Framing has to do with the presentation of the story. It looks at what context is provided, what metaphors, jargon, choice of words and imagery is being used. It focuses on how events and issues are presented and organised by journalists (Whitaker et al., 2013) and how they filter information (Wilkes, Corrigan & Ricard, 2010). As cited in Fairhurst (2005), frames are definitions of situations that produce meanings and organise experience. This thus implies that past experiences give frames more meaning and layers. Framing is both a cognitive device and a communicative activity “defined by selection, emphasis, interpretation and exclusion” (Fairhurst, 2005, p.167).

Framing also plays an important part in the representation of minorities and in the way a story is perceived. Wilkes, Corrigan and Ricard (2010), found that framing is a

process of creating explicit and implicit oppositions. Newspapers made readers connected to a larger group. Opposition to other groups reinforced this larger national identity. They notice how coverage on the American Indian Movement in Canada could be coded as containing five framings: militant, stereotype, factionalism, civil rights and treaty rights. The negative first three were most employed. Also, in minority portrayals in Canada, one group is always presented as deviant from the model. In these portrayals, media do not only use framing, but they also create an us-versus-them dichotomy (Wilkes, Corrigan and Ricard, 2010, p.43). In this dichotomy, the “them” is often lifted from its national identity by emphasising how the “them” group avoids their responsibilities as a citizen such as tax paying. A study conducted by Harding (2006) also found this dichotomy. They showed that news stories about Indigenous people in the late 1990’s still framed Indigenous issues, such as on-reserve housing and on-reserve drinking water, much in the same way as they were framed during colonial times. In this framework there is once again a strong focus on us-versus-them dichotomy in order to signify Aboriginal people as a threat and protect dominant interest. Gardiner (2003) has noted a shift in identity in stories about Indigenous sportsmen. From the moment they start winning, and thus do not form a threat for national identity, their identity shifts from an Indigenous to a national identity.

Indigenous representation in media is often absent in Canada. As cited in Mahtani (2001), various researchers have found that despite the culturally diverse nature of Canadian society, that very diversity is regularly absent from media representations. The paucity of voice is a particular feature in the problematic media treatment of First Nations. A lack of representation enhances a feeling of rejection by society in Indigenous societies (Mahtani, 2001). It also perpetuates the idea of the white Christian man as being the norm and it reinscribes this norm that stems from colonialist times. According to Mahtani (2001), media attention given to ethnic minorities should not jeopardize the Eurocentric hegemony; therefore minorities are often portrayed in negative or exotic stereotypes. They are presented as being at war with non-Indigenous people (Wilkes et al., 2010). White people are thus victimised instead of recognising the true victims, which often are the Indigenous people.

By performing a discourse analysis on newspaper articles, Love and Tilley (2013) showed how often a Western temporal framework, thus a linear timeframe is used when reporting about Aboriginal issues, who often employ a circular timeframe. This is

evident in the fact that references in the articles that were analysed by Love and Tilley (2013) were made chronologically. Time was also viewed in terms of phases of history that have a beginning and an end whereas this is not the case in many Aboriginal views on time. This framework limits the ability to provide a well-balanced and informative coverage of the issues at stake. It asks for Aboriginal issues to be translated into a frame that is not entirely suitable for telling their story, which imposes another hurdle in search of complete understanding of the issue. Another frame that is often employed in Aboriginal portrayal is the frame of Aboriginal people as inferior. Harding (2006) argues that news media have the tendency to present Aboriginal peoples as childlike or naive in order to approve of the idea that the Canadian state has the obligation to raise and help Aboriginal people towards progress.

In mediated representations of Indigenous women, the historical context of racism and sexualisation is often denied and colonial frameworks are still in use. According to Sikka (2010), the stereotype of the Indigenous woman is further compounded by the “overrepresentation of Aboriginal women and girls in the visible sex trade” (p. 201). The fact that this is one of the consequences of colonisation, of residential schools and of disrupted communities is denied. Therefore, it comes across as if their life is a choice and thus not includes the whole story. Jennifer England (2004) agrees on the lack of historical context in her analysis of representations of Aboriginal women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside in the documentary *Through a Blue Lens*. Their representation is paradoxical: on the one hand, they are hyper visible as perpetrators and outlaws, but on the other hand, they are invisible as real women and victims of harassment and murder. Deborah, an Aboriginal woman interviewed in England (2004) also mentions the marginalisation in the context of the missing women’s tragedy: “For Deborah the lack of rigorous police investigation is related to her experience of racism and her experiences of being stereotyped as a prostitute” (p. 307). The risk of this marginalisation, as said in Jiwani & Young (2006), is that it incites voyeurism instead of pity. Voyeurism stops people from seeing the urgency of the matter and it only aggravates the situation.

Besides framing, status conferral is also an important part of Indigenous representation. The theory of status conferral refers to the idea that “because of the influential nature of media, the mass media confer status and legitimacy on people, organizations, and ideas” (Whitaker et al., 2013). Sources are thus to be chosen carefully

since they do not only serve as sources, but also legitimise and represent groups. According to Mahtani (2001), Indigenous people are underrepresented in the media landscape, and often when they are represented, stereotypes are kept in place. The Indigenous people are mentioned in contexts where they are viewed as the group causing problems. This could be linked to the theory of status conferral. The minority group is thus often not granted status. In this context, the status is often granted to non-Indigenous officials.

2. Analysis & Findings

2.1. What language is being used to describe Tina Fontaine and her murder?

The first level of analysis is a micro level that acts on the level of word choice. Throughout the analyses of the texts, terms that refer to Tina Fontaine vary in degree of humanisation. The terms “child”, “girl”, “Tina”, “Fontaine who had just turned 15” (Lamert & Puxley, August 18; 2014) and “pretty little Tina Fontaine” contrast highly with terms such as “Aboriginal teen”, “Ms Fontaine” and “the Sagkeeng First Nation 15-year-old”. The first three terms accentuate her youth, her innocence and vulnerability, and make her seem more real and personal. They do not distinguish between Indigenous and non-Indigenous victims of homicide, but rather show her human side. The latter three are more anonymous, they take more distance from the victim and focus on her Aboriginality instead of presenting her as a young, innocent woman that was taken advantage of. It is important to mention that most of the terms that presented her as a young innocent girl were citations from others or were used in editorial pieces whereas the terms used by the journalists in news articles remained rather factual and focussed on her background as an Aboriginal girl.

The emphasis on her youth is not only apparent in the terms that refer to the victim herself but also in the way her appearance is described. More than once her tiny physique is mentioned: “five-foot three-inches tall and weighing only about 100 pounds” (Lamert & Puxley, August 19; 2014), “only 5’3” and weighed a feather-light 100 pounds” (Malick, August 21; 2014), “her slender neck” (Malick, August 21; 2014), “her body weighed just 77 pounds when it was found, a small girl who looked younger than her age” (Lamert, January 30; 2018). It is not only this physical vulnerability, but also her mental instability that is demonstrated in terms of emotional vulnerability: “she was unable to cope with the city life” (Lamert & Puxley, August 19; 2014), “her life turned

bad" (Mallick, August 21; 2014), "scars on her arms" (Mallick, August 21; 2014). Instead of the dehumanising of victims that Harper (2006) talks about, these words humanise Tina Fontaine.

According to Sikka (2009), women who became victims of sexual trafficking are portrayed as if they elicit it. This is different in the articles on Tina Fontaine when focussing on the use of verbs. Many verbs are in passive tense marking the passivity of Tina in the situation. "She has been exploited and taken advantage of" (Lamert & Puxley, August 19; 2014), "she has been murdered and put in the river" (Lamert & Puxley, August 18; 2014), "she was being sexually exploited" (Lamert, January 30; 2018) and "she had fallen into street life" (Star Editorial Board, February 23; 2018). Also most of the words that describe the crime have a very negative connotation for example "slaying" instead of murder, "dumped" instead of left, "stuffed" instead of put. The words "dump" and "stuff" are normally used for inanimate objects like garbage and pillows. These linguistic choices cause the articles to reach their goal as described in the title of journalist Heather Mallick's editorial piece (Mallick, August 21; 2018): "Tina Fontaine's death should horrify us".

All in all, on a micro level, the words that have been used in the articles regarding the death of Tina Fontaine and the crime case following the murder show a break with the traditional representation of Indigenous women as actively seeking trouble. The articles use words that express a certain degree of humanisation and with a pejorative connotation evaluate the crime as a horrible action. The word use emphasises her youth and innocence.

2.2 What context is provided in the articles regarding Tina Fontaine's death?

The next level of analysis is the meso level, which focuses on how the text is constituted and what frames and context is used. In almost all the articles that were released quickly after the body of Tina Fontaine was found, the wider issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women was addressed. This happened through both images, of for example the erected monument in downtown Winnipeg or images of portraits of many missing Indigenous women with Tina in the middle. In one of the articles, Winnipeg is even called ground zero (Laze Carlson & Galloway, July 16; 2016), a military term connected to the centre of a nuclear bomb or a centre or origin of rapid, intense, or

violent activity or change. The articles also feature background information through about the statistics behind the matter:

“Last week, Manitoba unveiled a monument to almost 1,200 missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The two-metre-high granite statue stands just by the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in downtown Winnipeg.

In May, the RCMP issued a detailed statistical breakdown of 1,181 cases since 1980. The report said Aboriginal women make up 4.3 per cent of the Canadian population, yet account for 16 per cent of female homicides and 11.3 per cent of missing women.” (Lamert & Puxley, August 18; 2014).

This frame puts the murder of the young girl into a larger perspective and especially the exact numbers can be confronting which shows how immense and poignant the issue is. It implies that Tina was not an exception and that a change in society is necessary. Also, in later articles, the murder is even said to have sparked renewed calls for a national inquiry. This idea is reinforced by, for example, the comparison that Winnipeg homicide unit officer Sgt. John O’Donovan made: “She’s a child. Society would be horrified if we found a litter of kittens or pups in the river in this condition. This is a child” (Lamert & Puxley, August 19; 2014). This comparison shows how cruel and paradoxical attitudes towards the issue often are. This reasoning is elaborated in a Toronto Star editorial (August 21, 2018), where Mallick points out that the children of Attawapiskat, a reserve that gets flooded often, have to sleep in school barracks and do not receive help from the government. Non-Indigenous people, however, do go to the Attawapiskat reserve to rescue and adopt stray dogs. The fact that she creates the opposition between the non-Indigenous and the Indigenous people and that, within this opposition she defends the Indigenous people, breaks with the traditional “us versus them” dichotomy that favours the “us”, by sympathising with the “them”.

Furthermore, many articles do not shy away from addressing the post-colonial trauma and the harm that has been done to the Indigenous communities such as residential schools and the sixties scoop, in which Indigenous children were adopted by non-Indigenous people without consent of the parents (Vowel, 2016). Again, the event is placed within the larger issue of Indigenous children who have a much higher risk at ending up in Child and Family services, which was also the case for Tina Fontaine. The articles admit that there are many flaws to the system that disadvantages Indigenous people. This is most apparent in the early articles dated from August 2014, when the

crime had just happened. In articles from 2017/2018 that inform readers about the trial against Raymond Cormier, this socio-historical context is less apparent.

When applying the theory of status conferral to the articles about Tina Fontaine, it becomes clear that in the early articles, there is a clear difference in status between the people that are being cited. Sergeant John O'Donovan, a white police officer, is given status. His expressions are mentioned at the beginning of articles and come across as very well reasoned. The fact that he is a white police officer standing up for this young and vulnerable Aboriginal girl makes his statements more credible. Another group that is being given a voice is Tina's family. They, however, are not granted the same status as O'Donovan. Their troubled family history is explained extensively before they and the stereotype of the Indigenous woman as a bad mother is confirmed with the introduction of Tina's mother, Ms. Duck: "Ms. Duck, who has struggled with alcoholism, said Tina stayed with her in Winnipeg [...] She believes her daughter then lived in a foster family and spent time with at her boyfriend's, though she isn't sure" (Laze Carlson, August 26; 2014). The fact that the mother is uncertain about where her daughter was, that she struggled with alcoholism and that her daughter could not stay with her all confirms the stereotype. Ms. Duck's utterances are therefore influenced by this information and they might be taken less seriously.

In short, there clearly is a break with the past tradition of writing with a post-colonial frame in the articles that concern the murder of Tina Fontaine. The writings adopt a frame that emphasizes the gravity of the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Context is given through statistics, images and historical events. Nevertheless, when looking at status conferral there is still a difference in status between a white police officer and a mourning Indigenous woman, the latter being contextualised to fit within a stereotype.

2.3 What social norms and attitudes are reflected in the articles on the murder of Tina Fontaine?

The case of Tina Fontaine is highly mediated and has become a symbol for a much wider issue. This is explicitly mentioned: "it reignited calls for a national inquiry" (Laze Carlson & Galloway, July 16; 2016). The articles do not simply inform the reader about the urgency of the issue, they also seem to be a cry for help from governmental institutions and organisations. They demand change by confronting society with existing

attitudes towards the topic. The following sentence illustrates this confrontation: “Behind the big blue tarps screening Tina’s corpse from view, Winnipeg’s Canadian Museum for Human Rights gleamed in the distance” (Mallick, August 21; 2014). The author uses the opposition of Tina’s corpse, a victim of an issue that is proclaimed a crisis of human rights, and the Museum for Human Rights to illustrate this paradox that Canadians live in. Another example of such a confrontation is the following that is featured in a Toronto Star article (Mallick, August 20; 2014): “Often there is not a word about Aboriginal children being neglected or abandoned or having a hard life after 150 years of colonialism, family patterns disrupted by residential schools, sexual abuse, extreme poverty and hearty never-ending racism”. The bubble of Canada as a happy, diverse and tolerant nation that is often sketched (Government of Canada, October 26, 2017) is burst by the enumeration of the cold and hard reality of (post) colonial history. These facts have often been and still remain largely hidden from the public eye, from history books and even from archives (Vowel, 2016), so it is telling that journalists opt to include these facts in a national newspaper in an article devoted to the murder of an Indigenous girl. In this sentence, the collision between the existing attitudes towards Indigenous people and the reality of poverty and abuse linked to colonialism and residential schools; two of the many harms that have been done by the non-Indigenous population sends a powerful message: Tina Fontaine is not the one to blame for this death, but society is. When applying the theory of agenda setting, it thus becomes clear that the media wants to tell people to think about the issue critically. It was front-page news when Tina’s corpse had just been discovered. The media attention did not stop, but continued until the trial of Raymond Cormier. Consequently, the issue stays on the public agenda.

Nevertheless, it becomes clear from the articles that it is not just awareness that must be raised but that action must follow. As noted in the Globe and Mail (Laze Carlson & Galloway, July 16; 2016) “a \$14 million dollar inquiry into the 2005 death of Aboriginal woman Phoenix Sinclair culminated in 2013 in 62 recommendations (nearly two-thirds have yet to be fully implemented)”. This means that although there have been inquiries already, they do not have the desirable consequences, which actions to improve the subject matter. The problem is that the same article also mentions how some policy makers do not act on the situation and even ignore the fact that racism, trauma and sexism are involved in the murder of this Indigenous woman. An example of

this came from the *Globe and Mail* (Laze Carlson, August 26; 2014): “Prime Minister Stephen Harper says that the crime was not to be considered a social phenomenon but purely a crime”. If decision makers like the prime minister cannot see the real problem, action in order to provide a more secure situation for Indigenous women can not be attained.

The analysed articles thus show conflicting social norms and attitudes. On the one hand there is an activism and a sense of urgency that change must be made. The case has indeed incited a national inquiry and has made people for example reconsider the Child and Family services. On the other hand, when looking at status conferral, the articles cite high status people expressing rejecting attitudes towards the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. This could keep colonial power relations intact since Aboriginal women are not being given a voice in the articles that were analysed for this thesis.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

3.1 Discussion

The findings about Tina Fontaine are different than was expected in the hypothesis that was based upon the theory discussed in chapter 1. At the time of Tina’s murder, grassroots projects were starting to form by Indigenous groups in order to address the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women. Already before the crime took place, inquiries were held, but the governmental organisations never felt the urgency to continue and act upon the results of those inquiries. Tina’s case has served as a catalyst for the idea that something must be done to change Indigenous women’s destiny, which can be seen as an explanation for the change of representation. The seed was already planted and the severity of this specific case, a 15-year-old girl that already was in a Child Support Programme being killed and being wrapped in an old duvet cover and thrown into a river weighed down with stones, made people realise the severity of the larger issue. According to Whitaker et. al. (2013), in order to be successful, they must be designed and delivered in ways that attract the public’s attention. They do this by using language that the audience recognises. Also the message must arouse needs and present ways to meet these needs. It is therefore possible that the reason of the changing representation is the already changing attitude in society instead of a media revolution. Now that it is clear that the representation is changing, it is possible to raise

more awareness for the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and to stimulate their emancipation. It is also clear that society already is more open towards change. Once media keep up this more positive representation, this can keep confronting people with current defaults in the system and thus keep on demanding change.

The validity of this research is limited because of the sample size. The research only looked at 2 newspapers with national reach, but it is possible that the representation of Tina Fontaine's murder is different in provincial or other local newspapers since these newspapers have a different audience. Local newspapers from a small town can reflect the opinions of this small town, while city newspapers reflect the cities attitudes. Since Canada is a very big country, it is hard to reflect the attitudes of Canada within a representation for newspapers with a national reach. The degree in which the established representation can reflect the existing attitudes towards Indigenous women is thus limited. Another limitation of the research is the fact that it is written from a non-Canadian, non-Indigenous, European perspective. This is a risk of a critical discourse analysis since I interpret linguistic choices and combinations as having certain connotations that might not have the same connotation in Canada for an Aboriginal or a non- Aboriginal reader. Another limitation of this research could be the fact that Tina's murder happened under special circumstances. She was a girl, not a grown woman. Also, she was already in the care of government services. After her initial disappearance, she was seen by officials, but they did not bring her back to her caretakers. The case thus not only shows the severity of the murder, but also the flaws in governmental institutions.

Tina's story was not the usual story of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The girl was already in government care, so her story rebukes the myth that government institutions are better able to care for these children than Indigenous parents. It could be possible that the attention that was generated by this case was occasioned by her young age, which made her case different from other cases regarding missing and murdered Indigenous women. A relevant follow-up question could thus be whether adult Indigenous women are held more responsible for their own abuse.

It could also be interesting to compare and contrast the murder of a white woman with the murder of an Indigenous woman or girl. This study could try to see whether the representations are becoming more similar or if there are still significant

differences on a linguistic level, a textual level and a societal level. Another element of this thesis that deserves more attention is the fact that a case such as Tina's has different stages of reporting. First there is the body that is found and the articles report a situation. Then there is a background story about the victim and the suspect. When a trial follows, that will also be reported. If the course of the case is followed, it is possible to see whether representation changes when the main focus of the article changes.

3.2 Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to determine the media representation of Indigenous women in news coverage on events regarding missing and murdered Indigenous women. By means of a critical discourse analysis, I have looked at this representation on three different levels. On a word level, it becomes clear that Tina's youth and innocence is emphasised. The articles made her human by adopting words that showed her vulnerability. She is a victim of a horrible crime. Through the use of words with a negative connotation, the objectification of the woman in this murder and the atrocity of the murder are made clear.

The context that is provided adds to this break with the tradition of representing Indigenous issues within a postcolonial framework. The murder is contextualised, in both writing and imagery, with information on the larger issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The statistics and pictures show that Tina is one of the many women who have been killed because of racism, sexism and postcolonial trauma. The murdered Indigenous woman is represented as a victim of society, which is elaborated, by strong metaphors and comparisons. Evidence is given through the mentioning of both personal information about the victim and historical facts about events that have can partially explain for her personal situation such as the disruption of family bonds by the residential schools. It makes the murder even more distressing and incites compassion for the victim. Although this representation shows a change with the problematic representation as found by Sikka (2009), Mahtani (2001), Wilkes, Corrigan & Ricard (2010) and Harding (2006), there is a big difference in status conferral between a white police officer and the Indigenous family of the victims. The stereotype of the squaw is found when looking at how the mother is represented as a flawed mother who struggles with alcohol abuse.

The Canadian national media emphasises the conflicting societal attitudes and norms on Indigenous women. On the one hand, it shows how society values the matter and how action must be undertaken in order to save these girls and women. This is done through confrontation with Canadian norms and values. On the other hand, the media shows how the national and federal government do not all see the problem or the urgency to act upon it. This devaluates the person and the murder of Tina Fontaine.

The Canadian written national media represent Indigenous woman in news coverage different than what was expected so the hypothesis is refuted. Tina Fontaine was portrayed as a young, vulnerable and innocent girl that became the victim of a horrifying history and reality. A reality that is hard to change, she was one of many.

4. Works Cited

- Borrows, J. (1994). Constitutional law from a First Nation perspective: Self-government and the royal proclamation. *U. Brit. Colum. L. Rev.*. Vol. 28(1), 1-47.
- Bourassa, C., McKay-McNabb, K., & Hampton, M. (2004). Racism, sexism and colonialism: The impact on the health of Aboriginal women in Canada. *Canadian Woman Studies*. Vol. 24(1), 23-30.
- CBC Radio (2018, March 15). Is the Trudeau government succeeding in improving the lives of Indigenous people? *CBC Radio*. Retrieved 23 May 2018, from <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/checkup/is-the-trudeau-government-succeeding-in-improving-the-lives-of-Indigenous-people-1.4538123>
- Elias, B., Mignone, J., Hall, M., Hong, S. P., Hart, L., & Sareen, J. (2012). Trauma and suicide behaviour histories among a Canadian Indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Science & Medicine*. Vol. 74(10), 1560–1569.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.01.026>
- England, J. (2004). Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects. *Antipode*. Vol. 36(2), 295–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2004.00407.x>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical Study of Language*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Fairhurst, G. T. (2005). Reframing The Art of Framing: Problems and Prospects for Leadership. *Leadership*. Vol. 1(2), 165–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715005051857>
- Gardiner, G. (2003). Running for Country: Australian Print Media Representation of Indigenous Athletes in the 27th Olympiad. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. Vol. 27(3), 233–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193732503255476>

- Gilchrist, K. (2010). "Newsworthy" victims? Exploring differences in Canadian local press coverage of missing/murdered Aboriginal and White women. *Feminist Media Studies*. Vol. 10(4), 373–390.
- Globe and Mail staff. (2017, June 15). Globe's audience largest in Canada: survey. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/globe-has-countrys-largest-weekly-readership-survey/article34119464/>
- Government of Canada, G. A. C. (2017, October 26). Canada 150. Retrieved 23 May 2018, from <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/france/150Canada150.aspx?lang=eng>
- Government of Canada, R. C. M. P. (2011, May 24). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Retrieved 9 May 2018, from <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/Aboriginal-autochtone/mmaw-fada-eng.htm>
- Government of Canada, R. C. M. P. (2014, May 27). Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview | Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Retrieved 9 May 2018, from <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/missing-and-murdered-Aboriginal-women-national-operational-overview>
- Harding, R. (2006). Historical representations of Aboriginal people in the Canadian news media. *Discourse & Society*. Vol. 17(2), 205–235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506058059>
- Harper, A. O. (2006). Is Canada Peaceful and Safe for Aboriginal Women? *Canadian Woman Studies*. Vol. 25(1&2), 33-38.
- INAC. (2008, November 3). Indian Residential Schools [administrative page]. Retrieved 31 May 2018, from <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015576/1100100015577>
- INAC. (2016, November 3). First Nations Child and Family Services [promotional material]. Retrieved 31 May 2018, from <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100035204/1100100035205>
- Jiwani, Y., & Young, M. L. (2006). Missing and murdered women: Reproducing marginality in news discourse. *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Vol 31(4), 895-918.
- Kubik, W., Bourassa, C., & Hampton, M. (2009). Stolen Sisters, Second Class Citizens, Poor Health: The Legacy of Colonization in Canada. *Humanity & Society*. Vol. 33(1–2), 18–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016059760903300103>
- Kuokkanen, R. (2008). Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Vol. 10(2), 216–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740801957554>
- Love, T., & Tilley, E. (2013). Temporal Discourse and the News Media Representation of Indigenous-Non-Indigenous Relations: A Case Study from Aotearoa New Zealand. *Media International Australia*. Vol. 149(1), 174–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X1314900118>

- Mahtani, M. (2001). Representing minorities: Canadian media and minority identities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. Vol. 33(3), 99-133.
- Media Kit *Globe and Mail*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.postmediaadvertising.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/15-759-VS-2016-Media-Kit-V14.pdf>
- OHCHR | End of mission statement by Dubravka Šimonović, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences. Official visit to Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved 24 May 2018, from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22981&LangID=E>
- Ohmagari, K., & Berkes, F. (1997). Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Bush Skills among the Western James Bay Cree Women of Subarctic Canada. *Human Ecology*. Vol. 25(2), 197–222.
- Razack, S. H. (2000). Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder Pamela George. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*. Vol. 15(2), 91–130. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0829320100006384>
- Sears, D. O., Sidanius, J., & Bobo, L. (2000). *Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sikka, A. (2009). Trafficking of Aboriginal Women and Girls in Canada. *Aboriginal Policy Research Series*. Ottawa, ON: Institute on Governance.
- Smith, D., Varcoe, C., & Edwards, N. (2005). Turning around the intergenerational impact of residential schools on Aboriginal people: implications for health policy and practice. *The Canadian Journal of Nursing Research / Revue Canadienne De Recherche En Sciences Infirmieres*. Vol. 37(4), 38–60.
- Smith, J. (2018, February 14). Time for ‘rights-based approach’ to Indigenous affairs, PM Trudeau says. *CTV News*. Retrieved 24 May 2018, from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/time-for-rights-based-approach-to-Indigenous-affairs-pm-trudeau-says-1.3803111>
- Tasker, J. P. (2016, February 16). Minister’s comment highlights confusion over missing, murdered women numbers. *CBC News*. Retrieved 11 June 2018, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mmiw-4000-hajdu-1.3450237>
- Toronto Star Media Sheet. (2018, August) Advertising Department *Toronto Star*.
- Valaskakis, G. G. (1999). Sacajawea and her sisters: Images and Native women. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. Vol. 23(1), 117-135.
- Vowel, C. (2016). *Indigenous writes: a guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit issues in Canada*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: HighWater Press.
- Whitaker, W. R., Ramsey, J. E., & Smith, R. D. (2013). *Mediawriting: print, broadcast, and public relations* (4th ed). New York: Routledge.

Wilkes, R., Corrigan-Brown, C., & Ricard, D. (2010). Nationalism and media coverage of Indigenous people's collective action in Canada. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 34(4), 41–59.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. Sage.

Wyld, A. (2017, December 15). It's been two years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. Are the Liberals living up to their promises? Retrieved 23 May 2018, from <http://nationalpost.com/news/politics/its-been-two-years-since-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-final-report-are-the-liberals-living-up-to-their-promises>

List of Analysed Articles

Mallick, H. (2014, August 20). To us, Tina Fontaine just another missing native kid. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Mallick, H. (2014, August 21). Tina Fontaine's death should horrify us. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Lamert, S., Puxley, C., Canadian Press. (2014, August 19). Winnipeg: Aboriginal teen's body found dumped in Red River. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Lamert, S., Puxley, C. (2014, August 18). Slain 15-year-old-girl found in river in Winnipeg. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Lamert, S., Canadian Press. (2018, January 30). Trial for accused in Tina Fontaine begins in Winnipeg. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Laze Carlson, K. (2014, August 26). Tina Fontaine; Police collect clothes from riverbank; Slain Aboriginal teen's mother says items gathered by authorities – including underwear, jeans and jacket – belonged to her daughter. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Laze Carlson, K. (2015, December 19). Tina Fontaine murder: Neighbours surprised 'Frenchie' accused of killing teenager; Acquaintances and former friends describe Raymond Cormier as a quirky man with a drug habit. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from LexisNexis

Laze Carlson, K., Galloway, G. (2016, July 16). Missing and murdered Indigenous women; Manitoba seeks role in federal inquiry; Province says it should be represented on commission as it has a large Aboriginal population and has already conducted studies. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from LexisNexis.

Star Editorial Board. (2018, February 23). The Law has done its job, but there must be justice for Tina Fontaine. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from LexisNexis