

**University of Alberta**

**Terms of Engagement:  
An Anthropological Case Study of the  
Media Coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake Standoff**

by

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Dedication**

**To my husband, children, and parents whose good humor and patience have sustained me while I researched and wrote about the Gustafsen Lake standoff.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is an anthropological case study that demonstrates the benefits of a structural anthropological program to examine media representation. It takes the media coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff as the example to explore the merits of this holistic perspective on media research. The theoretical approach draws from Levi-Strauss' structural theory, with additional applications from anthropological linguistics, situational analysis, and Foucault's conceptualization of power. The data include 561 news stories from 18 newspapers across Canada, plus radio, and television news stories, as well as ethnographic interviews with 26 journalists, RCMP officials, Native leaders and people from the local communities.

The narrative reconstructs the event from the time it was a local civil dispute and news story to its evolution as a massive RCMP operation and a national news event. The study identifies the relations and organizational processes between the media and their sources in their struggles to influence the media representations. Three aspects of the media event constitute the central analyses. Responses from two Native chiefs, a defense lawyer, the RCMP Superintendent in charge of the operation, as well as from members of the local audience provide contrasting views and impacts of the media coverage. Next, journalists' discussions of news production practices and policies during the standoff offer a contextual backdrop for the quantitative analysis of invective stereotype labeling in the Canada-wide sample of newspaper stories. Last, a structural analysis of the media contexts explores how RCMP misinformation, media competition, cooperation, bias, resistance, and cultural misperceptions contributed to the media portrayals.

The dissertation culminates with a critique of textual analysis as a singular approach to media studies, and outlines the benefits of a structural anthropological program. I employ the findings to suggest law enforcement and media policy recommendations, making explicit the structural power within law enforcement and the media that can either subvert or support a democratic pluralist society. This research builds on theories of stereotype construction, media stereotyping and contributes to the body of literature regarding the study of media, and media representations of minorities.

## Acknowledgements

This research was the result of a collaboration with people from as diverse perspectives as anyone might imagine. I could not have attempted this endeavor without the journalists who took time from their hectic work schedules at the *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Province*, *Victoria Times Colonist*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Press*, *Broadcast News*, *CKNW Radio*, *CBC Radio*, *Cariboo Radio*, *CBC Television*, *BCTV*, and *CTV*. A special thanks goes to George Garrett, now retired from *CKNW Radio* in Vancouver, for his contributions both to the research and as a reader of parts of this work.

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My committee allowed me unfettered autonomy to research a topic that was contentious, complex, and challenging, and that became my passion for the past four and a half years.

I would also like to acknowledge mentors from my earlier graduate years who encouraged me, and influenced this research. To Carl Urion, who inspired me throughout my Masters and PhD programs, as well as introduced me to anthropological field methods and linguistic anthropology. Carl was a strong influence on my decision to tackle the Gustafsen Lake standoff for my doctoral study. To Tony Fisher, who offered his wisdom in anthropology while on my Master's committee, and again during the early stages of my PhD program. To Anne Marie Decore, my Master's supervisor, who taught

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Last, but not least, is my tribute to Bruce Bain, who tragically passed away last year. Bruce took me under his wing during my undergraduate course work in language and cognition, and encouraged me to continue in this area of study as an anthropology graduate student. Bruce's scholarship in psycho-social dynamics of language guided my analysis of stereotyping.

Several people and institutions helped me to gather a vast data collection. Thanks to the Edmonton Public Library for the boxes and boxes of newspapers! In addition, I gratefully thank the *Vancouver Sun*, *Victoria Times Colonist*, and *CBC Radio* for copyright permission for assorted media materials. I owe a special thanks to individuals at 100 Mile House for their assistance in providing other materials: John Sinclair, current editor of the *100 Mile House Free Press* for copyright permission for newspaper photographs; to Peter Lunn, from Lunn Enterprises for copyright permission for the regional and town maps; to Nigel Hemingway, from Kidston and Hemingway for supplying me with survey maps of Gustafsen Lake; and to Allan Forcier, from the British Columbia Ministry of Forests, for a forest cover map of Gustafsen Lake.

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**List of Significant Events Pertaining to the  
Media Coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake Standoff**

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1989             | Percy Rosette asks Lyle James if he may hold a Sundance at Gustafsen Lake.  |
| 1989-1995        | The years that the Sundance take place at Gustafsen Lake.   |
| June 1995        | Unconfirmed reports of shots fired at forestry workers.   |
| 17 June 1995     | A meeting takes place between representatives of the ranch owner, people at the Gustafsen Lake camp, and the Cariboo Tribal Council.  |
| 2-12 July 1995   | The Sundance is held at Gustafsen Lake.   |
| 11 August 1995   | Forestry officers arrest two men for illegal fishing practices. Illegal weapons are found during a search of their vehicle. The men are taken into RCMP custody.                                    |
| 18 August 1995   | Shots are fired at an RCMP Emergency Response Team near the Gustafsen Lake camp.  |
| 19 August 1995   | The RCMP hold a press conference at Williams Lake.  |
| 24 August 1995   | Shots fired by camp members toward an RCMP helicopter   |
| 25 August 1995   | Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi visits the Gustafsen Lake camp. A gunshot is fired shortly after he departs. A few hours later, the RCMP set up barricades, preventing further media access to the camp. |
| 26 August 1996   | Grand Chief Mercredi makes a final visit to the Gustafsen Lake camp.  |
| 27 August 1995   | Shots are fired at two RCMP officers and their vehicle. They are saved from serious injury because they are wearing flak jackets.   |
| 29 August 1995   | The RCMP media relations officer holds an "off the record meeting" with the media.  |
| 4 September 1995 | The RCMP report a shooting attack on RCMP officers and their vehicle to the media.  |

- 5 September 1995 A few media witness and document the arrival of armored personnel carriers.
- 6 September 1995 The RCMP confiscate *CBC Television* video-tapes.
- 7 September 1995 A meeting between leaders of 17 bands of the Shuswap Nation, and RCMP officials is held at Alkali Lake.
- RCMP report that some people in the camp shot at an RCMP helicopter.
- 8 September 1995 Shuswap intermediaries begin visiting the Gustafsen Lake camp, and they bring food for the people.
- 11 September 1995 Twenty-five Aboriginal bands hold a meeting at Merritt.
- 11 September 1995 A firefight takes place between the Emergency Response Team and the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp.
- 12 September 1995 The Emergency Response Team fire on a lone male walking near Gustafsen Lake.
- 13 September 1995 Native spiritual leader Arvol Looking Horse visits the Gustafsen Lake camp.
- Chief Antoine Archie gives a message to the Gustafsen Lake camp in Shuswap and in English over *CBC Radio*.
- 15 September 1995 Television crews tour RCMP Camp Zulu.
- 16 September 1995 A media pool tours RCMP Camp Zulu.
- 17 September 1995 The Gustafsen Lake standoff ends and the camp occupants are taken into RCMP custody.
- 24 September 1995 Several members of the media attend the RCMP tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp.
- 8 July 1996-  
20 May 1997 Trial of the Gustafsen Lake defendants in a high-security courthouse in Surrey, British Columbia. The trial ends with 39 acquittals and 21 convictions.

## **List of People Identified in this Study**

### **Civilians**

Lyle and Mary James, owners of the ranch that includes Gustafsen Lake

Percy Rosette, a spiritual leader at the Sundances at Gustafsen Lake

John Hill, 1995 Sundance leader

Chief Antoine Archie, of the Canim Lake Band

Chief Agnes Snow, of the Canoe Creek Band

William Ignace (Wolverine), a leader at the Gustafsen Lake camp

Chief Nathan Matthew, of the North Thompson Band

Bill Lightbown, Kootenay elder

Ovide Mercredi, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations

George Wool, senior defense council of the Gustafsen Lake defendants

### **RCMP**

Staff Sergeant Martin Sarich, 100 Mile House RCMP Detachment

Sergeant Peter Montague, British Columbia RCMP media liaison

Superintendent Len Olfert, RCMP [Kamloops Subdivision]

Dr. Mike Webster, RCMP psychologist

### **Media**

Steven Frasher, editor of the *100 Mile House Free Press*

George Garrett, radio journalist, *CKNW Radio*, Vancouver

Conway Fraser, radio journalist, *CBC Radio*

Gary Mason, editor of the *Vancouver Sun*



**TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT:  
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF THE  
MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 1995 GUSTAFSEN LAKE STANDOFF**

**INTRODUCTION**

The following is a case study of the media coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff, which examines the contexts that contributed to the media characterizations of the event. Generally, the media presentation of a news event contains little information as to how the sources and the media jockey for the controlling perspective of the situation. In recent years, the struggles for defining news events between the media, institutions, and sources have come to the attention of the public by becoming major news events in themselves. A few recent Canadian examples are called to mind. These include the complaint by the office of the Prime Minister that the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Television* presented biased coverage of the 1997 University of British Columbia student protest of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Summit meetings.<sup>1</sup> Another case is the 1998 complaint by the British Columbia provincial government against a newspaper publisher's editorial policy for his 53 community newspapers to oppose the Nisga'a treaty, which had yet to be approved in the provincial legislature.<sup>2</sup> A final example is the news coverage of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) press

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<sup>1</sup> During this demonstration, the media televised the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) using pepper spray to subdue demonstrators. While video-tape recording the action, a *CBC* cameraman captured on video-tape an RCMP officer spraying the television camera and the cameraman himself. There was an implication at the time that the Canadian Prime Minister was involved in the instructions to the police to use whatever force necessary to subdue the student demonstrators. Later, the Prime Minister's office alleged *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)* bias in the reporting of the event. An investigation revealed that a *CBC* journalist had email communications with one of the student demonstrators, implying that the journalist may have crossed professional boundaries by acting as an advisor. A *CBC* ombudsman later cleared the *CBC* reporter of conflict of interest and anti-government bias. ("Reporter's coverage of APEC exonerated," in the *National Post*, 24 March 1999 A5.)

<sup>2</sup> David Black, the publisher, argued that the policy was restricted to editorials and did not inhibit the publication of a variety of views expressed in news stories, letters to the editor, or columns. He said that his decision to impose an editorial stance was in response to the provincial government's multi-million dollar publicity campaign for the Nisga'a agreement. After a review by the British Columbia Press Council, the publisher's editorial policy was upheld. ("Mine to do with as I please," in the *National Post*, 17 March 1999 B5.)

release announcing that an Alberta gas well shed had been dynamited by unknown persons, an explosion that was later disclosed as part of an RCMP undercover strategy.<sup>3</sup>

When the underlying news production circumstances of a news event are brought to public attention, multiple levels of reality are revealed. The level of reality that media traditionally make available to the public is comprised of the media products of the news gathering. The hidden levels of reality consist of the structural relations between the media and their sources in their negotiations and struggles to construct the definition of the situation in the construction of the news. When media include this contextual information in the news products, they integrate different layers of reality, bringing hidden aspects of the news to the surface. On such occasions, a traditional news schema is breached. Instead of observing and interpreting, the journalists have identified themselves to their audiences as active players<sup>4</sup> in the news event.

The 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff was a news event in which such a breach occurred. It was the largest and most expensive RCMP operation in its history. For approximately one month, the standoff was the occasion of a national and international news event. The standoff involved Natives and non-Native supporters camped on a small parcel of ranch land, which they defended as unceded Aboriginal territory. They refused to leave the location, and the RCMP were called in to assist in the mediation. After a series of shooting incidents and a seizure of weapons associated with the camp, the RCMP declared the situation a criminal investigation. A standoff between the people and the RCMP ensued, and there were more incidents of violence between members of the camp and the police, with two individuals sustaining injuries.<sup>5</sup> At the conclusion of the standoff, 18 individuals were arrested and charged with various offences, ranging from

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<sup>3</sup> The RCMP press release about the demolished shed alarmed the local community and raised suspicions against one of their neighbors, who was a central figure in the RCMP investigation. ("RCMP defend methods," in the *Edmonton Journal*, 5 February 1999 A8.)

<sup>4</sup> I consider "players" to be synonymous with "social actors" in this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Two individuals were injured during the standoff. A female member of the camp was shot in the arm during a skirmish with the police, and a soldier from the Canadian Armed Forces (part of a group that was brought in to drive and service the armored personnel carriers) was injured while handling a stun grenade.

attempted murder to mischief. During the pre-trial phase of the court case, the lawyers for the defendants submitted to the court that a fair trial had been jeopardized because of the pre-trial media coverage.<sup>6</sup> Evidence from media products, statements by witnesses for the defense, and testimony from the RCMP media liaison supported this allegation. During the trial, one journalist was identified by name as contributing to a police strategy. The media reported some of the trial revelations concerning the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. However, most of the circumstances of the news event were not brought to light. This case study of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff examines the portrayal of the event by drawing from the perspectives of the journalists, their primary sources, and the media products.

### **From Text to Context**

The preliminary analysis of Gustafsen Lake news stories from 17 newspapers across the country found the media coverage striking in terms of quantity and content. During the month-long period of the event, there were 529 news stories published.<sup>7</sup> However, the quantity of coverage varied according to the region, and was reflected in the proximity of the newspaper outlet to the event. The newspaper samples from British Columbia were saturated with daily news developments and related stories. With the exception of the *St. John's Evening Telegram*, the coverage in the maritime provinces was scant. Throughout the 17 newspapers, stories about the standoff at Gustafsen Lake were consistently twinned or placed on the same page as the concurrent 1995 standoff at Ipperwash, Ontario. News stories in British Columbia most often appeared in the first few pages of the newspapers, but in the samples from other parts of Canada, there was considerable variation. Incidents of violence generally appeared as front-page stories in the cross-Canada sample.

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<sup>6</sup> This information is taken from the transcripts of the Proceedings at Challenge for Cause Application, No. X043738 New Westminster Registry, New Westminster, B.C. 7 May 1996.

<sup>7</sup> This number does not include columns or editorials.

A distinctive feature of the newspaper coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff was that it was portrayed like a war. There were screaming headlines announcing violent clashes. The photographic images (which became file photographs for subsequent stories) captured angry-looking protesters in camouflage clothing and with faces hidden with bandanas. Grim-looking Emergency Response Team members in flak jackets were shown carrying high-powered weaponry. The most striking images were the photographs of a convoy of armored personnel carriers barreling down a dusty forestry road at dawn. The news stories referenced frequent helicopter patrols, reminiscent of the Vietnam War. There were constant references to AK-47 automatic weapons being in the camp. At the conclusion of the event, the RCMP disclosed that they made use of some of the technology employed during the Persian Gulf-War. Stories of police searches of civilians and their vehicles, and police blockades to prevent public access to the region reinforced the seriousness and tension of the time. There was a distinctive “us against them” theme, and a profusion of labeling from various sides to vilify the people in the camp, the police, and the government. Specific incidents in the news stories cast participants in the event as war enemies and war heroes. In the content analysis of the newspapers, it seemed that the hostilities in the standoff had erupted in the news story text.

In many ways, the media coverage of the standoff was also like a theatrical production: as one source left the scene or an incident faded in memory, another source or incident was waiting in the wings. There were periods of violent outbreaks and flurries of activity. At other times, there was little or no information about the protest. Often these lulls were taken up with interviews with politicians, academic experts, concerned Native and non-Native citizens, and human-interest stories that continued the flow of the news narrative. Generally, the information provided by the police and politicians was given greater prominence in the news stories. This was evident in their positioning within the story, in their consistency as news sources, and the number of times they were quoted. The standoff was episodic in terms of incidents involving police and the camp, and in terms of rotating media sources. Early in the conflict, there were quotations from the protest

leaders inside the camp. After about ten days into the event, this source vanished. Although all of the newspapers provided some degree of alternative perspectives, none of the news stories provided any first-hand witnessing to outbreaks of violence between the camp and the police. News stories maintained coherence in their narratives by linking previous and current developments, and by doing so, reinforced the particular media characterizations of the unfolding event.

At the same time, not all the newspapers in the sample conformed to the same telling of the news narrative. The most distinctive was *Vancouver Sun's* portrayal. Early in the standoff, the *Vancouver Sun* news stories began to openly challenge the police perspective of the event. There was greater contextual information about the dynamics between the police and the media, and the interactions between police and various sources. The *Vancouver Sun* printed a story describing a “closed-door” meeting with the journalists, in which the RCMP media liaison criticized them. On several occasions, the news stories stated that the journalists were not allowed access to the camp after the first week. The *Vancouver Sun* was the only newspaper to include references that raised doubts about the RCMP “multifaceted operational plan.” The *Vancouver Sun* also included information not found in the other sample newspapers. On close inspection, the information appeared to be actual conversations between the RCMP negotiators and the people at the camp.

One of the first problems encountered in the analysis of the newspaper coverage was that the richness of the data could not be adequately assessed with standard discourse and newspaper analysis methodologies. The large size of the sample should have yielded many possibilities for understanding the media portrayals of Native resistance. The analysis revealed patterns of characterizations, but they could not offer much more than descriptive assessments. Text analysis could not explain why the media portrayed the event and the players a particular way. Categories of news discourse features (either from media theorists or from sociolinguists), allow for a functional analysis of the media texts.

However, these are unable to track the dynamics of how the media and their sources negotiated (or struggled) to influence the dominant definition of the situation. The text analysis did reveal distinct frames from which the various actors acted and interacted, but the story content implied that these frames were informed by complex relations between the media and their sources. Even if the aspect of these relations had been set aside to create another avenue for analysis, these textual data were insufficient to get beyond speculative explanations, in order to enter the realm of conclusive understandings. As an anthropological problem, what was required was a means to “move off the verandah,”<sup>8</sup> and explore the lived experience of covering the media event.

In response, I developed an anthropological research approach to study media. This would allow me to access deeper levels of meaning than current text-based treatments. It is widely known that media texts often reveal bias, stereotype characterizations, and distortions of reality. Yet, the contextual factors that lead to such representations have not been systematically investigated. Anthropology has the tools from structural theory, anthropological linguistics, and situational analysis with which to explore the contextual relations that lie behind the media text. The Gustafsen Lake standoff will be treated as a case study: a) to identify the limitations of a textual analysis as a singular approach to media studies and b) to demonstrate the benefits of a holistic study of media representation, and more specifically, the benefits of a structural approach that considers media texts as well as the social contexts that inform them.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

Several different literary sources in the research of media, media and minorities, and ethnographic accounts of Native and non-Native relations in British Columbia provide a

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<sup>8</sup> This expression is commonly associated within anthropology as a shift in research paradigms, specific to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, around the time of World War I.

backdrop for this study.

### **Studies of Media**

Media anthropology has been a sub-discipline within anthropology since the early 1970s. Three areas of focus have been conceptualized by Allen (1994). The area that investigates media structure, function, process, technologies, and audiences is the closest fit for this study, although the aspects of a holistic and critical study of a particular media event are not identified. A search of the literature in media anthropology was unable to locate studies regarding specific media events, particularly those involving ethnic or racial conflict. Consequently, there were no *a priori* theoretical or methodological models to guide this research, and these had to be designed as part of this case study.

Several interdisciplinary studies from media and communications, cultural studies, sociology, and political science (some of which incorporate anthropological theory, concepts, and methodologies) contribute background information for this case study. These interdisciplinary studies range from general findings about media products and journalism to studies of particular events. They provide a framework to appreciate how media are generally studied, the features and themes found in media products, and parallel reporting conditions during the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

Text-based research most often focuses on the narrative qualities and functions of news products, which confer varying interpretations and assessments of journalistic claims of truth-seeking and objectivity. Bird and Dardenne (1988) examine the narrative and mythical qualities of news stories while considering these representations of reality, but not reality itself. Bennett and Edelman (1985) evaluate how the political narratives in news stories promote stereotype images. Hall (Hall and O'Hara 1984) also analyses the narrative and mythical themes found in news accounts, and interprets news as constructions of reality that are the outcomes of competing interests. Silverstone (1988) employs Levi-Strauss' structural model to examine the narrative features of television

products. Although Silverstone does not provide a specific methodological program, he affirms that media research should explore the structural and dynamic relations between the text and the context.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that media manipulation by powerful elites in the United States contradicts the ideals of democracy. Their analysis of international news events covered by influential media organizations reveals how the powerful structure the representation of news events. In this seminal work, Herman and Chomsky attempt to raise public consciousness to the subtleties of media control.

Hackett and Zhao (1998) critique postmodern interpretations of media as privileging the text while excluding other facets of study. They challenge media scholarship that discounts investigations that assess truthfulness, accuracy, and representational adequacy as outmoded. Hackett and Zhao call for research that seeks out deeper level understandings of media contexts, and that look beyond the surface structure of text for a more complete understanding of media.

Other interdisciplinary research examines media contexts in general and in specific case studies. The latter involves (to varying extents) analyses of media products. Generalized journalistic contexts concerning the socialization of journalists, routines, and news production practices that have particular relevance for this study are outlined by Breed (1955), Darnton (1975), Gans (1979), and Berkowitz (1997). Specific case studies that resonate with some similarities of the conditions during the reporting of the Gustafsen Lake standoff are found with case studies of the media coverage of the 1982 Falkland Island War and the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Harris' (1983) examination of the British media coverage of the 1982 Falkland Islands War details the journalists' responses to restricted access, relations with military sources, and starvation for fresh and balanced information. Kellner (1995, 1992) outlines the strategies used by military sources with the media to demonize the Iraqis and particularly Saddam Hussein, as well as to stifle



dissent in the media. Canadian studies of social and political movements identify how news stories are the outcomes of dynamic negotiations of frames between sources and the media, and discuss the impact of media practices and policies on news products. Hackett (1991) assesses the media coverage of the annual Walk for Peace in Vancouver, and includes the production factors and editorial perspectives that foster the positive characterization of the event in the press. Doyle, Elliott, and Tindall (1997) consider the role of the media as a site of contestation during the debate in British Columbia over the forestry practices that positioned environmentalists (including Greenpeace) against the forestry industry. They challenge the stereotype of media as an apparatus that promotes dominant ideologies. Robinson (1998) analyses the Montreal print and television coverage of the 1980 Quebec Referendum debate, and finds the dominant frame of the media characterizations to be most influenced by the politicians. Robinson also identifies the media's news production practices that facilitate a balance of coverage. Stevenson (1995) observes that a common fault of most critical media theory and media studies is the assumption that the audience accepts the media representations without question. He uses the audience studies of the Persian Gulf War to demonstrate that the British public displayed a range of critical perceptions of the media coverage. To summarize, there is a growing trend in media research to integrate news products with background information concerning the circumstances of covering news events. The aspect of audience response tests the effects of media coverage on public opinion by considering the agency of the public to interpret the media coverage within a personal frame of reference. Particularly in the wake of the critiques of the distorted media coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, there has been a call for more critical and detailed research of media events.

### **Theories and Concepts Regarding Media Representation of Minorities**

The literature regarding media representation of minorities outlines the features of how media consistently position minorities as socially marginal, and validate the social hierarchy that situates the minorities on the bottom rung. Fairclough (1989) examines the power of sources to maintain the dominant social values, and the minimal attention

provided sources with little or no status in the society. Van Dijk (1987) demonstrates how racism is promoted in mainstream media. Lule (1997) uses the example of the rape trial of former heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson to discuss more subtle forms of racial stereotypes in the American press. Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) examine the deficit image of minorities in the media, and that the characterization of minorities in the media as a barometer to indicate their social status. An inherent problem with these discussions is the unstated assumption that the conditions of media production, editorial policy, and power are standard, and thus yield predictable characterizations.

### **Media Representation of Contemporary Native Protests in Canada**

Tennant (1990) identifies that Native protest leaders in British Columbia have become more media conscious in the 1980s, and that the media have served to bring Aboriginal land claims to the public forum. Long (1992) concurs that at a national level media have helped to strengthen the support base for Native issues. Ponting (1990) assesses that the media attention of the Mohawks from Quebec has provided them with an international forum and a bargaining tool with the federal government. Grenier's (1994) content analysis of the *Montreal Gazette* prior to and during the 1990 Oka crisis found an "Indians versus us" general theme, most likely the result of advertisers subtly influencing news policies. Switlo's (1997) account of the Gustafsen Lake standoff centers more on the legal and historical aspects, but the author acknowledges that the RCMP did not provide the media with accurate information during the conflict. This contributed to distorted negative characterizations of the protest. Thus, media journalists and other social actors involved in Native protests and social movements have vested interests in the media coverage of these events. However, the success of Aboriginal activism in controlling their media representations is tentative due to the struggle with more powerful media sources and the media itself. These depictions of media coverage do not consider in their assessments the actual news production factors specific to the news event, or the negotiations between the media and various sources to define the situation.

### **Contemporary Ethnographies of Native/non-Native Relations in British Columbia**

Among the ethnographies of Native people in British Columbia are two ethnographies that provide some background understanding of how Aboriginal people experience being subordinated and marginalized in their interactions with non-Native people and institutions. Speck (1987) examines how the death of a young Native girl at Alert Bay, British Columbia signifies the level of disregard for Native healthcare. Speck links the tragedy to the larger political and historical underpinnings of Native/non-Native relations since the colonial period of the province. Furniss (1997) explores the pervasive thematic “frontier complex” that underlies the status domination by Euro-Canadians of Native people at Williams Lake, British Columbia. I conducted this research during the mid-1990s, a time of tense treaty negotiations in the region that included the period of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Furniss identifies the prevalence of stereotype characterizations of Native people and the various social settings where Native people are subordinated, as well as examples of how they contest how non-Natives define them. Both of these works identify how white colonialist attitudes concerning Native people are found within contemporary communities.

### **Conclusions**

From the literature cited, several points can be made. Research concerning media coverage of minorities, and specifically, cases of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, tend to ignore the actual circumstances of gathering the news and the competition between sources for the dominant perspective. Although the above ethnographic studies offer insights to the social dynamics of Native and non-Native relations in a variety of contexts, there is little investigation of the role of the media.

A common oversight in research of media events and media representations that restrict themselves to media products is that news production practices and the social relations that influence the media characterizations are assumed to be either irrelevant, static, or generalizable. This becomes further entrenched with functional discourse categories that

analyze media products, but that cannot adapt to news accounts that break with the norm. Functional approaches to media discourse are not adaptive to anything outside of a categorical framework. Yet, the contextual information that is occasionally disclosed within media products (and is identified in social science research) challenges media investigations to dig deeper. For example, investigations of Native social activism in Canada concur that Aboriginal groups have become increasingly efficacious in presenting themselves more positively through media images. Nevertheless, there have not been any studies to explain the contradiction between this development and the findings of negative stereotyped depictions of Native protesters in textual analyses of media characterizations of the 1990 Native conflict at Oka, Quebec. The lack of connection between these two phenomena explains, by example, the limitations of knowledge imposed when the analysis of media texts does not integrate the complexity and contradictions of a dynamic social world.

Therefore, a comprehensive study of the media coverage of an event (in this case a Native dispute) must get beyond a surface analysis of the characterization of the event and the various players. Such an investigation, if it is going to expand on knowledge about media and media coverage, must examine factors that are not apparent in the text.

The theoretical foundation for this study is comprised of Levi-Strauss' structural theory, van Velsen's situational analysis, and applications from anthropological linguistics. The method employed consider the news text as the surface structure, with the ethnographic and archival data forming the deep structure for understanding the event. The context of the media event that includes the relationships and frames of the journalists and their sources, as well as developments in the event, are examined. These background factors are integrated into a refined analysis of examples of media text generated at the time of the standoff. A validity check on the analysis is provided through select audience responses.

## **The Negotiation of Media Characterizations of a Native Dispute**

This case study considers media characterizations as outcomes of complex relations that negotiate interpretive frameworks between the media and their various sources. It is also assumed in this research that these relationships, like an event, are constantly changing. The uniqueness of the relationships is one aspect that contributes to the distinctiveness of each news event. In the process of negotiation, the social actors (including media) create diverse frames that compete and align with each other in order to dominate the interpretation of reality. The documentation of an event freezes the outcomes of the negotiated reality in that moment in time. The following is a narrative about the media coverage of the 1995 Douglas Lake blockade, which occurred a few months before the standoff at Gustafsen Lake. The narrative conveys some of the complex issues and relations between media, police, government officials, and Aboriginal people during a dispute. Before Gustafsen Lake, Native blockades in British Columbia had become major news stories. Often, journalists from different outlets would work along side of each other as they gathered information and produced their stories. The RCMP had an established practice of bringing Vancouver-based journalists (and camera crews) to news events in jets, helicopters, or buses. The RCMP media division considered this to be a cost-saving courtesy for the media. An analysis of the social interactions and power relations involved in reporting this Native dispute follows.

### **A Journalist's Narrative of the Douglas Lake Blockade**

*"There was an incident up in Douglas Lake...So, we get up to Douglas Lake...and all the media was lined up on the road outside the church—And of course, where the Natives had blocked this road. And—it was kind of the D-day before the potential riot the next morning, where the RCMP were going to go in and clear the area. And so we attempted to talk to their chief, and they said, 'In good time, Scotty Holmes will come out—Scotty Holmes will come out and talk to you.' In the meantime, all the rest of the media had left—gone back to Merritt—it was Miller time—it was time for a beer...*

*"And [our crew] stayed on the road there for about 2 ½ hours—played cards, and just stayed there. And sure enough, the chief came out, and walked out to the road with a small group of warriors, as they called themselves. We talked and explained to him our concerns about what could happen tomorrow—and no record of it. He—the chief said—we've got our own people here with cameras, [but a colleague] indicated to him that—'a*

*professional, independent [witness]—if history was going to happen, or change if history was going to take place, that this was a recognized, public witness... so he said 'Wait.' And we waited another two hours on this road, and he came back out. It was about midnight, and he said that he believed that we were sincere and honest and that we'd showed good patience, which they liked, and that if we came back at 2:00 in the morning, we would be welcomed past the line, and to park by the tent, the big teepee... [The crew] was allowed access under three conditions: that we didn't take pictures of a Native if he asked us not to; didn't interview any Natives—they could certainly talk to us, but only go to the spokespeople; and if asked to leave, we would respect that and leave....*

*"So, we went back—raced back to Merritt about 30 minutes away, to get some food. We went into the pub to drop off some walkie-talkies, and didn't tell our other crew what was happening. Because what was happening the next morning was, the media was going in on the bus—with the RCMP in the media tour. Well, we knew that they were going to be 20 miles away. If any shot rang out—nobody would hear it. We know that. And then once again, it would be our word against theirs—the RCMP against the Natives, and of course they'd fly over a helicopter and tell us what happened... So, we drove back out again. The Natives searched our vehicle and we went back in. But the next morning, Mr. Montague showed up. Adamant—[questioning] what we were doing across the line, through the line, by the teepee and [he] ordered us out. And we looked at each other and said 'ahh...' He ordered us out because the other stations couldn't get in."*

The journalist described how some of the same Aboriginal people had been at other blockades, and he recognized them. Some of these people removed their bandannas from their faces to talk to the journalist, who they now recognized from the night before. *"The one thing that got the blockade down was a meeting face to face with the federal minister and the provincial minister. And it happened in the church. It was all fenced off and no media were allowed in. And we were all like cattle on the outside of this fence looking in. And Chief Scotty Holmes said [to me], 'Please, come.' And he said, 'You must come for the blessing, and then you can come and go.' And he said to the warriors that 'he can come and go' and [the other media outlets were] stuck outside this fence—and I came in. And we did the eagle feather and the ashes and cleansed ourselves. And he said to keep respect when an elder speaks, that the time to interrupt is when she or he is finished—not in the middle. And they realized that having me there—while the ministers spoke—was a bit of insurance. And both ministers and the minister's aid asked if I was supposed to be there. And the chief said, 'Concern yourselves with the elders—not with him.' And they [the minister and the minister's aid] weren't happy I was there. They were very unhappy that I was there."*

**Why do you think they were unhappy?** *"Well, my opinion is that they could say, 'We smoothed everything over with the Natives,' and the Natives could say, 'Hey, but nothing happens, and we're not getting any better,' and I was an intermediary...I mean, I was a bit of insurance. Now, if what you were going to say in these meetings—this politician was going to say was—'I promise you better roads' and I'm not pressuring the politician*

*to say that—but if he says that, he's more apt to keep his word 'cause he's on camera. And I know—because they [the minister and the assistant] drew the attention to me right away, that they said, 'There's no media allowed in here.' And the chief said, 'But he's a guest of ours.' And the chief stood up and...it took probably an hour to bless everybody—everybody was blessed...And there was no bullshit. There was no bullshit. Because the politicians had nowhere to go. And I remember they interrupted a couple of the other Natives a couple of times. And the chief got up and ordered them to listen to the elder—her 70 years on this land has got to account to more than some months in the legislature in Victoria. And so, that night I was the only one...that got any clips, the only one that got anything—everybody else had to wait for the scrums after. And it didn't fare well. It didn't fare well with the competition. Anyways, so Douglas Lake was huge for [our crew]. And it was honest.” [Interview with journalist, anon]*

The above narrative illustrates some of the complexities of negotiating and competing for the ruling definition of the situation which engage media as well as their sources. The police assessed that a media presence under conditions of potential violence would not be prudent. However, from a non-law enforcement perspective, this arrangement would allow for the police and the government officials to negotiate with the Native leaders without a public witness. In this view, containment of the media provides the government officials and the police with the greatest control over the situation and the media characterizations.

Various motivations are evident for this media crew to resist the imposition of media containment. The crew first assessed that the police concerns for safety may have been unwarranted, and the particular crew was willing to risk a closer vantage. One of the other motivations to proceed was competition with other outlets. Scooping a story, especially one in which the media were forced into a “pack journalism”<sup>9</sup> situation, would be a professional triumph. Altruism is another motivation, with the recognition that a mainstream media outlet could be a viable witness to provide an impartial record of the event. A mainstream media outlet would also have more impact on shaping public perceptions than an amateur video recording by a member of the Native community.

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<sup>9</sup> Pack journalism refers to journalists sharing the same sources. There is little or no opportunity for an investigative approach, and the news stories offer little variation.

Associated with this, the presence of a mainstream media outlet might influence the conduct of the various players during the negotiations.

The interactions between the media crew, the Native leader, the police and government officials can be interpreted as negotiated gambits to either maintain or challenge the ability to influence the symbolic representation of the event. The group that was most able to manipulate the situation to their advantage would have the greatest opportunity to define the situation and possibly exert the most control over the negotiations. It would appear from the account that the police and the government officials were complementary in their goals to maneuver (initially at least) the situation to their best advantage. A parallel situation later developed between the media crew and the Native leader.

Media access to the event was predicated on the successful negotiations between the media crew and the Native leader, and the inability (or choice) of the RCMP to (not) interfere in these negotiations. The Aboriginal community appeared to test the journalists' sincerity. The journalists had to agree to conditions of coverage that would allow the community some degree of control of their media representation. On the day of the negotiations, the media crew could not resist the police dictates to return to the barricades. The Native leader's intervention created the bridge for the media outlet to cross over to the media event. In this way, both the Native leadership and the media outlet co-operated to gain media access. Both sides were rewarded: the media crew with an exclusive news story and the community with greater control over their public image. The Native leader used his position of authority and the locale of the negotiations (his community) to challenge the police authority to dictate media containment.

Contrasting the tenacity to gain access to the news event, the narrative suggests that the majority of the journalists were (at least outwardly) compliant. Because they formed a majority of the media presence, their interpretation of the event would also be reflected in the outcomes of this compliance. Most of the journalists were brought into the vicinity courtesy of police transportation. This has a subtle impact on the boundary roles between



the police and media. By traveling to the event (or as close as they were allowed) with the police, a reciprocating relationship is facilitated between the two groups. The blurred boundaries from this sort of relationship could diminish impartiality and stifle critical journalism.<sup>10</sup> The police restriction on media access also neutralizes them from becoming independent witnesses. At Douglas Lake, the journalists were physically led to the story, which, at another level of analysis, may have been a metaphor for their interpretation of the news event. By implication, the journalists—the ones who remained in Merritt, and later remained behind the barricades—accepted the limitations of the news stories that could be produced. Still, the impact of one outlet to challenge the predicated limitations on media witnessing is limited. In the end, the journalists that covered the meeting from the closest proximity provided the audience with a minority interpretation of the event. Such factors as audience, time frame, mode of media, and competition with other formal and informal sources of news, all reduce the effect of one news account that is radically different from the others.

The narrative also demonstrates that all of the players: the media, the police, government officials, and Native communities, had varying degrees of power and ability to negotiate and compete for control over the definition of the situation. This narrative supports the contention that, generally, the police and the government have the most power over the media to control access and hence the characterization of the situation. On this particular occasion, this was successfully challenged. The Douglas Lake blockade may have been an anomaly. The Native community is portrayed in this account as the group with the least power to define themselves or the situation. By asserting their support for the

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<sup>10</sup> While conducting this research, several journalists, even those who regularly caught rides with the RCMP media liaison, recognized that using police transportation blurred professional boundaries between themselves and the police. The relationship meant that maintaining an objective stance with the police became more complicated. A few journalists said that they avoided sharing transportation with the police because it infringes on professional ethics. One journalist said that Native people would not speak to media who they saw sharing transportation with police.

presence of a mainstream media outlet, they were now in a strategic position to correct this disadvantage. The outcome of this situation demonstrates that the negotiations between media and their sources are not necessarily predictable, and the narrative challenges the simplistic stereotype image of media coverage of Native protests.

Lastly, due to journalistic conventions, the details of the issue of access would not likely be included in any of the news accounts. Such information would exceed the boundaries of what is traditionally considered “news.” This is because it would breach the interpretive boundary in which the reporter’s subjective experience helps to frame the news account. The inclusion of such a dimension may interfere with the media’s own impression management by diminishing their objectivity and impartiality of the news accounts. Similarly, revealing the underlying dimensions of competition and struggle within media, and between media and institutions, to frame the news story would locate the media as part of the news event. By not including the details of the news context, objectivity is seemingly preserved because the journalists have not become part of the news story.

The Douglas Lake blockade is not entirely representative of the circumstances at the Gustafsen Lake standoff. At Gustafsen Lake, the people in the camp were heavily armed, and had a more direct and complex set of relations with the media. However, the RCMP control of media access and the resultant impact on the news, the competition between journalists, and the conditions that promote media resistance and compliance foreshadow the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The Douglas Lake narrative acts as a prologue to underscore the complex nature of this media event.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 outlines this anthropological investigation of media and provides a review of the literature related to the specific case study of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The anthropological study of media incorporates anthropological linguistics (which includes ethnography of communication, the study of folklore), structural anthropology, situational analysis and Foucault's conceptualization of power. The literature cited for the case study of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff includes media anthropology and interdisciplinary studies of media, theories of media and minorities, studies of media and Aboriginal resistance in Canada, and ethnographies that examine the relations between Native and non-Native people in the British Columbia interior.

Chapter 2 describes the sample and the method employed for the case study. The sample includes a breakdown of archival as well as interview data. The backgrounds of the journalists are provided and the interview protocols are discussed. Next, the methods of analyses, aspects of triangulation, validity, and ethical considerations are explained. The narrative representation of the news event and linguistic features of interview and archival data are described. Last, the scope and limitations of the research are defined.

Chapter 3 discusses the contextual background and the early developments of the standoff. The chapter opens with a general history of Native resistance in Canada, then narrows to the situation in British Columbia. Next, there is an examination of the relations between the media and the RCMP in the Vancouver area and at 100 Mile House prior to the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The narrative of the Gustafsen Lake standoff begins, incorporating interview data from several perspectives. The time frame spans from Percy Rosette's original request for the use of the property for a Sundance in 1989 until just prior to the influx of the large media outlets and the RCMP personnel in August 1995. This part of the narrative sets up the event as a background for subsequent chapters that deal more specifically with aspects of the media coverage and the media contexts.

Consequently, the analysis in this opening segment is not as detailed as with subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 begins with the initiating RCMP press conference that drew the media contingent to cover the news event, continuing up to the time that the RCMP put up barricades that prevented further media access to the Gustafsen Lake camp. The analysis explores the relations between the journalists and the camp, and the employment of impression management strategies by various sources as a tool to influence the dominant frame in news accounts. The news stories of the “failed” negotiation efforts by Grand Chief Mercredi are reassessed in light of interview data with the journalists and the media products. Last, the meanings of the installation of the barricades from the perspectives of the RCMP, the camp, and the media are presented as well as the impact on news production practices and the news stories.

Chapter 5 examines news gathering as a negotiation of information with sources that include barter, coercion, and appropriation. There is a special focus on situations of exchange of information that connect the media with the RCMP operation. The communicative features of the press conferences are examined, in terms of media protocols, news content, performance, audience, legitimacy, and physical plant. These show the difficulties experienced by the journalists and their various sources to disseminate and translate press releases into a news format. The chapter concludes with the frame of one of the news Native intermediaries who provide an alternative perspective of the camp to the media.

Chapter 6 discusses the two last violent incidents, occurring on consecutive days, that resulted in the most extreme media characterizations of the conflict: saturation and silence. The context of the events, the media products (or lack of them), and the media contexts reveal multiple levels of reality for both episodes. This analysis shows how a

media stereotype of the criminal character of the camp took its lead from the RCMP construct of the camp.

Chapter 7 concludes the narrative of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Much of the chapter centers on how the media and their sources adapted to a slowing-down of the news story. Reports of violence stopped, and progress was being made toward a resolution of the standoff by the Native intermediaries and spiritual leaders. During this time, the RCMP arranged a series of news gathering opportunities. All of these were highly controlled situations that almost guaranteed the RCMP dominance of the media interpretation of the event and of the camp.

Chapter 8 presents three final analyses of the media coverage. The first is an examination of specific audience responses and their perceptions of the media coverage, and the effects on their respective groups and communities. Concerns over the impact of audience responses are expressed by Chief Nathan Matthews, RCMP Superintendent Olfert, and defense lawyer George Wool. Local audience reaction to the media coverage of the standoff include ranch owners Lyle and Mary James, Chief Antoine Archie, *100 Mile Free Press* editor Steven Frasher, as well as some of the residents of 100 Mile House. The second analysis explores media stereotyping within some electronic, but primarily print, media. Insights from the journalists provide a contextual understanding of the quantitative findings of stereotype labeling of the people in the camp, as identified in news stories from the 17 newspapers in the cross-Canada sample, as well as the local newspaper. A further quantitative analysis identifies the national impact of the labeling by *Canadian Press*. The final discussion assesses some of the components of the structural relations between the media and those sources (primarily the RCMP media personnel) that contributed to the media coverage.

Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation. It begins by revisiting the research objectives to examine the limitations of text-based studies of media, and discusses the merits of an

structural anthropological approach to studying media, using this case study as an example. What follows is a response to the literature regarding minorities in the media, as well as previous research of the media coverage of previous Native protests. This is followed by some recommendations for the RCMP media relations program and for the media with regard to representations of Native people in the press during a conflict situation. The chapter concludes with some of the contributions of this research to various disciplines, and potentials for further research.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The literature review for this research draws from interdisciplinary studies of media, media representation of minorities, research of media characterizations of Native resistance in Canada, and community level ethnographies of Native and non-Native people in British Columbia. Although aspects of anthropological theory and methodology have been employed by other disciplines that study media, there is little media research grounded in an anthropological perspective to examine the interplay between text and context of a media event.

This dissertation goes beyond the inquiry of a particular event to demonstrate an anthropological approach to media analysis. Social science experts who study media focus on texts to decipher the meaning of events depicted. However, the paucity of systematic investigations of contextual factors leading to media representations suggests that a different conceptualization of media analysis is in order. This case study responds with anthropological theories and methodologies to extend the possibilities of media research.

#### **Anthropological Theory for This Case Study**

This study takes its theoretical and methodological approaches from anthropology to study media through anthropological linguistics, structural theory, and situational analysis. These approaches are seldom combined, yet each offers methodological and analytical tools appropriate for media research. Anthropological linguistics, through the study of folklore, and the ethnography of communication, provides discourse-centered techniques to investigate language, culture, and society in the text as well as within the context of natural communicative events. Structural theory offers the framework to examine relationships at various levels of structures within the social system. This is augmented with frame analysis, situational analysis and Foucault's ideas concerning

power. The combined research potentials of these approaches constitute this anthropological program for an investigation of media representations.

### **Anthropological Linguistics:**

#### **Ethnography of Communication and Folklore Studies**

Lorimer and McNulty's (1996) critique of content analysis approaches to media portrayals is that they lack a theoretical underpinning, resulting in unsophisticated readings (1996:106-107). In contrast, an anthropological perspective of media research draws from the broad scope of ethnography of communication and studies of folklore. Sherzer's (1987) conceptualization of a discourse-centered approach to study the relationships between language, culture and society provides the rationale for the application of communications-based methodologies to media analysis. Sherzer defines discourse as "a level or component of language use related but distinct from grammar." Discourse may be oral or written and "can be approached in textual or sociocultural and social interactional terms" (1987:296). Most importantly, Sherzer's notion of discourse relates textual patterning and the situating of language in natural contexts of use. He states:

As distinct from viewing text as metaphors (in the sense of Geertz 1973), an increasing number of researchers, in different ways, analyzes discourse, large and small, written and oral, permanent and fleeting as not only worthy of investigation in its own right, but as an embodiment of the essence of culture and as constitutive of what the language-culture-society relationship is all about (Sherzer 1987:297).

Sherzer considers verbally artistic and playful discourse, which includes narratives, and verbal dueling and political rhetoric among the modes of discourse that best reveal cultural meanings and symbols. I suggest that by extension, media products, such as news stories, could be interpreted within this range.



The anthropological study of folktales and myths provides the functional interpretations and methodological grounding available to an anthropological approach to media. The collection and translation of Native American oral folklore for anthropological purposes is considered to have begun with Schoolcraft (1851), a pioneer in American ethnography of Native folklore.<sup>11</sup> Powell (1883) further contributed to this collection, by recording myths and folklore in the original languages, using interlinear translations to reduce the effects of outside impositions on the interpretations. Boas (1891), who considered folklore an important source for identifying cultural values, instituted a more rigorous scientific approach, with taxonomic classifications to make further analyses possible. Thompson (1928) regarded motifs as the smallest element of traditional meanings, and indexed traditional narratives according to the various motifs present. This approach allowed for comparisons and historic-geographic analyses for the possible location of the point of origin. Propp's (1984,1968) structural analysis of the folktale incorporates a syntagmatic framework, which identifies the sequence and structure of Russian folklore. He discovered distinct morphological functions that prevailed in all Russian folktales. Dundes (1963,1964) later incorporated Propp's ideas into a structural examination of North American Indian folktales. Levi-Strauss (1978,1955) provided a structural analysis of myth, which he believed operated at several levels, to form a general cultural paradigm. Malinowski (1926) assessed the functional values of myths and folklore in their articulation and implications of cultural beliefs, and rules for social behavior. Furthermore, Malinowski appreciated that traditional narratives strengthened the prestige of cultural traditions by connecting them with a "supernatural reality of initial events" (Salzmann 1993:239). Hymes (1958) developed a structural methodology to study the narrative components—parts, acts, stanzas, verses and lines—in order to examine how messages are effectively communicated. Most importantly, however, he incorporated the

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<sup>11</sup> Salzmann (1993:236) notes that during the mid-17th century in North America, Jesuit priests were probably the first Europeans to collect Native folklore.

study of traditional narratives within the rubric of the ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes 1964).

Contemporary developments in folklore studies have witnessed a shift from the textual aspects of folklore to the performative considerations. This enlarges the scope to include the contextual aspects of storytelling, which attend to the detail of the relations between the storyteller and the audience. The latter includes an appreciation of storytelling in the creation and maintenance of social identities between the individual and society, the transmission of cultural and social meanings, and the particular aspects of each storytelling event. Bauman (1977) suggests that verbal art, which formerly centered on studying text, is also about performance. He discusses how performance “sets up or represents an interpretive frame within the messages being communicated,” and that the interpretive frame may supercede literal utterances (1977:9). He provides a summary of performance guidelines that includes the performer’s responsibility to the audience for communicative competence, as well as accountability for referential content (1977:11). Hymes (1981) considers performance central to the study of folklore and a form of interactive communication that requires communicative competence of the performer. He suggests that the competence of performances may be judged according to the degree in which the performances are interpretable, reportable, and repeatable. Hymes defines a performance as an occasion when one or more persons assume responsibility for the presentation (1981:84). Tedlock (1983) regards the rules for performance important, but also flexible for the needs of the storyteller and the particular audience. In Tedlock’s estimation, the craft of the storytelling should demonstrate the ability to transcend temporal and spatial distance from the action of the story—putting the audience in the middle of the action. Tedlock’s interpretation of performance includes the engagement of the audience as active participants in the storytelling event. He also acknowledges (more so than Hymes (1981) that the presence of recording devices alters the performance for the performer as well as the audience. Many of the features of the study of folklore,

traditional narratives, and myth have connections with the study of media, as will be discussed later.

Lastly, a critical perspective is possible through Duranti's (1994) recognition of the political struggles present in the traditional discourse, as exemplified in his study of the Samoan *fono*. Duranti's study also echoes aspects of Van Velsen's (1967) conception of the strategic event. The Samoan *fono* is a speech event that involves the village gathering to resolve crises and conflicts. Duranti offers examples of linguistic strategies employed by the speakers to confront, blame, and praise fellow community members. In the analysis of the *fono*, Duranti recognizes that the combination of textual analysis and contextual documentation of the speech event illuminates the differential power and status relations between the community members. For example, the way the speaker conveys information implies his perspective of the event of the crisis, as well as the speaker's manipulation of influence over the community members. Duranti advocates a methodology that combines ethnographic accounts on one hand and grammatical descriptions on the other, asserting that these will yield "more than the sum of its parts." (1994:121) Duranti situates his approach within the original goals of Bauman and Sherzer's (1974) ethnography of speaking.<sup>12</sup>

The above discussion demonstrates how anthropological methods have been incorporated to explore traditional narrative discourses. This has been accomplished in terms of content, thematic and analytic classifications, structure, social functions, social relations, and ideology. Although the textual representation of narratives is not ignored, the underlying circumstances of the story representation provide richer details and deeper levels of meanings. This allows the uncovering of nuances between the storyteller and the audience, which inform the product of the story itself.

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<sup>12</sup> Ethnography of speaking (Bauman and Sherzer:1974) is recognized to fall within the scope of the ethnography of communication.

I submit that traditional narratives, folklore, and myth resonate with many of the underlying forms, functions, and meanings associated with the media presentation of news stories. Parallel to traditional oral performances of narratives, we have television and radio broadcasts of news stories, press conferences, and media interviews. The media counterparts also focus on visual and audio aspects of the performance, with a distinct storyteller interacting with an audience (although often an imagined audience). Similarly, the traditional narrative text bears a likeness to written accounts of press conferences and interviews. The sensory aspects are reduced to visual symbols, which emphasize the language used, and written conventions, which attempt to simulate oral presentations (which are the likely sources). The functions of traditional discourse and media news stories are also similar. The media provide socially significant information through the text in order to inform the everyday lives of people in society. One reason media have become so compelling in contemporary societies is because of their ability to provide a commonality of cultural meanings in their media products. Similar to traditional stories, news stories contain imbedded guides for social behavior.<sup>13</sup> They also inform and validate the norms and values of society through the portrayal of events. With this understanding, the study of media falls within the scope of anthropological linguistics. Thus, the studies of folktales as text, and the later development of investigating storytelling contexts from an ethnographic perspective, provide the precedent for examining the product and the context of media representations. Ethnography of communication, as a discourse-centered investigative approach, serves as a link between anthropological studies of traditional modes of discourse and news discourse associated with contemporary media.

However, ethnography of communication and the study of folklore lack the analytical foundation to assess the relations between media and their sources that underpin the media products. In response, this investigation takes Silverstone's (1988) suggestion to

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<sup>13</sup> This is evident in the common perception (and body of literature) that news stories have the potential to encourage racism, gender bias, and violence.

employ Levi Strauss' structural theory to examine the relations between the context and media texts.

### **Structural Anthropology**

Structural anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1988 [1963]), provides the theoretical frame to examine media texts and the underlying contextual factors that contribute to them. I define structural analysis as a way of accounting for and examining multiple levels of a social phenomenon. A structuralist approach seeks out underlying complex social relationships that contribute to, but are not immediately identifiable in the media products at the surface level. As applied to a media event, and by taking Chomsky's (1965) system of syntax as an analogy, a structural analysis is conceptualized in layered structures. The surface structure is comprised of the actual media products: the published accounts of a news story, and the level that most media studies investigate. In this realm, linguistic (including semantic) categories, labels, and various narrative and thematic structures within the news story can be assessed. Yet, if one were to examine only the material products of media, the depth of knowledge is restricted. This is because explanations for causality and mitigating circumstances are often unverifiable from the data.<sup>14</sup> A deeper understanding is possible by examining the underpinning relations and contextual considerations in the deep structure. This level is attainable through ethnographic research that seeks the lived experiences as well as material artifacts (in addition to media products) related to the media event. The dialectic between the surface and deep structures optimize the understandings of how media representations are derived.

The following propositions on human interaction guide this structural analysis. Social actors position themselves in order to establish alliance and enmity relations. To initiate and maintain relationships, actors exchange valued items, and the negotiation that takes place during these exchanges may take the form of barter, coercion or appropriation.

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<sup>14</sup> Not only is this a weakness of functional approaches to textual analysis, it is a convention of media to refrain from revealing the full nature of the circumstances of gathering and reporting the news as part of the news story.

Negotiation implies power relations, and strategies used to exert power over others. Although power is not part of a Levi-Straussian structural paradigm, I will be incorporating Foucault's interpretation of power and power strategies later in the theoretical discussion. Structural analysis locates cultural issues and themes in the material and relational realms, and accounts for the influence of over-all structural schemes, such as social hierarchy, and time.

Another means to account for complex social relations is frame analysis, as outlined by Goffman (1974) and Tannen (1993). This analytical tool is commonly used in media studies, both for text and context-based research. According to Goffman, frames organize experience and offer definitions of the situation (1974:10-11). Frames are the interpretive structures that allow people to understand and act upon their social worlds. Frames are not static, but are mutable over time, adapting and redefining according to new experiences, information inputs, and social relationships. Frames are evident in the positioning of individuals, groups, and institutions during the news production process, and found within the media representations. Structural analysis allows for the micro-study of frames, considering frames to be the outcomes of dynamic social relations and responses to events.

The role of power within social relations provides a critical perspective for this structural analysis. Although Foucault's philosophical concepts later moved away from structuralism, his discussion of power equips structural analysis with a critical component to study relations between individuals and institutions. Foucault conceptualizes power as a "network, grid or field" of historically variable relations. It is a set of relations in which subjects are constituted as both the products and the agents of power (Baynes, Bohman, and McCarthy 1987: 96). Power is essentially positive: "an aspect of every social practice, social relation and social institution" and power relations are "nonegalitarian and mobile." Foucault asserts:

a power relationship can only be articulated on the bases of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other"

(the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:220).

For Foucault, power “exists only when it is put into action...and is not a function of consent.” However, “the relationship of power can be the result of a permanent consent, but it is not by nature the manifestation of consensus” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:219-220). A relationship of power is “a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:220).

Power relations are rooted in the system of social networks at the level of individual subjects in the social world, and at the level of institutions.<sup>15</sup> The human subject is placed in power relations which are very complex (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:209). The term “power” “designates relationships between partners...of an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one another (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:217). Power operates from the top down and from the bottom up, and is exercised upon the dominant as well as on the dominated (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:185-186). Foucault advocates a field of study in which “one must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:222).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Extending from Foucault, Wolf (1990) argues that organizations embody tactical and structural power, and that our understanding of power would benefit from conceptualizing organizations as a process, rather than a product. He states, “Asking why something is going on and for whom requires a conceptual guess about the forces and effects of the structural power that drives organization and to which organization on all levels must respond...Understanding how all these sets of people and instrumentalities can be aggregated, hooked together articulated under different kinds of structural power remains a task for the future (1990:591). Wolf advocates anthropologists employ models as “discovery procedures, not as fixed representations, universally applicable” that serve as a method of inquiry (1990:591).

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu’s theory of practice identifies a dialectic relationship between the social structure that constrains human action, while human action and politics create and modify social structure. This perspective draws attention to the dynamic interactions between social structure, institutions and social actors. (Wilk 1996:144)

In order to identify how power operates, Foucault recommends taking forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point of the investigation. (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:185). Such a program “consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:209-211). Foucault discusses the relations of power and the relations of strategies. “Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle.”<sup>17</sup> He defines strategy in three ways: to designate the means employed to attain a certain end; the way in which one seeks to have the advantage over others; and the means destined to obtain victory. “[T]he objective is to act upon an adversary in such a manner as to render the struggle impossible for him” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:224-225).

According to Foucault, power relations are intelligible because of their intentionality, and he argues that there is no power without a series of aims and objectives (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:187). Intentionality can be found within social practices, and the effects of those practices. “It is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical relationship in a particular society” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:187). Foucault finds a logic to the practices, involving will and calculation. However, the overall effect “escaped the actors’ intentions, as well as those of anybody else” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:187).

Foucault suggests that an analysis of power relations should include how power relations are brought into being. He provides examples of manifested power including the threat of arms, the effects of the word, economic disparities, the systems of surveillance, and rules that may or may not be explicit, fixed or modifiable (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:223). He states:

[d]omination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most inalcitrant fibers

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<sup>17</sup> Wilk (1996) finds that the process of struggle is a unifying force that creates a sense of common purpose, and hence community. Considered in this way, struggle is an aspect of identity formation (1996:4). This insight could be used to explain the identity of police, who struggle against those who defy the law, as well as Aboriginal people, who struggle for recognition and justice as equal members of society.



of society...it is a strategic situation more or less taken for granted and consolidated by means of a long-term confrontation between adversaries (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:226).

This case study of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff examines the structural power that shapes the relations between media and their sources. Similar to Foucault's program, it contextualizes the conflict within the social history of the state (at federal, provincial and local levels). I have reconstructed the developing relations between the players who had vested interests in the media representation for the purpose of exploring the struggles and strategies that helped to orchestrate the media coverage.

### **Situational Analysis and the Strategic Event**

This structural analysis of media representation is further refined by the inclusion of situational analysis. I define situational analysis as an analysis of social positioning and processes between individuals, groups and institutions during occasions when social stability is threatened.<sup>18</sup> Situational analysis acknowledges the complexity of behaviors, motivations and strategies found in various social settings. It (or aspects of this concept) has been employed in a variety of social science applications. This includes Goffman's (1961,1970,1974) discussions of social encounters, strategic interactions and frame analysis; Vygotsky's (1986) investigation of cognitive processes, Berger's (1963) suggested methodology for the study of social reality; Asch's (1975) ethnomusicological analysis of the ideal drum dance; and Linde's (1993) study of coherence in personal narratives. This study employs van Velsen's (1967) application of situational analysis, referred to as the strategic event, as the heuristic device to examine the media portrayals of such an occasion and the contextual factors that contributed to the characterizations. Van Velsen considers strategic events, such as disputes, the most fertile source of data for situational analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> Wolf (1990) also recognizes that "the arrangements of society become most visible when they are challenged by crises" and that these are opportune situations to study the role of power, "where major organizational transformations put signification under challenge" (1990:593).

Similar to the goal of an anthropological study of media, van Velsen regards situational analysis as a means to reaffirm real-life contexts and to use its heuristic potential to study social relations. Van Velsen's criticism of structural-functional analyses<sup>19</sup> is that "they are primarily concerned with relations between social positions or statuses rather than the *actual relations...*" (van Velsen 1967:131, italics my own). Consequently, the choices of individual subjects and conflicts are (conceptually) sacrificed in order to get at abstract general principles. Van Velsen's program recognizes the need for a diachronic perspective in the analysis, and that all data, not just select data that fit the ideal, are brought into the picture. He proposes that situational analysis for extended case studies is a remedy for the dilemma facing functionalist perspectives. In his estimation, "a situational analysis pays more attention to the integration of case material in order to facilitate the description of social processes" (1967:141). This idea is central to an anthropologically based study of media. Situational analysis demands a coherence in research design that entails a recursive process between data and a structural model in order to achieve refined, yet still "connected to reality," understandings of the system of relationships under investigation. This will be discussed in more detail elsewhere.

Likewise, the perspective taken for an anthropological approach to media supports van Velsen's (1967) and Wolf's (1990) recognition that conflict situations provide an epistemological window to explore the complex relations between individuals, institutions, and society. While there are a variety of events that take place during social encounters, not all events are considered strategic. Strategic events are dramatic circumstances that threaten social stability. It is during serious social conflicts that relations between groups, institutions (such as media, governments, and police), and individuals are under the most stress, and hence most likely discernible and verifiable for

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<sup>19</sup> Van Velsen uses "structural analysis" for the theoretical convention with which I am familiar as "structural-functional analysis." Structural-functionalism offers synchronic analysis of the structures and morphology of society, classifications of societies, and comparisons between societies. Structural-functionalism is best associated with the British social anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown. Following Gluckman's lead in making British structural-functionalism more in tune with conflict and change in society, van Velsen explores the heuristic potential of situational analysis that employs the strategic event.

study. During such crises, identity boundaries between conflicting groups are most brittle, and thus most distinguishable for the examination of social structures and relations. Van Velsen's situational analysis is an attempt to tap the complex workings of social behavior at a time when the relations are most strained and thus most visible.

The study of media representations is particularly suited to situational analysis and its refinement, the strategic event. During periods of social unrest, the strategic event and the media are natural associates: media are invariably drawn to social conflict. On one level, the media chronicle the event in a textual form. However, at the level of social relations, the media are another variable in the complex interactions between groups. This model also suggests that the media's power in social relations is its role in the magnification process that marks the strategic event.

The application of situational analysis and the strategic event is a response to strong interpretations of postmodern theories of intertextuality that deny external reality. These views are articulated by theorists such as Derrida (1976), Lacan (1977), and Barthes (1975). The gist of strong versions of intertextuality is that there is no other reality outside of the text. This stance has serious implications, as noted by Tallis (1988) and Norris (1992). Tallis' counter-argument to intertextuality is that real-world associations are most likely the impetus for language, not the other way around. In terms of this discourse-centered approach to media, intertextuality taken to the extreme implies that media create reality rather than interpret it. This notion could also be used as a justification that media studies need not seek answers beyond the text, by giving the false impression that the text represents the upper limit of knowledge. What alarmed Norris (1992) in his critique of postmodern interpretations of the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War was the attempt to reduce the horrors of the conflict to the surrealities of media text. The driving force to employ situational analysis and the strategic event is a response to the application of intertextuality to media studies in the past two decades. Situational

analysis and its refinement, the strategic event, operate on the premise that there is an independent reality beyond the text.

I also propose that situational analysis is a research tool applicable to studies of media in contemporary pluralist societies, where underlying tensions and differences between groups and institutions are difficult to assess under ordinary “stable” circumstances. When situational analysis is combined with a structural analysis with a critical perspective, the analysis of power relations and struggles between individuals, groups, and institutions is augmented.

The capability of structural analysis to construct models is the organizational tool that holds the various analytical components and elements distinct, and yet shows how they are dynamically integrated. These models are conceptual representations that use language, rather than concrete diagrams. The conceptualizations can be verified with the research data, thus keeping them connected to lived experiences. Models allow for possibilities of hierarchical arrangements and may account for unlimited combinations of interactions between the elements. A structural analysis can also predict how the model might react if one or more elements are subjected to a change in circumstances (Levi-Strauss 1988:426-427). In other words, the models created are not preconceived: they are based on the particular facts under consideration. Levi-Strauss regards the best models as those that can be tested against actual circumstances (1988:428).

Thus structural anthropology theory searches for deeper levels of understanding to account for complex relations and interactions. This requires an expanded methodology, database and analysis. An ethnographic study provides the methodology to obtain a different (but related) set of data. Ethnographic accounts are concerned with the lived experiences and perceptions of those immediately connected to the phenomenon (in this case, the construction of news stories). This would include media and their contributing sources. It is from this database that deeper levels of understanding can be achieved,

causal factors can be accessed, and thus a clearer picture of how media representations are derived is made possible.

Although a structural perspective cuts through the limitations of a functionalist approach to examine media, there are some deterrents mentioned by Tallis (1988), which I will address. Tallis' (1988) interpretation of Levi-Strauss' structuralism is that it reduces everything to structure, ignoring the context that made the analysis of the structure possible. He finds that over-emphasis of structure is evident by the generalization that all experience can be understood in terms of binary opposed signs (1988:73). Another problem he raises with structuralist thought is its incorrect assumption that the "system" can be defined in isolation from specific situations and without reference to extra-linguistic reality (1988:73). Tallis argues that structuralism has forgotten the "referential context and extra-linguistic experience [that] account for the intuitive appeal" in structuralist analysis. In response, I suspect that Tallis' assessment is most likely based on Levi-Strauss' later work on mythology that had fewer connections to ethnographic field data than his earlier studies of kinship and marriage. However, I do concur that Levi-Strauss' assignment of binary opposites seems to be forced at times. To account for these difficulties, the structuralist interpretation taken for this program does not assume a rigid application of structural linguistic theory in terms of binary oppositions and the temptation to reify systems. Rather, the data will be used to suggest the criteria that set the boundaries between elements. Lastly, situational analysis ensures that the linkages between structural models and actual contexts are maintained.

### **Summary of the Theoretical Foundation**

The following is an explanatory model of how I have integrated the above theories into the case study of media representation. The Gustafsen Lake standoff was a strategic event during which several crisis episodes took place. These episodes constitute units of study for situational analysis of the surface (media texts) and the deep structure (news contexts). I have employed anthropological linguistics concepts, frame analysis as well as

situational analysis to examine the media texts in the surface structure. The contextual data took many different forms, allowing a variety of analytical techniques. I analyzed interview transcripts and related textual artifacts (such as institutional policies and procedures) according to their interpretive frames, positioning of individuals, groups and institutions, and aspects of communication that influenced relations between players. My structural analysis of this data identified the forms of exchange, negotiation strategies, agency of the actors, relations of power, and cultural themes and issues. I assessed press conferences and news production processes in light of their communicative and performative features. The chronological organization of the media texts, and (as much as possible) the elements in the deep structure, provided me with the framework to track changes within the two structures concurrently. I studied the dialectic relationship between the media texts and the context of the news event through several iterations between the elements in the surface and deep structures. The findings identify the interplay of organizational processes that constrained and resisted the interpretations of this media event and how these processes connected to the larger social field. This combination of theories made it possible for me to probe media representation as a complex, multi-layered social phenomenon.

In conclusion, the utilization of Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology increases the potential to achieve deeper meanings in the study media. There is an appreciation that relations in society form a complex system. The analysis identifies the elements within various levels of structures in order to understand the relations between these elements. It also seeks out organizing principles to account for the way in which the elements within the system interact. Levi-Strauss posits that it is within these relations that cultural meanings are found. This structural analysis attempts a higher level of abstraction in order to discover social and cultural meanings. Although Levi-Strauss' program seeks out generalizations and universals, it is appreciated that this will require many case studies such as this before any generalizations might be made. However, each case study may be used to critique media theories and contribute toward theory building. Thus, structural

anthropology provides the theoretical perspective that is compatible with the study of media in relation to the rest of society, since it conceptualizes social, cultural, linguistic, and cognitive systems as being inherently connected.

### **Media Anthropology**

Over the past several decades, anthropology has made connections in the integration of media as a collaborative channel to raise public awareness about the discipline, as an analytical tool for journalists, and as a subject of anthropological investigation. A brief developmental history follows. Bishop (1985) traces the history of the image of American Anthropology from the late 1920s, when major newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, began printing stories about anthropological findings and ideas. Topper (1976) describes how media became more formally recognized during a 1969 workshop during the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The goal of the workshop was to examine the potential for anthropology to benefit from a closer integration with media, both for the dissemination of anthropological information and to assist in a more scholarly analysis of news by journalists. A byproduct of the latter was to promote “advocacy journalism” that would demonstrate the importance of diversity and cultural relativity, and that would become a mode for social change.

Allen (1994) also provides a history and an analysis of the directions that integration of media as a sub-discipline within anthropology might take. Allen notes that by 1977, a “Directory of Media Anthropologists” featured 44 anthropologists (Allen 1994:4). Most of the discussion in the 1970s was concerned with the importance of communicating anthropological findings and ideas to the public. By the late 1980s, the focus shifted to addressing the limited scope of information, which was often presented by journalists, and anthropology’s reluctance (and inability) “to apply its methods and perspectives to current events and communicate with the public” (1994:5). The sub-field of media anthropology was conceived during the mid-1980s, and has been dedicated to synthesizing the training and practice of journalists and anthropologists. The goal was to

create “a more culturally aware and globally conscious general public” through media products (1994:21). Allen outlines two branches of study for media anthropology. These include a research branch, which investigates media structure, function, process, technologies, and audiences, and an applied branch, which envisions the communication of anthropological information directly through media channels, or indirectly via anthropologically trained journalists (1994:26-30). Lett (1987), who combines careers in broadcast journalism and cultural anthropology, finds that the primary difference between the two fields is epistemological. Journalists report “facts” that originate from a recognized authority, whereas with anthropologists, evidence is independently examined, tested, and evaluated. While journalists generally subscribe to the idea that objectivity is synonymous with balanced reporting and being “fair” to all sources, with anthropologists, objectivity is much more tentative (1987:358). In more recent years, the study of media as a research topic has been given wider attention, exemplified by the cross-cultural research by Kottak (1990, 1996); Appadurai (1990,1991); Ginsburg (1991); Lull (1991); Lyons (1990); and Weatherford (1990), to name a few. However, a search of the literature identifies that there is a paucity of anthropologically-based research of media events, specifically, events involving a serious conflict with Aboriginal peoples.

### **Studies of Media from Other Disciplines**

Researchers of mass communications, cultural studies, political science, and sociology have drawn upon research methods and concepts derived from, or shared by, anthropology in their analyses of media and media products. Examples from this body of literature have been selected for their relevance to this study in terms of theories, methods and findings. Generally, two tracks characterize the research from these disciplines. First is an emphasis on the media products, with the most recent approach being the analysis of the narrative features of news texts that invoke a range of interpretations of intertextuality. Second is an emphasis on the contextual aspects of news production, emphasizing journalists’ experiences of covering news events, with an integration of news products in the analyses.



Bird and Dardenne (1988) connect the study of cultural myths and chronicles for their analysis of the narrative qualities of news. They attend to the mythological processes of news narratives and the study of these as an entrance point into culture. Although Bird and Dardenne concede that news is not fiction, they posit that journalists rely on limited narrative schemas that, in turn, restrict how they interpret reality and social interactions. Bird and Dardenne conceptualize news as stories about reality, but not as reality itself.

Bennett and Edelman (1985) examine how politicians and media create social worlds through formulaic and stock narratives that facilitate the dominant social order. Rather than regarding the phenomenon as a problem of linguistics, they look to the larger social conditions that promote inequalities and the public's acquiescence of these. The authors argue that "the relationship between political legitimacy and narrative authenticity is so strong that political actors and journalists alike maximize their chances of gaining credibility with the mass audience by fitting new events into old symbolic molds" (1985:169). Bennett and Edelman suggest that presenting "both sides" of a story is of little value when the storyteller still has control over presentation. Instead, they call for journalistic or popular narrative styles that set the scene for critique of the material conditions that explain competing political accounts.

Hall (Hall and O'Hara:1984) also discusses the narrative aspects of news stories. He considers news as complex constructs of reality that have been negotiated between the media and their sources, but which, at the heart, convey thematic cultural narratives that affirm definitions and values of the society. Hall considers the distinctions between narratives of "real" experience and "fiction" oversimplified, and he eschews journalistic claims of authority that the media convey the "truth."

Silverstone (1988) examines the relation between television and myth, and television as a storytelling medium. He employs Levi-Strauss' structural model for the analysis of television text. Silverstone posits that "the text and the context are crucially interrelated"

and that this relationship is both structural and dynamic (1988:30). Silverstone presents a theoretical, rather than an explicit, methodological model. He proposes that an analysis of television should explore the mechanisms of how text and context lay claim to each other with an analysis of the details of social and psychological interaction, memory, narratives, and identity.

Zelizer (1997) conceptualizes journalists as an interpretive community, and suggests that journalists and their craft might be better understood by incorporating anthropology, folklore, and literary studies to examine their practices of narrative and storytelling. According to Zelizer, journalists' narratives provide inside information about news production contexts, and the narratives offer a means for journalists to examine critically news practices that are called into question during the coverage of memorable news events.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) employ a propaganda model and content analysis to assess mass media in the United States. The model works on the premise that there are a set of filters that reduce the news, "leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print" (1988:2). The effects of filtering are so subtle, that journalists naively believe that they have maintained their objectivity. Herman and Chomsky cite several international news events as case studies (such as the elections in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the war in Vietnam) that confirm the validity of their propaganda model. The theorists identify that the news conveys a reality that serves the powerful, but that represents a different reality from the actual situations. They recommend a story-by-story view of media operations to reveal the pattern of manipulation and systemic bias (1988:2).

Hackett and Zhao (1998) define media as the most important form of public knowledge. They posit that the "regime of objectivity" that is supported by news gathering and presentation practices subtly works against representing reality. The stability of media access to high-ranking sources, and the routines for acquiring and presenting news,

privilege bureaucratic facts over non-bureaucratic facts. Hackett and Zhao argue that the more “objective” the news, the more likely that it becomes an information outlet for established authority; consequently, it becomes less able to sustain democracy (1998:78). In response, the authors advocate that journalists break away from the confines of the “regime of objectivity” and instead convey the struggle and competition for the ruling frames within their news accounts. However, Hackett and Zhao do not reject “the journalistic ideal of truth-telling” (1998:135). They discount the postmodern approach to media research, which suggests that the search for underlying structures of news, and evaluations of news in terms of truthfulness, accuracy, and representational adequacy is outmoded. Hackett and Zhao find that this research paradigm lacks a program for critical media analysis and social reform. In response, the authors call for research projects that look beyond surface appearances of text, and analyze underlying causalities of media representations. Such studies should “reassert journalism’s role in critically unearthing social reality and unwelcome truths” and “bring under scrutiny and under question the concepts and categories through which media create and assert the knowledge of the real” (1998:135).

Journalistic contexts are included in studies by researchers who have experience as journalists, and those who have either employed participant observation in news rooms or interviews with journalists as their methodologies. I have limited the literature to those studies that bear the greatest relevance to the context of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Several of these are regarded as classic works, frequently cited in media research. Unfortunately, there were few studies of Canadian media contexts, especially ones concerning conflict situations involving Aboriginal people.

Lippmann (1961) uses the media coverage of World War I to explain how stereotypes are constructed. His theories on stereotyping and the formation of public opinion have informed the field of cognitive psychology and are now being re-introduced into contemporary media studies. Lippmann argues that stereotype images are almost

unavoidable. We generalize experiences in order to gain control of our world of reality. During conflicts, stereotypes of the “enemy” offer group identity and solidarity, while at the same time manufacture consent for how the enemy is treated. Because it is impossible to have first hand experiences of everything in the world, we rely on powerful people and institutions to fill in the gaps of information. Authorities of any organization have a power advantage to sway public opinion, thus assist in the construction of stereotype images. They consciously decide “what facts, in what setting, in what guise he [sic] shall permit the public to know” (Lippmann 1961:247-248). Lippmann identifies a paradox with stereotypes in democratic societies: although stereotypes are “inadequate and biased, endorsing the interests of those who use them” they are “a necessary way of processing information” (Pickering quoting Lippmann, 1995:693). News discourse involves information processing, and inherently recycles old stereotypes and implants new ones in receptive quadrants of society.

Breed (1955) describes how journalists are socialized into conforming to news policy, with an analysis that is still considered applicable to contemporary journalism. He argues that conformity is based primarily on the sociocultural situation in the particular newsrooms. Journalists’ conformity to news policy is tempered by conflicting journalistic ethics, a tendency to be more liberal in perspective than their publishers, and the “ethical taboo” that prohibits the publisher from dictating stringent policy to subordinates. Breed conceptualizes six factors that influence journalists to conform to news policy. These are: institutional authority and sanctions; obligations and loyalty to employer; aspirations for promotions; lack of incentive for professional guilds to interfere with policy; the positive morale associated with the activities associated with the profession; and the perception that journalists fulfill an important role in providing valuable information to the public. Conversely, journalists’ deviations from the norms stem from the vagueness of news policy and the proximal advantage that journalists have to access the facts, and their agency to determine which sources to be contacted and which sources to be privileged. Furthermore, stories written by “beat” specialists are less likely to experience editorial

interference. Breed makes a similar evaluation regarding journalist “staffers” with “star status.” Breed’s seminal work indicates that the factors that facilitate journalistic conformity to news policy are complex. He finds that the reference group behavior (interactions with colleagues and superiors) contributes to the pattern of conformity (or lack of it).

Darnton (1975) identifies that a feature missed in media research is the milieu in which news stories are produced. He assesses that journalists do not consciously write for an idealized imaginary audience, but instead write with several reference groups in mind: editors, peers, colleagues from other outlets, sources, and interest groups. Journalists are aware of “becoming captives of their informants” and “slipping into self-censorship” after developing a rapport with sources (1975:183). Spokespersons’ proximity and identification with the media may result in a “we’re all in this together” approach with the media, with the spokesperson inadvertently crossing professional boundaries and influencing the story angle. Spokespersons have been known to dispense information to media favorites, but this often backfires, and the marginalizing becomes an impetus for journalists “left in the cold” to band together. Major news events that challenge journalists to produce stories within tight deadlines comprise a rite of passage, and the recollections of these occasions constitute the cultural lore of the profession. According to Darnton, important news stories tend to follow a pattern that reflects “what a story should be.” However, because journalists focus on the immediate time frame, they are unaware of the connections between the news characterizations and “ancient ways of telling stories” (1975:191). Darnton concludes that news stories inherently fit cultural preconceptions of “news,” and that “the context of the work shapes the content of the news” (1975:192).

Gans (1979) combines the content analysis of news stories and stints of participant observation over a ten-year period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Although his analysis does not connect the content of news stories with the context of the specific

media coverage, he does identify the importance (and complexity) of striving for objectivity and balance in news coverage. Competition is a central feature of the profession of journalism, and it serves to stratify journalists and media outlets, and is a mechanism for quality control. Sources with the greatest authority and responsibility in society are preferred over those who are relatively unknown, as are sources that can provide concise information. He notes that institutions such as the military exert control over information going out to the media. Gans acknowledges the particularist aspects of journalistic contexts: that they vary according to the news event, the particular outlet, the editorial policy, the journalist's style, and the historic moment.

Berkowitz<sup>20</sup> (1997) finds that while dealing with unusual and unpredicted news stories, journalists try to find routine ways to deal with the non-routine event (1997:362). The success of covering such events also requires the journalist to typify the scope of the news situation, and to predict the resources required and to develop adapting strategies. The latter requires negotiation and improvisation. News production deadlines seem to be more ominous during these cases, especially for electronic media, with their increased number of deadlines and for which greater technical support is required. Unusual events upset the news schema, and journalists often redouble their efforts to stretch their resources and redistribute these to produce news. Competitive pressures between outlets to get the story first increases the stress factor during these circumstances. The type of coverage provided by the competition largely dictates how each outlet responds in their attempts to avoid duplication. Berkowitz concludes that work routines serve two purposes during the coverage of unexpected events: as a guide for organizational behavior; and as an evaluative measure for journalistic performance (1997:373).

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<sup>20</sup> I have not detailed the research on journalistic routines in "normal" circumstances by Tuchman (1978). Although the work is highly regarded within the study of journalism, I found that it does not convey as many parallels to the 1995 Gustafsen Lake media coverage as the work by Berkowitz (1997), who explores the recovery of stability during unexpected news events.

Harris' (1983) case study of the British media context during the 1982 Falkland Islands War discusses issues of media containment and censorship, social relations between sources and the media, and relations within the media. According to Harris (1983), the media coverage of the Falkland Islands conflict evolved into an "information war" in which the goal of the media (publicity) collided with the axiom of military planning (secrecy) (1983:16). The military spokespersons did not provide journalists with adequate information to satisfy their demands for news stories. Because most of the media were confined to the British ships, there was little opportunity to compete for stories—resulting in "pack journalism." The journalists spoke of a hunger for fresh and allowable news, and of attempts to balance the news stories. In response to the latter, the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* included Argentinean news accounts in their coverage. This created a furor in Thatcher's government regarding the ramifications of the coverage on British public opinion and military morale. For the *BBC*, the government's objections to the other side of the story raised the issues of ethical journalism and the priority of objective journalism during a war-time situation. The journalists that covered the Falkland Island crisis felt that they had been manipulated by the military to provide one-sided information, which projected an "us against them" portrayal. They were told to withhold information because lives were at stake, but when the embargo was lifted on these news stories, their value as fresh information had diminished to the point of worthlessness. Harris raises the question as to what is the role of the media in a democratic society during serious conflicts—to provide nationalistic support, or to provide balanced coverage? He concludes that the implications of the struggle over media representation of the event may prove to be more important than the war itself.

Kellner's (1995, 1992) study of the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War argues that the media coverage (particularly television) was hegemonic. It affirmed an unjustifiable war, with the media legitimizing the dominant groups that defended the American involvement, and excluding dissenting voices. Kellner examines how the media influenced the public sphere to sanction the use of extreme force that killed hundreds of

thousands of Iraqis. The strategies identified include the media focus on the personalized evil of Saddam Hussein, the transmitting as “facts,” the unverified stories of Iraqi atrocities, and racist projections of Arab peoples. The media displayed the superiority of the American military through simulations of the American military missiles (although reports after the conflict reveal otherwise) in contrast with the indiscriminate attacks of Iraqi scud missiles. The television depictions seldom captioned the human and environmental misery, and when it did, the blame was laid on Saddam Hussein. The military and state controlled the media by disseminating specific information, and by organizing select media representatives into pools which were then taken to pre-selected sights. According to Kellner, the threat of cutting off access to information (which was the experience of journalists who were critical of the war) ensured that the media would be passive and accept the dictates of the military. The one-sided coverage of the Gulf War successfully stereotyped the conflict as “good versus evil,” and public debate was stifled in the mainstream media.

Canadian studies of media have also incorporated the analysis of media products with the context of the media production. Hackett’s (1991) study of the meanings conveyed in the media coverage of the annual “Walk for Peace” in Vancouver, British Columbia combines a frame analysis of media products with interviews with Vancouver media and organizers of the Walk. Hackett finds that routine sources and processes of news gathering and news production significantly influence media coverage (1991:256). Mild partisan support from the media is tolerated within the outlets because the event is not regarded as contentious as a labor dispute or a political controversy. Journalists in senior positions regard the annual event as being a subtle support to liberal social perspectives. At the same time, Hackett’s interviews with the editors reveal that, had the Walk organizers taken on a radical political stance, there would have been less coverage of the event and it would have been characterized with skepticism (1991:259).



Doyle, Elliott, and Tindall (1997) explore how media set the framework to understand the environmental struggle with the British Columbia forest industry. The authors demonstrate that the “frames” or “schemas” of the environmentalists, the British Columbia Forest Alliance, the British Columbia media, and the audience are negotiated and contested in the interpretation of the environmental issue of clear-cut forestry. They also concur with previous research that media provide openings as well as obstacles for social movements. They pose the question, “If the media do provide openings for social movement framing, what of attempts by movement opponents to counter these frames?” (1997:244). The findings were that the B.C. Forest Alliance engaged in an aggressive media campaign to “counter-frame” the media images of forestry practices provided by Greenpeace and other environmental groups in the province. The authors conclude that media are not the simplistic apparatus for the reproduction of hegemony and dominant ideologies that are often depicted in other studies. Instead, they find media sites of contest, and that media are more open, pluralistic, and diverse than they are usually characterized.

Robinson (1998) examines the role of the media in the 1980 Quebec referendum and the evolution of the nationalistic discourse under the Parti Quebecois. Robinson includes interviews with Montreal journalists at the time of the referendum as well as frame and discourse analysis to assess television and print media coverage of the 1980 Quebec referendum. Robinson acknowledges the importance of daily rituals and routines of news production, and how news consumption influenced how the referendum was conceptualized and fought. Among Robinson’s findings are that the politicians were in control of defining the meaning of the referendum vote, and that news production and editorial practices influenced the “assignment of ownership” and the legitimization of perspectives of the event. The media determined the selection and priority of news sources, which included politicians, experts, and “people in the street.” The media elites were active players in the depictions of national identity, but they also consciously maintained their professional distance in the media characterizations. The conclusions of

the study point to the importance of the Montreal media in constructing images of Canadian national identity, and influencing public opinion.

Stevenson (1995) critiques critical media theories and studies that do not account for the audience response to media representations. He argues that it cannot be assumed that the audience passively accepts media characterizations at face value, exemplified by the study of audience responses to the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War which found a range of critical perspectives. He points to several complex factors that may influence audience evaluations of media coverage. These include geographical distance from the conflict and temporal factors regarding the likelihood of diminished public support over time. Another factor is the psychological distance provided by sanitized media characterizations, which minimize or omit portraying the destructive force and human suffering of the people under attack. Stevenson advocates critical media analyses that integrate audience research into a structural analysis (1995:192).

### **Theories of Media and Minority Groups**

Contemporary media theorists appreciate the complexity of media representations of minorities. Still, there is a concurrence that mainstream media are geared toward projecting a dominant ideology that actively avoids presenting the perspectives of minorities (vanDijk 1987,1988,1989); (Wilson and Gutierrez 1985); (Fairclough 1989); (Parenti 1993). This is accomplished in a variety of ways.

While targeting a mainstream audience, the press often identifies with a generic model that requires minimal accommodation for differences such as race, ethnicity, or gender. Fairclough (1989) asserts that news producers target an ideal audience, with an ideal subject position, and that this is mostly a reflection of the dominant ideology. Consequently, negative innuendoes, disclaimers, assumptions, and omissions about minorities in the media are often unnoticed by writers and editors, and later by audiences who consider themselves mainstream. This lack of sensitivity persists because the

dominant value system and group memberships are subtly affirmed. Fairclough refers to the dominant discourse as one that appears to be neutral and just "common sense" (Fairclough,1989:91).

Media may collaborate with outside sources in the production of the news. According to van Dijk (1989), the media are partly dependent on other power groupings and institutions, such as the police and governments. They negotiate power with institutions and act to magnify the authority of law enforcement and other government institutions. These sources also have the credibility to define "others" and events, sometimes with greater command than the media. This is demonstrated with the quantity of quotations, the perspective of the headlines, and the frequency with which these sources appear in the news (1989:113). Fairclough (1989) regards journalists and their sources as sharing the role of being news producers, acknowledging that sometimes the lines between the two get blurred. He maintains that media sources, depending on their social prestige and authority, demonstrate powerful influences on the perspective of the news story. Fairclough states: "[g]overnment ministers figure far more than unemployed people, and industrial managers or trade union officials figure far more than shopfloor workers." In the end, the news will likely adopt the perspective of "existing power-holders" (1989:50-51).

News stories about minorities are a major source of stereotyping. Parenti (1993) asserts that the press has the power to repeat untruths over and over again, until the concepts become absorbed into the consciousness of the audience (1993:193-194). Van Dijk (1987) suggests that we base our knowledge about ethnic groups and racial minorities largely on what we see, read and hear from the news media. Van Dijk (1987) considers that the everyday lives of ethnic minorities are unknown in mainstream society, but when they do become newsworthy, ethnic minorities are portrayed in stereotype themes. He dichotomizes the themes as passive roles (as society's dependents), or as active roles (as society's enemies) (1987:235). Both types of themes carry a negative social connotation.

The press is a particularly compelling source when there are no personal experiences of relationships with members of minorities. In the media, minority voices are most often represented (if they are represented at all) as the model for the entire group. While this has the potential to create positive as well as negative stereotypes, neither possibility acknowledges the complexity of the composition of any group. Events about racial minorities in particular are reported through white eyes, which is the primary reason for the alienation and distrust of news outlets by minority citizens (Wilson and Gutierrez 1985) (van Dijk 1987).

Media may inadvertently rely on and perpetuate stereotype images without any regard for the impact of the media portrayal on the larger group when casting individual members of racial minorities who gain notoriety. This was Lule's (1997) evaluation of the newspaper coverage of the 1992 rape trial of former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson rape trial. Lule finds the portrayal of Tyson "ugly and flawed by its reliance upon racist imagery" (1997:377). He acknowledges that Mike Tyson's attitudes and behaviors toward women were offensive, but he also contends that the media characterizations abandoned restraint, casting Tyson as a powerful, dichotomized, symbolic type. For Lule, journalism that produces such thematic portrayals of an individual member of a racial minority have no control over the ensuing process of stereotyping of the whole group. He calls for the confrontation of racism in society and journalism through the examination of the language in the press and the type of images that are being created.

Media also have a track record of promoting a deficit or "threatening image" of minorities to mainstream society. According to Wilson and Gutierrez (1985), "minority coverage in mainstream news reporting provides insight into the status of minorities" (1985:134). Exclusion and misrepresentation of racial minorities foster an "us against them" syndrome in the mainstream (1985:139-141). Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) explain that when a minority group offers resistance to hegemonic forces, the media characterize the actions of the minority as a threat, and bring this to the society's attention. Then the

media proceed to cover society's response, which is often violent in nature (1985:135-136). One of the primary ways to legitimize violence in response to minority resistance is to criminalize minority behavior without examining the history and the context of the issues from the minority perspective.

Media have a tendency to agitate rather than conciliate when there is a conflict between dominant and minority groups. Van Dijk (1987), Fairclough (1989), and Parenti (1993) reason that the press is an unsatisfactory conciliator between dominant and minority groups because the media act as both the recipient and the transmitter of pressures to conform to the dominant ideology. This diminishes the possibilities of fair representation of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly representation that enhances reciprocated positive value for their differences. Instead, these differences are most likely portrayed as stereotype images, and more often than not, presented as inferior or threatening to dominant values. If the representation concerns the political activity of a minority, it is most likely cast as a threat to the stability of the society (van Dijk 1987:363-364). Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) conclude that during confrontations between minority groups and the dominant society, "the news media have the opportunity to exhibit leadership in race relations, unfortunately, their historical track record has been poor" (1985:137).

The above theories and concepts regarding the media representation of minorities are based on analyses of media products from diverse media in the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. These assessments of media representation of minorities take a generalized view of how minorities are depicted in the press, and that the media contexts are standard. Pickering (1995) points out that the flaw of most research of media stereotyping is that they engage in a contradiction to their own objectives by taking a stereotypical attitude toward media. This predilection will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

## **Canadian Studies of Media and Aboriginal Resistance**

There are relatively few studies *per se* of Canadian Aboriginal resistance and the media. I am including pertinent references found in works that were not specifically focused on this aspect in addition to two prominent media studies of the 1990 Oka crisis.

Tennant (1990) relates how, during the mid-1970s and 1980s, Native people in British Columbia established blockades as a show of resistance concerning resource and land allocations. During these occasions, a senior Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) police officer would act as a media spokesman (Tennant 1990:207-208). Subsequent demonstrations in the 1980s reveal greater sophistication and assertiveness as "protest leaders actively sought the understanding of the non-Indian editors and journalists in order to influence white public opinion" (1990:209). Beginning in the 1980s, the media became instrumental in bringing Native land claims to the public forum.

Long (1992) notes that Aboriginal activists have learned the importance of media and media coverage of a dispute. Media brought issues to the level of consciousness and fostered a broad support base (1992:129). In a more recent work (1997), he examines counter-hegemonic activity among Canadian Native people, particularly the development of worldwide coalition support for the Lubicon First Nation in Alberta. This was the occasion for Native as well as ecological interest groups to join forces. He examines the spiritual, cultural, economic, and political aspects that interact in this coalition, appreciating that such coalitions in themselves are complex and feature internal dissent. Long concludes that "the types and degree of diversity found within the hegemonic or counter-hegemonic camps are as important to their success or failure of social movements and coalitions as their unity" (1997:167).

Blomley's (1996) article concerning the Native Indian blockades in British Columbia between 1984-1995 identifies a distinct pattern: roadblocks followed by "the predictable round of condemnation and fulmination on editorial pages and in the provincial legislature" (Blomley 1996:5). He states that the press under-reports conciliation during

Native disputes, "perhaps because they detract from the media tendency to seek confrontation" (1996:27).

Harris' (1991) content analysis of the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* during the Oka crisis offers a feminist critique of the media portrayals of Mohawk women. She questions the lack of visibility of female protesters at Oka, and a lack of recognition of their roles in the political struggle. Harris concludes that the denial of the agency of Mohawk women is "no less than colonial in its potential to limit Native women's participation within their own culture" (Harris 1991:15).

White Eye (1996), a First Nations journalist employed in mainstream media during the Oka crisis, describes how a managerial decision ensured that the story plan concerning local Aboriginal perceptions of the Oka conflict was projected through the non-Native lens. White Eye (1996) also raises issues regarding the degree of trust that the media have for First Nations perspectives of conflicts involving their group. He found that media management hesitated in allowing him to write stories about Aboriginal disputes. White Eye surmised that his employer "assumed" that his bias would offend a mainstream audience.

Ponting (1990) discusses how the Mohawks of Quebec received international attention through the media coverage during and after the dispute. This enabled them to make contacts with the United Nations and the European Parliament. The resultant inquiries from these international bodies resulted in a competitive bid for international support. This includes the Canadian government taking several measures to defend its conduct, while Mohawk representations refuted these and countered with allegations of human rights abuses against the Canadian government. Ponting concludes that we should expect continued international involvement in Aboriginal disputes. He warns that, in the future, stakes may be raised in Aboriginal affairs with the threat of international loss of

reputation, Canada's response to Quebec's sovereignty aspirations, and the radicalization of Indian protest tactics.

Grenier's (1994) content analysis of the *Montreal Gazette* prior to and during the 1990 Oka standoff finds that substantial media attention did not occur until the introduction of the Quebec Provincial Police in riot gear (Grenier 1994:317). He argues that the newspaper was "literally obsessed with conflict-based Indian issues during the sample period, with conflict orientations present in 80% of all Native Indian straight news stories" (1994:320). For instance, after the blockade was established at Oka, "Native Indians [were presented] as unreasonable, bent on hostility, and a threat to established order." The news stories expressed the general theme: "Indians versus us" (1994:328). Grenier outlines various media theses to account for the portrayals, including "audience thesis,"<sup>21</sup> "activity thesis,"<sup>22</sup> and "organizational thesis."<sup>23</sup> He most strongly supports the "power structure thesis" that considers the primary motivation for news stories as economic, with the power and influence of advertisers subtly influencing news policies. The gist of this theory is that sensationalized stories sell more newspapers, thus guaranteeing a large advertising market. Grenier's study of the media coverage at Oka (though restricted to one newspaper over seven months) points to a distinct pattern of racist representation.

Glavin (1996) compares the influx of the media and the police to the Gustafsen Lake standoff with a circus coming to town, along with the exaggerated intensity of the event followed by the subsequent deflation when the circus "left town." Glavin discusses the development of the standoff, and how the local newspaper, the *100 Mile House Free Press*, was the only media outlet to really appreciate the process of how the minor dispute

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<sup>21</sup> The audience thesis argues that the media publish impartial news, which it deems the audience should know about (Grenier 1994:326).

<sup>22</sup> The activity thesis suggests that the activity of the event determines the coverage pattern (Grenier 1994:328).

<sup>23</sup> The organizational thesis considers the character of the news to be the product of internal news processes and operations. These factors may vary from one media outlet to another (Grenier 1994:329).



evolved into a major media event. Glavin considers that the RCMP press conference at Williams Lake was the point in the even during which “the real story ends.” He surmises that this occasion signified when the telling of the event got out of control for the police as well as for the media. Consequently, the news stories fed on the various personalities that emerged and the lack of verifiable information and journalist witnessing meant that rumors abounded. In Glavin’s assessment, the Gustafsen Lake standoff was an insignificant local dispute that was magnified out of proportion.

Switlo (1997), who was one of the original lawyers representing the Gustafsen Lake defendants, published a monograph concerning the Gustafsen Lake standoff during my fieldwork. Although this publication did not alter my research approach, I note that we each invoked different historical contexts as well as different sources of data to examine the standoff. One of the primary motivations for Switlo’s examination of the standoff is in response to the British Columbia Attorney General’s and the RCMP’s insistence that there is only one side of the story concerning Gustafsen Lake. Switlo argues that “the other side of the story” reveals “the corruption, the abuse, the fraud” from federal and provincial levels of government as well as the RCMP during the conflict (Preface 1997). To support her position, she incorporates historical incidents involving Aboriginal peoples in Canada, legal precedents, select media stories about the standoff, court testimonies, and interviews with Aboriginal leaders from the region (but not from the immediate locale). Although Switlo acknowledges that the RCMP did not provide the media with accurate information during the conflict, she does not discuss media specifically.

### **Ethnographies of Native/non-Native Relations in British Columbia**

There are relatively few ethnographic studies of contemporary Native and non-Native relations in British Columbia. The following two works identify community settings where Native people have been marginalized, and their efforts to challenge the non-Native dominant status quo.

Speck (1987) examines the case of the tragic death caused by appendicitis of a young Aboriginal girl from Alert Bay, British Columbia. Speck chronicles how the child died of what is generally considered a common ailment because of unprofessional conduct by non-Native medical staff. The ethnography details the measures taken by the Native community to seek answers as to why this happened, and to hear the responses from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the provincial and federal ministries of health. The work underscores the historic colonial subordination of Native people that exists at the community, institutional and government levels.

Furniss' (1997) ethnographic study investigates the Indian/white relations in Williams Lake, British Columbia at the height of the mid-1990s land claims conflicts. Furniss notes the prevalence of a "frontier complex," internalized by Euro-Canadians in the area. This complex is rooted in identity themes associated with a historic pride in how the original European settlers experienced pioneer life and developed an economic base. Furniss finds that this identity construct influences (historically and currently) how Euro-Canadians position themselves in a dominant relation to Native people. This positioning is evident in a variety of settings and social interactions. Furniss notes that stereotype characterizations of Native people abound. The depictions of "the drunken Indian," "the criminal Indian," and "the welfare Indian" persist, in spite of ample evidence of contradictions to these schemas. Furniss identifies Natives' subtle forms of resistance in response to these stereotypes. Additionally, Furniss' fieldwork includes the period of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff. Furniss briefly describes the racial tension at Williams Lake resulting from the standoff, and includes examples of anti-Native racism experienced by some of her research participants at Williams Lake and at 100 Mile House.

The above accounts of Native/non-Native community relations provide insights into the depth of alienation experienced by Native people in their everyday lives. The studies link

occasions of discrimination and marginality to the historical way in which Native people have been treated since the colonial period. Both works provide examples of how Native people identify their subordination in a variety of social and political situations. These ethnographies examine Native/non-Native relations at the level of community, as well as Aboriginal responses to institutions. Although this research was not based on a traditional ethnographic approach (I did not live in a particular community for an extended time), and the focus is different, there is a connection between these community studies and this one. The case study of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff constitutes another way of examining social practices that damage relations between Native and non-Native people in British Columbia.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This diverse body of literature informs this research by providing an anthropological foundation for theoretical and methodological applications. The literature also creates a backdrop for appreciating the intersection of media, media and minorities, and community-level research of Native and non-Native relations.

## Chapter 2

### Sample and Method

#### Sample

Originally, I designed this research project to incorporate strictly news stories taken from newspapers at the time of the Gustafsen Lake standoff for data. In January 1996, I obtained newspapers from the Edmonton Public Library (they were about to be recycled). From these, I conducted an initial text analysis of the news coverage of the standoff. I then obtained CD ROM versions of other newspapers so that I would have all provinces represented, ending with a total sample of 17 major newspapers across Canada. My analysis found various patterns of representation and there were also some inconsistencies, implying editorial policies and journalistic styles at play. However, I could not find sufficient contextual information within the news accounts to explain the exceptions in the news discourse. In order to understand the underlying context, I extended the data collection beyond the text to include the journalists that covered the event. From there, the availability of data and potential for appreciating the news context expanded exponentially.

I made several trips to Vancouver to interview the journalists that reported the event. The first journalists mentioned colleagues from other media who might be interested in participating in the study. Subsequently, I developed a network of journalistic sources from radio, television, and print media. In the course of gathering interview data, I obtained various radio and television news accounts, although these were not sufficient to run a parallel analysis with the newspaper coverage. During the interview trips in Vancouver, I spent some time attending the trial proceedings held in the nearby city of Surrey. On these occasions, I met and interviewed some of the people who had been in the camp at some point in time during the summer of 1995, but who were not charged. I acquired various court records concerning the standoff, especially those that were related

to the media coverage. The interviews and additional materials also raised questions for me concerning the roles of important media sources. Consequently, I decided to broaden the scope to include RCMP personnel, the British Columbia Attorney General, and the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. As a final component to the research, I traveled to 100 Mile House and visited the site of the standoff.

The data that I collected for this ethnography are comprised of media products, legal and law enforcement documents, interviews with journalists, RCMP officials, and Native and non-Native civilians. The media products include 561 newspaper stories from 18 August 1995 to 19 September 1995. This constitutes the period of the standoff that received the greatest media attention. I selected newspapers according to their availability from the Edmonton Public and University of Alberta Libraries. My goal was for the newspaper data to represent all ten provinces. With the exception of *Le Devoir*, all are English language publications. I have gathered the following newspapers in either hardcopy or CD ROM versions: *Victoria Times Colonist*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Province*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, *Regina Leader Post*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *London Free Press*, *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Le Devoir*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, *Charlottetown Guardian*, *St. John's (Newfoundland) Evening Telegram* and *100 Mile House Free Press*. In addition, I have included for reference purposes news stories published prior to the time of the standoff, news stories of the trial, and news stories of other related developments. Additional media products include tapes of radio and television productions: select news clips from *BCTV* (1995); the *CBC* documentary, "Standoff at Gustafsen Lake" from the news program, *The National* (1995); the video-taped television program, "Gustafsen Lake" from the Vancouver East Community 4 program *Nitewatch* (1997); the *CBC Radio* program, "The Cops, the Natives and the *CBC*" from *Now the Details* (1995); the *CBC Radio* program, *Sunday Morning*, broadcast on 10 September 1995; and select radio news clips from the Vancouver radio station, *CKNW* (1995).

I also acquired legal and procedural archival documents relevant to the media coverage of the event discussed during the trial. These include: a copy of the Direct Indictment; a copy of the Petition for the Release from Custody of Defendant Joseph Adam Ignace; excerpts of court transcripts of the pre-trial Challenge for Cause Application; excerpts of the transcripts from the trial; and a copy of the Reasons for Judgment. Two articles that appeared in the *RCMP Gazette*, written by Dr. Mike Webster, an RCMP psychologist at the Gustafsen Lake standoff, provided insights into the RCMP negotiation strategies employed during the standoff. These are: "Influence in Crisis Management" (Volume 58:2, 1996 pp. 8-14) and "The Use of Force and the Gustafsen Lake Barricade" (Volume 58:2, 1996 pp. 16-19).<sup>24</sup> I also obtained a copy of the RCMP Operational Manual regarding media relations, a copy of the handbook, "The RCMP and the Media: a Spokesperson's Guide" a copy of the RCMP Report to Crown Counsel<sup>25</sup> and, courtesy of the RCMP, some memos from their files regarding their operational plan at Gustafsen Lake.

The 26 journalists that I interviewed for this study were from the following media outlets: *Victoria Times Colonist*, *Vancouver Province*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Press*, *Broadcast News*; *CBC Television* (national and provincial) and radio; *CTV*; *BCTV*; *CKNW Radio* from Vancouver; *Cariboo Radio* (based in Kamloops) and *100 Mile House Free Press*. Some of the journalists that I interviewed estimated that 40 to 60 media personnel gathered at the time of the standoff. However, I could not confirm an actual number. From my research, I know that the number of media in attendance fluctuated during the one-month period, and it likely included reporters, camera crews, and other production staff. The 26 participants for the study included reporters, editors, and camera personnel, representing (what I conservatively estimate) approximately 75

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<sup>24</sup> These RCMP newsletters are not listed in the bibliography because they are not available through a public library.

<sup>25</sup> I have not changed the spelling of "Counsel" to be consistent with "council" as this spelling appears on the title the legal document. However, I use "council" to refer to the defense lawyer interviewed for this research, even though by Canadian custom, lawyers are referred to as "counsel." With the exception of this legal document, the tribal, band, social science research, and media organize themselves using the term "council," which did not require any spelling modification.

per cent of the major media outlets that covered the standoff. I have not distinguished particular roles, and other than named sources, I collectively refer to everyone as “journalists” or “reporters.” In consideration of gender, and in keeping with promised anonymity, I used “he” throughout, although there were women journalists covering the story that participated in this research. I chose not to distinguish the gender of sources because, in some instances, this would have compromised their anonymity. I did not include staff from *CNN*, *UTV* (Vancouver), *Toronto Star*, or *Montreal Gazette* (these last two newspapers sent a journalist to 100 Mile House for a few days), nor the smaller independent news media, such as *Georgia Strait*. I did not include any of the Native media because I wanted to concentrate on larger media outlets, which would have had the most influence over the national and provincial characterization of the news story. Most of the journalists in this dissertation are quoted anonymously, although some volunteered to be named. I chose only to identify sources that played significant roles (and would be otherwise identifiable), and those that are public figures. The journalists who are identified by name include Gary Mason, editor from the *Vancouver Sun*, George Garrett from *CKNW Radio*, Vancouver, and Steven Frasher, editor from the *100 Mile House Free Press*.

Almost all of the journalists from Vancouver had covered Native protests in British Columbia before, including Clayoquot Sound, Lyell Island, Duffy Lake, Adams Lake, Penticton, and Douglas Lake. Two of the journalists covered the 1990 Oka crisis in Quebec, and a few had covered hostage-taking incidents. Only two of the reporters discussed covering stories where they worked alongside other journalists for more than two weeks. One of the reporters had been to Croatia, and he said that Gustafsen Lake was much more volatile. Everyone I interviewed considered Gustafsen Lake an extreme in terms of journalistic coverage, conflicting perspectives, logistics, and representations of people and events. Relatively few journalists were there for the entire time of the standoff. Only six (including the local newspaper editor) of the 26 journalists

interviewed<sup>26</sup> had this distinction. These individuals took pride in being “long-timers” (a self-identifying label that prison inmates interpret in a similar manner!). Those who were there the longest felt that they had a much clearer picture of the situation and the greatest appreciation of the relations that evolved between the various groups during the dispute. The interviews also indicate that the journalists who were only there for a few days or a few weeks experienced the event and the reporting of it in different ways than the “long-timers.” The 26 journalists varied in the degree of experience, from seasoned to very well known to a few that were relatively new to the craft.

The 17 non-media sources include police and government officials, Native leaders and spokespersons, and local people from the town of 100 Mile House. All of the police, government, Native leaders, and spokespersons agreed to drop their anonymity. The RCMP sources include Kamloops RCMP District Superintendent Len Olfert;<sup>27</sup> the British Columbia RCMP media liaison Sergeant Peter Montague;<sup>28</sup> RCMP psychologist Dr. Mike Webster; and Staff Sergeant Martin Sarich, from the 100 Mile House RCMP Detachment. I also interviewed the adjunct communications officer for the British Columbia Attorney General, Paul Corns. The RCMP officials provided details of the event from a law-enforcement perspective, and contextualized the standoff with information that was not released to the media during, or after, the standoff.

Other non-media sources also contributed unique insights to the conflict that helped to appreciate the complexity of the situation and the people involved. These include the ranch owners Lyle and Mary James, whose property ownership was questioned during the dispute. Gustafsen Lake is located on their deeded property. Canim Lake Chief Antoine Archie and North Thompson Band Chief Nathan Matthew offered perspectives

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<sup>26</sup> The 26 journalists include *Vancouver Sun* editor, Gary Mason, who remained in Vancouver the entire time of the standoff.

<sup>27</sup> For convenience purposes, I will use “Superintendent Olfert,” although the official title was “District Superintendent.” Superintendent Olfert has since retired, but I refer to him by his RCMP rank.

<sup>28</sup> Since this research began, Sergeant Montague received a promotion to the rank of Staff Sergeant, and he is currently in the RCMP Commercial Crime Unit. For simplicity, I will be referring to him as Sergeant Montague, as this was his rank during the Gustafsen Lake standoff.



as participants in the unfolding event, and as leaders of Native communities. The 1995 Gustafsen Lake Sundance Leader, John Hill and Kootenay elder Bill Lightbown shared their recollections and concerns about the heightened tensions at the Gustafsen Lake camp before and during the standoff. George Wool, the senior defense council for the defendants explained the legal implications of the media coverage on his clients and the trial, drawing also from his previous experience as a senior RCMP officer. In addition, several local citizens kindly agreed to talk about their recollections of being in the hub of the activity in 100 Mile House. Most of these local sources were in the hospitality industry, and they provided anecdotes and reflections of what it was like to be in the middle of a major media event.

Despite the numerous sources, there were several omissions, either by my choice or by the individual's choice. Although I acquired independent newspapers from the Vancouver area and information from the website established for the Gustafsen Lake Defenders, I did not include these as part of the data sample. It was my judgement that they did not fall within my definition of mainstream media, although in general, the alternative media were more critical of RCMP and government representatives. This study addresses many of the issues raised in the alternative media, regarding misinformation in the media and RCMP conduct toward the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp. I did not include the defendants of the standoff as participants in this study. This was because I conducted most of the interviews during the trial and it would not have been legally advisable for them to speak to me about the standoff during the trial, or during the appeal process. A few of the people from whom I requested an interview declined. This includes British Columbia Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh and Ovide Mercredi, the former Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. They did not reply to my requests for interviews. To compensate for these omissions, I collected media interviews of the sources (who declined from participating in this study), taken at the time of the standoff.

## **Methodology**

The methodology that I employed treated the newspaper stories as the "surface structure" of media representations, anticipating that deeper levels of structure would be accessed with ethnographic interviews. Multiple media sources identified patterns of representations, content information about the event, and implications of causality for the media characterizations. My investigation first focused on the news texts that in turn raised questions for me to ask during ethnographic interviews. The interviews and accumulated documents (including additional media materials) that I collected during the field component allowed for several iterations between the context of the news coverage and the news products. These culminated in a refinement of the original text analysis.

The analytical process invoked in this research is similar to Agar's (1986) description of how ethnographers examine strips of cultural activities to hypothesize cultural schemas during fieldwork. According to Agar's model, as more data are collected (or as the culture is experienced through time), breaches or breaks in the coherence of these schemas appear. Through feedback loops within the data, these breaks are (ideally) resolved. The outcome of this process is a deeper understanding of cultures and cultural practices. In this case study, the breaches of understanding the media coverage were originally found in the textual data, and answers to these questions were sought with the interview sources, often leading me back to the texts for further insights.

## **Text Analysis**

The text analysis consisted of assessing the features of the media representations from the 17 sample newspapers and using this information as a point of entry into the fieldwork. Van Dijk's (1987, 1988, 1989) discourse analysis of newspaper stories involving minorities provided the categories for patterns of representation and thematic structures. Van Dijk's methodology for critical news analysis examines the news text in terms of presentation and discursive features. These include the lay-out of the news story, the journalistic style, syntax structures, and placement of clauses. The analysis also examines

semantics and lexical choice, and the evocative meanings conveyed. The content is assessed in terms of reported speech, particularly how journalists signal approval or disapproval of sources and topics, and rhetorical strategies that consider techniques used to increase the impressions of authenticity and precision of information. More specific to the methodology for studying ethnic minorities in the press, van Dijk employs the study of relevance structures in the news discourse. This considers the hierarchical ordering of information and sources as indicative of their placement in terms of news worthiness and credibility, as well as their social status. Van Dijk identifies that headlines and leads summarize what is considered most important, according to the production standards and functions of the media outlet. Headlines and leads are the most likely aspect to be recalled by the audience to define the situation at a later time (1987:257).

In addition, I have included a quantitative analysis of the stereotype labeling in the news stories of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff. This quantitative analysis documents the frequency of stereotype labeling that reinforced the creation and dissemination of a stereotype theme of the people inside the Gustafsen Lake camp. The incorporation of this quantitative component takes as its lead van Dijk's (1987) quantification of headline themes. I incorporated this quantitative aspect as another means with which to seek patterns of stereotype representations within and between newspapers, and as a way to measure and compare lexical frequencies in the news discourse. Quantitative aspects of news discourse have been recognized as a superior means for identifying patterns of representation for large databases of discourse (Roberts 1997). The prevalence of the terms "rebels," "renegades," and "squatters" to describe the people inside the camp was a salient linguistic feature in the original 17 newspapers in the sample. I will argue that these repetitive labels were central to the communication of a stereotype theme of the people inside the Gustafsen Lake camp.

For the news stories of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, I identified the usage of these stereotype labels within the news narrative (headlines, lead-ins, all journalist-authored

portions) and within indirect quotes from sources. I did not include the use of labels in direct quotations of sources in the quantitative analysis, but made note of these separately. This was because I was interested in ways the media framed the account and represented the camp, and because news sources seldom used these terms in direct quotations. The tallies were restricted to the above-mentioned period of the standoff and identified according to the newspaper outlet. In the course of the data organization, it was apparent that many of the sample news stories, particularly outside British Columbia, were authored by *Canadian Press* journalists who were covering the conflict. Because this implied another pattern of representation, I reorganized the data to distinguish news accounts and labeling usage according to authorship by staff reporters and those provided by the *Canadian Press* news service. Lastly, I decided to include the *100 Mile House Free Press* news stories in the quantitative and content analysis while I was conducting fieldwork there. The inclusion of the local newspaper provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the “local” and “outsider” media practices and contexts of coverage, and the resultant media products for the standoff. The quantitative analysis of stereotype labeling is found in Chapter 8.

## **Integration of Text and Context**

### **Interview Protocols**

I conducted most of the interviews in coffee shops or private offices, and a few interviews took place over the telephone. My interviews with journalists were mostly structured around pre-set questions intended to elicit information regarding news production practices and experiences of covering the meeting event. Some of the questions were open-ended, allowing the reporters to provide a range of responses. After this part of the interview concluded, the discussions were more casual, and the participants often provided details that the interview questions did not address. The interviews varied in length, from about one-hour to about three hours. On most occasions, the interviews took place during a single meeting. However, with a few of the journalists (such as with Steven Frasher from the *100 Mile House Free Press*) and with defense

council George Wool, it was more convenient to spread the interviews out over a few days. The information that I gathered from early interviews was used to modify the topics to be discussed during subsequent ones, although I continued to ask the standard interview questions. Interviews with non-media were less structured, and hinged on the frames of reference of the non-media interviewees and their connections to the media event.

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

I tape-recorded most of the interviews, or when this was not possible (during telephone interviews) I took extensive notes. I copied all of the audio-tape recordings and the notes and returned these to the participants for verification and changes. I transcribed the interviews and interview notes, yielding more than 600 single-spaced pages of data. I coded the transcripts according to the topic themes. These themes were suggested in the repetitions of particular words and topics. This was assisted by using the word search feature of the word processing software of the interview texts. In a similar way, thematic identification was also performed on the interview data from non-media interviews. Since the interview subjects included journalists as well as non-journalist sources, there were wide variations of perceptions concerning the event, and of the resultant media coverage. I also cross-referenced the interview data according to the chronological account of the event. This chronology allowed me to organize news reports, chronological narratives, and court documents, into an integrated framework which provided details about specific incidents. The chronology became the central organizational tool for the data, and this was carried over to the organization of the dissertation because it unified most of the data. However, not all of the derived interview themes fit neatly into a chronological format, but I included these in the dissertation within discussions at convenient junctures.

The organization of the data into the chronological unfolding of the standoff facilitated the employment of situational analysis, particularly the examination of strategic events. A central premise taken in this research was that the Gustafsen Lake standoff was a

strategic media event. At the time of the dispute, there were reports of intense displays of potential force between combatants and the mass convergence of police. The magnitude of the situation drew journalists and various Native and non-Native groups from across the country. Compared with other media events, the standoff spanned a prolonged time frame, creating opportunities for police and media, as well as various groups and individuals, to interact with the developments of the conflict and with each other. A review of the media coverage over the month-long period confirms that, at least in the way the standoff was reported, the standoff appeared to threaten social stability at local, provincial, and national levels.<sup>29</sup>

I incorporated a situational analysis of the data at the macro and micro levels of the research. At the macro level, the Gustafsen Lake standoff was considered a strategic event during which the relations between various players and institutions emerged. At the micro level, specific episodes of the standoff, or emergent conditions, were also examined as strategic situations. Patterns and developments suggested in the micro level were extrapolated to the macro level for further study. My understanding of the connections between the micro and macro levels were made possible through a feedback process between news texts, institutional documents, interviews with the players, the context of the unfolding event, and the context of the news production.

I considered several elements in the analysis of relations between players that may have influenced the media portrayals. First are the roles and statuses of the actual players in the event with respect to Canadian society, and with respect to group affiliation.<sup>30</sup> This included police, media, Native leaders, elected officials, social groups, and private citizens. The roles and statuses are also distinguished in terms of agency and adaptive strategies to particular developments. Relational aspects between players included

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<sup>29</sup> The magnitude of the media event was ascertained by noting the media outlets covering the event, the number of news stories, the number of front-page headlines, and the frequency the event was the central topic in media programs and documentaries.

<sup>30</sup> Status at the level of group affiliations includes hierarchies within the RCMP, the news organizations, the Native and non-Native communities, and within the Gustafsen Lake camp.

interpretive frames, power, competition (for resources and control of frames of interpretation), conflict, resistance, compliance, presentation strategies, information control, and negotiation of information. The above-mentioned components allowed for an appreciation of the complexity of the situation and the dynamics between institutions, groups, and individual players. The chronological lens allowed the aspect of change over time to be incorporated into the study.

Frame analysis was an important component of the situational analysis, which I found accounted for the divergent perspectives found in the media texts and interviews. In addition to social science and anthropological linguistic applications (Goffman 1974; Tannen 1993), frame analysis is a frequently used method for media research that examines the text and context of news, including studies by Gitlin (1980), Fairclough (1989), Hackett (1991), and Robinson (1998). Frame analysis is also compatible with the research goal of accounting for change over time. This is supported by Gitlin (1980) and Hackett (1991), who consider media frames to be constantly evolving and adapting.<sup>31</sup> Frame analysis is recognized as a tool for information processing, and is a methodology that successfully transfers between textual and contextual modes. It entails discovering the underlying bases for interpretations of reality. In this research, frame analysis centered on assessing the dominant frame of the news discourse. This involved seeking the dominant meanings and themes through lexical and grammatical features in news headlines and lead-ins, as well as the way in which information and sources were represented in the media. The interpretive frames of interview sources (or the RCMP media and operational plans) required examining the subject positions of the players (considering roles, status, and connections to the event). Next, it involved seeking evidence of this frame in behaviors (individual as well as group) or material products (including institutional documents and media products). Thus, frame analysis was another means to connect textual (news products and documents) and contextual (interview) data.

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<sup>31</sup> In addition to the use of frame analysis to study media and media products, frames are also employed within the journalistic process itself. Gitlin (1980) regards frames as tools journalists use to process and regulate large amounts of information.

Ethnography of communication was another research tool used to assess the interview data. It allowed me to examine the contextual elements of press conferences in order to reconstruct, as best as possible, conditions that may have influenced news production and news products. Although the interview data allow only a limited opportunity to appreciate the communicative nuances, the multiple experiences of news sources, journalists, and spectators provided some insights into possible influences on the media coverage. The criteria examined were taken from Hymes (1974). These included setting, participants, ends (outcomes of the communication), key (emotional tone of the communication), instrumentality (mode of communication—oral and written), norms of interpretation (media conventions for press conferences), and genre (form of the communication). Related to ethnography of communication were the audience responses to the media portrayals at the time of the standoff, and at the time of the research.

A final step in the research was the re-evaluation of the news text analyses in light of the information regarding news production practices, communicative features of press conferences, and news and event contexts. I have situated the findings of the discourse analysis in specific episodes of the narrative of the standoff, and in a final analysis of the media coverage. I have done this in order to emphasize the importance of contextualized discourse analysis. Discourse analyses of media texts are found in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The quantitative analysis of the stereotype labeling, and a discussion of media stereotyping, begin in Chapter 6 and are concluded in Chapter 8.

### **Validity Checks**

There may appear to be a contradiction in this study: although I argue that the media coverage did not represent the event fully or accurately, on occasion I still rely on media products as historical referents for this research. Shortly after I commenced this research, I quickly became aware of the shortcomings of the news coverage, and that this would have a serious effect on the degree of validity of the news data sources. I countered this by testing the news data sources with court and law enforcement documents, plus



interviews with journalists, RCMP, Native leaders, and Native and non-Native people. In addition, this study benefited from the hindsight understandings of the Gustafsen Lake standoff trial where many of the instances of media misrepresentations were pointed out in court. The media relayed this information to the public in their news stories. I have been cautious in ensuring that the news accounts that I use for information can be authenticated with other non-media sources.

In developing the research protocols, I have taken into consideration aspects of triangulation, face validity, and construct validity (Lather 1986).<sup>32</sup> The variety of different types of sources, different methods of analysis of interview and news stories, and the varying theoretical schemes (anthropological, media, news discourse) provides for the triangulation of data, methods and theories. Data sources have been compared and verified for face validity in several ways: text to text, text to journalist or other interview source, and between all possible combinations of interview sources. This cross-checking also assisted in discerning patterns from which some generalizations were derived. Face validity is also a feature of the inclusion of select audience responses to the media coverage and to the research findings. I achieved triangulation by employing a variety of approaches for content analysis of the news stories. Construct validity was facilitated with the wide range of interview sources offering different vantagepoints of the media event, eschewing preconceived theoretical interpretations of the relations between media and their sources in the analysis of these perspectives. Lather (1986) also outlines criteria for catalytic validity that involves an opportunity for the participants to be conscientized (Freire 1993) during the fieldwork. I do not think that I could realistically comment on this because I interviewed people with divergent opinions of the situation. However, I am optimistic that, for people from any of the "camps," electing to participate in this study at least provided a satisfaction to incorporate their sides of the story. This may have been the only affirmative aspect for the participants.

## **Ethics Protocols**

This case study involved an emotionally charged situation, and some people were reluctant to participate, or were concerned that I might distort the information which they volunteered. I have incorporated several ethics protocols to alleviate these concerns as much as possible. Each person was supplied with an Ethics and Consent Form advising them of their rights to safety and confidentiality and my responsibilities to them as a researcher.<sup>33</sup> They signed this form (with the participant keeping a copy) before the interview began. Conditions of anonymity were assured for interview participants, except in special circumstances. People who were public figures during the event, or those who played unique roles in the media coverage, were asked to waive the protection of anonymity.

I returned a copy of the taped interview or the typed transcript to all informants, and asked the participants to review the tapes or transcripts before signing a Release Form. The Release Form authorized me to use the interview material for analysis and in the dissertation. I have made corrections based on the feedback from the participants. Lastly, I asked a finite set of journalists and sources to review the ethnographic aspect of the media involvement in the event, in order to provide a final test for validity. Upon completion of the dissertation defense, I will give all participants a disk version of the thesis (providing they have computer access). In the case of the local Native and non-Native communities, I will provide a hard copy version for the community libraries.

## **Representation of the Media Event in the Dissertation**

I have represented the media event using a chronological format. Each episode begins with a news caption or headline that was published in various newspapers. The news captions became the scaffold on which the context was built. I have used a chronological

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<sup>32</sup> Construct validity involves the avoidance of imposing *a priori* theoretical interpretations on ethnographic data (Lather 1986:67).

<sup>33</sup> These guidelines are consistent with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants (1997) as well as the ethics guidelines for research with human subjects from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (1999).

organization for the narrative of the event for several reasons. A chronology is an organizational structure for the narrative that replicates how the news story actually unfolded, and it is a convention for narratives to be found within the genre of “news.” Out of this framework, patterns and processes, such as changes over time, are more accessible. The emergent patterns and changes might include those in various relationships: between news stories, media, news sources and news processes. Yin (1994) appreciates the value of chronological structures in case study reports because causal sequences can be tracked over time (1994:139). A chronological format is also a narrative approach that acts as an aid for those who do not recall the event, or for those who may have a recollection of the event but from a different perspective. With the latter, it is a way for me and the reader to begin at a point of shared knowledge. My goal is to provide a process for the reader and myself, through the explanation of the underlying background to the media event, by which to construct a framework of understanding. Thus, the format of presentation is carried over from the chronological aspect of news, and taps into one of the inherent ways in which we organize and classify our knowledge of the world.

### **Representation of the Interview Data**

In the following account of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, I have attempted to acknowledge the consensus, as well as the range of perspectives. My goal is to respectfully represent the various voices of the participants in the study. As much as possible, I include my own voice as distinctive from these. As the writer, I have made choices regarding the representation of the information and the relative emphasis of the sources. Yet, I cannot deny my own perceptual framework in being a non-Native woman who has never lived in the British Columbia interior. These factors have influenced my interpretation of the situation and the players. However, the variation and quantity of sources, as well as the investigative aspect of the research, has allowed my perceptions of the conflict to evolve throughout the research process. Nevertheless, as an anthropologist,

I acknowledge that I will never be able to entirely remove my interpretive frame, and that total objectivity is impossible.

The interview data in this dissertation appear most often as a dialogue between the interviewees and myself. The comments by the interviewees appear in italics; my interview questions and comments appear in bold script. I have used square brackets [ ] to indicate sections of the quotations for which I have inserted words to clarify the text for the reader. I have also employed square brackets to identify quoted interview sources. I consider the participants part of the audience for the research findings. In response, I have attempted to represent the interview quotations in a manner that makes their contributions as accessible as possible. I incorporated quotations from the interview transcripts using standard English language orthography and traditional spelling. I have represented individual pronunciations by non-standard spellings. Conversational details such as repair mechanisms [umm or MMmm] and [laughter] are noted. Pauses and breaks in topics are represented by commas and periods. Omissions in the quotations are identified with ellipsis points [...]. The rationale for the representation of the interview data is to provide as many details as necessary for the appreciation of the participants' meanings and perceptions of the event. The representation of the interview quotations is not for the purposes of speech analysis. The representation of the interview data is consistent with the research goals provided to the participants of the study prior to commencing the interviews.

My intention is to incorporate the voices of the participants as a significant part of the ethnographic narrative. Considering the socially disruptive nature of the conflict, I believe that it is important that the range of perspectives and experiences be heard from those who contributed to the research. This might challenge a reader to reconsider interpretive frames of the conflict from a position that under ordinary circumstances would be dismissed. In this way, this study will also speak to the issue of stereotyping on a more personal level.

### **Representation of Newspaper Stories and Archival Sources**

The archival sources include media products as well as legal documents and correspondence. I have bolded the labels “rebel,” “renegade,” and “squatter” in the quoted media texts, to draw attention to the language use during the media event. Quotations from media texts (from newspaper, radio, and television) are italicized, and newspaper quotations immediately following chapter subheadings are single-spaced.

### **Definition of Stereotyping**

The collection of data and the investigation of the media representations of the Gustafsen Lake standoff and their contexts allowed for an examination of the process of media stereotype development. A working definition of stereotyping in relation to media is drawn from Lippmann (1961) and Pickering (1995). In this study, stereotyping refers to a fixed perception of a person, or a group of people, based on generalized beliefs. At the core of stereotypes may lie a kernel of truth. However, built around this “truth” is a score of associations and attributes that are rigid and limited characterizations of a group. Consequently, a combination of the attributes of a few, or a few attributes, become the defining schema associated with a group of people or individuals perceived to belong to a group. Stereotypes provide ready-made snapshot understandings about people that do not require personal experience with the people being generalized, or the characterizations make a connection with the limited experiences in the process of the formation and validation of the characterizations. Stereotyping is based on reduction. It precludes any sense of individual differences. It does not suspend final judgement until all available information is considered. It assumes that all of the information about the group is known and the identifiable traits apply equally to all members of the group.

The conundrum of stereotyping is that it is a natural cognitive function, related to information processing (Pickering 1995; Lippmann 1961). We need to categorize and generalize experience in order to make sense of our experiential world. Language is particularly conducive to stereotyping because a word is a refinement of a multiple of

meanings. A word settles on general concepts, but it loses nuances of meanings that reside in the margins. In this sense, words parallel stereotyping. The processes of reduction, generalization, categorization and ultimately, naming are all involved in language, and these are all properties of stereotyping. It is not surprising that stereotyping is prevalent in the media because it requires both information processing and language. Media provide experiences and information about people and events too far removed for individuals to personally experience. Language creates associative meanings that close the experiential gap between the actual experience and the media audience. Sometimes the language entails labels that are used as identity markers to represent people, which, through repetitive usage, reinforce stereotype images. The topic of stereotyping is introduced in Chapter 6, and more fully discussed in Chapter 8.

### **Scope and Limitations**

For the purposes of this dissertation, media are interpreted to include all mainstream modes: print, radio, and television. Out of necessity, this research had to be limited in scope, because of the enormity of the data strictly for the Gustafsen Lake standoff and its connections to local, regional and national social history. This study does not examine the Gustafsen Lake standoff trial or any of the related protest demonstrations. The concentration on this particular event precluded any examination of the media coverage of earlier Native conflicts in British Columbia, or Native use of media in British Columbia in their appeals for increased land and utilization of resources. However, these worthy topics deserve an entirely separate study.<sup>34</sup> The analysis of media products is restricted to newspaper stories and, to a lesser extent, television and radio accounts. It does not include editorials or letters to the editor. The ethnographic focus is from the perspectives of the journalists attending the event, although contrasting points of view from other interview sources and documents are included.

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<sup>34</sup> There is a history of the Shuswap involving the media to bring attention to their needs for land and resources since 1874. On 28 August 1874, Kamloops missionary Father Grandidier O.M.I., wrote a letter

I appreciate that some interviewees withheld information from this research because of personal, professional, and legal ramifications. Although I gathered information from a vast array of sources, I have concluded that knowing the complete story is virtually impossible.

I suggest that any examination of a media event that involves such complex social relations and issues will fall short of arriving at the total picture. This is a dilemma identified by social science research in general, and this difficulty resonates within the journalistic profession. I would counter that the inability to comprehend total reality should not predetermine the limits of knowledge, or the degree that one should confine a search for deeper understandings. I argue that a creative approach to this dilemma is to seek out as many resources as are available, and from there, to assess patterns, relationships, interconnectedness, and contradictions. Even a partial understanding that has depth has greater potential to expand what we know of the real world than it would if the whole project were abandoned. In this way, the limits of understanding are more open-ended, the investigation has greater heuristic potential, and the knowledge derived has greater authority to promote social reform.<sup>35</sup> I assert that the large quantity of the data amassed is sufficient for the examination of many of the contextual factors of the news event and some of the outcomes. I take responsibility for any errors or exclusions of pertinent information relating to the media coverage if they were within the scope of the materials collected.

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to the *Victoria Standard* newspaper appealing to the government and the public for an increased allotment of land (Palmer 1994:40).

<sup>35</sup> This argument is consistent with Norris (1992 ); Tallis (1988 ) and Eagleton (1996 ).

## **Chapter 3**

### **“Serious Red Alert”**

This chapter situates the Gustafsen Lake standoff first in terms of the development of Native resistance in Canada, and then more specifically to the situation as it existed in British Columbia. The remaining part of the chapter examines the early stage of the standoff, before the large contingent of media and police arrived on the scene. The case study of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff takes as a premise that the incident and how it was characterized was not an isolated event. It connects in various ways to the history of Aboriginal people in Canada, previous instances of Native disputes, and the recent history of the relations between the media, the RCMP, and various other media sources.

#### **Historical Background to the Gustafsen Lake Standoff**

The following is a summary of the historical background to the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The focus is on those historic factors that explain the development of Native resistance in Canada, and the diverse responses of Native communities to mediation attempts by the various levels of government. This information is helpful for understanding many comments from the various sources quoted in this case study.

#### **Canadian Overview**

Canada has a long history of negotiating land agreements with its Native people. In the early 18th century, treaties involving property became prevalent with the Europeans' desire of private ownership and exclusive use of the land. Provisions for more formal protocols were established with the British Royal Proclamation in 1763, which provided a legal process for Indian peoples' consent to the Crown for clear title to traditional lands. The 1867 British North America Act (section 91(24)) provided federal jurisdiction over Indians and lands reserved for Indians. A concerted effort was made to cede certain Indian lands for the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and to free up other transportation routes across the Canadian prairies. By 1921, there were several treaties



settled, including 11 that were assigned a number. These spanned southern Manitoba, across the prairies, and to the Mackenzie District to the north.

Native resistance in Canada can be traced back to the reserve era that began in the 1830s<sup>36</sup> (Wilson and Urion 1995). Direct appeals to the federal government began as early as 1874, when delegations of Native leaders began traveling to Ottawa to make appeals for land allocations for reserves (Long 1992). In response, the federal government passed a series of Indian Acts, beginning in 1868 (Asch 1993:3). The 1880 Indian Act protected reserves by redefining them as crown lands, and by prohibiting taxation of reserve land or property on the land. It also imposed a “chief and council” band structure that paralleled local government and was similarly subordinate to central authorities. The Indian Act also gave the federal minister of Indian affairs and his officials the authority to regulate reserves and Native bands (Tennant 1990:45). In the 1930s and 1940s, Aboriginal groups became more organized and began to pressure provincial and federal governments for reform, and to form networks across Canada. In 1951, Ottawa’s response to these overtures was to amend the Indian Act, although paternalism and colonialism were still perpetuated in more subtle forms. In 1969, the federal government produced the White Paper on Indian Policy. It recommended that the special status of native Indians be gradually eliminated through policy mechanisms. The White Paper served as a catalyst for large-scale organization of Native interests (Long 1992:120). Natives opposed the proposed changes to their status, and considered the White Paper proposals another imposition of white law to define Natives’ lives. In 1970, Native political and spiritual leaders agreed to adopt the position paper, “Citizens Plus,” from the Indian Association of Alberta.<sup>37</sup> This report rejected the White paper because it did not recognize the symbolic importance of treaties to status Indians. It was felt that without treaties, Native people would lose their traditional cultures and way of life. They

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<sup>36</sup> According to Wilson and Urion (1995), the Canadian reserve period began in the 1830s. Treaty policies were modified in the 1850s. By the late 1860s, reserves were established in areas that had become alienated from Native control (Wilson and Urion 1995:58).

<sup>37</sup> There were also position papers prepared by Indian associations from other provinces.

believed that their last hope for these to survive rested on official recognition of their special status (Weaver 1981)(Long 1992 :121).

The response to the White Paper signified the emergence of the modern period of Native politicization, which persisted throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Long 1992:121). In this movement, arguments for self-government, and original sovereignty, and an expanded sense of Aboriginal rights were formulated. By 1981, concerns about land rights were redefined to include the right to Aboriginal self-government. During this time, Native people utilized the courts to have their arguments heard. In 1973, the Nisga'a tribe of British Columbia lost their case against the federal government to recognize their ownership of traditional lands. Yet, this outcome held promise. Despite the Supreme Court's split decision regarding the current existence of Aboriginal title that favored the federal government, it also affirmed pre-existing Aboriginal title before the arrival of the Europeans. This encouraged Native groups to proceed with their attempts to have their inherent Aboriginal rights recognized. The treaty process in British Columbia evolved out of that 1973 ruling. In 1997, the Supreme Court decision on the Delgamuukw affirmed Indian ownership of traditional land,<sup>38</sup> and acknowledged the validity of oral history in a court of law.

In the 1960s, when Native leaders were honing their skills in political and legal lobbying, a "strategic militancy" emerged from the Native Indian movement. The function was to provide a second line of defense if the legal and political avenues were hindered at the federal government level. The American Indian Movement (AIM), as well as black militant resistance in the United States influenced a Canadian Native militancy in terms of similar tactics to draw public and official attention to specific concerns. Strategic militancy motivated various staged Aboriginal protests in Canada. These include Lubicon Cree in Northern Alberta (1980s), Haida of British Columbia (1980s, 1990s), Peigus

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<sup>38</sup> The MacKenzie Valley Pipeline and the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreements previously acknowledged Aboriginal ownership of traditional lands.

Indian Band in Manitoba (1989); Algonquins of Golden Lake (1988), and Mohawks of Kanasetake at Oka Quebec (1990) (Long 1992:127). Protests targeted logging companies, the military, and the Canadian public. However, the adversary was ultimately the Canadian state (Long 1992:127). As early as 1974, the RCMP described the Indian movement “as the single greatest threat to national security,” through pockets of unrest were dismissed by politicians “as socially insignificant actions by a small and desperate group of Indian extremists” (Long 1992:127, quoting York 1989:251). Natives came to recognize the power of media during these incidents of “strategic militancy,” and that it could be used to their advantage to gain national and international attention for their discontent, and to increase support.

### **British Columbia Overview**

The situation of land settlements in the province of British Columbia did not evolve in the same manner as in eastern Canada two centuries ago. A few treaties had been finalized for Vancouver Island between 1850 and 1854, about the time when Europeans began settling in the province. On the mainland, James Douglas, the chief factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, established a system of allocating meager reserve acreages to Native communities in order to accommodate the influx of European settlers and their needs for land. Yet, as individuals, Indians could acquire an even larger portion of land by formally relinquishing their ties to their traditional communities and, similar to the European settlers on Vancouver and the mainland, use the land for homesteading. Few Native people, however, took this opportunity (Tennant 1990:34-36).

There was a prevalent notion that Indians should be assimilated: be taught white ways, and live in urban areas. Indians were encouraged to leave the reserve, and were advised that if they relinquished Aboriginal title, they would be rewarded with increased social status and political rights. There was no incentive to establish treaties (as provided in the Royal Proclamation of 1763). Under Joseph Trutch, the chief commissioner of lands and works, the size of the reserves was further reduced when the reserves were surveyed for

homesteading. A catastrophic small pox epidemic that wiped out one-third of the Aboriginal population was yet another circumstance that justified the reductions. Although British Columbia joined confederation in 1871, the federal government had no authority to compel the province to acknowledge Indian title, or to exceed the 10-acre per family formula (Tennant 1990 :44).

When British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, the federal government assumed responsibility for Indians and lands reserved for Indian peoples. Despite overtures from the federal government to British Columbia to clear title through treaty making, little substantive progress was made. Except for Treaty 8 in the north-eastern corner of British Columbia and the Douglas treaties in the 1850s, there have been no agreements with the Indians of British Columbia to extinguish Aboriginal title.

Some Native communities in British Columbia became activists in their response to the stalemate between the provincial and federal governments. In 1874, the Coast Salish protested, asking for 80 acres per family. Their attempts at reform were rebuffed. Between 1880 and 1899, Indians in British Columbia developed greater political awareness, making specific demands for Aboriginal title, treaties, and self-government. They mounted protests to call attention to their case. By 1886, overtures by British Columbia Native leaders were rejected in Ottawa. In 1887 there was a blockade staged at Fort St. John, where the Native community demanded a treaty. The same year, Treaty number 8 extended from Alberta into British Columbia, challenging the notion that Aboriginal title would not be recognized in the province. After 1927, Aboriginal political activity went underground in the interior of the province, and the outlawing of land claims was quietly accepted (Tennant 1990:82). In 1958, the Native Brotherhood was formed and activism resurfaced. However, over the next 10 years this movement was unable to achieve solidarity among the various Native communities. The impetus for solidarity came from Native responses to the federal government's White Paper. The Aboriginal peoples' common rejection of the White paper prompted them to create new

organizations in British Columbia (as well as in other provinces) for the purpose of advocating reform. The 1973 Nisga'a ruling is considered to mark the contemporary era of the political protests by Native communities in the province.

Blockades were used by Native communities to express discontent in British Columbia since the 1870s. A century later, blockades became a frequently used political tool to draw attention to their frustrations over land allocation and resource extraction (Blomley 1996:10). Responses by Natives to the glacier-paced resolution of land and resource issues took two forms that were not mutually exclusive. One of these was to seek mediation through legal and political processes. By the mid-1980s, the majority of British Columbia Native communities had submitted formal statements of land claim to the federal government, in spite of the insistence of the provincial government that Aboriginal title did not exist. The second response, often taken by those groups either frustrated by the treaty process, or those who declined this option, was to stage protests, usually in the form of a blockade. Over the past 15 years, blockades have been more prevalent in British Columbia than in any other province in Canada. The provincial government's refusal to recognize Aboriginal title, combined with the pressures of increasing resource extraction, resulted in renewed commitments by disgruntled Native communities to stage blockades, such as at Lyell Island and Clayoquot Sound (Blomley 1996:9). In the summer of 1990, the most extensive round of blockades took place, involving 20 different Native groups. Unlike previous blockades, many blockades in 1990 involved shutting down public transportation routes on major roads and rail lines. Duffey Lake was the most protracted blockade, lasting from July to November. The Duffey Lake blockade sparked counter-blockades by non-Natives (Blomley 1996:9).

Although many blockades were associated with the 1990 Oka standoff in Quebec, Blomley (1996) considers that each blockade was rooted in local factors (1996:9-10). The tension of Native disputes in British Columbia seemed to abate with the 1991 election of the New Democratic Party (NDP) provincial government and the subsequent

acknowledgement of Aboriginal title. The treaty process was supported by the majority of Native communities and blockades decreased in frequency, "but the furore around them has not" (1996:10). In 1995, several blockades were mounted by Native communities that refused to take part in the treaty process. These included blockades at Douglas Lake Ranch and Adams Lake. Dissenting groups discounted the treaty process as a form of sellout of Native sovereignty, and as a strategy to stall resolution while valuable resources were being extracted. These groups also contended that some of the Native leaders who promoted the treaty process did not have the mandate of their communities to do so (1996:10-11).

Over this past decade, the economic instability in the province and mounting frustration of Aboriginal people over stalled land negotiations has been punctuated by an increase in the number of protests and blockades. This has been countered by non-Native groups who are outraged by the inconvenience of the protests. Political movements, such as "One Right for All," regard any treaty settlement as an affront to democracy because they perceive this as a concession that privileges Native communities. Conversely, many Native people in British Columbia have strong feelings about their traditional rights to the land, and they are supported by legal precedents and settlements in other parts of Canada. Combined with a general lack of awareness of the historical background of the treaty situation (Tennant 1990), the issue remains highly contentious, years after the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Most British Columbians have a stake in the resolution of issues of title and resource allocation. In the event that all Native communities in British Columbia are reimbursed and allocated property, non-Native citizens will relinquish provincial revenue sources and opportunities for private resource development. Although other blockades have taken place since the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff, the province has experienced relative calm. However, the continued public debate over the provincial government's final approval of the Nisga'a treaty, and the precedent that its success or failure sets, may result in a resurgence of strife. On this note, I will begin the discussion of the media coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff.

### **Context of the Media and their Relations with the RCMP**

The majority of journalists who covered the standoff, including those whom I interviewed, were from Vancouver. They all had previous experiences in dealing with each other and with the RCMP at various news events. As a group of journalists, they talked of respecting each other, but understood that competition was a driving force between the outlets. Competition between outlets could take place at several levels: scooping a story, landing choice interviews, being assigned to a big story, and working for an outlet with the most prestige and financial resources. Another area of competition was in maintaining a positive rapport with important media sources. For the Vancouver media outlets, the RCMP is one such crucial source.

Although about half of the journalists interviewed for this research were either complimentary toward the Vancouver RCMP media division or declined from making any comments, this was not the consensus. Those who were supportive of the RCMP media personnel appreciated the efforts taken by the RCMP to provide information and access to news stories. They described the RCMP media liaison as fair and reasonable. Nonetheless, journalists from several outlets believed that the relationship between the media and the RCMP media liaison had become strained before the standoff at Gustafsen Lake. They contended that their dependence on the police for information was being manipulated.

The journalists that were critical of the relationship between the media and the RCMP media division described a “carrot and stick” approach used by the media liaison in dealing with them. There was a sense that even before the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the RCMP media liaison used the power of being their most important source as leverage. The media liaison had been offended on previous occasions when journalists sought out unofficial networks to news stories before an RCMP press release took place. The journalists provided more than one instance when this strategy (typical for large media

outlets) resulted in some consequence, which they interpreted as a form of punishment. After one particular incident after the Gustafsen Lake standoff (in an unrelated news story), when an outlet “scooped” a breaking story, the RCMP media liaison publicly stated that the offending outlet would be excluded from future RCMP press conferences.<sup>39</sup> Journalists from several outlets talked about being ostracized or humiliated in front of peers by comments made by the RCMP media liaison. The worst sanction was being left out from breaking news announcements: it reflected poorly on the journalist’s ability to maintain connections with an essential source, rendering the individual a liability to his employer. Several journalists also believed that the professional boundary between *BCTV* and the RCMP had become blurred, with the media liaison enlisting *BCTV* to assist the RCMP in becoming more “media aware.” Related to this was the suspicion that *BCTV* was favored with inside police information about stories that were about to break. Suffice it to say that the competition between the various outlets in Vancouver was stiff. Based on the interviews with the many journalists, unwittingly or otherwise, the RCMP media personnel had become part of this dynamic.

### **RCMP Media Relations Program**

Since the early 1990s, the RCMP have developed a media relations program, which is a component of community policing. According to Sergeant Peter Montague, RCMP media liaison for British Columbia, “*We had always been a silent force and suffered from a fortress mentality when it came to dealing with media issues.*” To address this, an RCMP media relations program was designed, based on a marketing program. The goal of the program is to keep the public apprised of what the police force is about, and what they are doing. There is an emphasis on accessibility and accountability, and RCMP members are taught how to interact with the media.

In the earlier stages of the program, the RCMP went to the media to learn how to communicate with the public. Sergeant Montague states that “*We put together a program*

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<sup>39</sup> This was confirmed by journalists from *CBC Radio*, *CBC TV*, and the *Vancouver Sun*.



*and a policy which we reduced from say, 10 pages of—which said nothing—to basically five paragraphs—which captures our—the essence and spirit of our program—still leaving a lot of artistic freedom to the members to deal with the media.”* The media program is considered a program that is open to public scrutiny, which is important for the RCMP public image. Sergeant Montague states, *“Everything that we do we try to enhance our confidence level—the public’s confidence level—in US as a police force.... If we ever lost our credibility with the public then, we really wouldn’t exist very, very long.”* Media relations also entails correcting misinformation, making sure that the media have the facts, and *“Have our point of view accurately reflected, and reported.”* He states that, *“Leading up to a charge, we can discuss the matter in a more generic sense, and advise the public what we’re doing,”* but that *“We can’t discuss anything before the courts that could be deemed to be contemptuous.”* The relationship between the police force and the public is important: *“It’s not a secret police force, and it’s not an ominous place to come—it’s a friendly place—it’s a place where we want to share the information—always keeping the integrity of evidence in mind—we have to protect the integrity of evidence, and protect the privacy of individuals—make sure that we do not say anything inappropriate about a person. We could never name a suspect, for instance. You know, we could only say that ‘we have a suspect in mind, and we’re continuing an investigation of the bank robbery.’”* [Interview with Sergeant Montague, May 27, 1997]

The above depiction offered by Sergeant Montague needs to be framed as an idealized model. It was not the prototype for media and public relations which were employed during the standoff at Gustafsen Lake.<sup>40</sup> The decision made by the RCMP to alter the

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<sup>40</sup> I am including this discussion of the RCMP’s deviation from the RCMP media plan at the Gustafsen Lake standoff here in order to differentiate the ideal from the real. Without this explanation, it would appear that the preceding narrative of the media event is a form of entrapment of the RCMP, which is not the purpose of the research.

media plan for the Gustafsen Lake operation was shaped by a series of incidents associated with the Gustafsen Lake camp and its occupants, and the police investigations of these. The RCMP assessed that the people in the camp were capable of violence. There was substantive evidence of people who were preparing for an armed engagement with members of law enforcement. The effects of these RCMP assessments on their operational plan, and ultimately their media strategy, are examined later.

### **Local Media and RCMP Relations**

News stories generated from police reports in the *100 Mile House Free Press* are only one aspect of the weekly community news publication. The RCMP officers provide the journalists with information from police reports, and the detachment often arranges for the reporters to speak with the constable heading an investigation. The detachment does not have a designated officer in charge of media relations. The newspaper staff considers the communications between them and the local police very satisfactory and amiable. Editor Steven Frasher commented that if the reporters find something that they think the RCMP has mishandled, *“they call them on it.”* However, he also found the detachment to be very cautious about releasing information. *“For example, if we have someone involved with—even quite a significant crime...they won’t release the name—even if there’s 90% likelihood the person will be charged before the magistrate—before we hit the streets. They still won’t release the name to us—prior to the formal charge being laid.”*<sup>41</sup> This is often in conflict with the editor’s goal to *“explain the incident as thoroughly as we can—to effectively shut down the rumor mill...get the correct story out there to start with, and have that story hold water and credibility.”*

The editor considered the tension between the newspaper and the local police detachment regarding the release of information a minor dilemma, but it also points to the differing views of information, and the varied purposes information serves. In the case of the *100*

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<sup>41</sup> Staff Sergeant Sarich confirmed that his detachment is cautious when supplying the media with any information regarding an investigation because of the risks of tainting a subsequent trial.

*Mile House Free Press*, seeking informal sources of police information for the publication of stories does not offer a competitive or economic advantage. The accrued law enforcement news updates over the space of a week are sufficient to satisfy the appetites of the local audience. The editor contrasted his weekly newspaper with the larger outlets in Vancouver, and stated that the newspaper is not likely to ever scoop a breaking news story. The newspaper strives to provide complete and balanced reporting of events by attending to pertinent detail without being sensationalist.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The relations between the Vancouver media and RCMP media section, and their local counterparts at 100 Mile House, illustrate the differences between the small town and large urban media and police relations. At 100 Mile House, there is little, if any, competition for news stories from the local RCMP detachment. Information is likely to be provided directly from the specific officer, and there is no actual media program. The local media are totally reliant on the somewhat limited information from the police detachment, but they are not compelled to establish alternative networks for information. The relations between the Vancouver RCMP media division and the Vancouver media outlets are more complicated. In Vancouver, the information demands of the media, and the public information needs of the RCMP, are such that information dissemination requires specialized staff. Yet, the RCMP media program does not seem to satisfy the competitive nature of the media. Alternative information networks are important to journalists as supplements to police information, and as a potential means to scoop stories that would otherwise be equally doled out to media outlets during press conferences. Competitiveness also makes the journalists more sensitive to favoritism and censures by the RCMP media section. In this large urban context, the tension between the media and the police regarding information centers more on issues of access as it relates to competition over obtaining information before other outlets. Although the RCMP remain an important media source, the aggressive pursuit for news between outlets ensures that

measures taken by the RCMP to fully control information to the media will be met with some degree of resistance. The preceding concludes the contextual framework for the local and Vancouver media, and their respective relations with the RCMP, that was carried over to the Gustafsen Lake standoff, and influenced the media characterizations.

### **Early Beginnings of the Conflict at Gustafsen Lake**

The following is a narrative of the early period of the standoff, before the influx of the large media outlets. It begins with a description of 100 Mile House and its geographic situation with other locales connected to the standoff.

#### **100 Mile House**

100 Mile House is located in the rugged interior of the province of British Columbia. It had just celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an incorporated district municipality in July 1995. Historically, it had been on the “Cariboo Gold Rush Trail” during the 1860s gold rush era. Several decades ago, the primary commercial activities came to include lumber, ranching, and tourism. Over the past few years, the population in the town has dramatically increased. The town is mostly comprised of non-Native people. Some Native people work in the town, but they usually commute from other places. Highway 97 is the main thoroughfare through the town, linking 100 Mile House to Vancouver, 400 kilometers to the south, and to Williams Lake, 90 kilometers to the north. 100 Mile House is about halfway between Vancouver and Jasper, Alberta, making it a regular stopover location for tour bus operations. Four Native Indian reserves are located in the region. Canim Lake is located about 30 kilometers north-east of 100 Mile House. Dog Creek is situated about 50 kilometers west, and Canoe Creek about 10 kilometers further west. Alkali Lake is approximately 130 kilometers west of 100 Mile House, and is easier to access from Williams Lake. These three reserves to the west are located off Highway 97, accessible only by forestry roads. The James Cattle Ranch incorporates Gustafsen Lake, and is located in the area between Canim Lake and Dog Creek reserves. Gustafsen Lake, the site of the standoff, is located about 35 kilometers away, on the Exeter Station

Road leading north-west from the town. A map of Gustafsen Lake in relation to nearby communities is found in Appendix 1. A map of 100 Mile House is found in Appendix 2.

The following narrative is taken from a variety of perspectives: rancher Lyle James; Chief of the Canim Lake Band, Antoine Archie; Sundance leader, John Hill; newspaper editor, Steven Frasher; local RCMP Staff Sergeant, Martin Sarich; and RCMP Superintendent, Len Olfert. The narrative traces the early stage of the conflict that transformed the conflict over the occupation of property into a major confrontation with the police, and the shift from a local to a national media event. This account is followed by a brief analysis.

**13 June:** *"A growing dispute between the sundancers and James comes to a head after native Indians fence off the religious site, blocking cattle from the area. James arrives at the camp bearing an eviction notice. He brings along about a dozen ranch hands 'for support' and to witness the serving of the notice. There is a wide disparity between the Indian and non-Indian version of what occurs that day. Splitting the Sky says: 'About 15 of his hands drove up in 4x4s and pickups. They pulled out rifles and threatened to kill them. One of them pulled out a bull whip and said: 'This is a good day to string up some red niggers.' James denies any of that happened. 'There was no confrontation. We went in and served them the notice,' James said. 'We didn't have any arms whatsoever.'"*  
[chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

**14 June:** *"Two members of the B.C. forest service are near the lake inspecting timber when they see people in the trees. Suddenly there's a loud gunshot and the forestry workers see dust fly from the road in front of them. They flee, unhurt."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

Lyle and Mary James are an elderly couple who own the ranch property where Gustafsen Lake is situated. They live in a modest home next to the Dog Creek and Canoe Creek reserves. They previously lived and ranched on the Flathead Indian Reserve in Montana for 25 years before they moved to the interior of British Columbia in 1972. Lyle James purchased the ranch for 1.1 million dollars. The ranch property is extended by leases and a grazing permit issued by the forestry department, which James purchased. His total property extends to about a half a million acres (182,000 hectares), on which he has about 3,000 cattle and 70 horses. The James Cattle Ranch Company is a family operation, and

one of his sons-in-law is from one of the local reserves. James has six or seven ranch hands (but this number fluctuates), and he employs people from the local reserve.

In 1989, Percy Rosette, who was residing at the Alkali Lake Reserve #1 asked Lyle James if he could hold a Sundance at Gustafsen Lake.<sup>42</sup> Lyle James did not have any concerns when he gave his permission. The local Natives had already been camping in the location, and the area had always been open for the enjoyment of local people as well as visitors. But the rancher did not like it when Percy said—*“If you don’t let me, I’ll pull the Indian Act on you, ”* He recalled, *“but—that didn’t even concern me—I didn’t know what he could do, but it still didn’t concern me. And—so—[he had Percy promise]... there were to be no structures or anything built there.”* There was no written agreement between Percy Rosette and Lyle James for those initial years of the standoff.

In the first two years, there were complaints that people fishing in the lake received minor threats from some of the participants of the Sundance. A more serious incident took place one night in 1992 when two couples vacationing at the public campground near the lake had shots fired through their tent while they were sleeping. One of the guests, accompanied by one of Lyle James’ Native ranch hands, went to the Sundance camp and made a positive identification. The police conducted an investigation; two people from outside the area were identified as suspects, but nothing further developed.<sup>43</sup> It was after this that Lyle James and Percy Rosette made a formal written agreement, witnessed by a Native RCMP officer. There were to be no permanent structures built, and the time limit

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<sup>42</sup> The Sundance is a sacred rite that originated with the Oglala Sioux of the South Dakota plains in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has since spread to other regions and (to some extent) has been adopted by members of different tribal traditions. It is a ritual of sacrifice to the Creator and a means of personal renewal. The ceremony requires the preparation of a sacred arbor and other sacred symbols, as well as fasting, praying, and dancing. Several variations of the ritual have developed among different groups. The formal ceremony may exclude the participation of non-Native people. The Sundance ceremony may involve (as did the 1995 Sundance at Gustafsen Lake) the male dancers piercing their chests. Thus, the notion of Sundance “tradition” is variable and relative.

<sup>43</sup> During the trial, the defense council demonstrated to the court that the RCMP could not identify who was responsible for the shooting.

for the use of the area for the Sundance was to 1993 inclusive. Lyle James did not have a problem with the Sundance being held on the property, but he was increasingly concerned about the threats made to people who were also in the area. He stated that, *“But the thing was, it wasn’t REALLY and never was really the ones that—of the Sundance—that caused the problem. It was always some others that came in.”*

Although the four-year Sundance cycle ended in 1993, another Sundance was held at the site in 1994. In the winter following the 1994 Sundance, Lyle James discovered that Percy and his wife were living in a cabin at Gustafsen Lake. Neither James nor the RCMP realized at the time that Percy Rosette and John Stevens had hired Native rights lawyer Bruce Clark in early January, 1995 to represent their land claim for the area used for the Sundance.<sup>44</sup> Without this knowledge, Lyle James considered Percy Rosette’s continued occupancy on the property a private civil matter. He made inquiries at the local RCMP to have the sundancers evicted, and he consulted with a lawyer.

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Since the 1960s, the Canim Lake reserve has been working toward a positive and accepting relationship with the town of 100 Mile House and the local RCMP detachment. In the 1960s, there were racist episodes and a sense that Native community members were subjected to unfair policing. In the early 1970s, the Canim reserve formed an Integration Council with the members of the Emissaries of the Divine Light, a spiritual community at 100 Mile House.<sup>45</sup> Their main purpose was to deal with discrimination

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<sup>44</sup> Clark included the Gustafsen Lake case with other Native land submissions to the Queen at Buckingham Palace on 27 March 1995.

<sup>45</sup> The Emissaries of the Divine Light is a spiritual movement that was brought to 100 Mile House by Michael Exeter. Michael Exeter is a member of one of the founding settler families in the area. The Exeters, a socially prominent family in England, purchased a large tract of ranch land in 1912 near 100 Mile House. Michael Exeter’s father was sent to the region to operate the ranch. Michael Exeter became involved with the Emissaries of the Divine Light in the 1940s or 1950s. When the founder of the Emissaries of the Divine Light died, Michael Exeter became the spiritual leader of this worldwide movement. He also inherited the title 8<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Exeter when his father died. This information is relevant to other aspects of the developing conflict mentioned later in the narrative.

against Native people in the region. According to Chief Antoine Archie, *“Through that, we got a good relationship working with 100 Mile, and we maintained that for a number of years—maybe 20 years or so—and that’s something we wish to hang on to!*

One element that Chief Archie felt might damage this relationship was the militancy associated with the Gustafsen Lake Sundance. Chief Archie had never heard about the Sundance before it was introduced at Gustafsen Lake. He recalled attending some of the meetings held to explain the ceremony to the local Native communities. He stated that, in 1992, *“a couple of particular meetings that I had gone to—[they] weren’t just talking—they were mixing politics...But I brought my son—and I told him to come and listen, so that later on he could say, ‘Well, I took part in that—I took part and I listened.’ ... So when I talked to the sundancers out here...and I read up on other stuff...I talked to a few other people who were involved in other Sundances, and they’re not saying the same thing.”* It seemed to Chief Archie that the people who brought the Sundance to Gustafsen Lake *“developed some of their own kind of lines cause it really doesn’t really fall in with traditional Sundance.”* He believed that the Sundance practiced at Gustafsen Lake was different from the traditional Sundance from the Lakota. Chief Archie said that they brought this up with the sundancers: *“We challenged them out there. And we told them—the Sundance was supposed to only occur for four years, and you’ve got to give the land a rest, according to the real sundancers.”*

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John Hill, also known as “Splitting the Sky” or “Doc,” had attended the Gustafsen Lake Sundance in the summer of 1994, and was invited to lead the Sundance in 1995. He is a Mohawk aboriginal, who was then residing in Alberta for the last few years before the standoff. He had been introduced to Percy Rosette through William Ignace (Wolverine), and he was given permission to celebrate the Gustafsen Lake Sundance. Percy Rosette asked Hill to lead the 1995 Sundance, and they had a number of planning meetings throughout 1994 and 1995. The Sundance had a significant meaning to Hill, and he was



committed to the exacting preparations of the grounds, the fasting, and the dance. *“And—of course, during Sundance times, we post signs up at—you know—on the grounds there that there’ll be no guns, no booze—no alcohol—no negative attitudes—just a good code of conduct there. And anybody that comes there comes to pray, and comes to pray for the people.”* The previous year, Hill learned about the conflict between Lyle James and Percy Rosette. According to Hill, Lyle James had *“started to call the Sundance a form of devil worshipping,”* as part of the argument that the Indians should get off the land, that the time had expired, and that too many people were coming. It seemed to Hill that Lyle James thought the Sundance was getting out of control, and he wanted the people removed.

In 1994, Hill remembered being appalled by the hundreds of cows that *“kept coming onto the grounds...defecating all over our grounds.”* The rationale was that if the rancher could not guarantee that his cows would bypass the area, they would do something on their own to stop the cattle from wandering into the sacred circle. According to Hill, there could have been as many as five to seven hundred cows grazing in the area of the Sundance grounds. In preparation for the 1995 Sundance, Hill and others saw the remnants of an old fence lying around, and with the help of the others, erected a fence to stop the cows from coming in. For the sundancers, putting up the fence was a solution to prevent the cattle from interfering with the Sundance, but it also took on a deeper significance. Hill maintained that the building of the fence was innocent. He considered the fence a means to keep the cows out, and a way of circumventing the *“hassle of chasing cattle away while praying for the ancestral beings to come and visit us, because they won’t visit when the cows are defecating on the site.”* They built the fence, but felt the hostility from the rancher and his employees later. This did not bother them *“because—it had become well established that the land wasn’t theirs in the first place, and the fact that there was no real legal surveys done down there, the reality was that this Lyle James would never produce a deed.”* Hill mentioned that he participated in making the video-taped program, *The Defenders of the Land*. One scene in the video-

tape shows him teaching people inside the camp techniques of defense, skills he thought they needed because there was already a sense that the camp would be attacked.

In Hill's estimation, tensions peaked when the rancher figured the sundancers were trying to establish a "*territorial imperative*." Hill admitted that building a fence to ensure that there was no desecration upon the Sundance site was a form of staking the territory. The sundancers complained to the RCMP about a number of gunshots into the camp that originated from behind the bush at Bottle Lake. **Were you firing back?** "*Ahh—initially no. We filed and lodged complaints that there was being shots fired into the camp. Initially no. And any shots that were fired in a future role—were warning shots—never direct shots—were only warning shots. Because we didn't want any physical confrontation—because as I say—it was against the rules of a Sundance time to have weapons—to have guns, while you're conducting the ceremony. So we couldn't violate that. It's a spiritual law.*" According to Hill, the RCMP did not get involved in the shooting incidents because they said it was outside of their jurisdiction, and that conflict between them would have to be settled in a civil court, in a civil fashion. Lyle James was advised by his lawyers that it would cost 25 to 30 thousand dollars to get a civil injunction, which he did not want to spend. Hill said that it still would have cost James "*a couple of thousand dollars*" to have the land surveyed, and James was still adamant about not producing a deed.

Hill recalled, during the preparation time of the Sundance, that the cowhands came in with guns, and a bullwhip, and that "*the guy with the bullwhip said that 'this was a good day to burn down a Goddamned cook house and to string up some red niggers.'*"<sup>46</sup> This sounded like the Ku Klux Klan, "*and that's heavy Ku Klux Klan country up there.*" According to Hill, the rancher and his hands scared the young men in the camp when

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<sup>46</sup> Although Hill did not mention this during the interview, another source inside the camp alleged that Hill, as the leader of the Sundance, was not physically present for this confrontation. At the time when the eviction notice was presented, Hill was praying in the distance. This source also stated that one of the ranch hands brought a video camera, and filmed Hill praying in the distance. This filming was said to have breached the sacred protocols for the Sundance.

they saw the guns in the “car”: *“they didn’t know what them guys were going to do!”* Hill stated that if the rancher and his employees had not acted so aggressively, everyone would have left the camp after the Sundance. At the conclusion of the Sundance, the participants were asked if they were going to break down their resolve and leave. But Hill admitted that even before the Sundance, they were still very angry and upset from the hostilities shown to them. They felt that they were being watched and stalked, and claimed that they could see people with weapons in the bushes. Sometimes these situations led to angry confrontations, but the RCMP did not become involved.

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Lyle James presents a much different version of presenting the eviction notice. He learned early in June that the people at the Sundance camp had built a fence down to the lake and closed the gate into the area. They had posted someone to watch the gate. The fence prevented his cattle from moving freely in the area and from being able to follow the trail, which was part of their annual summer trek.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, Lyle James was even more anxious to have the people removed. The RCMP told him that they would not get involved to serve an eviction notice, and his lawyer advised him to bring several witnesses. On 13 June 1995, James and several of his ranch hands drove to the Gustafsen Lake camp and waited for Percy to return. While they were waiting, one of the ranch employees began playing with a bullwhip. According to James, this employee was not in the immediate vicinity of the camp and the people waiting for Percy. Lyle James recalls: *“And they played that up so much! And—it wasn’t that he had any intentions of threatening with it—he was just playing—foolin’ around with it.” Was he within sight of the cabin? “He was within sight, ya. Probably within sight.”*

While at the Sundance camp, the rancher and his employees removed the camp stove

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<sup>47</sup> According to Lyle James, cattle require a stable route from year to year, otherwise, they become lost and the size of the property makes it difficult for ranch staff to locate them. He advised me that this is a common understanding among cattle ranchers.

from the cabin because it had been removed from their cow camp. According to James, they were particularly careful about the language they used when speaking with the people at the camp, and denied anyone using the phrase “hanging some red niggers.” *“But what they wanted was a direct confrontation with us. And—there was no way. Where would we be? We’d be dead.”* He did concede that on a different occasion one of his employees arrived at the camp one night after drinking, but Lyle James could not vouch for anything that might have been said by this individual. He had no prior knowledge of the visit, and he would not have given his consent.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after this late-night incident, the employee *“found a threatening note on a tree there, and...he quit and left.”* According to the rancher, they gave the note to the RCMP.

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The *100 Mile House Free Press* had been covering stories about the Sundance ceremony held at Gustafsen Lake since 1993. The Gustafsen Lake Sundance, first celebrated in 1990, had drawn 400 to 500 Native people to the remote location for the first two years. In 1992, there was a shooting incident involving tourists, and two Native men, both from the United States, were arrested, but no charges were laid. In 1993, the Sundance attendance was mostly from the local Native communities. That year there were three incidents reported to the local RCMP detachment between sundancers and non-Native people who were in the vicinity camping and fishing. The sundancers complained that the tourists did not respect their need for privacy, and they asked the tourists to stay away from the general area of their Sundance camp during the ten-day ceremony. None of the incidents that year involved weapons, nor were there any injuries. The 1994 Sundance ceremony was celebrated without reported incidents. In June, 1995, while the Sundance preparations were being made, there were confrontations between the sundancers and the

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<sup>48</sup> This incident was well documented in the media and during the trial. One of the ranch hands, apparently after consuming alcohol, had allegedly rode to the camp late one night on horseback, yelling and making a commotion that woke everybody up. He said that the ranch hands and the police were going to raid the camp and burn it down. This scene was witnessed by non-Native people who were camping nearby, who later testified in court that the incident did occur.

rancher Lyle James, as well as an alleged shooting incident involving forestry workers. At this time, news stories about various disagreements and incidents connected to the Sundance camp began appearing regularly in the weekly newspaper, and many of these were front-page stories.

Local newspaper editor Steven Frasher recalls that in the middle of June, two forestry workers out “timber cruising” were allegedly fired at, but the people out at the Gustafsen Lake camp denied any knowledge of anything happening. Locating physical evidence was nearly impossible because the area is thick with bush. A further impediment was that the forestry workers could not identify a shooter.

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John Hill argued that *“someone had ‘architechted’ some lie about some forestry worker being shot at.”* He stated that they knew that the only way that the RCMP would become involved was if there was a threat to the general community. Hill considered the forestry worker shooting incident *“as well as about five other incidents”* as being constructed *“solely for the purpose of allowing the RCMP to get involved... Nobody has ever been indicted, nobody has ever been brought up as a suspect, and none of the investigations are ongoing—they’ve all been completed.”* He was convinced that the alleged charges against the camp were part of a conspiracy to close down the camp.

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On 17 June 1995, a meeting arranged by the local RCMP between the Cariboo Tribal Council, representatives of the ranch owner, Gustafsen Lake camp members and the RCMP took place at the Gustafsen Lake camp.<sup>49</sup> The Cariboo Tribal Council representatives included Chief Agnes Snow of Canoe Creek and Chief Antoine Archie of Canim Lake. The various parties discussed their concerns, and they drew up an

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<sup>49</sup> Lyle James was unable to attend this meeting personally because he was in the hospital.

agreement. The negotiations included guidelines for the Sundance and a provision that after the Sundance everyone would leave the camp. The Sundance was to be held 2 July to 12 July 1995. Chief Archie, as one of the local chiefs at this meeting, recalled telling the people at the camp: "*When you people are gone, we're going to be here, we're going to clean up the mess. We're going to pick up our lives and carry on. But you people are here, and you are going to be gone. And we told that to the people at Gustafsen Lake—is that you people are going to come here, cause a disturbance, and you're going to be gone, and we're going to have to be here to deal with that. And we have to start building up our relationships the way it was. The way we had it—because we're stuck—we have to live here. We can't have animosity. Nobody can live on when there are grievances. It's not good for our kids. We've got to think for our kids, not just of ourselves.*"

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At the end of June, one of the people inside the camp invited Steven Frasher out to the Sundance site. This invitation was a surprise because he knew that white people would not normally be allowed, since the presence of non-Natives traditionally was considered a defilement of the Sundance area. When Frasher arrived at the camp, he learned that the local television station *CFJC* had also been invited, although in previous years, media attention had been declined. Splitting the Sky (also known as John Hill or Doc), Ernie Archie, and Percy Rosette were at the camp. Frasher recalled that Splitting the Sky "*was talking in terms entirely different than anything we'd associated with Gustafsen Lake up to that point.*" According to Frasher, the discussion was about having to deal with the Queen to resolve the dispute. They also mentioned that, at one time, the land had been designated as part of the reserve.<sup>50</sup> "*And yet they couldn't show you anything to back it up... And then—they walked us out past the Sundance site, and had earlier agreed that we could take some pictures out there—which again—according to the Sundance rules—just is not done.*" During this visit, he surmised that there had been a shift in attitude at the

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<sup>50</sup> According to Palmer (1994) there is no legal survey for the Alkali Lake Reserve #1. All existing documents post-date the establishment of the reserve.

camp. He believed that the central force behind the shift was John Hill, who was to be the Sundance leader that year.

In Frasher's opinion, the invitations to the media, the discussion of the politics, and the opening up of a sacred area (which traditionally is off-limits to non-Native people) was "to create their spin on the situation, and that was all controlled by Hill—I think Percy seemed to be very uncomfortable with the attention, because to him, it was a Native spiritual thing...." Frasher observed Percy and Ernie speaking in Shuswap, and Ernie then came to Hill. Frasher recalled Ernie's comments to Hill: "No, they're not going to take pictures of the Sundance arbor. It's just not right." By this time, Frasher had already snapped a picture with his camera, believing that it was permissible.<sup>51</sup> It appeared to Frasher that when Percy asserted his authority, the others respected him. He was also under the impression that Percy may have been overwhelmed by these stronger personalities. Frasher was concerned that the vocal militant element "would have to latch onto his cause to take whatever legitimacy they could from what Percy was doing...And that's what we were contending—even before the standoff concluded—just based on what we knew of Percy Rosette." [Steven Frasher, 100MHFP]

### **Shooting Incident at Lac La Hache<sup>52</sup>**

**5 July 1995:** "Elder sundancer denounces militancy of some of the people inside the camp." [100 Mile House Free Press, 5 July 1995<sup>53</sup>]

In the 5 July 1995 edition of the *100 Mile House Free Press*, a news story appeared, in which a Sundance elder<sup>54</sup> spoke of concerns over the militant nature of the 1995 Sundance.<sup>55</sup> The elder mentioned that rifles were present "right in the Sundance

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<sup>51</sup> *100 Mile House Free Press* editor Steven Frasher was the only journalist at the Sundance camp that took a picture of the Sundance arbor. The picture of the Sundance arbor was the only one in the roll of film that was over-exposed.

<sup>52</sup> Lac La Hache is a community north of 100 Mile House.

<sup>53</sup> This is taken from the news story, "Sundancers denounce militant action," in the *100 Mile House Free Press*, 5 July 1995 p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Although the newspaper article uses the elder's name, I have not made this disclosure to protect the elder's personal security.

<sup>55</sup> This story about the allegations of the elder and the subsequent story of a shooting incident at Lac La Hache were not widely known outside of the local communities. I consider the incident pivotal in

*grounds,*” as well as people wearing camouflage fatigues at the worship site. The elder disagreed that guns were necessary to defend the area. The elder was worried that Percy Rosette, the Sundance faithkeeper, was being manipulated by others, who had been shunned in their communities because of their militant actions. The elder stated that the militant attitude present at the 1995 Sundance was *“part and parcel of the Confederacy movement for sovereignty under the umbrella of the Sundance”* (100MHFP, 5 July 1995 p.3). The sundancers thanked and commended rancher Lyle James for *“his past kindness and understanding regarding the use of his land.”* They also stated that John Stevens and other true sundancers were angry that the relationship with the rancher had been upset. In the same issue, the 100 Mile House Free Press ran a story in which Ernie Archie, Gustafsen Lake *“war chief,”* admitted to Sundance elders that a gunshot was *“accidentally”* fired weeks ago. This admission changed an earlier statement given by Ernie Archie and Splitting the Sky (John Hill) to the *100 Mile House Free Press* reporters the week before.

Several weeks after the 5 July 1995 news stories, editor Steven Frasher received a cryptic press release from the RCMP, advising that a gunshot had been fired into a house at Lac La Hache. Canim Lake Chief Antoine Archie and Steven Frasher linked the Lac La Hache shooting incident with the elder criticizing some of the people and activities at the Sundance.<sup>56</sup> By July, the local newspaper editor and other journalists in the interior had become aware of the changed tenor from previous Sundances, with it being transformed into a political vehicle. However, not everyone associated with the camp was considered part of this politicized element. Indeed, even Percy Rosette had told a friend in town that *“some of the young people in the Sundance were getting short-fused, and he was really*

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demonstrating how the media had become part of the story, and implicated in the possible repercussions to the elder.

<sup>56</sup> At the August 18<sup>th</sup> Williams Lake press conference, Sergeant Peter Montague identified the Lac La Hache incident as one of the justifications for considering the activities in the camp as ‘terrorist’ in nature.



worried.” The source said that he believed that the shots fired did not come from “*true sundancers*,” but from “*angry young men*.” [*Vancouver Sun*, 14 September 1995 B1<sup>57</sup>]

### **Disagreements Between the People in the Camp and the Local Native Communities**

In spite of the previous agreement to leave after the Sundance, some of the people remained at the camp. Hill explained that a decision was made to complete the Sundance first, and then deal with the land issue by citing various international laws, and by getting their “day in court.” He did not elaborate on how the decision was made, or who was involved. He argued that the land was put up for sale and/or leased by the Canadian government illegally. Hill quoted from the Proclamation of 1763, saying “*that unless the Aboriginal peoples and their Aboriginal hunting grounds are unceded territories—unless they are willfully ceded to the crown—the land shall be left unmolested and undisturbed.*” He reasoned that, historically, this land was never willfully ceded by this Shuswap nation, and that it was acquired illegally.

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According to Chief Archie, when he and others who were concerned about the nature of the Gustafsen Lake Sundance named various people who supported them, “*Those people told us to mind our own business.*” He told the people at the Sundance camp that they had promised to leave after the Sundance cycle was over. “*And I pointed out to them—I told them—that Indians—that the Indian word is stronger than any written word. You give your word, and you don’t break it—that’s it. And he had broken the word out there. He had an agreement originally to practice for four years, and then they were going to leave.*” And that agreement was with Lyle James. “*Right. That agreement was [!!!] it seems.*”

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<sup>57</sup> This quotation is taken from the newspaper story “English aristocrat and Gustafsen Lake militant have close spiritual beliefs,” by Elizabeth Aird in the *Vancouver Sun*, 14 September 1995 B1.

Chief Antoine Archie recalled how Percy Rosette said that he had a vision of some graves around the Sundance area. Chief Archie explained that with the smallpox epidemic, which killed so many Native people in the previous century, *“there are Indian graves all over the place,...[but that] it’s pretty hard to prove.”* He pointed out that the paradox of the situation is that it would be sacrilegious to dig up the area in order to prove the case.<sup>58</sup> *“They said it was their land, that it was Indian land, and they said that they were going to get it. And we told them—if they were going to claim the land, it would have to come through consensus... We told them that we were in the treaty process...and we told them that they couldn’t speak for us—I told them that my people have chosen me to speak for them, and I spoke for over 500 people. And I told them that anything I said, I was accountable for. I told them that you people here can get away with anything—you people here can say anything you want and get away with it, because you’re not accountable to anybody.”*

*“And they said, ‘Well, you’re—you’re under a government elected system,’ and I told him THAT our people had developed their own electoral system—here at Canim Lake. We developed it, it’s not the same as any other band, we’re elected for four years, each and every council is elected for four years, but we have an election every two years—so that our members are staggered. We never, ever have a full new council...and that’s the way we designed it. And that’s not the DIA [Department of Indian Affairs] system, that’s our system. We designed that, and we put it forward to our band members, and the band members voted for it, and that’s what we do.”* In spite of Chief Archie’s explanation, the people in the camp insisted that Antoine Archie was still working for the “DIA.”

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<sup>58</sup> *100 Mile House Free Press* editor Steven Frasher recalled that Percy Rosette showed the media where the burial grounds were located during their tour of the Sundance camp in June 1995. However, Chief Antoine Archie was later quoted in the local newspaper, “The elders do not know of any burial sites in this area,” and Chief Agnes Snow supported him by adding, “all the community members, elders, chiefs and councillors of all the Northern Shuswap stand together on this.” This is taken from the news story, “Chiefs condemn radical action of ‘outsiders’ at Gustafsen Lake,” in the *100 Mile House Free Press*, 23 August, 1995 a3. The authorized survey map of the Gustafsen Lake area (District Lot 114, Lillooet District File 3615, Drawing #9615SKE/69) prepared by British Columbia Land Surveyors Kidston and Hemingway, on 29 August 1996 was introduced as court evidence. The map did not indicate the presence of a Native burial site.

Some of the sundancers used the argument that they only acknowledged hereditary chiefs. Chief Archie explained that since so many Shuswap people died during the smallpox epidemic more than a century ago, hereditary lines have all but vanished. On the rare occasion, someone might in passing mention having a hereditary chief in the family, but that nobody pursues this to gain authority. Chief Archie said that the elected band council structure at Canim Lake has a system of checks and balances that his community appreciates. *"Because if you've got somebody in there that you're really not happy with, you can't change it. We needed something that we could change, and something that we could fix. Something that we can evaluate, measure, and work."*

In the summer of 1995, when Lyle James and the people inside the camp were at loggerheads, Chief Antoine Archie went to the camp on his own to talk to them a few times before anything more serious happened. As many as five local people were in the camp at the time, including two of his nephews. Nobody would leave the camp. He concluded that many of the young men in the camp were "urban Indians" with little, if any, knowledge of traditional languages and skills. They did not seem prepared to look after themselves by hunting and living off the land. He describes one of his visits to the camp: *"I went in there, the first time we sat down—[with] Splitting the Sky [John Hill]... and he asked us to bring in burgers. So I knew that—they're not used to this kind of lifestyle—they're from the streets—a lot of them. They're not used to living in the bush. Percy—he could live there forever. Wolverine—could live there forever. But the young guys would get sick—and they started to get sick."* On one occasion, Chief Archie and his wife had been fishing at the lake, and he dropped by the camp. Only one of the people at the camp would talk to him. *"And at the time I was joking with him—I said, 'This here is our traditional territory. What the hell are you doing—scaring all the game up here?!'"*

#### **Proclamations to the Media**

**19 July 1995:** *"The sundancers issue a press release describing themselves as 'defenders of sovereign unceded Shuswap territory.' They announce that they are making preparations 'to resist an invasion by the RCMP.'" The press release quotes their*

*lawyer, Bruce Clark, as advising them that "as a matter of strict law, you are acting within your existing legal rights by resisting the invasion."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

Another local journalist recalled receiving facsimiles from the camp in mid-July, one in particular signed "the Defenders of the [Shuswap Nation]." The information was similar to a mission statement. The journalist remembered the message was similar to "*We the Defenders...will not tolerate use of our traditional land...*" The message alluded to the fact that they had not left the Gustafsen Lake camp, and explained why their group was remaining.

The local Native response to the people remaining at Gustafsen Lake proclaiming themselves "Defenders of the Shuswap Nation" was to deny the group's identification and to distance themselves. According to Chief Antoine Archie, the local chiefs made public statements that "*these people don't represent us, we do not promote violence—we just kept saying that all the way through.*" Some of the local Native people became so irate that they threatened to confront the people inside the camp. Chief Archie said that he explained to the local Native people that "*these people [in the camp] had nothing to lose—they had nowhere to go back to, they didn't have anywhere to go back to—and the more publicity they got, the better help to them—you were just playing into their hands. And I pointed out to them that our constable—Bob—knew and told us that these people were heavily armed, they had automatic weapons... Which, with stuff like that, and they told the media—'we want a fight.' But—if the RCMP had stepped back, and we had taken them out—see the problem?*" [Interview with Chief Antoine Archie, 25 July 1997]

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On 20 July 1995, two of Lyle James' Native ranch hands were allegedly threatened and shot at by people inside the camp. The frightened employees rode all night to report the incident to Lyle James. They contacted the local RCMP, and the ranch hands described gunfire that may have come from semi-automatic weapons. At first, the police discounted

the notion that semi-automatic weapons were involved, and suggested that the shots were more likely from hunting rifles. According to James, the police revised this assumption after the weapons seizure at the Fraser River by two Native Fisheries Officers from two individuals who had been previously involved in the celebration of the Sundance.

#### **Emergency Response Team Compromised**

**11 August 1995:** *"A pivotal development takes place when two Native Indians from Gustafsen Lake—Dave Penna<sup>59</sup> and Ernest Archie—are arrested by fisheries officers for allegedly gillnetting salmon in the Fraser River during a closed period. Searching their truck the officers find a weapons cache—including an AK-47, a Soviet assault rifle that is popular with guerrilla organizations. The rifle has a magazine with 30 rounds of ammunition, which it can fire in three seconds. The two men are taken into custody along with their arsenal: a loaded AK-47, a Glock 9-mm semi-automatic pistol loaded with Black Talon bullets designed to inflict maximum damage on human tissue, knives, machetes, camouflage clothing and a garrote made of piano wire."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

**18 August 1995:**<sup>60</sup> *"Shot narrowly misses Mountie."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 11 September 1995 B8]

Both Staff Sergeant Sarich and Superintendent Olfert discussed how the activities at the Gustafsen Lake camp had been documented by police for several months. They concurred that nobody believed that the Sundance would become the flash-point of violence that it became. The Sundance had been in the Cariboo for a number of years, and the incidents at Gustafsen Lake were considered minor (relative to other situations in the province). In the summer of 1995, three Native RCMP officers from the area had been assigned to help negotiate a peaceful settlement with the sundancers. One of these officers attended the Sundance. The Native officers also frequently met with the people in the camp to discuss a resolution, and they were in the process of arranging another negotiation meeting later in August.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The correct spelling is Pena, but this is how the name was spelled in the published account.

<sup>60</sup> The actual date on this published chronology published in the *Vancouver Sun* was 17 August 1995. I have confirmed with other sources that the incident occurred 18 August 1995. This was corrected in the lengthier chronology published the following day, "Standoff at Gustafsen Lake preceded by a vision," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3.

<sup>61</sup> According to the Report to Crown Counsel (Kamloops Sub/Division File 95KL-334), one of the Native constables (unnamed here to protect his anonymity) reported that while visiting the camp on 18 July 1995,

After the confiscation of the cache weapons at the Rudy Johnson Bridge on the Fraser River, Staff Sergeant Sarich discussed with his superiors intensifying the investigation of the camp.<sup>62</sup> According to Staff Sergeant Sarich, he and Superintendent Olfert disagreed as to the extent that the media should be notified of the developments. Staff Sergeant Sarich was not in favor of going to the media, and he debated this point with his superior for about a half hour. His concern was *"that we would create a media [event] and a standoff—we would give them the audience. I said that these are a group of radicals, they have seized some property, they're 40 kilometers out—and that's the other thing that I had to be able to justify to everyone..."* After the strategy meetings at Kamloops, there was a decision not to contact the media. Instead, the plan was to put in a reconnaissance team to assess the camp for artillery, fox holes, and booby traps, and to estimate how many people were there. They would next devise a strategy to contain and remove the occupants, and then they would go to the media. *"Unfortunately, we were compromised."*

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he talked to "unknown males" about a tree cutting incident. During this time, he saw a red dot of light moving across the center of his chest and then disappearing. The following day at the camp, the same constable observed a red dot of light move across the chest and disappearing on another Native RCMP officer who had accompanied him that day. A senior ERT officer interpreted this light as an infrared sighting device associated with a firearm. Switlo's (1996) account of the Gustafsen Lake standoff describes how Sundance camp occupants Percy Rosette and his wife also witnessed red circles of light appearing on their foreheads from high-powered weaponry. They associated this with low-flying helicopters hovering over the farm where they stayed after the standoff. They feared that they were going to be assassinated by the RCMP before the trial (Switlo 1997:132).

<sup>62</sup> Defense council George Wool argued during the Gustafsen Lake trial that firearms are part of the rugged Cariboo culture. He asserted that the RCMP's lack of understanding of this cultural element led to their over-reaction to the 11 August 1995 seizure of weapons. Wool pointed out that only a few of the weapons were illegal, or considered out of the ordinary for the region. During my interview with Staff Sergeant Sarich of the 100 Mile House RCMP Detachment, I asked about the prevalence of weapons and the implications on policing in the area. He confirmed that one of the distinctive factors of law enforcement in the interior of British Columbia is that civilians possess a large number of firearms (compared to urban areas). In his experience, the RCMP can expect to confiscate six to twelve firearms from one residence during a domestic dispute. This appreciation has increased the concerns for the safety of RCMP officers, and has been one of the factors that guided his decision to call for Emergency Response Team (ERT) assistance on six occasions in 1995. Staff Sergeant Sarich said that with the developments at Gustafsen Lake, his judgement to involve the ERT to diffuse the situation was consistent with previous practices.

The ERT reconnaissance mission began late in the afternoon on 17 August.<sup>63</sup> They spent the night a few kilometers away from Gustafsen Lake camp. They were spotted in the early morning by a camp member while they were attempting to film defensive structures and the camp area. The camp horses started moving around, alerted to the officers' presence. Shortly after, someone in the bush spotted the camouflaged officers and called out. When no one answered, the individual fired a shot in the direction of the ERT, narrowly missing one of the members.

Staff Sergeant Sarich assessed that the willingness of people inside the camp to shoot at anyone warranted a more serious approach from the police.<sup>64</sup> With the element of surprise gone, they could not proceed safely to the next phase of the plan. The RCMP senior officers asked that the three local Native RCMP constables not go into the camp for further discussions, because they thought that the situation was too dangerous.<sup>65</sup> The ERT reconnaissance were called back and Superintendent Olfert wanted to inform the media. By this time, Sergeant Sarich was willing to concede on this point. Superintendent

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<sup>63</sup> The RCMP admitted during the trial that they did not have a search warrant for the camp prior to this reconnaissance mission. This is taken from the news story, "Police wanted 4,000 troops at Gustafsen," in the *Vancouver Province*, 8 January 1997 A4.

<sup>64</sup> During the trial, the RCMP testified that they assumed that the people inside the camp knew that the camouflaged men were ERT officers. The officers did not consider that they might have been mistaken for vigilantes.

<sup>65</sup> The three Native RCMP spoke publicly about their involvement in a news interview. One of the Native RCMP officers, Bob Wood, told the reporter that he resigned from the force because of the way the RCMP dealt with the dispute at Gustafsen Lake. He felt as though his advice was being ignored, and the resolution meeting, which was to have been held between 18 August and 21 August 1995, "*would have settled the matter.*" After the ERT was compromised on 18 August, he and the other Native RCMP officers were asked not to go into the camp. Staff Sergeant Martin Sarich and Sergeant Peter Montague defended this decision, because of the rising danger to their officers. Constable Charlie Andrew was quoted in the news story as saying that "*he was upset and frustrated by his treatment during the standoff,*" and in hindsight would not have gotten involved. Constable Geordie Findlay said that originally he believed that the RCMP were not interested in his input. (Findlay submitted a report to his superiors 12 July 1995. This report traced the history of the Gustafsen Lake area, and he recommended that the RCMP not take action. He reasoned that if the RCMP used force against the camp, the current lack of local support might be reversed and would make the police "look bad"). However, after his testimony in court, Findlay learned of other incidents that pointed to escalated tension at the camp and the possibility that somebody might be killed. Findlay's final assessment was that, rightly or wrongly, the RCMP had to "take action," and he was thankful that nobody died. This information is taken from the news story "Botched siege prompts native Mountie to quit," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 11 July 1997 B4.

Olfert contacted Sergeant Montague in Vancouver to set up a press conference the following day. [Interview with Staff Sergeant Sarich, 24 July 1997]

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Steven Frasher was contacted by a man calling from Lac La Hache on behalf of Percy Rosette. He reported that armed men were seen wandering around close to the camp, "*sneaking around in the bushes,*" and that these people were all camouflaged. The message relayed was that these people might be vigilantes. Frasher learned that Rosette telephoned the RCMP detachment to report the sightings.<sup>66</sup> According to Frasher, the messenger described Percy as quite upset on the telephone with the RCMP, exclaiming to them, "*They're out to get us you know!*"

However, the RCMP did not want to reveal that it was their ERT in the bush until the reconnaissance team was safely out of the area. It took at least eight hours before the RCMP contacted Rosette to tell him not to worry (by this time the ERT had long since retreated), and that the men in the bush were RCMP officers.

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Shortly after Percy Rosette discovered armed men (ERT) lurking around their camp, Hill, who was by this time at home in Hinton, Alberta, received a telephone call, advising him of a "*serious red alert.*" In Hill's opinion, the situation was life-threatening, and Percy and Percy's wife Toby telephoned him an hour later to confirm the threats of future confrontations. Hill called "*Jones*" (William Ignace or Wolverine), as well as "*a bunch of people from down the area down there,*" and told them to "*go on red alert*"—and "*to send up some men in there, man—and make a physical presence... in case they come—at least we're ready to meet them head-on—you know what I mean?*" Thus began a series of networked telephone calls to Vancouver and other parts of the province to people who

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<sup>66</sup> Percy Rosette telephoned the 100 Mile House RCMP, but because of the early hour, the call was transferred to the Williams Lake RCMP detachment.



would come to Gustafsen Lake to support the dispute. These supporters were those involved with Native sovereignty, human rights activists, and environmentalists.

John Hill argued that, *"If I hadn't have been on the outside—that threat assessment team [ERT] that they sent in there on August the 19<sup>th</sup> [actually 18 August] three days [after] that—that crucial meeting was to happen—and we assert that they sent that threat assessment in there to kill the occupants. To create an incident so that they would not have to deal with the larger question of jurisdiction—to paint us as terrorists, to paint us as cultists, to paint us as renegades, militants, criminals—the whole works—to demonize and discredit us—so that they could justify and they could wipe out—that they could wipe out the issue for jurisdictional arguments."*

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In Vancouver, CBC TV broadcast a story that evening (August 18) about the Gustafsen Lake dispute, incorporating a film clip from a video-tape produced by the camp, *Defenders of the Land*. The CBC received the video-tape from supporters who had recently been in the camp. The camp supporters believed that the video-tape would provide their side of the developing conflict. The newscast drew the immediate attention of the RCMP because the film clip showed people inside the camp preparing (what seemed apparent to the police) for an armed battle against the RCMP. Hill, appearing as a spokesperson in the video-tape, announced that any entry by police would be considered an "act of war." According to Sergeant Montague, the video-taped program went beyond expressing the goals and ideals of the camp. The video-taped program featured a blatant display of weapons and an intention to harm police. Sergeant Montague recalls that [the video-tape was] *"showing them with AK-47s, making statements like 'take the high ground here, if the RCMP arrive, this is the best way to shoot at them from here.' And THIS caught our attention—that they're OPENLY telling the public through the CBC National News, that there's going to be big trouble, there's going to be a*

*showdown. Now up until this point, the RCMP had been very passive and trying to deal with the situation...*” [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter situates the Gustafsen Lake standoff within the historical background of Native resistance in British Columbia. It also provides an overview of the relations between the media and the law enforcement, as well as a narrative of the early stage of the dispute. The historical context is the backdrop for appreciating the diverse perspectives in the narrative of the emerging conflict. Topics regarding the British Columbia treaty process, ownership of land, band organization, the role of militancy as a political tool, and relations with law enforcement and media are all imbedded in the interpretations of the developing event.

The narrative shows how a minor civil dispute escalated into a conflict of major proportions. The roots of this are evident in the adversarial positions taken by several players. For example, Lyle James’ and John Hill’s differing frames are informed by their contrasting understandings of land ownership in British Columbia. Similarly, Chief Antoine Archie’s and John Hill’s perspectives disagree on many levels: over Sundance practices and interpretations, legitimate Native forms of governance, the British Columbia treaty process, and the legitimacy to act on behalf of Native people.

Although Chief Archie and John Hill were only two of the players’ in the conflict, their frames of reference are representative of a central organizational feature in how the standoff was understood: as insider and outsider perspectives. Chief Archie’s level of appreciation of the social relations which were most affected, and resolutions of land and resource issues, were informed by insider knowledge of the local Native communities and how they have struggled with racism and intolerance. His concern was the immediate and protracted impacts of a serious conflict on local Native and non-Native community relations. John Hill’s understanding of the social relations at play, and resolutions to land and resource issues centered on historical and legal precedents, with an eye toward wide-

based reform for Aboriginal people at the provincial and national levels. The clash of perspectives between the sides that these two individuals represented was particularly evident over the issue of group identity. When the people at the camp began referring to themselves as “Defenders of the Shuswap Nation,” signifying the group’s implied legitimacy and wide support, there was a strong local disavowal. The local leadership and many of the local Natives contested this identity because they considered most of the people at Gustafsen Lake “outsiders,” whose radicalized perspective and political goals did not represent those of the local Native communities.

The narrative also shows how the dispute developed into a volatile situation and, in the process, transformed the role of the RCMP. Originally, the RCMP acted as mediators in the argument over the occupation of a 20 acre parcel of land. Based on the information collected for this study, it would appear that the escalation of the situation began when those remaining in the camp became embroiled in a series of shooting incidents, and when the weapons were seized. This was the impetus for the RCMP to shift their interpretation of the situation from a civil dispute to a serious criminal offence. The police defined the shooting incidents and the possession of dangerous weapons as acts of terrorism. This implied that the social order was under a serious threat. When these frameworks of the camp and the RCMP are compared, it becomes apparent that the local interpretation of the conflict had become subsumed. The new definitions necessitated the stakes of the dispute to be raised, with each side claiming a moral justification and a need for public support. The escalation of the dispute and the revisions of the definition of the situation were also related to the introduction of people and agendas outside the local context. The aspect of insider/outsider perspectives and the impact on the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff will be further examined in Chapter 8.

The account of the early part of the dispute reveals the relationships between the local media, the camp, and the local RCMP. The local media were involved as participants in the event in addition to reporting the developments. A few of the sundancers (both the

militant and the conservative sides) sought out the local media outlet to convey to a public audience their definitions of the situation of the camp. The militant aspect of the camp dominated the local media coverage, and engaged in what appeared to be a public relations campaign. By taking the initiative with the media early in the dispute, this element enjoyed an unfettered media status and an audience that normally would not be afforded a group so vocal against law enforcement and government institutions. There was little or no challenge by law enforcement and government institutions through the local media. Contrasting this pro-active response for media attention in the camp was the reluctance of the local RCMP to involve the media, especially the large outlets. With the RCMP decision to invite the large media outlets in order to introduce them to a breaking news story, the media dominance by the militant element in the camp would be contested. The people in the camp would now be competing with the RCMP and government officials for control of the news stories and the influence on public opinion.

## Chapter 4

### “Geared Up”

*“We know the weaponry is there and we also now know that they’re prepared to use it,” Olfert said. “We clearly associate this as an act of terrorism.”*<sup>67</sup>

The remaining chapters are concerned with the media coverage at the time of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoff, primarily from the perspectives of the journalists. I acknowledge that the journalists’ recollections are not representative of how other people experienced the conflict. The meanings and recollections of the standoff were not the same for the people inside the camp, the RCMP personnel, various surrounding Native and non-Native communities, and those people that gathered to support the diverse sides of the dispute. The focus on the recollections of the journalists is not to suggest that they suffered any worse than the other groups (thereby trivializing the conditions endured by others). Indeed, some of the details of the adaptations and inconveniences for the reporters covering the event seem trivial on the scale of the living conditions of many of the other people involved. Nor is the choice of this dominant frame intended to imply that the journalists’ experiences have the greatest legitimacy in this event. Nonetheless, I assumed that the journalists’ recollections shed the greatest light on the understanding of the circumstances of the media coverage during the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

The frame of the RCMP (as a separate entity from the RCMP media plan) also helps to situate the next chapters of the standoff. The RCMP operational plan, for the most part, took as its model *“a barricaded situation.”* This model provides guidelines for engagement used by law enforcement for hostage takings and similar circumstances. A component of this is conflict management, a process approach to facilitate co-operative communication, with the goal of eventually reaching a resolution. Conflict management promotes initiatives that *“make it easy for them to say ‘yes’ and make it tough for them to say ‘no’”*. This technique is in contrast to *“that idea of amassing a significant amount*

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<sup>67</sup> The quotation from Superintendent Olfert is taken from “‘Terrorism’ will end, RCMP warns,” in the *Calgary Herald*, 20 August 1995 A12 (CP).

*of force and crushing the opposition,*” an approach that is more likely to result in casualties. [Interview with Dr. Webster, 21 June 1997] A *“velvet glove and an iron fist”* characterized the method the RCMP employed during the Gustafsen Lake standoff, but it was not common knowledge at the time. This consideration will be discussed in light of the media characterizations of the standoff in Chapter 6.

This chapter begins with the gathering of the media to the initiating press conference at Williams Lake. This press conference set the media frame for the RCMP definition of the situation. The RCMP were the most authoritative source physically present at the conflict. Because of this, their perspective offered the most compelling frame for the media to promote in the news stories. It would also be the frame for the media to contrast in their attempts to offer a sense of “balance” in their news accounts. The opportunity for the latter was greatest during the few days in which the journalists were allowed access to the people at the camp.

Journalists are actively engaged in seeking out interesting news, and the announcement of the RCMP press conference at Williams Lake carried with it the promise of an important news story. By implication, this meant that all media outlets would be expected to provide their own representations of this news story in order to maintain a competitive standing within their professional community. In the RCMP advisory of the news conference, there appeared to be a breach in the communications networking: not all of the outlets were directly informed (or informed in time to attend) by the police. This set off a series of responses among these outlets to repair the break in the flow of information from this police source, and to adapt alternative means to cover this news story. It also left an unpleasant after-taste among some of these journalists because of their interpretations of how and why the miscommunications took place.

Neither the journalists nor the people who were temporarily inside the camp characterized the relations that developed between the media and the camp as generally

positive. The tension between the two groups stemmed from differences in perspectives in the accuracy of the media representations of the people in the camp and the discontent that motivated the protest. In their attempts to control their public image, the camp leaders selected journalists that they believed would provide the fairest representation (as in minimal distortion of their position), and denied access to the rest. This strategy may have exacerbated rather than alleviated the chances of media distortion. The news coverage of the standoff began to peak with the arrival of Grand Chief Mercredi on the scene and due to the gatekeeping of the media at the camp, many news stories were published and broadcast without journalistic witnessing.

Within this portion of the narrative are discussions of media proximity to the event and the news production practices that were adapted in response. These aspects are identified as salient features of the media coverage of Grand Chief Mercredi and the RCMP establishment of barricades. A glimpse of some of the meanings and interpretations of the barricades are provided from the perspectives of the police, the camp, and the media. This is followed by an analysis of the impacts of the RCMP barricades on the news gathering and news characterizations, and how the heightened tension helped to frame the police, media, and civilian interpretations of various situations.

#### **Williams Lake Press Conference**

**19 August 1995:** *"The media are taken on an RCMP flight to Williams Lake where they are briefed on events at Gustafsen Lake. In a press conference reporters are shown the weapons cache and hear from James and a local native Indian leader, Chief Bill Chelsea of the Cariboo Tribal Council."*<sup>68</sup> [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

The RCMP media personnel in Vancouver contacted several Vancouver media outlets to inform them of the RCMP press conference at Williams Lake. Some of the journalists

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<sup>68</sup> Bill Chelsea was Chief of the Alkali Lake (Esket) Band, which is Northern Shuswap culturally, but not part of the Cariboo Tribal Council.

made arrangements to fly to Williams Lake on the RCMP jet. One reporter said that, while on the plane, "*Montague did give some info [but did not give away the full content] on the plane—that the gist was that a local rancher and some natives were having a disagreement over land, and that some of the people involved had criminal records.*" Not all of the Vancouver media were notified of the press conference. A few journalists learned of the press conference from colleagues working for other outlets, but still managed to arrive at Williams Lake on time. Arrangements were made for reporters to share information with those who could not attend.

According to the journalists who gathered at the RCMP Detachment at Williams Lake, the mood at the press conference was very serious. The RCMP officials had described several shooting incidents connected to the Sundance previously.<sup>69</sup> They laid out the weaponry which was confiscated from two Aboriginal men who the police said had been at the Sundance.<sup>70</sup> The police played a tape of a *CBC* TV news story that included a clip from the video-taped program, *Defenders of the Land*. The journalists remembered the segment of the video-tape that showed Splitting the Sky (John Hill) teaching what appeared to the police to be guerrilla warfare tactics. According to one journalist, the RCMP showed the video-tape to give the media an idea of what the people inside the camp were like. Superintendent Olfert made most of the comments on behalf of the RCMP. Concerns over the activities inside the camp came from several sources: the RCMP, Bill Chelsea from Alkali Lake, and Lyle James, the rancher who had originally given permission for the Sundance.

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<sup>69</sup> According to defense lawyer George Wool, the prosecution was never able to connect the shooting incident at Lac La Hache or the confiscation of weapons at the Fraser River with the Gustafsen Lake Sundance camp. Wool argues that, by assuming these linkages and making them known to the media, the RCMP were providing the media with details that had yet to be proven in court.

<sup>70</sup> During the Williams Lake press conference, the RCMP displayed an AK-47 assault rifle, a loaded nine-millimetre semi-automatic pistol as well as another rifle; martial-arts weapons; a garrote, which is used to strangle; two machetes and an axe. This is taken from the news story, "'Terrorism' will end, RCMP warns" in the *Calgary Herald*, 20 August 1995 A12 (CP).



The *100 Mile House Free Press* was not informed of the Williams Lake RCMP press conference in sufficient time to attend. Steven Frasher, editor of the town newspaper, was incensed that his newspaper had been overlooked. 100 Mile House is the closest municipality to Gustafsen Lake, and the local newspaper audience represented the communities most affected by the dispute. Frasher was aware of the potential for a standoff at Gustafsen Lake to disrupt and inflame relations between local Native and non-Native communities. The escalation of the dispute to a major news event should not have excluded the *100 Mile House Free Press* from participating fully in the media coverage. Missing the press conference meant that the editor had to “play catch-up” to keep up with the latest developments. However, the newspaper’s adjustment was made easier because it had covered the story longer than any other media outlet. The staff knew of the history of the Sundance in the area and the issues that divided some of the people at the camp and the local Native communities. The newspaper had chronicled the shift toward militancy at the camp earlier that year. The staff also knew who to contact for information and where to find them. Because of their familiarity with the community and the beginnings of the conflict, the staff could more readily discern the most reliable sources in the area.

The *Vancouver Sun* was another media outlet that did not attend the Williams Lake press conference. The newspaper office had not been contacted by the RCMP media section. According to one journalist: “*We tried to figure out what happened—we phoned up Montague and basically said, ‘what the fuck happened?!’*” They speculated that the newspaper had been overlooked because of the way they had written previous news stories that depicted Natives versus RCMP where “*we didn’t necessarily do what the RCMP had told us to do all the time.*” At the same time, the journalist didn’t rule out that it could have been a case of innocent miscommunication. The journalist pointed out, however, that it would have been possible to reach someone in the news office on Saturday morning. “*But our response was—we felt left out. The other thing is, as a journalist, when the police charter a plane, fly people to a press conference at a*

*particular place, they WANT this covered, so you know they have an agenda. I mean it's quite obvious.*” Not making it to Williams Lake meant that the *Vancouver Sun* reporters also had to “play catch-up” and present a news story with a different angle. The journalist conducted long distance telephone interviews with people who provided another side of the story to contrast the police. The reporter spoke to a variety of people, including a non-Native person in the vicinity who was in contact with the group. *“He said that there's a lot of lies being told about the people in the camp...I was partly going after the angle of – well, we've heard the police's side of the story, what's the Native side of the story, kind of thing...”* [Interview with journalist, anon]

The reporters who did not find out about the dispute at Gustafsen Lake first-hand at the Williams Lake press conference prepared for coverage in a number of ways. Some of the regional journalists had been aware of the situation from stories of complaints about the situation in the British Columbia legislature in Victoria that year. Others knew that the situation was brewing because of the faxes sent by the people in the camp and interviews that had taken place in June. Once the story broke, journalists heard about the conflict while watching television, reading newspapers, or listening to radios while on summer holidays. When some of these journalists returned to work, they were assigned to the story. Journalists also prepared to cover the event by reading previous related news stories, and they accessed their media outlet's own library resources. The recursion of previous news accounts informing new news stories (including keeping up with alternate modes of media and with competitors) continued throughout the coverage of the standoff.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The Williams Lake press conference was instructive for the media because it provided them with a framework they could incorporate for the opening news stories. These news stories were dominated by the RCMP presentation. The group of journalists recalled the RCMP District Superintendent Olfert referring to the kind of weaponry and the shooting incidents being “terrorist” in nature. They said that this shaped the way in which they

regarded the situation and the choice of language in their news stories. The “key,” or mood, of the press conference was also influenced by the serious manner in which the police conducted the press conference, and the display of the weapons left lasting impressions with the journalists. The people presenting information at the press conference all provided various but concurring perspectives about the situation at Gustasfen Lake. There were no contrasting opinions of the conflict, leaving the journalists to seek the people inside the camp for the other side of the story.

The initiation of the media to the RCMP frame of the event was complicated when certain media outlets were overlooked. There was an underlying sense that the police held a valued commodity (news), but this was not distributed evenly. In a few instances, some journalists surmised that the RCMP favored certain outlets and news services, and ignored those that were outside of this scope. The explanations and grievances offered by the journalists from the local media outlet and the *Vancouver Sun* became part of a larger pattern of dissatisfactions from several outlets with the coverage of the media event. The journalists who could not attend the Williams Lake press conferences, but who did compose news stories of the event, compensated by making alternative arrangements for being apprised of the details.

### **Media Converge at 100 Mile House**

Several reporters took the initiative and went directly from Williams Lake to the smaller community of 100 Mile House after the press conference. During that first week, other journalists, mostly from the Vancouver area, also arrived at 100 Mile House. They came prepared to stay for a day or two while the conflict was resolved. By mid-week, it became clear that resolution was going to take more than a few days. Journalists rearranged their lives back home, discussed with editors and producers the alternatives for coverage, and tended to their immediate needs. They fit this in while covering the story and meeting deadlines for publications and broadcasts.

Some journalists drove up to 100 Mile House with their own vehicles, but soon they learned that the forestry roads that connected the town with Gustafsen Lake demanded sport utility-type vehicles, which they rented. The reporters also found out how easy it was to get lost on the labyrinth of forestry roads that link 100 Mile House to Gustafsen Lake, Dog Creek, and Alkali Lake. The last several kilometers to Gustafsen Lake were so deeply rutted that tire blow-outs and flat tires were common for media as well as for police. This also created extra business for the local tire store.

Lodging was a primary concern for the media throughout most of the dispute. This was the peak of the summer tourist season for the local hotels. The Red Coach Inn, the largest and best equipped of the establishments in town, had to juggle rooms between media and guests who had reserved many months in advance. Although the hotel also provided accommodations for RCMP, Native intermediaries,<sup>71</sup> and supporters of the protest, only the media were moved around.<sup>72</sup> For the journalists, the first priority of the daily routine was to secure accommodations. One journalist referred to this as *"the job from hell,"* because there were not enough hotel or motel rooms, with vacationers, the bus tours, and the enormous influx of police and media. Arranging for a room for the night could take as long as two hours, and needed to be completed before anything else in the day was planned. Some journalists shared rooms, and a few journalists had to temporarily move to other establishments until rooms at the Red Coach became available. Hotel rooms were at such a premium that they were passed like a relay baton: as one journalist prepared to return to Vancouver, the colleague coming in from Vancouver would inherit the room. A few journalists found alternate accommodations where they could have a stable

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<sup>71</sup> At the time of the standoff, the media referred to the group of Native elders and chiefs who were invited by the RCMP to go into the camp as "Shuswap negotiators." Steven Frasher pointed out to me that this was an over-simplification, because the intermediaries belonged to the Gitksan, Okanagan, and Shuswap First Nations. For this reason, I have used "Native intermediaries" or "intermediaries," in order to avoid misidentifying group affiliation. Dr. Webster from the RCMP negotiating team also advised me that "intermediaries" is more appropriate to describe the role of the Native elders and leaders that comprised this group. The RCMP had trained negotiators, who continued to work behind the scenes, and their roles were distinct from those people who went into the camp.

<sup>72</sup> Many of the incoming RCMP also stayed at the Red Coach Inn. At a mid-point in the standoff, Sergeant Montague requested that the police take over the whole hotel, but the manager declined.

arrangement, and conceded having to also check back at the Red Coach for messages and press conferences.

Other needs were thrown into chaos. Some reporters arrived with enough clothes for three days—and ended up staying almost a month. A few made a hasty trip back to Vancouver to pack, and others had clothes shipped to the town. Journalists went to the stores at 100 Mile House and purchased whatever clothing (particularly warm clothing for autumn) and personal items they required. Because press conferences could be called with only a few minutes notice, journalists often took meals as they were rushing from one venue to another—if they bothered at all. According to a local source who observed the hyperactivity and the eating habits of many of the media, it was as though they ate a full breakfast, but lived on coffee and chocolate bars for the rest of the day. As most of the media came from Vancouver, where fresh fish and seafood are plentiful, a few had never eaten so much beef in their lives! One journalist exclaimed, *“And up there, you just ate cow all the time!...I remember when I looked out the window of my hotel room, there was a nice herd of beef cattle out the back window!”* [Interview with journalist, anon] The media quickly figured out where the best bars were located. Many journalists frequented these places to unwind, and to meet and chat with local people. The late-night press conferences, and the potential for developments at any time, exhausted journalists who did not have partners to share the work-load. During the first 10 days after the Williams Lake press conference, many of the journalists worked with little sleep.

Journalists had to adapt to scarcity of communications facilities. Cellular telephones did not work past 108 Mile Ranch, and reporters had to obtain radio-telephones. They soon realized that the radio-telephones were not secure for private conversations: they could eavesdrop on conversations occurring between competitor journalists, the police, as well as the camp. Several sources recalled, *“Everybody was always listening!”* Some journalists, like the police, developed code words or spoke in very guarded terms when speaking with colleagues over the radio-telephones. Such a loss of privacy was

particularly stressful for journalists who were camped at the isolated Checkpoint 17 and for whom this was the only link to the outside world for professional as well as personal communications. There were many rumors of RCMP wire tapping, and several people were convinced that the RCMP had tapped every telephone and fax machine in the region. Not all the television outlets had their own satellite dishes, and had to rent satellite time from other outlets with satellite trucks. However, this meant that satellite time was at a premium in terms of availability and expense. Breaking news announcements that occurred just before radio broadcast or newspaper deadlines meant the stories had to be read over the telephone to Vancouver. If the journalist's room was not available, this was done in the hotel lobby, where there was no privacy from curious hotel guests. One journalist had to run to a restaurant down the street where he could hookup his laptop computer to send news stories through electronic mail because of an incompatibility with the telephone lines in the hotel. Another journalist recalled composing stories in a moving vehicle, *"and writing our script on our knee on a bumpy road...it was insanity. I'm actually amazed that we were able to turn out the material we did. It was very exciting, there was a lot of adrenaline, and as things settled down and got into a routine, it got less exciting."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

The Gustafsen Lake news story also took a toll on the local newspaper staff. According to Steven Frasher, the story of the standoff disrupted the flow of the weekly newspaper routine. He and his staff put in extra hours in order to cover the Gustafsen Lake press conferences and developments, in addition to covering other news beats. He recalled that the influx of the media and the police seemed surreal—that this could not be happening to 100 Mile House. Some reporters from other outlets used his office facilities and perused previous news stories of the Sundance. There was a sense in 100 Mile House that *"the eyes of the world are on us."* He noted the dislocation of the situation in town: that although there was an aura of excitement and a sense of *"something's happening here,"* the action and sense of danger of the event were several miles away. [Steven Frasher, *100 Mile House Free Press*]

The possibility of a violent ending was another stress factor. Some reporters described experiencing a sickening sense of foreboding about the conflict, which was not alleviated until they returned to Vancouver when their shifts concluded, or, for those that remained, when the standoff ended. The shooting death of a police officer during the 1990 Oka standoff and the tragic ending of the 1993 standoff at Waco, Texas were in the thoughts of several people at the time. There were references to these events in the early news stories of the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

### **Summary and Remarks**

For the journalists who converged at 100 Mile House to cover the standoff, adapting to the conditions of reporting meant coping with the instability of the logistics, as well as the potential for catastrophic breaking news. There was no sense of a time-line for the event to climax, creating what several people referred to as a *"hurry up and wait"* mentality. The journalists found the exhaustion for about the first two weeks brutal, and most of them considered the coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff more hectic than any news event they had ever covered before. Media deadlines were consistent, but the short notice to attend RCMP press conferences kept the journalists alert for a news-breaking event. Once personal needs were secured and deadlines met, journalists regained some aspects of control over their situations. In spite of that, the re-establishment of routines could do little for the unpredictability of developments. The routines could not regulate the hours of work, or address the sustained loss of privacy. These conditions continued to be sources of tension, particularly for those who covered the event for the longest time.

### **Journalists and the People at the Camp**

**21 August 1995:** *"A Sun reporter who visits the camp is told by Wolverine: '(Police) and the media, you are all part of the New World Order. They'll have to take us out in body bags.'"* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

A few of the journalists in the region had made the trek to the camp for interviews, weeks before the dispute had become a breaking news story. One reporter recalls having a conversation with Wolverine, or “Jonesy Ignace” as he was also known. The reporter described the scene where he was at the camp, in late July, and sitting around the campfire drinking coffee with six or seven people at the Gustafsen Lake camp. *“They were fairly laid back, but very persistent in their message—that there was a New World Order, and there was a conspiracy against Native people—things along those lines...”*

Soon this relaxed atmosphere was broken: *“Jonesy Ignace just got up in my face, he got very emotional, saying that the media was part of the problem, an institution, part of the conspiracy, things along those lines.”* How did you respond to [Wolverine’s] claim that the media was part of a conspiracy? *“Well, I disagreed with him and I told him we have some ethics about objectivity and how we try to get both sides of the story. He just interrupted with, you know, ‘that’s bullshit!’ and he started screaming and raising his voice and stuff like that.*

*“At that point you sort of have to pretty well have to come to the conclusion that you cannot convince anybody, so you change the topic, and try to move on to something else.”* OK. *“Because you weren’t going to convince him—it became quite evident when I tried to explain what my job was and the fact of what I was doing, that I wasn’t on a payroll, I wasn’t a spy—he called me a spy—I said I wasn’t a spy—I can attest to that I told him—he cut you off—just said ‘bullshit you’re all in this together, you’re here, probably taking notes and will go back deliver it to the police’—things along those lines. So ya, I mean he was confrontational on that, but you have to change the subject—what are you going to say, what would you do to convince someone so strong in their beliefs?”*  
[Interview with journalist, anon]

After the Williams Lake RCMP press conference, most journalists were nervous going inside the camp to get interviews. The journalists learned that the people inside the camp



had a cellular telephone and many of them contacted the camp in advance to introduce themselves and request permission to visit. But this did not necessarily quell the nerves of journalists who perceived that they were walking into a hazardous situation. One reporter recalls being so frightened the first time he went to the camp that he clutched his gym bag in front of his chest to shield himself from gunfire during his walk from the driveway to the cabin. He admitted that these fears were not based on any first-hand experience, but on a lack of information. He said that the only details available were supplied by the RCMP, who were portraying the conflict more as an issue of abnormal behavior than a conflict over land claims. The police had indicated to the media that there were a “*fair number*” of firearms in the camp, which also played on his mind. He said that he calmed down when he met one of the mothers of the camp members as he was walking. The mother talked about her son and said that he was not the violent sort—but she did not know the others in the camp.

Another journalist described his first time out. He felt as though the people in the camp were very nervous and watching their visitors’ every move: *“Drove along that road—gravel road...then took the right off that gravel highway—and then you drove on these massive pot holes. They could see you coming from all angles, when they watched ya. We drove up to the barbed wire fence, and you got out of your vehicle, and you presented yourself. And Wolverine was there, and Suniva was there, Sheila was there and Tron was there...And then—we spent 4 or 5 hours with them that night...—trying to figure out some of the nonsense from reality.*

*“And I’ll never forget that night—we came out about 10 o’clock, it had been a 15-hour day, as we got off that road and on to the main gravel road—our tire blew up! [laughs] It surprised us! [The journalist described having to unload the gear in the vehicle to get at the spare tire and the jack] And sometimes the younger Natives would say ‘OK—go—now go’ you know like, ‘we’re doing visiting now.’ And there was an obvious, real tension there, pressure—and so I’d say, ‘OK, we’re done, OK we’re going’ and [the*

young Natives would say] *'LEAVE! Now GO! ' you know like, trying to control the area again. So we went back to town.'* [Interview with journalist, anon]

Despite the nervousness on both sides, a few journalists did get in to talk to the people inside the camp, and they brought in gifts such as cigarettes and coffee. According to the journalists, these visits were not like media scrums,<sup>73</sup> they were much more relaxed. The meetings often took place while sitting around the fire. There were minutes of silence; some Natives covered their faces, hiding themselves to prevent identification. A few reporters and photographers ventured into the cabin, but this triggered immediate defensive responses from some of the members of the group. According to one journalist, some members of the media were attempting to capture pictures of firearms. One reporter had a sense that the people were heavily armed, but he could not tell if the "look-outs" behind the trees were armed. Other journalists also observed that the young men who guarded the perimeter of the camp acted *"very, very nervous."* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

The conversations and interviews that took place between people at the camp and the media made apparent the occupants' resolve. Remaining at the site was symbolic of their dissatisfaction with the lack of resolution of Aboriginal land title in the province. The people did not believe that the provincial treaty process, or the Canadian judiciary, were adequate to resolve Native land issues fairly. Instead, they wanted to engage the Governor-General and the Queen to hear Native petitions regarding land ownership at Gustafsen Lake. The television and newspaper coverage distinguished two different discourses in the camp concerning the approach taken for the protest. One side emphasized that Percy Rosette had a vision that the Gustafsen Lake site was sacred land, which made it appropriate for the Sundance. This group eschewed violence as a means to

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<sup>73</sup> A journalist explained a "scrum" as an impromptu press conference, with several reporters surrounding a source, turning their microphones and cameras on and asking the source rapid-fire questions.

acquire the property.<sup>74</sup> The other side, most often represented by Wolverine, sounded militant and agitated. Wolverine talked of a conspiracy by a “New World Order” that had an agenda to decimate Native people.<sup>75</sup> On more than one occasion, Wolverine made references to being so committed to remaining on the land that they would only “come out in body bags.” He said that if this occurred, then Canada would have to explain its actions to the world.<sup>76</sup> Members of the camp refuted the RCMP allegations to the media that there had been shooting incidents and that they had illegal weapons. They told the journalists that the RCMP “say anything to the press to make us look bad in the public eye.”<sup>77</sup> However, a shooting incident originating from the camp on the morning of 24 August which had been announced in an RCMP press release was confirmed on a Native website. The incident became a national news story.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> During this part of the standoff, several different “experts” provided background information on the Sundance ceremony. Some of these news stories identified that the Sundance was a religious practice that had been brought into the area from the Plains Indians’ tradition and was not part of the Shuswap culture. This information was used by newspaper columnists to challenge this aspect of the camp’s justification for the right to the land. Examples include: “Sundance ritual ‘new to B.C.’” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 23 August 1995 B3; “Cast from Good, Bad and Ugly,” by Mike Roberts in the *Vancouver Province*, 31 August 1995 A13; and “Since when do natives have the only patent on visions?,” by Joey Thompson in the *Vancouver Province*, 30 August 1995 A14.

<sup>75</sup> Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi also noted that there seemed to be two different perspectives in the dispute. He identified the “hawks” having a militant perspective, with Wolverine as the primary exponent, and the “doves” having a spiritual perspective, with Percy Rosette as the faithkeeper and most frequently identified spokesperson for the spiritual aspects of the camp. This information is taken from the news story, “Indian camp ‘split’ over leaders,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 31 August 1995 A3.

<sup>76</sup> The phrase “come out in body bags” appeared in several news stories, including “If we go in body bags, we win, defiant B.C. natives say,” in the *Edmonton Journal*, 23 August 1995 A1.

<sup>77</sup> One of the people at the camp told reporters that the shooting incident with the forestry workers and the shot fired at the ERT officer (18 August 1995) were misrepresented. The individual advised the journalist that the shot fired at the ERT was a warning shot into the air. This information is taken from the news story, “Indian rebels plan to ‘leave in body bags’,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1995 A1. A subsequent news story included information from a camp source, who admitted there were “a couple of .22-calibre rifles, but none of the heavy weaponry, such as an AK-47, that police found at the Fraser River.” This quotation of the news text is taken from the news story, “RCMP conducts wide probe into militant Indian group,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 24 August 1995 B6.

<sup>78</sup> The episode was discussed on a website in the internet and referenced in the news story, “Rebel saga rides the Internet,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 27 August 1995 A5. Other newspaper accounts of the helicopter shooting include: “Mercredi given 2 days to end Indian standoff,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 25 August 1995 A1; and the RCMP press release of the incident is found in the *Globe and Mail* (reprinted from the *Winnipeg Free Press*), “Shots ring out at rebel camp RCMP chopper observes native gunfire,” 25 August 1995 (CP).

Within a few days of the media descending from Vancouver, the *BCTV* crew fell out of favor with members of the camp. This may have been triggered by an impromptu interview attempt between the *BCTV* journalists and a couple of people from the camp one morning outside of a restaurant at 100 Mile House. *BCTV* played the segment later that evening on the news, and the next time the *BCTV* crew drove out to the camp, the reporter was met with threats and hostile accusations, and he retreated quickly to the van. Although *BCTV* returned to the camp area one more time, they did not go into the compound; they stayed behind the fence. Word of the incident at the camp with the *BCTV* journalists quickly spread among the other members of the media. However, not everyone was sympathetic: *“Certainly if someone put a gun to someone’s head or something, I would get involved, but they made statements about the Natives, and they made inferences and stuff, in their items, that—either they are true, and they can stand by them, or—it’s just satisfying part of the crowd—part of the audience that’s back home saying—‘there goes those damn Natives again’ or whatever. So, you know, it’s one of the things about being in the field—you have to look people back in the face and say, ‘you said it’ or ‘you did it.’”* [Interview with journalist, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

The first week after the Williams Lake press conference, media were gathering in the town, and they drove out to the isolated Gustafsen Lake camp. A few reporters were able to develop and maintain a positive rapport, but not all of them. Some journalists felt that the people in the camp unfairly stereotyped their profession, a turn-about on media stereotyping Native people.<sup>79</sup> A few of the journalists seemed to redouble their efforts to challenge the stereotype of the media that was held by (at least) some of the people at Gustafsen Lake. Nonetheless, the camp tested the proof of these efforts in the media publications, and they did not appreciate how they were cast in some of the news stories.

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<sup>79</sup> The most formal occasion for Native people to discuss media stereotyping was with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, published as a report in 1996.

The camp attempted to control their information and their public image in the media. The camp faced a dilemma. They needed media coverage in order to have their side of the story come out to the public, but some of the journalists wrote or broadcast stories that the group at the camp believed were untrue or biased. Media were advised that they could only speak with certain people, and they were frequently directed to Wolverine. The people at the camp selected the journalists who were allowed into the camp for interviews, and refused others.<sup>80</sup> The camp may have attempted to repair their damaged media image by advising journalists of their perspectives on the shooting episodes, and by denying that they accumulated a large cache of firearms that included illegal weapons. However, later there were shooting episodes that implicated the camp as the aggressors against the RCMP, that were well publicized in the press. The RCMP confiscated one illegal weapon from the back of a truck during the 11 September 1995 firefight, and another at the camp during the police investigation that took place after the standoff was concluded. As these contradictions were identified by the police and relayed to the media, the credibility of the camp (which had been previously challenged by a variety of other groups) was called even further into question in the media accounts.

In order to evaluate how the media were representing them, people in the camp and their supporters monitored the news coverage from several media outlets. In the 100 Mile House area, there were three newspapers available: *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Province*, and the *100 Mile House Free Press*. Those television viewers who did not have cable or a satellite dish watched *BCTV* and *CFJC* (a *CBC* affiliate). *Canadian Press* news stories were generally unsympathetic to the camp, and frequently labeled the group as “rebels,” “renegades,” and “squatters,” but I learned that *Canadian Press* reporters were still welcomed into the camp.<sup>81</sup> When I asked one of the journalists about this, he said that the people in the camp did not read any of the articles from *Canadian Press* because these were not published in the three newspapers sold in town. According to my discourse

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<sup>80</sup> The issue of restricting access to journalists was confirmed by interviews with people who had been in the camp during this part of the standoff, journalists, and news stories.

<sup>81</sup> A discourse analysis of invective labeling is found in Chapter 8.

analysis, newspaper stories paid the greatest attention to the militant views held in the camp. The quotations and paraphrases from the camp leadership were most often the most volatile and extreme of pronouncements. The resultant media characterizations in the newspaper stories show that the images of the camp were co-constructed by the media, the camp sources, the police, and government officials. The news accounts emphasized the hostility of the group, and the demands were presented as outlandish. This will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

**Media Coverage of Ovide Mercredi, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations 24-26 August 1995: "Mercredi arrives and visits the camp—but gets a cold reception."** [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September A3]

The Cariboo Tribal Council invited the Grand Chief Mercredi to come to Gustafsen Lake to intervene with the people at the camp.<sup>82</sup> For the journalists, Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi's arrival at the standoff seemed to define the story as a national news event, and more media congregated at 100 Mile House. The RCMP told the media that they would give Mercredi two days to negotiate a settlement, but that, in the meantime, the RCMP would continue making their own plans to remove the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp.<sup>83</sup> At the first meeting, the journalists arrived at the camp in advance of Grand Chief Mercredi. As they approached the camp gate, young Native men asked for their names and checked back with the leaders to confirm whether the journalists would be allowed inside. This created some hard feelings among several members of the media about unequal access, and the preferences of the camp shifted the competitive advantage to outlets that normally had to work harder to secure news opportunities.<sup>84</sup> One of the journalists wandered into a bushy area that shielded the cabin from the Sundance arbor,

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<sup>82</sup> Chief Antoine Archie confirmed in our interview on 25 July 1997 that the Cariboo Tribal Council invited Ovide Mercredi to Gustafsen Lake. Several people (including media and police) assumed that either the RCMP had invited the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, or that he came on his own accord. These speculations each played upon distortions that featured both the RCMP and the Grand Chief in a negative light.

<sup>83</sup> This information is taken from the news story, "Mercredi given 2 days to end Indian standoff," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 25 August 1995 A1.

<sup>84</sup> One journalist found a parallel in the camp's selection of reporters: "See it was almost—what Montague was doing to the media in town, the Native people were doing to the media out at the camp." [Interview with journalist, anon]

and noticed the security measures provided by the young men acting as look-outs. Their camouflage clothing allowed them to “*fade back in the bush like a hologram,*” and they were communicating with “*clickers and other things*” immediately as the journalist walked into the area. One of the look-outs emerged and advised the reporter, “*You’re out of bounds, go back over there.*”

The journalists that were left at the fence attempted to listen to the conversations between Mercredi and the camp leaders, and many of the news stories that day were based on this information. “*We were allowed to go in—not right to the meeting, but fairly close, close enough that eventually we discovered that we could hear most of it, if... there were only a few of us, [listening near the fence] and we shut up... There were about eight of us at the end perched along the fence, and we could overhear—hear every word. Umm—which was doubtless why Mercredi didn’t want us back the next day.*” [Interview with journalist, anon] However, one of the journalists permitted inside the camp said that the distance of the other journalists would hamper the coverage of the event. He said that another barrier would be the lack of understanding of the style of interaction between Mercredi and the leaders of camp. “*Now everyone else could get shots a hundred feet away, but of course you couldn’t hear it, and you could only partially see it, so I could get Mercredi’s face through the fire, Wolverine—everybody there... There was no song and dance, there was no exchange—there was a lot of yelling and stuff—but it was yelling of emotion, NOT at someone, like ‘Mercredi, you’re an idiot’ or ‘Wolverine, you’re stupid’ or something. It was all directed at the emotion of the moment...it was respectful... . And, of course, the other media can hear this a bit—they’re holding their mikes over the fence, and...they had their cars parked so that they could hear bits and pieces, but they were putting the mikes over the fence, and it was 50-60 feet away, and I was 6 inches away...*” [Interview with journalist, anon]

After Grand Chief Mercredi left the camp, one reporter lingered, talking with two RCMP officers who were parked on the road, when he heard a rifle discharge. The reporter

recalls that it sounded like the shot originated from the bush. *"I mean, it was close. The one thing you knew was that this was not—I mean they were not [firing] up at the main camp. No way. It scared the shit outta the officers too. Naturally they said, 'GET OUTTA HERE!' No kidding! And so we departed. They departed briskly in the opposite direction—" Oh? "Oh, ya, they were really scared too. 'Cause, I mean, they were not set up for anything, they were not ERT guys or anything,... whether they were saying, 'we are bored, now go away' or sending us a sort of farewell greeting after Mercredi, or, HMM—" Is this the same shot that was heard after Mercredi left? "Mmmm. Yes it was." It's important to link these—so it was not just one of several... "No, there was only one after Mercredi left that I'm aware of. And that was it." [Interview with journalist, anon] A few of the journalists accompanied the convoy with Grand Chief Mercredi to the Dog Creek Community Hall for another meeting with local Native people, local chiefs, some RCMP officers, and Lyle James. On the way, the RCMP pulled Mercredi's car over to inquire about a gunshot that had been reported. They surmised at the time that somebody possibly fired a gun as a salute (negative or positive) after Grand Chief Mercredi had left.*

### **Summary and Remarks**

By Grand Chief Mercredi's account, a degree of trust had been established between himself and the people at the Gustafsen Lake during the first meeting.<sup>85</sup> However, this was not conveyed in the newspaper characterizations by the large media outlets. A discourse analysis of the news stories from this meeting in the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Vancouver Province*, the *Victoria Times Colonist* and the *Globe and Mail* (the most widely read newspapers in the province) finds that the meeting was consistently negatively characterized. The *Vancouver Sun* referenced the negotiations with Mercredi as *"dramatic"* and a *"clash over ways to seek justice."*<sup>86</sup> In the *Vancouver Province*, the majority of the account provided a description of the panicked response by the media and

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<sup>85</sup> Grand Chief Mercredi's description of his relationship between him and the people at the camp is found in the news story, "The Standoff," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 28 August 1995 A3.



RCMP when the shot was fired near the camp, with a pejorative depiction of the campsite. The meeting was briefly referred to as [Mercredi's] "first unsuccessful negotiations."<sup>87</sup> In the *Victoria Times Colonist*, the headline focused on Mercredi's appeal that the people risked death, and the accompanying *Canadian Press* news account featured a lead-in about the shot fired after the meeting.<sup>88</sup> The *Globe and Mail* reprinted *Canadian Press* news stories from several Canadian cities (all originating from 100 Mile House). The *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Charlottetown Guardian* featured similar lead-ins that centered on the gunshot fired after Mercredi left the camp. The reprinted news story from the Newfoundland *Evening Telegram* focused on Mercredi's warning to the camp that they risked death if they refused to leave.<sup>89</sup> The accounts that provided details of the meeting schematized the negotiations in terms of appeals by Mercredi, and demands and refutations by Wolverine, not alluding that any sense of trust had been established. The news narrative of Mercredi's warnings about the camp members' unyielding position put them in peril and the gunshot that day supported the RCMP frame of the conflict. Indeed, much of the focus in the newspaper accounts was placed on the shooting incident, although the media gathered for the negotiation meeting, and the firing of the weapon took place after this was concluded. The above analysis, plus a check on the lexical frequencies of subsequent news stories, finds a pattern of representation that characterized Mercredi's negotiation efforts at the camp as a "failure."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> This quotation is taken from the news story, "Mercredi, rebels clash over ways to seek justice," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 26 August 1995 A1.

<sup>87</sup> This quotation is taken from the news story, "Behind the barricades of defiance," in the *Vancouver Province*, 27 August 1995 A28.

<sup>88</sup> This information is taken from the news story, "Mercredi: Rebels risk death," in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 26 August 1995 A1 (CP).

<sup>89</sup> The news stories in the *Globe and Mail* were reprinted from: "-Natives-Weapons Drop the guns, Mercredi tells rebel natives," in the *Winnipeg Free Press* 26 August 1995 a2 (CP); "Tension rises with native groups Shot fired after the Assembly of First Nations national chief Ovide Mercredi met with rebels," in the *Charlottetown Guardian*, 26 August 1995, page 1, section A; and "Mercredi meets with rebel natives," in the (Newfoundland) *Evening Telegram*, 26 August 1995 p.7.

<sup>90</sup> During the standoff, the use of "fail" and "failure" were the most frequent descriptors of Grand Chief Mercredi's negotiations at the camp in the *Vancouver Sun* ( 2: 1 in a headline, and 1 in a chronology), the *Vancouver Province* (5: 1 in a lead-in, 2 in chronologies, 1 under a photographic illustration, 1 in the news narrative). The headline, lead-in, chronologies, and the statement following a photographic illustration would have a greater influence than the usage in other parts of a news narrative because of the summarizing function. The *Victoria Times Colonist* and the *Globe and Mail* printed stories authored by *Canadian Press*

Several factors may explain the media representation of that first meeting with Grand Chief Mercredi. First, the news characterizations of the negotiations depicted the interactions as hostile, a more extreme but plausible interpretation after Wolverine's comments prior to the meeting.<sup>91</sup> Second, newspapers require headlines and lead-ins that summarize the central meaning of the event, and these have a predilection to sensationalize aspects of a situation. Angry-sounding debates, dire warnings, and gunfire are dramatic occasions, and these were the focal points in the newspaper sample.

However, the context of the coverage also helps to explain the news texts. First, it is reasonable to assume that reporters who witnessed the meeting had richer details than those relegated to the barbed wire fence. The data confirm that the majority of reporters who wrote the above-mentioned news stories were not allowed inside the camp. Second, there may have been news production and editorial policies at play. The only print reporter (from the large media outlets in the sample) that was allowed inside felt constrained by the editorial practices of his outlet. This journalist explained, "*You were really limited in what you could do, other than report on Ovide Mercredi's words... And there's also a consciousness that there's a limited concentration span, if you had attempted to explain at length the context and explain Mercredi's words... it would really be lost, it would be chopped. The editors were going for the drama, they weren't going for the philosophical... . It was a drama event.*" [Interview with journalist, anon] Last, some of the reporters allowed inside the camp shared their audio-tapes of the meeting with associates at the fence. Although audio-tapes provide accurate quotations, other communicative details are missing, such as the non-verbal component (body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact). Furthermore, an awareness of the positioning and impression management that underlies such negotiations, as well as an understanding

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that did not use "fail," but presented the negotiations as confrontational, ending in a stalemate, with no sense of progress.

<sup>91</sup> Wolverine commented about the pending meeting with Grand Chief Mercredi, "*He can put on fatigues, then he's welcome to come on this side of the fence.*" This is taken from the news story, "Mercredi given 2 days to end Indian standoff," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 25 August 1995 A1.

of Native communication styles, would have provided a broader interpretive base for understanding the situation. However, there was no evidence of these elements in the above-mentioned newspaper stories.

A comparison of the media interpretations of this meeting is possible through examining two photographs of Grand Chief Mercredi, Wolverine and Percy Rosette, taken and published by the *100 Mile House Free Press*.<sup>92</sup> (Refer to Appendix 3 to view these photographs.) The first picture, taken during the negotiations, is similar to photographs published in other newspapers in the research sample. This photograph reveals some of the gravity of the situation: the distancing between the players and the somber facial expressions, including the concerned expressions of the spectators in the background. The central players in the scene seem to be more intent on the discussions than the intrusive presence of the media. The second photograph, an exclusive for the local newspaper, contrasts how the Native leaders represented themselves during and after the meeting. The picture was taken after the other media left, and the negotiations had concluded.<sup>93</sup> The same people appear as in the photograph previously discussed. However, in this case, they are facing the camera directly. They are physically touching, and their facial expressions are more relaxed, especially for Chief Mercredi and Wolverine, who were the most distant in the photograph taken during the negotiations. The second photograph softens the impression of tension between the three leaders. Even if the Native leaders posed for the photographer, this could not be said for the smiling spectator in the background. This caption is also more amenable to Grand Chief Mercredi's evaluation of his progress at the camp that day. Yet, because the journalists from the large media outlets did not witness or record this transaction, there was no indication that their depictions of the negotiations were exaggerated. Interviews with eye-

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<sup>92</sup> The photographs were taken by Jonathan Green, a reporter for the *100 Mile House Free Press*.

<sup>93</sup> The *100 Mile House Free Press* editor cautions that the photographer asked the people to pose for the exclusive picture, and that the mood conveyed in the photograph does not reflect the tenor earlier in the afternoon. Nevertheless, I counter that leaders involved in negotiations often comply with such media opportunities as a way of conveying a sense of optimism to the public.

witness journalists reveal that the negotiations were agonistic<sup>94</sup> rather than aggressively hostile. I propose that the second photograph points to another layer of the relations between Mercredi and the camp that other media missed. The underlying communication issues, the media contexts, and the photographs challenge the typecasting of the initial negotiations as a “failure.”

Therefore, it is likely that the media interpretations of the meeting were skewed because of their pitch for the dramatic details of the negotiations and their emphasis on the shooting incident. The police and government officials, who later commented on the futility of the talks, would have obtained most of their information from the larger media. The electronic and print reports would have been restricted by time, space, and other editorial factors. Still, the media representations of the negotiation meeting with Grand Chief Mercredi were consistent with the news stories of the coverage of the Williams Lake RCMP press conference. The group at the camp appeared to be hostile, and someone near the camp did fire a weapon. The impressions that were left on many of the media and the resulting news accounts maintained coherence with the news narrative of the developing event.

### **Closing off the Camp to the Media**

The evening of Ovide Mercredi’s first visit marked new developments in the RCMP operational strategy: the cellular telephone in the camp was cut off, preventing incoming and outgoing telephone calls. In addition, the police had set out a spike belt and barricades, and prohibited unauthorized entry to, or exit from, the camp. Some of the journalists remained back near the camp, but RCMP officers told them to return to the town.

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<sup>94</sup> “Agonistic” refers to conflict behavior that is more of a display of emotion, than aggression.

The following narrative details the experience of one media crew that attempted to contest the access boundary created by the RCMP.<sup>95</sup> *"As soon as we came out of the gravel road, ...there was an RCMP car there. And that's when I said 'XXX, I don't think we should be leaving.' [The colleague] said, 'well, we'll go a little further and then we'll be able get to an autotel [where the telephone link will be possible].' ... And that's when we found that log-cleared area. And pulled off there. Because the RCMP helicopters were flying—looking for people, 'wonder who's in there and not in there?' All the media had gone...So we didn't have to go anywhere. We could stay there—and we waited. And then we got a call from our people in the east, who'd said that...they didn't want to send us out without bullet-proof vests and gas masks. Because of the danger the RCMP had said there was to be, and there were guns and everything else.*

*"And as we drove a little further, the RCMP had set up checkpoint 20—the 20 kilometer mark in the road. And I saw this, said 'XXX look!' They had spike belts out, they had guys with night vision glasses. They had full—machine guns—I'm not sure of the technical term, but machine guns. Full—bullet proof vests, and the whole works. And we drove down and I said 'XXX, I don't like this. They were geared up. So I said, 'XXX, I don't like this.' XXX said, 'Well look—' and a guy [RCMP] came over and said, 'Your driver's license, please?' I said, 'Ya,' and I gave it to him. He said 'Thanks very much.' And he turned and walked away—like now we're supposed to drive out.*

*"[I] put it in four wheel drive, and booted back—and spun out and took off back towards the camp. 'Cause I just wanted to get a chance to think here a minute. I wanted to figure out—you know—Montague—RCMP Montague—promised we could come in on*

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<sup>95</sup> The RCMP barricades also caught one journalist by surprise. An unidentified reporter allegedly set up a tent in the bush, a few kilometers from the camp. Consequently, when the RCMP set up the barricade, the reporter was on the wrong side of the line. He hid inside the tent, hoping the police would not find him. The RCMP found him the day after the barricades went up. They took the journalist into town, seized his film, processed the pictures and wanted him to identify who was in the pictures. After that, the journalist left 100 Mile House.

*Saturday, for the next meeting with Mercredi—it's on tape, it's on camera... We were given permission to come back in Saturday. And I had a good debate with XXX about this—that why don't I stay?....*

*“But at that point—I felt I had more trust for the Natives than I did for the RCMP. Just because—sure, we'd heard 'genocide'...we heard all that stuff over and over—but, I mean, at least they'd talk to you. And so anyways, we sat out at that dugout—we marked the truck with [a sign that read] 'news' and stuff. We got a phone call on the autotel from XXX—conference call—from the 'highest as the high is high'—that we had to leave. We weren't prepared with bullet proof vests or gas masks. There was talk about gas—gas would've been smart to calm everybody down—if it came that far. There was talk of gas—like tear-gas or something—dropped from helicopters—or whatever—and we weren't prepared. We didn't have gas masks and we didn't have bullet proof vests...*

*“We respected their wishes and we left. That night, I didn't sleep a minute. Got back to the hotel...and I said to XXX, 'We blew it.' ...And in fact, we got back into the vehicle at 11 o'clock that night and drove back—to try and get back out there, and they [RCMP] said, 'Oh, no—you'll have to come back at first light...I said, 'Damn, I should have just gone with my gut.' My gut was to stay.*

*“Because I knew—sure enough the next morning, the road's all blocked. Police escort. Checkpoint 20's as close as we could get. 20 kilometer mark in the road. And there we sat—all our vehicles lined up. Waiting for Mercredi to come through. I said, 'Peter'—He showed up—I'll never forget—in these mirrored sunglasses, big round ones, the little rims, the mirror in his eyes and—the glasses, and he said, 'Mr. Mercredi has asked that there be no media in there because it affected the dialogue yesterday' or whatever, whatever...” Is this what Mercredi said? “This is what Montague says Mercredi said. And I looked at [my colleague] and I said, 'I understand what's been started—and we've been fucked. We've been dicked.'” [Interview with journalist, anon]*

Another journalist stated that, *"When he first came, Mercredi said several of us [media] could witness the negotiations. Then we left that night, and saw that a spike line had been laid out. We were told Mercredi didn't want media. I'm not sure if that was ever true or not. I'm not sure whether we ever got to the bottom of this. Mercredi was surprised to learn that media were not allowed in and didn't immediately answer. There was confusion over who had asked for the media ban. We were told by officers that night that we would be allowed to go back over to the other side the next morning, but we were not."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

That morning at the RCMP press conference at the Red Coach Inn, one journalist said that the media liaison announced that there would be no further media access to the camp. Shortly thereafter, the journalists proceeded to the camp, behind Grand Chief Mercredi's van. They stopped at a railway crossing on Exeter road, and one journalist jumped out of his vehicle to talk to Mercredi. According to this journalist, Mercredi asked, *'Are you guys going to come in today?'* Apparently, Mercredi did not know about the camp being closed off, and he told the journalist that he had not made this request. He also did not know about the cellular telephone at the camp being cut off. This was something that he soon discovered from the people in the camp. Later Mercredi told reporters that he spent much of the second meeting listening to the anger and frustration in the camp, and the mediation talks did not progress very far. *"A lot of faith had been put into what Mercredi could do. What really came out of...the press conference [later that evening] was how Mercredi...felt he had been sandbagged by the police without them...I see that weekend as a real turning point. Mercredi got sent in without being told that they [police] had cut off the phone. So he went in that day, and basically got nowhere in the bargaining, because the people in the camp were so angry that the phone had been cut off and, basically, those were his two days, and that's really all he had a chance to do."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

Several hours later, Grand Chief Mercredi gave a scathing press release about the RCMP activities interfering with the discussions on the second visit. The following afternoon, the RCMP agreed to give Mercredi another opportunity to negotiate at the camp.<sup>96</sup> Minutes after this was agreed upon, there was a breaking news bulletin that two RCMP officers had been shot at several times while in their vehicle. They were saved from being killed only because they were wearing thick, army-type flak jackets.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The analysis of the positioning of the RCMP, Grand Chief Mercredi, and the media points toward the RCMP operational plan being the reckoning force that Grand Chief Mercredi and the media had to accommodate. It also reveals the lack of RCMP transparency of their operational strategies, by agreeing to Grand Chief Mercredi's returning to the camp without any knowledge of the pressure tactics used on the people inside. However, Mercredi's criticisms were not lost on the journalists who lingered near the camp after that first meeting. These journalists also believed that the RCMP had been duplicitous when the RCMP assured them future admission into the area, but then laid out a spike belt on the road and put up barricades. A year later, during the interviews, a few of the journalists postulated that Mercredi's "media ban" was really part of a larger RCMP plan to control the perimeter and the communications at the camp.

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<sup>96</sup> A *Vancouver Sun* news story outlines Grand Chief Mercredi's complaints against the RCMP interference regarding his second (and final) negotiation meeting at the camp. Mercredi accused the RCMP of "sandbagging his mediation efforts." He described the mood in the camp as "extremely angry and hostile" and he predicted violence between the camp and the RCMP if the RCMP did not stop the pressure tactics. He said that low flying helicopters were buzzing the camp and increasing the level of tension. The news story said that Mercredi disclosed that the RCMP were "advancing plans to invade an illegal camp of armed native Indians because of white public opinion... They told me that they have to go ahead for two reasons—one, they don't want to set a precedent. And two, they are saying white public opinion demands it. That still doesn't make it right." Later in the same news story, Mercredi is quoted again, "The greatest presumption in law is innocence. Everyone is entitled to that. These individuals, whether you agree with them or not, are entitled to that." These excerpts are taken from the news story, "RCMP actions anger Mercredi," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 28 August 1995 A3.



## **Interpretations of Closing off Communications and Putting up of the Barricades**

### **1. The RCMP**

Superintendent Olfert's and Sergeant Montague's explanation for cutting off the communication link at the camp was that it was an initiative of the RCMP operational plan instituted to resolve the conflict. The RCMP had a concern that the people inside the camp were receiving instructions over their cellular telephone from people on the outside, such as the Sundance leader John Hill and lawyer Bruce Clark. The RCMP believed that outside interference such as this would strengthen the resolve for the people to remain inside the camp. Advisers to the camp may have been encouraging them to hold out for a wider political and legal impact by pressuring for a ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada regarding Clark's constitutional argument.<sup>97</sup> This influence was seen to undermine police negotiations and to keep the issues at an ideological level. Furthermore, the RCMP were concerned that the cellular telephone had been used to draw supporters into the camp, adding to the number of people involved. Police officials assessed that many of these outside supporters came out of curiosity, or in support of the larger question of Native rights regarding land claims. The supporters may have perceived the people in the camp as innocent victims. The police doubted that the supporters had been advised of the threats of violence and shooting incidents perpetrated by some of the people associated with the camp—and if they were, these events were portrayed as fabrications. With the supporters' perceptions that the issue was strictly dealing with land claims and human rights, the involvement of many other people was likely. The media plan was to reinforce the idea that the people in the camp were employing illegal means to promote their cause, and to dissuade people from coming to the area. The police decision to cut off the telephone communications was intended to circumvent outsiders from interfering with the police negotiations, and to prevent any more people from joining the group at Gustafsen Lake.

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<sup>97</sup> Clark's constitutional argument was based on an application of the 1763 Royal Proclamation. Based on this document, Clark identifies that Queen's Privy Council is a more appropriate institution for negotiations involving Canadian Native people and their rights than the Canadian judiciary.

Similarly, the RCMP officials asserted that the establishment of the RCMP barricades was a tactical decision to minimize the potential for violence and injury. There was a concern that a groundswell of supporters might converge on the camp, making the situation more volatile and difficult to defuse. It had already been established that there were several weapons in the camp, and unrestricted public access increased the possibility that more armaments would be brought inside the camp.<sup>98</sup> From the perspective of the police, open communication and unrestrained access to and from the camp had the potential to escalate the seriousness of the situation, and to increase the potential for violence and loss of life. Thus, setting up the barricades was an attempt to control the perimeter of the camp, contain the people inside, and to ensure that supporters and armaments would be prevented from entering the camp.

## 2. The Camp

Interviews with sources that spent some time at the camp indicated that the prevalent perception there was that the barricades and the closing off of the camp's communication were a prelude to an RCMP assault. According to William Lightbown, a Native elder who had been in the camp for several days, he and three others decided to leave the camp soon after the barricades were established. He recalls that, at this time, many of the people inside the camp believed that they might be killed by the police. In an attempt to prevent loss of life, he and a few others left the camp, thinking that if they talked to the police and the media they could resolve the situation. The group was detained at an RCMP checkpoint. *"They said, 'You can't come out—you've got to go back in,' and I laughed, I said, 'You're kidding? You can't stop us from coming out.' I said, 'Who the hell do you think you are?' I said, 'You can't order us around on our own land, and tell us we can't come out of that camp.' I said, 'You might be able to bullshit the rest of the people,' I said, 'but you're not bullshitting me!'* The RCMP officers at the checkpoint

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<sup>98</sup> The RCMP did seize weapons from a vehicle headed to the camp on 25 August 1995, the same day as the first meeting between Grand Chief Mercredi and the camp. These weapons included a 12-gauge shotgun and ammunition, two illegal high-capacity magazines for a .308-calibre assault rifle, 200 rounds of .308 ammunition, and a bow. This information is taken from the news story, "Cops, natives on brink of violence," in the *Vancouver Province*, 27 August 1995 A5.

held the group there for two hours. *"They said that they would have to contact Ottawa, which tells me that Ottawa was informed on an ongoing basis—non-stop, through this whole process. And the word that came back—they said, 'Well, Ottawa said that we have to let you through' and I said, 'Well, of course you have to let us through—there are no options.' So they let us through."* While detained, he had his first contact with the RCMP tactical squad (ERT) *"with masks on—hoods pulled over, and all you could see was their eyes."* [Interview with William Lightbown]

### **3. The Media**

For the journalists, the barricades signified a loss of a valued media source and a competitive advantage. The barricades also increased the dependence of the media on the police for information about the camp and the activities behind the barricades, and increased the potential for abuse of police authority. One reporter stated: *"So that really turned the whole Gustafsen Lake for me, right there. Like...and it took away our advantage—really took away our advantage. And we're all on the same level of playing field right now. All of us. A men's playing field. Completely controlled. 'Trust us, they're happy. Trust us, they're eating. Trust us this and trust us that. And from that point on, it became a real battle, because we, not only in my opinion, had to try and figure out the stories, and figure out what's going on, but then we had to fight kind of a bureaucracy who knew what was going on and we just weren't being told."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

One reporter concluded that cutting off the media was a trade-off in the RCMP tactical justification for the barricades. He recognized that there would be a cost for the control of media access: *"There is a danger in keeping them [journalists] in complete ignorance and dependant utterly on [the police] for information. Because, particularly in retrospect, on how they [the police] conducted themselves...had we had a camera in there or a pool arrangement, they [the police] would have been able to say 'hey—we can prove it.' It's the same thing for the other way around too. Media exist for a reason in this country. We*

*were, to a certain extent, prevented from doing our job, which is recording events as they happened.*” [Interview with journalist, anon] A few of the journalists found that cutting off media access to the camp contributed to the “pack journalism” that they said characterized the coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. During the research interviews, several of the journalists felt that the media had been “invited” to cover the event, but that the barricades helped to bring the media under the control and the convenience of the RCMP.

However, not all the reporters were concerned about the lack of access to the camp. Some of them believed that, for unstable conflicts such as these, the media should not be able to access a group that was so volatile. Few journalists said that they would have gone to the camp after the barricades were set up. Some of the most strident critics of the RCMP agreed that safety was an issue, and that they were not willing to take the risk of covering the event from the camp, or anywhere else inside the barricades.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The establishment of the RCMP barricades and the closing of camp communications were interpreted according to the logic of the frames held by the RCMP, the people in the camp, and the media. The contrast in perceptions reveals how each of these main participants in the event interpreted the developments and the motivations of the opposing sides according to their respective identities, roles, values, and goals. The RCMP and the people in the camp had contradictory interpretations of the situation, with neither side acknowledging the validity of their counterpart. Both sides seemed to be suspicious of each other, and it is understandable how actions taken by one side might be interpreted as a threat by the other. The polarized perceptions held by these two groups made the media a site of struggle for the RCMP and the camp to define the situation to the public in order to gain widespread support.

Since the focus of the thesis is on the media coverage, I will limit the analysis to the interpretations of the journalists. The barricades severed the relations between the media and their sources at the camp. They also altered the competitive standing between the journalists. The blocking off of the camp by the police meant that journalists who had gained the trust of the camp were unable to utilize it as a valued news resource and as a competitive advantage. Conversely, the barricades did little damage to reporters who had been turned away from the camp; indeed, the barricades returned competitive potential to them. It is not clear whether the media playing field became flattened as a consequence of the barricades or by the lack of availability of alternative sources that might provide lucrative information for competing journalists. In this situation, the most valued source would be one that could provide contrasting information (to the police), about the camp. To a very limited extent, this was accomplished, as will be discussed further.

At the same time, the loss of media access to the camp meant that police had control of the information about the camp and the activities behind the barricades. With the advent of the barricades, the media were forced to trust the RCMP to provide accurate details about the developments in the conflict and the conditions facing the people inside the camp. In this situation, the function of the police included the role of the interpretive “middleman” between the reality of the event and the media. However, such a function carries with it vulnerability and power. As one of the above journalists suggests, the police may have been vulnerable to accusations of conveying false information. Nevertheless, by virtue of their institutional status, legitimated authority, and tactical power, the police were in a superior position to define the situation and control the media. The loss of communications and the barricades blocked the camp from contesting the police to the media or their supporters. Once the RCMP established a telephone line for negotiating a settlement, the police negotiators were the only group with whom the camp could voice their concerns until the Native intermediaries began to visit the camp. The RCMP did not relay these concerns to the media. Aside from this, the people in the camp did not have the social standing or the credibility to challenge the RCMP, especially

without concrete evidence. Therefore, the barricades provided the police with the opportunity to dominate the interpretation of the standoff to their best advantage. This topic will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

### **The Barricades, the Media, and the Characterization of the Event**

The RCMP set up the barricades on Saturday evening (26 August 1995). By the following day, some of the journalists and television camera crews set up a make-shift camp, and unloaded their equipment for filming. Sunday afternoon, after the attack on the police, the barricade was moved three kilometers further down the road, and this is where the media and the final checkpoint remained for the duration of the standoff.

The barricades created a “before and after” time marker, with specific news contexts associated with each. Before the barricades, the media were able to drive to the camp, and provided they had permission from the occupants, they could go inside. Journalists witnessed gunfire at the RCMP helicopter, and observed the tension and the security measures taken by the people in the camp. After the barricades, eyewitness accounts of incidents at or near the camp were impossible. Even at Checkpoint 17, the journalists were so far from the camp that it was impossible for them to hear any sounds of gunshots—even when “thousands of rounds” (on 11 September) were allegedly exchanged. There was no way to confirm if the RCMP were giving the full story, the degree to which it was sanitized or exaggerated, or if they were giving any part of the story at all.

The barricades created two outposts for the media. The Red Coach Inn became the setting for all RCMP press conferences, and the message boards provided times of news briefings. Many informal discussions took place between journalists and supporters of the camp at the Red Coach Inn parking lot. In town, media portrayed the event from the press conferences at the Red Coach Inn, or along the main thoroughfare of the town. Checkpoint 17 became the secondary news center. That checkpoint was the location that

marked the closest allowable proximity to the camp for the media and the public. It was situated on the primary road that all RCMP and ERT used to get to the RCMP field operation Camp Zulu. Native intermediaries used this road when traveling to and from the camp at Gustafsen Lake. A local couple living adjacent to the RCMP Camp Zulu traveled this road to go back and forth to town. Since waiting for anything exciting to happen on this road was boring and tedious, many journalists preferred to spend most of their time at 100 Mile House, and would only travel to Checkpoint 17 occasionally. If journalists worked in teams, often one would cover the news in town, the other at Checkpoint 17. Only a few media stayed at the checkpoint for extended times and, generally, these were television camera crews who usually commuted back and forth in shifts. An exception was one *CBC* cameraman, who spent 22 days at the checkpoint without returning to town. Journalists at Checkpoint 17 slept in their vehicles, and for the last few days *CBC Television* brought in a motor home for its crew. While the majority of the journalists remained in town and attended press conferences where official statements were made, those that stayed at the checkpoint were able to get different “off the record” information from the police. Because of the length of time the journalists and police spent together at the checkpoint, they developed a friendlier rapport than most of their counterparts at 100 Mile House. Checkpoint 17 will be examined in further detail in the following chapter.

The barricades also magnified the prominence and power of the RCMP media relations team for the characterization of the event. The media became almost fully dependent on the RCMP media liaisons for updates on the conditions and developments behind the barricades. The RCMP could give out information, or withhold it, at will. The media became vulnerable to the police and their discretionary power to control and limit new information. The police defined what was “news.” Announcements of minor developments took on heightened importance, as one journalist quipped, “*Even a press conference that said little or nothing was still a news event.*” However, some journalists did not confine themselves to Sergeant Montague as the only RCMP source. They

developed informal channels to get “insider information.” For instance, those from the Vancouver area had previous contacts with Vancouver RCMP while covering other news stories. The journalists might strike up conversations during chance meetings in town or at Checkpoint 17. The information did not have the legitimate authority of the formal press conference.<sup>99</sup> But the details did contrast the vagueness that the journalists complained typified the RCMP press releases. As one journalist commented: *“Anyway, one of the things that was interesting to me was that the RCMP media relations was never really too keen on was the fact that I knew quite a number of the officers, from just having been around. And periodically, when I found them, they would talk to me. I mean, the theory was supposed to be that absolutely nobody talked to you unless it was Montague and Ward, and whoever they set up. And so—I’d...find a story by running into one of them at the grocery store, you know...”* Their guards were down when they talked to you... *“Cause they’re all buddies! I mean, they’re all buddies of mine!”* [Interview with journalist, anon] Informal sources never became major influences in the news accounts, but the details they provided were used during the question period of the press conferences.

The barricades, and the ensuing restriction of information and sources for updates, increased the pressure among the journalists to obtain fresh news in order to convey a sense in their news stories that the event was not static. Fresh news had become scarce. Supplementary stories could be developed from secondary and peripheral sources. These included stories offered by supporters of the protest, or politicians in Victoria. In Vancouver, news wires and colleagues provided subsidiary stories that analyzed the situation from the perspectives of a variety of experts and academics across the country. Sometimes these types of stories would be the most important story of the day, shifting peripheral information to the central part of the event. Competition among journalists at

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<sup>99</sup> An unclassified RCMP memorandum to Superintendent Olfert from Sergeant Montague dated 1 September 1995 identifies a concern that “There is a potential danger that members might express views not consistent with our official messaging.” The recommended strategy is that “The Force should never allow such a negative message to leak out. If we can prevent internal turmoil from becoming a story, we should.” (pp.1-2).



100 Mile House for new angles increased, and promises of exclusive news opportunities (such as a fly-over of RCMP Camp Zulu) become a hotly contested commodity. With the number of people coming into town to support various sides of the conflict, the journalists usually found someone willing to be interviewed. On occasion, supplementary sources would be combined with an updated summary of the conflict to create “new news.” Thus, the journalists, with the assistance of news sources and news opportunities, were able to move the story and hold it in the public attention. Nonetheless, with the exceptions of lawyer Bruce Clark and the Native intermediaries (who, for limited time frames had police permission to visit the camp), the above alternative sources were unable to furnish any current information about the camp that contrasted with the RCMP perspectives.

The establishment of barricades also created the impetus for journalists to listen to the police scanners and radio-telephones, which the police negotiators used for a time while talking to the people in the camp. After Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi encouraged the RCMP to open a telephone line to the camp, journalists could hear interactions between the camp and the RCMP negotiators for approximately 10 days. The local businesses sold out of radio scanners, and almost everyone was listening: media, shopkeepers, local residents, and ranchers. The police periodically scrambled frequencies, and they used code words. And, until the RCMP established a low frequency telephone link with the camp, there was always the possibility of media, supporters, and local people listening. However, the journalists did not find these conversations particularly newsworthy—except when the source was the people in the camp. On these occasions, some journalists “*jumped on it.*”

Radio scanners, which picked up the interactions between the RCMP, were also used as a reference to probe the RCMP media liaison during press conferences. On one occasion, a journalist overheard two police talking about a “*Native person stepping on a stun grenade*” and behaving in a disoriented fashion. He overheard one police laughing to the

other, “‘Looks like another drunken Indian on a Friday night!’ Yet when you asked Montague that same day if anyone in the camp was injured or disoriented from a stun grenade, Montague said, ‘I can’t comment on that.’” Another reporter remarked: “Quite often if you couldn’t get the full picture of what was happening, you could at least sense that something was happening, and sometimes get specific information that you could go to somebody and say, ‘what is this?’” One journalist recalled hearing requests for the media as a witness: “The people in the camp made frequent requests for media on the radio. Their biggest concern was being treated fairly.” Eavesdropping on the radio-telephone also allowed listeners to form impressions of the mood in the camp. One such instance was a poignant conversation between a parent (outside the camp) whose daughter remained inside the camp. The parent was pleading with the daughter to come out. The journalist recalled that she said that she “*couldn’t come out*,” and then the line was cut off. Listening on the police radio-telecommunications also gave the journalists an appreciation of the relations between the RCMP negotiators and people inside the camp. The journalists frequently heard agitated and hostile remarks coming from the camp side of the conversations. Several of the journalists remarked that the RCMP negotiators demonstrated “*a great deal of patience*.” [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### **Chapter Conclusion**

A situational analysis of the relations between the media, the RCMP, and the people in the camp identifies a dramatic decline of the ability of the camp to influence the media to its own advantage. Before the press conference at Williams Lake, the group at the camp commanded local media attention, with the local rancher and Native communities offering the strongest challenge to the group at Gustafsen Lake. The mounting number of shooting incidents, the confiscation of weapons at the Fraser River location, and the incriminating video-tape on *CBC Television* news gathered the momentum for the conflict to shift into a major media event. From the time of the RCMP initiated press conference, the RCMP took the media lead away from the camp and established an interpretive frame of the people in the camp as being dangerous. The RCMP’s labeling of

the illegal activities associated with the camp as acts of terrorism radicalized the group for the public record. The journalists attending the Williams Lake press conference were primarily from the most influential print and electronic media outlets in the province. In general, the journalists had little or no background knowledge of the local community or the previous years' Sundance ceremonies. With the Williams Lake press conference, the group's news value became magnified in proportion to the wider media reach, but their public face was damaged.

The camp made efforts to contest their damaged reputation in the media, but these attempts were undone in several ways. The ambivalence in the camp toward the media continued after the Williams Lake RCMP press conference, but this was now directed toward journalists from large media outlets. If their demands for an audience with the Queen and their vows to "come out in body bags" were intended to gain positive media attention, it had the opposite effect. The news characterizations of the declarations accentuated the radical stance of the group. Camouflage clothing, tight security, and surveillance of media at the camp conveyed an impression to the journalists that the group was militant. Camp members asserted their control over their information to the media by ousting at least one journalist from an influential news organization, and by refusing entry to several of the others. This not only influenced how some of the journalists regarded the camp, it also had a limiting effect on the witnessing and variety of the media interpretations with their negotiations with Grand Chief Mercredi. On the other hand, two shooting incidents originating from the camp took place in the presence of media, and these incidents became important news stories. After the barricades were set up, the group at the camp could not repair or maintain relations with the journalists and present themselves in a more positive light. The strategies employed by the camp to control the media demonstrated that the people in the camp had the willingness and some agency to manage their public image. Nevertheless, many of these initiatives appeared to self-sabotage their group, and this may have compounded the negative impressions of the camp in the mainstream media portrayals.

The reasons for the Gustafsen Lake camp's decline in media influence and the damaging characterizations in the press at this point during the standoff were multi-factored. Compared with the situation before the Williams Lake press conference, the RCMP had now taken the lead in dominating the frame of the news characterizations of the standoff. The frame of the media products at the time reflect a "law and order versus criminals" definition of the situation. In this analysis, the relations between the camp and the media did little to challenge the frame of representation provided by the RCMP at the Williams Lake press conference.

Probably the most influential factor of the RCMP operation on the media characterizations of the Gustafsen Lake standoff was that of the RCMP barricading the primary road to the camp. When the camp began to exert control over media access, it somewhat inverted the usual status hierarchy among the group of journalists from Vancouver, privileging even the local newspaper at 100 Mile House over larger media outlets. This changed again with the establishment of the RCMP barricades, when the media were equally cut off from this source. This forced the media hierarchy to regroup once more, except this time with diminished sources and supply of news for which to compete. The establishment of the barricades provided the RCMP with a near-hegemonic control over the definition of the situation at the camp to the media, and prevented the people in the camp from having a media voice or a witness. However, the research indicates that the media adapted to the situation by expanding in other directions. At the checkpoint, in the town, and through telephone interviews and police radio-telecommunications, the media found legitimate and not so legitimate ways to recover from losing the camp as a central media source. Nevertheless, these alternative sources could not effectively challenge the dominant frame of the situation offered by the RCMP. The RCMP stated that their intention for putting up the barricades was to prevent the conflict from involving more people and more weapons, and thus becoming more volatile. In spite of that, the barricades contributed to conditions of reporting that

increased the potential for distorted media coverage of the event and the people involved.  
This aspect will be demonstrated by example in the next chapters.

## Chapter 5

### “Show of Force”

*“When Ryan asked how many people are in the camp, Ignace laughed and said, ‘‘Why are you asking that? There’s an Indian behind every tree here.’’ Other rebels could be heard laughing over the radio phone.”*<sup>100</sup>

The news gathering process invariably requires some form of an exchange. When people provide information or a perspective about some element to the media, it gives them (aside from other rewards) an opportunity to take a more distinctive role in the construction of the news. News sources with power, status, or news appeal have a greater potential to influence the dominant frame in news stories, and a chance to sway public opinion. The media, in turn, benefit by having such needs as information, authentication, and balance satisfied. However, the reciprocity is not necessarily balanced between the media and their sources, and the media are often typecast as the exploiters in the exchange. Nonetheless, it is assumed in this study that news sources have varying degrees of agency to control their stock of information, although it might still be in high demand by the media. News sources may also be in competition with each other to influence the dominant perspective of the news. A further complication is that the media themselves may want to portray a news story in a particular way, and will adjust the presentation of its sources and their information accordingly. These situations may lead to struggles and maneuvering between media and their various sources. The negotiation of information and the outcomes in the news accounts is the central analytical focus throughout this chapter.

The negotiation of information between spokespersons, the press, and the spectators was most frequently found during the press conferences at 100 Mile House. The press

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<sup>100</sup> This excerpt was overheard from the radio-telephone link between the camp and the RCMP negotiators, and published in the news story, “Hopes rise for ending armed standoff,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 31 August 1995 A1. It was published days after the RCMP advisement to the media to cease publishing from this source.

conferences at the Red Coach Inn were the official mechanism for the transmission of information with the greatest legitimacy. The news material provided at this venue was the most influential for the characterization of the news event. The successful disbursement of information by spokespersons, and clarification of information by journalists, required knowledge of the norms and routines of press conferences and an understanding of the nuances of performance for spokespersons, media, and the public audience. Yet, this knowledge was not commonly understood or shared by those in attendance, and this led to some communications conflicts.

Some instances of information exchange connected the media coverage more directly with the RCMP operation, and these are given greater analytical attention. The negotiations between media sources and the media took the forms of barter, coercion, and appropriation. The specific cases in this chapter include: the media's use of police radio-telecommunications; the RCMP engagement of a journalist in a police initiative; the shooting episode of 4 September, and the RCMP confiscation of *CBC* video-tapes of the camp. These topics are discussed within the chronological format of this chapter.

#### **Shooting Episode, 27 August 1995: The Flak Jacket Incident**

**27 August 1995:** *"At 3:40 pm, two RCMP officers are shot in the back as they and two others protect three forestry workers brought in to clear fallen trees from a road. The two officers get burns and bruises from the slugs that rip into their bullet proof vests, but otherwise are unhurt. Their truck is hit dozens of times."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]<sup>101</sup>

The attack on RCMP officers on patrol took place within two days of when the RCMP set up the barricades. According to the RCMP sources, this violent episode imprinted heavily on the minds of the RCMP at Gustafsen Lake, underscoring for them the level of danger

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<sup>101</sup> One of the details of this episode that the large media outlets missed was that the forestry workers were Aboriginal men, working for a Native-operated forestry crew. There were rumors among the Gustafsen Lake supporters that this shooting incident was fabricated by the RCMP. It was established during the trial, and confirmed during the research by defense council George Wool that the incident did occur, and that the shooting originated from certain unnamed members of the camp.

and volatility of the situation. The narrative of the news coverage is taken from the perspective of Sergeant Montague and several of the reporters.

The following is an excerpt of Sergeant Montague's perspective of this incident, and his recollections of how he conveyed the news to the media. *"The day that we got shot...there was an awful lot of emotion. I was sitting in a restaurant, talking to some media. We're having a coffee, about 2:30 in the afternoon, if I remember correctly—and the UTV camera man came in. He was dead-white and he was sweating—and he sat down and he said, 'You don't know, do you?' And I said, 'I don't know what?' And he said, 'your members have just been shot.' And I said, 'This is no time to be making jokes.' He said, 'no I'm not.' He said, 'Peter—they just got shot—I don't know if they've been killed, or what.' So—I went out to our command center—the screaming and the yelling, and the stuff that was going on—oh, man..."*

**Panic?** *"I would say—there was some panic because we couldn't distinguish through the radio communications—they were so poor—if they were dying, if they were—out—cause here—if they needed medical attention—what they were saying is 'We don't know how badly we are hurt—we know we've been shot.' 'Cause they could feel the burning sensation and the numbness. But never having been shot before, they didn't know if the bullets had penetrated, or if they were just going to fall over and die—like—they didn't know. So, they're yelling for all this stuff, and—you know—the other members are trying to get going the other way, and they were yelling on the radio, 'We don't know where we are going!' and 'What's going on?' and—it was pandemonium—it best describes it.*

*"When we finally got the members to the hospital, and had to go out and deal with the media—my message was, 'Low key. Low key. No—don't raise the level—just low key. Everything's fine, we'll deal with it.' And we went out there with that message. That our members have been shot, and we're a professional police force, and we will deal with the situation in the appropriate manner. And there was no heightened level of emotion—purposefully—it was subdued. And that was to keep our people confident that everything*



*was fine here. Tell the public—no one's going to over-react. And we MAINTAINED that message, until September the 11<sup>th</sup>, and that was the day of the gunfight.” [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]*

At the checkpoint, the journalists heard the crackling and disjointed police communications over the radio and the message that ambulances were on the way. The ambulances came flying past a few minutes later. All they could hear on the radio were snatches of information about shots being fired, but they were not sure what was going on. At 100 Mile House, news of the shooting brought some journalists racing up Exeter Road. But by the time they arrived at the checkpoint, there were no further developments. *“There would have been a photographer up there at the blockade to—you know—to take that photo—up at the actual road block kind of thing. So, our sense was that something happened.”* At Williams Lake, another reporter who was preparing to interview Grand Chief Mercredi, relayed this update to him, *“His face went—‘Oh my God!’—he looked really worried”* One television crew hastily turned around while on the way to an interview with rancher Lyle James because on the radio-telephone they received a call *“that three officers were killed!”* Another reporter saw the two officers walk up to the ambulance and get in, and the ambulance drove away without sirens. Later, at the press conference, some of the reporters thought that Sergeant Montague looked visibly upset. They asked him if he would name the officers who had been shot, but he would not release that information.<sup>102</sup> One of the journalists recalled that this shooting incident

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<sup>102</sup> The shooting episode involving the two RCMP officers contributed to a series of near-panic situations and confrontations. A group of four RCMP officers in a police vehicle on an adjacent forestry road became lost when they were instructed to clear the area. They eventually abandoned their vehicle and they were flown out by helicopter. The vehicle was retrieved three weeks later. A few hours after the shooting incident, German tourists unwittingly drove into the area that the RCMP were still in the process of securing. RCMP officers jumped out at the vehicle in a full “take-down,” with police weapons aimed at the vehicle, much to the confusion of the tourists who could barely speak English. There were several RCMP car searches during the standoff. One occasion involved two vehicles with several Native passengers (including a baby) on the forestry road leading to the checkpoint. According to the news account, one the occupants of the vehicles commented, *“It’s not a shock to be treated like this because my people are always treated like this,”* he said of the police action.” (The last incident is taken from the news story, “Hopes rise for ending armed standoff,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 31 August 1995 A1.)

*“changed the whole situation”* for the police, with the potentially fatal shooting of two of their members.<sup>103</sup> [Interview with journalists, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

The incident of the two officers being shot sent shock waves through the corps of RCMP, the journalists, the local community, and via the media, the world beyond. The confusion of the situation spread from the RCMP to the journalists. Ironically, it was a member of the media that informed the RCMP media liaison of the shootings, temporarily reversing the roles between them. The media liaison’s narrative provides a window in which to examine his concerns about conveying the announcement of the shooting incident without betraying any alarm. It was important for him to engage in impression management for the police force, portraying them as competent professionals—even under the conditions of a surprise attack. His announcement of the shooting to the media carried with it an awareness of the audience that would be affected by the news: other members of the RCMP, the media, and the public. Although the RCMP media liaison perceived he was successful in subduing his internal reaction to the situation, his performance was not thoroughly convincing for his audience of journalists who prepared the news stories.

### **“Off the Record” Meeting**

**29 August 1995:** *“Reports gained by phone anger RCMP.”* [Headline, *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1995 A3]

*“And so there was a bit of a closed-door meeting—‘All the media—into a room—let’s talk.’”* **How did you feel about that meeting?** *“Actually, I was kind of excited—I knew that I hadn’t done anything wrong! And I was talking—I was sitting beside XXX—and said, ‘You didn’t put anything on the air, did you?’ And he goes, ‘No.’ And I said, ‘Neither did I! So let’s just sit back and watch the people squirm who buggered, eh?’”* [Interview with journalist, anon]

It was tempting for the media to include information gathered from scanners and radio-

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<sup>103</sup> I confirmed that the flak jacket shooting episode was a pivotal event for the RCMP at Gustafsen Lake with Sergeant Montague and Staff Sergeant Sarich.

telephones in the news accounts after the barricades were established. However, publishing this material without the permission of one of the parties involved in the telecommunications is illegal. Permission would not likely be forthcoming from either side: the RCMP had already indicated that they would be tightly controlling information, and there was no legitimate way of reaching people inside the camp. In this study, the media's use of radio telecommunications is considered the appropriation of police (and, in some circumstances, camp) information without consent. Some of the media outlets published excerpts of the conversations for at least one news story. These include the *Vancouver Province*, *CBC Radio*, and *Vancouver Sun*. *BCTV* filmed reporters listening in on radio conversations, and the radio conversations could be heard. These publications and broadcasts came immediately to the attention of the RCMP media team, who was also monitoring the news coverage.<sup>104</sup>

Sergeant Montague announced that he wanted to convene an “off the record meeting” with accredited journalists, immediately following the press conference. Journalists from small or independent newspapers were not allowed to attend, nor were any of the spectators. The following is a composite of the accounts of the “off the record” meeting that the RCMP media personnel held immediately after the regular late-evening news conference on Tuesday night (29 August 1995).

Two journalists took immediate exception to the fact that Sergeant Montague had arranged for the RCMP cameraman to record the “off the record meeting” as part of his RCMP training tapes: *“And in walks this cameraman, and he's recording all this. And I said, 'What is he doing here?' 'He's recording this.' And I said, 'If it's off the record, it's off the record—if he shoots, I go!' And another [journalist] gets up, 'I'm goin' too!' You don't get to pick and choose what [they] get to shoot. It's all for the training video.”*

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<sup>104</sup> Over the past few years, it has become common for the RCMP to monitor news stories in high profile RCMP investigations. In the case of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the RCMP also conducted public opinion polls to gauge their public approval rating.

One journalist paraphrased Sergeant Montague's speech: *"You can't do this, (you know) Jesus Christ, I've been goin' to bat for you guys, you know that if it weren't for me, you would have no coverage, the checkpoint would be back at the highway on Highway 97, you wouldn't be allowed any access, there'd be no news conferences. My superiors [he said] don't want to give you guys anything, they just want to shut it all down."*—That's what he said."

*"And...he proceeded to empower himself by using the stance that if it weren't for him, we would have no coverage—of course, forgetting that this was a democratic society—and I found it quite interesting."*

*"A lot of the media people were upset. Personally, I found it not humiliating but insulting—we're all professionals and here we are being told that you know if you're not good little kiddies you're not going to have any cookies, basically... I can remember him marching into the basement of that hotel and said, 'If anybody uses any dialogue from there...' And it was like he slapped us on the wrist. And I—remember turning to XXX and saying, 'The only one that can slap me is my boss.'"*

*"George Garrett, [a senior radio journalist] the "voice of reason," calmed things down, said basically that what was done was done, but that no one would do this any more...Everybody [the media] were chastised like children. Montague was taking control of the situation, threatening to shut down all of the media access. It was a show of force—a bullying tactic."* According to my sources, Montague left the meeting, and gave the journalists the option of complying. He asked them to make a decision, and then get back to him—by coming to his hotel room and letting him know. One journalist analyzed the situation like this: *"So the weird thing is: A. He's wanting everybody to make the same decision. He's wanting the group to decide—so it creates a sort of group mentality. B. He's asking reporters to decide—now maybe CBC TV reporters have more power... but that's not my job. I don't make decisions like that. I'm not.... It's not my role."*

[Interviews with journalists, anon]

Unwittingly, a radio journalist at Checkpoint 17 continued broadcasting live “hits” for the 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. evening news, including recordings from the police radio-telecommunications. When the journalist returned to the hotel, he was confronted by Sergeant Montague, [paraphrasing what Sergeant Montague said] “‘Do you have any idea what YOU have done?!’ He sounded morally outraged. ‘YOU risked the lives of all the people out there!’... All I remember is that it took me a long time to get over it...” [Interview with journalist, anon]

The reporters from the *Vancouver Sun* inadvertently skipped out on that late-night press conference, and instead went for supper. When they returned, they were inundated by other journalists telling them about Montague’s ultimatum. The *Sun*<sup>105</sup> reporters spoke with their editor, and the decision from the Vancouver desk was for the reporters to file their stories as usual. The editors and lawyers in Vancouver would determine if the stories would run. The stories continued to be printed, and the *Sun* also immediately published a news story about the meeting, effectively taking it from the realm of “off the record” to become “the public record.”<sup>106</sup> All of the other journalists that had submitted incriminating stories for print pulled them or quickly edited out the contentious parts.

During subsequent press conferences, *Vancouver Sun* reporters said that they felt ostracized by the RCMP media liaison because of their publications of police radio-telecommunications. They recalled that Sergeant Montague ignored their questions during press conferences, and the journalists brought this up with their editor. Journalists from other outlets re-introduced these questions, which were more likely to be answered by the police media liaison. One journalist was critical of the *Vancouver Sun*, not because of the legal or ethics issues, but because of the unfair competitive advantage publishing from the unauthorized source gave them. Occasionally, journalists from competing outlets asked the RCMP media liaison during press conferences if and when the RCMP

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<sup>105</sup> I use *Vancouver Sun* and *Sun* interchangeably for simplicity.

<sup>106</sup> “Reports gained by phone anger RCMP,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1995 A3.

were going to press charges against the *Vancouver Sun* for publishing information obtained illegally. Although the journalists were aware of the friction between the RCMP media liaison and the *Sun* journalists, few of them believed that Sergeant Montague's treatment was extreme.

### **Summary and Remarks**

Consequences of the "off the record" meeting altered the news gathering process and the news stories. All but the *Sun* journalists stopped quoting or, in the case of radio and television, taping from the radio-telecommunications, although they continued to listen while this was still possible. Many of the journalists still used the information to pose questions during the press conferences. As with other unauthorized information, a few journalists subtly incorporated the material into their news stories in order to create a nuance, without actually admitting that they "heard" the information from the police radio-telecommunications.<sup>107</sup> The *Sun* occasionally published information from the radio-telephones, imbedding the transcripts within its news stories. Thus, the *Sun*'s decision to continue printing unauthorized information provided the most overt case of media appropriation of information, but it was by no means the only media outlet that challenged the police's control of its information.

As a strategic situation, the meeting also brought to the surface resentments from the journalists toward the RCMP media liaison, and old rivalries between Vancouver outlets may have had a new vent. The "off the record" meeting was significant to the various journalists because the RCMP media liaison presented the situation as a disciplinary response from the police to censure a media practice. The journalists' objections centered on issues of the RCMP media liaison's misuse of authority and, related to this, the manner that he employed to deliver the message. The RCMP media liaison also seemed unaware of the chain of command within large media organizations that prohibit

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<sup>107</sup> These insertions of unauthorized radio-telecommunications were so subtle that an analysis of the media texts could not pick these out with any certainty.

individual journalists from making the final decisions regarding publications.

An examination of how the RCMP attempted to win back control of the police information from the radio-telecommunications follows. The RCMP media liaison framed the situation around the principle of reciprocity: the RCMP would continue to provide information necessary for news stories, and the media would discontinue publishing information that was not meant for the public. The resolution took the form of an ultimatum that implied that the journalists themselves could unilaterally make this decision. There was an implication that the decision had to be made quickly, preventing much debate or consultation. The instruction to report to the media liaison with a decision positioned the RCMP media liaison's authority over the group of journalists—a status inadvertently affirmed by those journalists that complied with the instruction.

Although the group was sympathetic to the infraction committed by the radio journalist at Checkpoint 17 (it was perceived by the others as an honest mistake, and the reporter immediately ceased the practice), there was little support for the *Vancouver Sun*. It was considered by several members of the media that the journalists from the *Sun* were breaching journalistic ethics, thus undermining the professional standards of the larger group. The resistance offered by the *Vancouver Sun* also challenged the RCMP media liaison's threat to further reduce police information, a consequence that would hurt all of them. That the *Sun* did not seem to suffer from this act of rebellion, and actually enjoyed a competitive advantage over all of the media outlets, added to the resentment within the group. The journalists' condemnations toward *Sun* reporters also functioned as a form of validation of the RCMP dictates (and the law) by exacting pressures for the *Vancouver Sun* staff to conform. Hence, the peer pressures applied to *Sun* reporters were in response to professional standards, competitive motivations and, indirectly, the RCMP media liaison.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> By the time I interviewed the journalists, a few of them said that they reversed their original judgement of the *Vancouver Sun*'s decision to continue incorporating police radio telecommunications. Reflecting

The police radio-telecommunications provided the central source for journalists to sense what was transpiring behind the barricades. This was information that they might use for the news coverage. This “closed door” meeting between the RCMP media liaison and the media was not a chastisement for journalists eavesdropping on RCMP negotiations. In order for the RCMP to advise everyone to cease listening, they would have had to call a town meeting. The reprimand was more likely because the media were spreading camp information to the wider public outside of the local area.<sup>109</sup>

### **The Creation of a Media Celebrity**

The lawyer Bruce Clark, who some of the people at the camp identified as their legal council, did not contribute much to the resolution of the standoff. However, he did play a major role as a frequent media source and a topic in the media coverage of the standoff. Bruce Clark came onto the scene of the Gustafsen Lake standoff just as Ovide Mercredi was preparing to exit. It was unknown to the RCMP at the time that Clark had been in the shadows of the dispute at least since January 1995. It was at about that time that Percy Rosette and John Stevens asked him to represent their case for the Gustafsen Lake property. Clark was preparing for a number of legal cases involving Aboriginal land disputes to be forwarded to the Queen at Buckingham Palace. He had been testing his legal argument regarding Aboriginal territories for several years. All that would be required is for one of these cases to be ruled on favorably, and a precedent would be established that might have altered the protocols regarding the resolution of Aboriginal

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back on the situation, and the issues that came up in court, they wished that their news organizations had also published from the radio-telecommunications.

<sup>109</sup> I found out during my fieldwork that the dispute between the RCMP and the *Vancouver Sun* was not resolved during the standoff, although months afterwards, the *Vancouver Sun* editor received a letter from Sergeant Montague. The letter advised the editor that the British Columbia Department of Justice found that the newspaper was accountable under Section 9(2) of the Radiocommunication Act for intercepting and divulging radiocommunications without permission from the originator (the RCMP). The conclusions of the RCMP were that the *Vancouver Sun* “acted contrary to public interest.” The letter anticipated that if similar circumstances arose in the future, “we will be able to mutually agree on what constitutes legitimate public interests without compromising the objectives of our respective organizations.” (Letter dated 8 December 1995) The matter has not been pursued in court at the time of this writing.



land ownership. Until this point in time, Clark had been unsuccessful in any of his attempts to have his argument validated in the Supreme Court of Canada.<sup>110</sup>

When Clark first arrived at 100 Mile House, the RCMP did not validate or acknowledge Clark or his role as a lawyer for some people in the camp. After the negotiations between Mercredi and the camp were discontinued, the RCMP suddenly reversed their statements to the media regarding the lawyer. The RCMP announced that Clark would be working with them to resolve the situation and they eventually allowed him into the camp. Several hours later, Clark emerged with a declaration advising that the people in the camp chose not to withdraw from the property, but instead would wait for the British Columbia Court of Appeal ruling on Aboriginal claims. Clark held up a bullet shell casing found near the camp, which he alleged came from an RCMP weapon. Clark defended the camp for shooting at RCMP officers, stating that they were acting in self-defense. By the next day, the RCMP advised the media that Clark was no longer part of the RCMP negotiation team. Clark then traveled to England in an attempt to have his petition heard by the Queen, and then returned to 100 Mile House to appear in court for some of his clients. During the court session, the judge held him in contempt, and he was put in jail. After another court appearance, he was sent for a 30-day psychiatric examination that extended past the resolution of the standoff.

Two questions are raised for this examination of the media coverage: why did Bruce Clark become such a media celebrity at Gustafsen Lake, and why did the RCMP reverse their initial judgement of him and include him in their operational plan, only to return to their original position?

The answer to the first question—why did Bruce Clark become such a media celebrity at Gustafsen Lake?—is provided in a montage of responses from the journalists: “*He was a*

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<sup>110</sup> At the time of this writing, Bruce Clark’s argument remains unsupported by the Supreme Court of Canada.

*colorful character, and you're not going to avoid colorful characters in a story like that...it's a bonus when he's a bit like that. Because—it makes for great TV—and he can't come across so much in print, but on TV, people could see this guy, plus he's flamboyant—Montague is pretty much as dull as dishwater... Clark was flamboyant—and he dressed...and he's yelling and he's swearing...And most of the other people up there—the Natives, the non-Natives, the townspeople are—either not very articulate—or they're just not great interviews. And then somebody like Clark comes along—the flashy lawyer from Ottawa, with these weird glasses that cost a fortune—he's an obvious for the media because he's different, plus he also claimed to represent the people in the camp, which was a big part of it. I mean, if he just blew into town and said that he wanted to represent the Indians, then he wouldn't have got...he would have got a bit of coverage...He went into the camp, he knew Wolverine, Wolverine and these other guys said he was the greatest lawyer and they respected him...The fact that he was colorful was a bonus for the media.” [Composite of remarks taken from interviews with journalists, anon]*

The media concurred that they were attracted to Clark because he had news appeal: he had an unusual appearance and a flair for the dramatic, he was very articulate, and he was tireless in the promotion of his legal argument. Journalists also saw him as volatile, and they suspected that he exaggerated the accusations of harm being inflicted on the people in the camp. He was described as a consummate actor: one journalist described how he appeared calm before he entered the courtroom, but as soon as he entered, *“he'd turn on like a light switch.”* At the same time, a few journalists considered that Clark's distress about the denial of the public access to the court on the day he was charged with contempt might have been legitimate. According to a journalist who was present, Clark objected so violently, it only aggravated the antagonism from the police and the judge. *“He should have known that they were after him...he could have diffused it, or he could have not fallen into the trap, but he decided to push the envelope.”* [Interview with journalist, anon] The timing of Clark's arrival was also a factor in his celebrity status at Gustafsen Lake. There were no developments in the standoff. The barricades were up,

and the number of stories that contrasted with police accounts was at a premium. According to Gary Mason, editor of the *Vancouver Sun*, the news story was beginning to drag, and Clark injected interest into the story. Clark's media visibility continued throughout the standoff, but peaked during his two stays in the 100 Mile House vicinity at the time of the standoff.

Clark's ability to draw media attention toward himself, and the magnifying effect of the media spotlight, were instrumental in Clark becoming a media celebrity. In the newspaper stories, Clark was mostly characterized as a "joker," a relatively harmless individual who provided comic relief in the narrative of the standoff. Clark's brief period of positive media coverage coincides with his brief stint with the RCMP negotiation team.<sup>111</sup> Once the RCMP disassociated from Clark, he was maligned by the RCMP, the Attorney General, and the media. Clark's claims of solidarity with the camp, combined with the barricades preventing an alternative perspective of the RCMP, positioned Clark as the superimposed "face" of the people at Gustafsen Lake in the media. The newspaper stories accentuated his appearance and his behaviors with unflattering photographs and descriptions in the news text.<sup>112</sup> Labels such as "rebel," and "renegade," which were

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<sup>111</sup> The shift in the media and RCMP presentations of Clark are tracked in the following *Vancouver Sun* news stories. Just as Bruce Clark became known in the Gustafsen Lake media coverage, the *Vancouver Sun* identified Clark as the lawyer who formerly represented the Lil'Wat Peoples Movement in British Columbia, who were charged with obstructing and assaulting police during a blockade. The same news story also mentioned Clark's arrest after refusing to leave a courtroom. This information is taken from the news story, "Indians fear police assault," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 21 August 1995 A1. RCMP and media support of Clark are found in "Lawyer allowed to talk to rebels in bid to end standoff," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1995 A1. The transition period when the RCMP and the media provide a minor degree of affirmation (but no outward signs of negativity) occurred with Clark's press release after his visit to the camp. This appeared in the news story, "Lawyer says police shot at Indians first," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 1 September 1995 A1. Clark's "official" role in the RCMP strategy is provided in the news story, "Standoff lawyer parries with police" in the *Vancouver Sun*, 2 September 1995 A1. The signal of Clark's fall from grace came when British Columbia attorney general renounced Clark's resolution proposal in "Lawyer accused of 'criminal extortion,'" in the *Vancouver Sun*, 2 September 1995 A4. The full reversal of the RCMP on their assessment of Clark is identified in the news story, "Gustafsen Lake standoff: RCMP find bullet-ridden vehicle," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 5 September 1995 A3.

<sup>112</sup> One of the most personal attacks on Clark in the media is found in a newspaper column entitled, "A face only an alien mother could love." The columnist links Clark's personal appearance with his association with the people inside the Gustafsen Lake camp. An excerpt of the article states, "It is disturbing to see their legal advice is coming from someone who looks almost exactly like an alien who crash landed in the Nevada desert in 1947...If all this is not compelling enough there is one final piece of

originally used in news stories to describe the people in the camp, were gradually incorporated in the description of Clark.<sup>113</sup> News stories included examples of Clark's poor track-record in his legal defense of Native issues, and his lack of credibility within the law society also diminished his public face. Journalists, and others closely involved with the resolution of the protest, concurred that Clark's own behavior may have done more to damage, rather than to help, the credibility of the people inside the camp. The above analysis confirms that the media accentuated this outcome.

In answer to the second question—why did the RCMP reverse their public assessment of Clark and include him in their operational plan?—the Gustafsen Lake trial revealed evidence that differed from the news account, and that implicated a member of the media.<sup>114</sup> Very few of the media realized, at the time of the standoff, that the RCMP had engaged George Garrett, a *CKNW Radio* journalist from Vancouver, to act as a messenger for the RCMP and for Bruce Clark's response. This occurred just before the RCMP publicly announced their support of Clark's involvement. The following is the excerpt of George Garrett's interview.

*"Peter Montague, the media liaison for the RCMP, came to me and he said, 'Can you find Bruce Clark?' And I said, 'Sure.' " Why do you suppose he came to you? "I was a conduit...I found out later why...But first of all, 'Can you find Bruce Clark?' and I said, 'Sure.' 'Would you give him a message for us?—I said, 'Yes.'—Tell him that we'd like to talk to him.' I said 'Sure.' I knew he was staying at 108 Mile Ranch...so I drove up there*

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*evidence that proves beyond any doubt that this is an alien from outer space. Look again at the picture. Notice the peculiar eyeglasses. So far as I can determine, eyeglasses like this are not available anywhere in our solar system." This excerpt is taken from the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 31 August 1995 A2.*

<sup>113</sup> The topic of labeling in the newspaper stories will be discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>114</sup> RCMP psychologist, Dr. Webster said that the negotiations with the camp improved when Ovide Mercredi visited the camp. *"The next breakthrough was when Bruce Clark shot himself in the foot," he said. "We believed that if we didn't give him an opportunity that his name would be haunting us for the rest of this thing. So we inserted him and we believed that he would shoot himself in the foot. And sure enough, he did it. So that was good. We eliminated him there. He destroyed his own credibility."* This news story excerpt is taken from "Patience 'key' to peaceful outcome," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1995 B2.

*and interviewed him, told him I was relaying a message from the RCMP that they wanted to speak to him. He said, 'That's fine.' And I said, 'Would you mind going on tape, and you can just tell me on tape what you want to tell them, and I'll play the tape for them.' 'Yes, I'd be glad to.' And he directed it specifically to Sgt. Montague, and it was to the effect that, 'Yes, he'd be glad to co-operate, please feel free to come and see him, whatever.'*

*"So, I acted as a messenger between the RCMP and Clark and made no bones about it. I put it on the air—it was sort of embarrassing—trying to inject myself into the story, which is not a good thing to do." Why do you suppose that they didn't just ask an officer to go up to where he was staying? "I don't know. That would've been the simplest thing. I would've told them where he was. I just said, 'Yes I knew where he was,' and that was that.*

*"So, I took the message to the RCMP, and the cameraman for the RCMP [XXX], with my knowledge, was video-taping as I played the tape for Montague and others in the RCMP, in the detachment at 100MH. And I don't remember what I said, or what jokes were said, or whatever, but I played the tape for them in any event, and got their response and did a story on it...I didn't have any idea I'd done anything wrong.*

*"It came out at the trial—George Wool, one of the lawyers, made an issue out of the fact that I was helping the RCMP. And there's a touch of irony here in that George Wool is a former RCMP Staff Sergeant, who knows full well how people interact, whether they're media, police, or whatever, and there's a pretty good trust relationship that's built up. And if I say one thing, I think I have the trust of police generally, and the RCMP included, in this province, because I've been around for 40 years, and I have been known for not betraying a trust. So, I thought I was doing nothing more than trying to expedite a situation, and help bring a resolution to it.*

*"I later found out...that it was Mike's [Dr. Webster's] psychology to involve Clark—to have him go in—and they anticipated that he would come out with guns blazing, so to speak—that he would be an antagonist. What they wanted to do was let Clark self-destruct. Which he did. 'Cause he went into the camp—after all this—let's get Mr. Clark involved etc., etc., then he comes out and accuses the RCMP of doing...whatever he said, and the thing went down hill from there. And apparently Mike Webster had anticipated that's exactly what Clark would do. And—you know, he'd been held up as the guy representing the Natives, and knew all about going to the Queen, and so on—it was bloody ridiculous. But—they wanted to let him show the public what an idiot he is. And sure enough, he came out with that kind of an attitude, he was featured at interviews, [promoting] this idea that this was a Native land claims case that should go to the Queen, it should go to the Privy Council, and on and on it went. He was involved in a court hearing for one or two of the people who had come out of the camp. And he went berserk in court..."*

*"So, the RCMP strategy was to make him self-destruct on his own volition, which he did added, I think, to the image to the public that these people were kooks or criminals— or whatever." So, knowing that, how do you feel about your participation in that whole scene? "Well, I did it in good faith. And I thought it was properly motivated." On your part. "It was on my part, and I thought it was on their part too. I thought that they were genuinely desirous of getting him involved, hoping he would resolve it."*

**Had you known at the time that there was a psychological ploy, would you have willingly participated? "I don't think so. I guess hindsight is 20-20, but if you know you're being used in an improper way, then I think you draw the line and say 'Wait a minute.'" [Interview with George Garrett, 29 May 1997]**

### **Summary and Remarks**

George Garrett was named by the senior lawyer for the defense during the Gustafsen Lake trial, as an inappropriate party in the police operation. The lawyer argued that

Garrett's participation with the RCMP strategy crossed professional boundaries: he had inserted himself into a news story, and he had lost his journalistic objectivity by collaborating with one of his news sources. In the defense council's estimation, the RCMP ploy was to assist in the negative characterization of Clark and, in the process, the people inside the camp made Garrett's participation more damaging to his professional reputation. A few journalists, who know George Garrett, considered that his involvement in the RCMP plan was *"worse than what CBC did,"* (a topic that will be covered later). The journalists who were interviewed after George Garrett's trial appearance said that the fact that Garrett was so well respected in the media community, and that he is considered their "elder," saved him from peer censure. One journalist commented, *"Put anyone else into that equation—you'd get a different outcome."*

The following is an analysis of the factors and negotiation process that resulted in Garrett becoming a messenger to Bruce Clark for the RCMP. In this situation, I posit that the negotiations superficially involved Garrett supplying information, but underlying this, the negotiations really concerned Garrett's services (as a messenger) and his identity (a member of the media, as opposed to a police officer). First, Garrett was vulnerable to being exploited. He was (and remains) a well-known supporter of the police, thus increasing the likelihood of his co-operation with the police. A request for his assistance by the RCMP appealed to Garrett's sense of morality and his desire to contribute in some way to potentially save lives. Garrett was also known to be trustworthy, a character trait that he holds with pride; thus, the RCMP could trust that he would carry out the request. The RCMP request to Garrett was coercive because they did not provide him with the details of the extent to which his co-operation would involve him, nor their actual motivations for this request. The RCMP did not give Garrett sufficient time to evaluate his professional involvement in the request, or to speak to his employer or other colleagues, who may have been better able to critically evaluate the situation. The original RCMP request for Garrett to find Bruce Clark expanded into Garrett agreeing to tape the interview, which situated the request as a reciprocal arrangement. The favor

netted Garrett a news story, and it provided the RCMP with material documentation of Garrett's interaction with Clark. The RCMP request enlarged again, with Garrett agreeing to present the tape at an RCMP strategy meeting. Although Garrett was aware of the video-taping during the meeting, he was not advised, at the time of the original request (to find Clark), that this meeting would be video-recorded. This progression of favors and commitments exacted a higher cost to Garrett than that to which he initially agreed, resulting in Garrett being drawn deeper into the police initiative—for which he was accused of being an RCMP collaborator.

Garrett's involvement in this police strategy was not mentioned as causing any strain in the police/media relations at the time of the standoff. However, at least as a partial consequence of Garrett's role, Bruce Clark did not leave 100 Mile House as he had originally planned, and he went on to draw primarily negative media attention, which discredited the people in the camp. It would be difficult to assess whether this would have happened without Garrett's involvement. The data suggest that Clark was an enthusiastic media source, and the quantity and tone of media attention he received could not be traced to Garrett's initial negotiation between the journalist and the RCMP media liaison. Clark had the agency to control much of his public presentation, although the media seemed to be guided by the RCMP assessment of him.

#### **Coverage of the Attack on the RCMP Suburban**

**4 September 1995:** *"Shots fired at Mountie patrolling camp; he returns fire."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 11 September 1995 B8]

**4 September 1995:** *"RCMP Cpl. John Ward said the shooting occurred at 8:45 p.m. when the natives opened fire on an RCMP vehicle that was on patrol a few kilometers from the native camp."* ["Gunfight erupts between RCMP, natives," *The Vancouver Sun*, 5 September 1995 A1]

**4 September 1995:** *"The militants, who set up camp in June, fired on an RCMP emergency response team a few kilometers from the camp late Monday and then stalked them during the night, Ward said. The armored vehicles helped extricate some team members Tuesday, although others were still in the bush surrounding the camp. "This is the fifth incident where members of the RCMP have been shot at," Ward said Tuesday.*



*"It's become clear that we must deploy armed personnel carriers to provide protection to our members." Ward initially said police officers returned fire Monday night, but he later said that had not been confirmed."*

[*"Army called in after Mounties shot at again," The (St John's Nfld) Evening Telegram, (reprinted in the Globe and Mail), 6 September 1995 p.8 (CP)*]

**5 September 1995:** *"Shooting prompts police to bring in four armored personnel carriers. Four RCMP officers who came under fire from armed native Indians later ignored opportunities to shoot their attackers, an RCMP official said Tuesday. 'They showed great restraint,' Cpl. John Ward said of the decision by the four officers, members of the emergency response team, not to fire on armed natives who followed police when they retreated from the camp."*

[*"RCMP exhibited 'great restraint,'" Calgary Herald, from the Vancouver Sun, 6 September 1995 A3*]

Establishing the links between the text of the news accounts of the shooting incident of 4 September 1995 and the media context of the event was problematic for this research. This is because the details provided by the RCMP to the press at the time conflicted with the episode that actually took place. None of the journalists in the early part of the fieldwork mentioned this shooting incident as being significant in terms of the media coverage. There was no sense of anything being untoward until the topic was discussed in the trial, almost a year later. The RCMP Report to Crown Counsel is used to summarize the shooting episode as it occurred, as opposed to how it was reported by the media. Three RCMP vehicles carrying constables were driving down 1100 Forestry Road, and gradually the second and third vehicles lost sight of the lead vehicle. The second vehicle, carrying four constables, encountered a muddy section, which the report refers to as a "mud bog." It was at this time that some of the occupants "*heard a popping sound.*" They noticed that the right side mirror collapsed toward the truck. The Report to Crown Counsel states that the officers in the second vehicle assumed that they were being fired upon, hence they returned random fire. During the investigative interviews by the RCMP shortly after the episode, only one of the occupants of the last vehicle attested to hearing gunshots originating from the side of the road. The other three passengers could not see anyone from the roadside firing at the vehicle ahead, although they witnessed shots being

fired by the officers in the vehicle ahead of them. The day after the alleged shooting, a police and service dog search of the area found “one old shotgun shell casing.”

Although the RCMP investigating team realized, within 24 hours, that there was little evidence to support the original account of the shooting incident, there was only one minor correction given to the media. This was to recant the earlier statement that the police officers returned fire. There was no correction to lessen the assertion that the officers had been stalked by people from the camp. The only evidence in the Report to Crown Counsel that might support that someone may have been in the vicinity was that grass around a nearby tree was trampled down and identifiable footprints were in the mud. Except for the old shotgun casing found on the ground, the only other shell casings were found inside the police vehicle that was allegedly under attack. These casings would have come from shots fired by constables inside the vehicle, who had indeed returned gunfire. There was no indication to the journalists at the time that the event may have been a case of frayed nerves on the part of RCMP officers on patrol. One journalist described the press release of the incident, and the depiction of the officers being stalked, as “*very convincing.*”

According to defense lawyer George Wool, taped conversations between the people in the camp and the RCMP negotiators confirmed that Wolverine advised the negotiators that the reported shooting incident (heard over the *CBC Radio*) was not true. Wolverine accused the RCMP of “*bullshitting.*” Wool asserts that, “*The police knew right then that they had a timely denial of that media event*” (Interview with George Wool, 29 May 1997). The police vehicle was taken for forensic examination, and on 16 September, the released forensic report stated that the mirror could have been hit by a foreign object, such as a tree branch. This conclusion was also included in the Report to Crown Counsel. None of the findings of the police interviews, the results from the search for evidence, nor the results of the forensic report were provided to the media during the time of the standoff, when it was a national media event. Yet, at about the same time as the news

coverage of this shooting incident, the provincial premier confirmed, in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, that the APCs had been ordered two weeks prior.<sup>115</sup>

### **Summary and Remarks**

A discourse analysis of the various versions of the news accounts follows. The reader should keep in mind that the information contained was largely unsubstantiated. The headlines of the above news excerpts summarize the incident: the RCMP were targets of an unprovoked attack, and that attacks such as this had happened before. The headlines imply that despite being victims, the RCMP showed “restraint,” and that an appropriate response to the violence of the situation was to bring in armored personnel carriers. The headlines accurately reflect the quotations from the RCMP media liaison, who provides the dominant perspective of the news account. Lastly, the headlines also contribute to a schema of the standoff and the various actors involved, and fit in with the overall frame of “law and order versus criminals.” The text elaborates this theme, with the added detail of this being the fifth shooting incident—a rhetorical strategy that adds to the impression of accuracy of the report. The enumeration of the number of attacks plays on the sense of danger associated with the characterization of the people in the camp. The RCMP media liaison’s assurances that the RCMP were acting with “great restraint,” and the details provided, point to a desire to portray the RCMP in a favorable light. The references to the RCMP requiring APCs to protect them from stalking and armed “native Indians” is reminiscent of the age-old motif of an “Indian War,” except that the “cavalry” which was called in was comprised of APCs. The geographic range of the news stories cited above confirms that the press releases reached a national audience, thus increasing the scope of influence on public opinion. According to one journalist, “*The truck episode with the*

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<sup>115</sup> The RCMP press releases at 100 Mile House implied that the shooting incident was the cause for the armored personnel carriers (APCs) to be brought in. The twinning in the news accounts of this detail, and the precautionary cancellation of Native intermediaries being allowed into the camp, added to the sense of danger and the volatility of the people in the camp. Another news story published in the *Victoria Times Colonist* at about the same time (6 September 1995) quoted British Columbia premier Harcourt advising that the police had ordered the APCs two weeks earlier, around 23 August 1995. This is taken from the news story, “Harcourt calls for patience as key to Gustafsen peace,” in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 6 September 1995 a3.

*mirrors—was never corrected. Initially this was an innocent mistake. But failing to correct this as fast as they could exaggerated the seriousness of the incident.*” [Interview with journalist, anon] <sup>116</sup>

Another connection between the text of the news stories and the news context is taken from RCMP Operational Manual II.16 Media/RCMP Relations, which was in effect at the time of the standoff. (Refer to Appendix 4 for excerpts of the RCMP/Media Relations protocols.) The manual represents the codified norms of communications between the RCMP and the media during police investigations. It outlines provisions that call for information which is to be released to the media to be “relevant, timely and reliable,” and to “keep a record of information given to the media to protect against misquotation, exaggeration or sensationalism” (Section C.3:1872/93-04-23 and Section F.1c:2114/94-11-17). The manual also asks that any information released to the media not “result in injury, injustice, or embarrassment to anyone” Section F.1d:2114/94-11-17). When I asked Sergeant Montague, the senior media liaison, about the press releases of this shooting episode, he stated, *“I can’t deal with that, because I wasn’t there.”*<sup>117</sup> Other RCMP officials interviewed in this study acknowledged that *“mistakes were made,”* and the mistakes with the media were largely due to the hectic pace and the sustained stress during the standoff. Nevertheless, my research has identified a breach between the RCMP institutional protocols for media relations and the actual media practices conducted by the RCMP at the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

### **Checkpoint 17**

Checkpoint 17 was the name assigned to the location of the barricades on the main forestry road leading to the camp. Perhaps because Checkpoint 17 was associated with extreme working conditions for both police and media, it evoked significant meanings for them. Checkpoint 17 became the outpost for the RCMP controlling the perimeter of the

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<sup>116</sup> According to this research, the errors in the characterization of the 4 September 1995 shooting episode were noted in the Petition for release from custody, 12 April 1996.

<sup>117</sup> At this point during the conflict, Sergeant Montague had taken a five-day rest leave, and he was replaced by his assistant, Corporal Ward.

restricted access area. It was a transition marker: it divided what was allowable for the media and the public, and what was forbidden. It marked the entry point to a different reality, one that was controlled by the police. Although journalists did not pursue their curiosities, they could only imagine what was beyond the barricades, and around that curve in the road. The camera crews and journalists that stayed at the checkpoint had only a few tasks they could accomplish. As the closest point to the action of the news story, the idea was to capture, on film, politicians or other important people driving to the camp. The windshields and windows of vehicles passing by were usually tinted, so the occupants could not be identified unless the vehicles pulled over and the people inside stopped to chat.

Over time, the police and media who regularly stayed at the checkpoint developed a friendly camaraderie; there was none of the aloofness between most of the journalists and the police that was evident in town. Police officers shared rations (which one journalist said were much better than his canned food), and they would throw a football, or sit around on lawn chairs when nothing was happening. On warm sunny days, the media would drop the back doors of their "4X4s," take off their shirts, lie back and suntan: *"It was a bit like sitting at the beach, waiting for something to happen."* One afternoon, a colleague on the telephone from Vancouver said that there had been a news flash on the internet that a policeman had been shot at Gustafsen Lake—the comment inadvertently came over the journalist's speaker, and everybody heard it. *"Everybody just jumped—especially the policemen! But it turned out to be nothing. It was some hoax. But it showed that everybody was tense all the time, waiting for something to happen."*

The level of stress during the conflict was not particularly noticeable in town, except for during some press conferences when the RCMP announced serious shooting incidents. The sense of tension was more palpable for journalists and police the closer one came to the camp. Checkpoint 17 is the closest the media ever got to witnessing this uneasiness.

One journalist recalled that as evidence of the officers' fear one of the police officers wore two flak jackets instead of one, "*in that heat!*".

At Checkpoint 17, evenings were particularly nerve-racking. For several days after the two officers who had been wearing flak jackets had been shot at, police were especially alert for people from the camp stalking and perhaps sniping. This was particularly the case for police and media who were unaccustomed to rural life. The night was so dark in this isolated area, that they could not see anything. Sounds of wild animals and wandering cattle were interpreted as people from the camp sneaking around in the bush. When the tension abated from the flak jacket incident, and there was more confidence that the area was secured, they started having evening campfires. A few days after the shooting death of the Native Dudley George at the standoff at Ipperwash, Ontario, journalists and two RCMP officers (who had never been assigned to this post before) were sitting around the campfire. The officers went into the bush to investigate a noise and one of them inadvertently fired a gun. This sent the journalists scrambling for safety, and a group of ERT converged on the area. The noise turned out to be a grazing cow, and the two RCMP at the checkpoint were relieved of their duties that night. According to the journalist sources, the next day, Sergeant Montague announced that it had been a "quiet night," and he refused official comment on this incident.<sup>118</sup> The "unofficial" shooting episode at Checkpoint 17 is instructive in showing how the RCMP media liaison seemed reluctant to confirm to journalists, even as witnesses to an incident, of occasions that would embarrass the RCMP.

For the journalists and camera crews, the "big events" became redefined in terms of what was unique in the journalists' isolated situation. They made note of the regularity of shift changes every 12 hours with the parade of 10 or 12 vehicles carrying uniformed ERT with camouflaged paint on their faces. They watched as the RCMP dog handler, and the

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<sup>118</sup> The research data confirm that *BCTV* included a short video clip and a voice-over of a shooting incident at Checkpoint 17 that bears a strong resemblance to the above incident.

occasional convoy of unmarked supply trucks drove through. Television newscasts that featured video clips outside of the press conference included action shots of drive-bys as vehicles drove past the checkpoint. A major break in the story was the sudden appearance of ambulances because this implied an accident or an outbreak of violence. However, witnessing the APCs rumbling down the gravel road was the biggest story to break at Checkpoint 17.

### **Media Witnessing the Arrival of Armored Personnel Carriers**

**5 September 1995:** *“Four military armored personnel carriers roar past the outer perimeter, headed for the camp area. Police say the National Defence<sup>119</sup> APCs will be used to transport RCMP patrols.”* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

When the armored personnel carriers (APCs), also known as Bisons, were brought into the region of Gustafsen Lake on 5 September, it was one of the biggest news stories of the standoff witnessed by the media. The arrival of the APCs was all the more shocking to the journalists because the police had been denying various media queries about whether the military or military equipment were going to be called in. One of the television camera crews at Checkpoint 17 received a vague tip from police officers a few hours earlier: *“I had my tripod set up, longshot—ARRRRR—and they came flying by, all 4 of them, with the guys standing proud as daylight up there. They shot through...And then I phoned back to 100 Mile House—and it was like—Highway 1 to Nowhere—coming up...So that was a big turning point—that. A really big turning point—because that was a real show of force.”* [Interview with journalist, anon] Journalists at Checkpoint 17 made hasty telephone calls to colleagues, who were sound asleep at 100 Mile House, and then to the main desks at Vancouver.

At 100 Mile House, reporters were waiting to hear the official word about the APCs. *“And the police aren’t—they aren’t commenting, so everybody’s tense again—wondering ‘What’s going on? What’s going on?’ And the cops aren’t there to say anything. So you’re scrambling to find Montague—you don’t know where he is—he might be in his*

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<sup>119</sup> This spelling of “defence” is how it appeared in the published news story.

*room, or maybe in the detachment—trying to get him to tell us what is going on—'cause he's the only cop there who would ever tell us what was going on...The next news conference, whenever that would be—maybe in an hour after something happened—might be two hours—he would—he would tell you what was going on as much as he wanted to tell you... ” [Interview with journalist, anon]*

Within minutes of the telephone calls from Checkpoint 17, a brigade of journalists jumped into in their vehicles and barreled down the forestry road as quickly as they could—to see the video footage. By the time the media arrived, the APCs were past the Checkpoint 17 and parked three kilometers ahead at what would later be revealed by the RCMP as Camp Zulu. The media were not informed until the end of the standoff that four additional armored personnel carriers were brought in on large trucks from alternate forestry roads in order to avoid detection. At the time, nobody questioned why some of the APCs were brought down the main forestry road in full view for the journalists at Checkpoint 17 to see, while others were brought in secretly.

### **Summary and Remarks**

For the journalists, the meanings of the APCs centered on two aspects: that the dispute had taken a more serious turn, and that the media had documentation of the event. The sight of the four armored personnel carriers, roaring down the dusty road at dawn, was eerie. The occasion implied some degree of military assistance, increasing the sense of drama and the potential for a violent confrontation. At this point in the event, the journalists were starved for information and first-hand witnessing. The coverage of the APCs satisfied these needs with a critical development that they could report, and with the bonus of validating their media efficacy: *“We were there!”* The video footage was seen across Canadian television, and photographs were shown in most newspapers across Canada the next day. These were shown again in subsequent news stories chronicling the event, as a reminder of the RCMP show of force. Still, the journalists in this research did not consider the impact on the audience or critically assess how the media may have been



serving the police, who had the most to gain from this coverage. In this evaluation, the significance of the media coverage (besides gaining a top story), was that it uncritically transmitted the RCMP message of their prowess to the public. The visual image of the armored personnel carriers evoked a war rhetoric that had the potential of inflaming audiences supporting any side of the conflict.<sup>120</sup> This aspect will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

### **Press Conferences at 100 Mile House**

The press conferences at 100 Mile House were the central mechanism for authoritative information dissemination during the standoff, and they played an integral part in the media characterizations. Originally, these were held at the local RCMP detachment, but this soon became impossible, with the number of media, and all of their equipment increasing. The management of the Red Coach Inn offered to accommodate press conferences in its main meeting room in the basement.<sup>121</sup> When the supporters of the Gustafsen Lake camp requested their own place to talk to the media, the management allowed them to use the vacant service station next door.<sup>122</sup> In between press conferences, people also gathered in the hotel parking lot to talk. Many reporters considered the Red Coach “command central” during the standoff. Once the barricades were established, the journalists did not venture far from town to cover new story angles, in case they might miss a breaking news announcement at the hotel. Most of the television news casts of the standoff included video-recordings of the press conferences, and the newspaper and radio

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<sup>120</sup> During his court testimony, Superintendent Olfert acknowledged the risks of a media leak regarding the RCMP acquiring armored personnel carriers. He stated his concerns that the news would lead to a racial firestorm during a strategy meeting held on 30 August, 1995. This meeting was video-taped and later played during the trial. This information is taken from the news story, “RCMP feared a ‘war’,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 9 January 1997 A8.

<sup>121</sup> The hotel management recognized that communications between media and advising media of RCMP press conferences would be problematic, and two message boards were set up. One of these message boards became an information center for supporters of the protest, who posted faxes from supporting groups. This message board became a source of contention at the time of the standoff because the hotel management received complaints from guests that the messages on the faxes were offensive. Near the conclusion of the standoff, these faxes were removed by the hotel staff. Some of the protest supporters believed that the directive came from the RCMP, but this was firmly denied by the hotel management.

<sup>122</sup> The Red Coach Inn and the service station are owned by the Emissaries of the Divine Light.

news accounts all depended on the RCMP press releases for quotations and summaries of developments.

The RCMP controlled the timing of the press conferences, and aside from breaking news announcements that could be made at any time, the press conferences were regulated to coincide with television news broadcasts. The latest one that journalists recalled took place around 2:00 a.m. This meant that media had to develop a communications network to notify each other: as soon as a notice of a press conference was posted in the lobby, journalists scrambled to find their colleagues. The scene was chaotic, with reporters running around, banging on doors, and calling out that the press conference would take place in an hour—or less. It was even more disorganized because, with the frequent room changes, it was difficult to remember where their colleagues were staying. Although the journalists were in competition with each other, they felt a responsibility to look out for each another, to make sure that nobody was left out. *“It was messy...and it WAS messy, and everyone was exhausted. But no, I’ve never seen anything like it. We’d have news conferences at 7:00 in the morning and 1:00 at night...we were all really ragged.”* [Interview with journalist, anon] The *100 Mile House Free Press* office, several blocks away from the hotel, was informed of press conferences only on a sporadic basis, and this was a sensitive issue for the staff. During the entire time of the standoff, the RCMP media team did not contact Steven Frasher, the editor. He felt like he was *“excluded from [his] own backyard.”*

Press conferences provided the platform on which the RCMP could advise the media of new developments, “for the record.” In accordance with RCMP regulations, the information was provided in English as well as in French, usually necessitating the participation of two RCMP spokespersons. Although the RCMP generally took “center stage,” other spokespersons participated, such as Ovide Mercredi (while he was in town), and a few of the Native supporters (until other arrangements could be made). For about

the last 10 days of the standoff, Native intermediaries provided the media with updates about the camp.

As a speech event, the press conferences were also the site of negotiations and struggles for media sources, and places where the media constructed news stories. As exemplified below, the communicative features of the press conferences incorporated aspects of story telling, performance, and audience interaction. The norms and practices of press conferences at 100 Mile House were not commonly understood, creating difficulties for spokespersons, media, and spectators.

One journalist described the aggressive press conferences as *“a clash between people who needed information for the sake of filling in 30 minutes, and knowing that some of the police were getting adept at serving it up in the most dramatic fashion.”* [Interview with journalist, anon] The media had brought with them their aggressive press conference style from Vancouver, and re-created it at the 100 Mile House Red Coach meeting room. Press conferences were also open to the public, and most of the non-media who attended were supporters of the camp, and may not have understood the communicative conventions of press conferences. According to one journalist, a few of the spectators attending the press conference would ask questions along with the various media, and sometimes these questions would be rather pointed. Sergeant Montague appeared to get upset and *“stomp away, and the rest of us media would have nothing.”* From the journalists’ recollections, it appears that some of the spectators did not understand that a press conference is for the benefit of the media, not the public. Once the RCMP media liaison established the rule that he would only answer questions from the media, the press conferences were returned to the usual format.

The RCMP media team was conscious of their performances during presentations. Either they attempted to convey emotional detachment from the content of the press release, or

they presented an emotional response to create a particular impression for the media.<sup>123</sup> However, these performative efforts did not work as planned on all occasions. Journalists are keen observers of people's reactions, and they were watching the RCMP media liaison for the coherence between the content of what was said and his emotional tone while conveying the press release. These subtleties gave some journalists a sense of what the dynamics were like for the RCMP. One journalist noted: *"It was quite clear that some of what the police were reflecting to us and what sounded like angry statements—were really reflections of fairly frightened, alarmed and confused cops. Montague probably reflected that fear more than once when he came out to give his statements."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

A phrase that Sergeant Montague repeatedly used at the press conferences with the media was "the multifaceted operational plan" that the RCMP were carrying out. A few journalists thought the phrase was an obfuscation that sounded impressive, but it did not hold much meaning. The media liaison also advised the media, on more than one occasion, that they were part of this "plan," and that they were working together with the police to carry out this "plan." While several journalists discussed the implications (which will be more fully covered in Chapter 8), the phrase became a standing joke in some of the news rooms in Vancouver and back at 100 Mile House: *"And in the Red Coach, somebody would say, 'Oh, what are you having for breakfast?' and I'd say, 'I can't tell you that. It's part of my multi-faceted operational plan for the day!' sort of thing... You realize the stupidity of it. Like, you're joking about it—because that's sort of the best way to be critical about it."* Another journalist grumbled, *"To this day, that phrase makes me want to get a beer!"* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

The journalists also had initial difficulties adjusting to the press releases given by some of the Native spokespersons. For the journalists, it was imperative to be able to include information from the Native representatives who were in contact with the camp almost on

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<sup>123</sup> This was confirmed by Sergeant Montague during my interview with him on 27 May 1997.

a daily basis. This source offered information to the media that was recent and relevant to the development of the event. The perspective offset the RCMP as the only source of information about the camp. According to the journalists, Native spokespeople seemed to have difficulty communicating information that the media could put into quotable forms. Part of the problem may have been that the Native media liaisons were not trained to deal with a large group of journalists, as was the RCMP media team. One journalist considered that the problems in the communications may have stemmed from a fear of being misquoted, perhaps a carryover of the stereotype that Native people had of mainstream media. Another observation was that the spokesperson would leave the podium immediately after giving a prepared statement, without asking the media if there were any questions, which was a crucial component of the press conference. The journalists found that these spokespersons seemed to become more at ease at the podium over time, and the pattern of communication for press conferences came more in line with the expectations of the journalists. It will be shown later in this chapter that the communication issues with the media for the intermediaries were more far-reaching than the media realized.

Some of the journalists were aware of how the public could erroneously assume that the action of the event was in the town, rather than several miles away. One reporter made the point that the Red Coach press conferences were 35 kilometers away from the camp, and that Checkpoint 17 was 17 kilometers away from the town, but they might just as well have been in Vancouver. A television journalist described having to hedge the information provided during live television updates. He said that he continually emphasized that the camp was actually 35 kilometers away from where he was standing, and that a spike bar and a barricade on the forestry road prevented closer media access. The journalist wished that he could have announced that none of the media really knew what was going on. He said that he held back from making this disclosure while “on the air.”

Journalists regarded most of the RCMP press conferences as inadequate to satisfy their needs for news coverage and deadline demands. The RCMP generally withheld details of developments, and they portioned out information selectively. The journalists also considered much of the information vague, except when the bilingual RCMP media liaison gave the French-language press releases. The bilingual journalists identified these as more informative than the English language versions.<sup>124</sup> The RCMP media team explained to the press that they would not provide information that would compromise their police operation. However, the fact remained that there was usually insufficient information for covering such a news event. Because press conferences were the only legitimate venue for RCMP information dissemination, a large media audience was guaranteed. Some journalists complained that attending the press conferences was hardly worth the effort when there was no breaking development. The scarce supply of information resulted in the journalists' "*starvation for news*," which characterized much of the Gustafsen Lake standoff media coverage. This chronic situation would also have an effect on the reporting of information presented by the RCMP at the press conference that advised them of the most violent shooting episode. This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

The hotel management arranged for the supporters of the protest, who were most often Native, to have their own facilities for press conferences. Yet, the media did not attend these press conferences regularly. The primary reason offered was that much of the information was repetitious and had limitations in being "newsworthy," at least for the conventions of the large media outlets. According to several of the journalists, the supporters talked about their perspectives of various historical contexts that underpin the situation of Native people in the province, and how the protest at Gustafsen Lake fit into this history. Consequently, the journalists could only use this as background for the news stories. Historical information does not evolve, as does news. The journalists were

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<sup>124</sup> The journalists found that the contrast in information in the English and French RCMP press releases had more to do with the change of media liaisons for the French edition, rather than anything intrinsic about the language itself.

interested in fresh news about the camp. When the supporters made reference to what was going on in the camp, *"We would say, but how do you know?—You weren't there!"* A few of the supporters may have been in the camp a couple of weeks before—but for the journalists, that news was dated. Consequently, the supporters of the protest and the mainstream media had difficulty in accommodating each other.

Another component of the press conferences was the teleconferences held between the media and the provincial Attorney General Dosanjh. These were usually arranged at the behest of the print and radio journalists<sup>125</sup> through his adjunct communications officer, Paul Corns, who came to 100 Mile House for this purpose. The telephone interviews were held in one of the Red Coach Inn meeting rooms, or in one of the hotel rooms. There were no established times, and the number of reporters who attended varied between two and eight. These telephone interviews were open to the public, and occasionally non-media attended, and these people included the Native intermediaries. According to the journalists, the Attorney General *"made himself very, very available, right from the beginning,"* and near the end of the conflict, the telephone press conferences were almost daily. The information that the Attorney General provided consisted mostly of statements in support of the RCMP. *"He would keep telling us that he trusted the RCMP, and that they were in control of the situation, and that whatever resources they needed they would get, and that they didn't want bloodshed, and that this wasn't the way to solve land claims in the province, and that there was a legitimate process. We always got the same answer, no matter what we asked him."* Another journalist commented on the consistent theme: *"He was in there—sort of 'law and order, law and order.'"* The journalists noted that, towards the end of the standoff, the Attorney General's statements seemed to be more strident. The reporters regarded the Attorney General as an important news source that provided the provincial government's

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<sup>125</sup> The Attorney General was available for interviews in Victoria and Vancouver for the television outlets, and these were incorporated in the Gustafsen Lake television news stories.

perspective: that the Gustafsen Lake standoff was a “*police problem*.” The journalists concurred that, “*We knew there was a lot of politicking at the time.*” [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

Press conferences can be assessed as a speech event specific to the media tradition, with tacit conventions of communication. Some of the conventions involve appropriate content, and the process of relaying and clarifying information. It is an example of a negotiation: spokespersons give their group’s perspective to the public, and the media is provided with information that will be transformed into a news story. The most useful information for the media features qualities such as relevance, immediacy, clarity, and reliability. At the Gustafsen Lake standoff, status figured into how these criteria were judged. Although the journalists described the supporters’ information as repetitive, and thus not particularly news worthy, they also found the Attorney General’s information repetitive, yet his quotations maintained a high news value. The status afforded to this elected government official, whose portfolio connected to the policing of the province, ensured his comments would receive media attention. Indeed, the journalists sought out this news source. From the descriptions above, the negotiation of news information between media and spokespersons of all levels of expertise presented challenges. In addition, the press conferences were a limited source for journalists gathering information. The RCMP served up the news according to what they wanted the media to publish. Due to the media’s own preservation of credibility to their audiences, they had to continue with the illusion of presenting authentic accounts, although few of these could be independently verified. To raise the issue of not being able to confirm much of what the RCMP were advising would directly call into question the credibility of the police source, and that might jeopardize media credibility as well.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Of the newspaper outlets that covered the Gustafsen Lake standoff, only the *Vancouver Sun* discussed how the lack of media witnessing had influenced the news coverage of the standoff, and these accounts were printed at the conclusion of the standoff. These include: “Selected media get look at Zulu: RCMP allow trips into forward base of operations,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 18 September 1995 A3; and the editorial, “All the news that’s fit to...be manipulated,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 22 September 1995 A18.



A convention of the press conference is the strict identification of who may participate and the appropriate communicative roles that they play. Typical press conferences allow spokespersons and the media personnel as the two groups of participants who engage each other in providing and clarifying information which is to be incorporated into news stories. Spectators are considered guests, but their questions during the media question period breach the protocols for press conferences. Such interference threatens a breakdown in the speech event. During the Gustafsen Lake standoff press conferences, some of the spectators may not have understood that interactions during press conferences are for spokespersons and the media. The complication was that, for much of the standoff, the RCMP were the only official source of information about the camp and the police operation for the media as well as for the non-media people gathered in the room. It was the only possible venue for interaction between the audience and the police media liaison.<sup>127</sup> When the protocols of press conferences excluded the public audience as active participants, the lines of inquiry were restricted to aspects of the event that only enhanced news stories. In the case of the press conferences during the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the media may not have been asking the same questions as would concerned citizens and relatives of the people inside the camp. The protocols of the press conferences were re-established, with the RCMP media liaison only answering questions initiated by the media. Many months afterward I met civilians who believed that they had been silenced.

The creation of a second press conference site allowed supporters to speak on topics that they believed were not forthcoming from the RCMP dominated press conferences next door. The people who spoke there did not have to adhere to the standard protocols or norms of press conferences. The second venue provided a platform for those who did not

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<sup>127</sup> There are newspaper and television news accounts that show that some of the spectators spoke with the RCMP media liaison after the press conferences. On one occasion, a parent of a teenaged individual inside the camp confronted Sergeant Montague after a press conference. She is quoted as saying, "*I want her to come home and I want her to come home safe. I want to let you know my daughter is not a terrorist. She attended the sundance ceremony on those grounds. I want to see her babies being born.*" This excerpt is taken from the news story, "Indians offered gifts for freedom after talks fail," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 29 August 1995 A1.

adhere to the RCMP definition that the conflict was a law enforcement issue. Instead, the frame offered at this venue was that the dispute at Gustafsen Lake was connected to the resolution of Aboriginal land issues in British Columbia. Nonetheless, this content had only limited appeal for the mainstream media gathering news. Also, the service station venue implied a loss of status for the information disseminated; the RCMP delivery of press releases in the hotel conference room connoted officialdom, authority and credibility. The vacant service station (although providing a space at a time when space was in short supply) was less likely to be associated with these qualities.<sup>128</sup> On another plane, even the physical appearance of the service station and the lack of amenities made this media center an impoverished alternative to the Red Coach Inn. The proximity to the hotel allowed the media to attend easily. However, the service station was far enough away from the conference room in the hotel that journalists would not feel obliged to walk next door, especially if the information was not regarded as newsworthy.

#### **RCMP Confiscation of *CBC Television* Video-Tapes**

**6 September 1995:** *"Meanwhile, the RCMP arrived at the Vancouver newsroom of CBC-TV Wednesday with a search warrant and demanded video cassettes containing coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The television station turned over the tapes after receiving word from a lawyer that the RCMP's warrant was legal, said CBC senior producer Connie Monk. 'As a general rule we don't like handing over tapes and we don't hand them over,' said Monk. 'But we also comply with the law.' The RCMP did not go to other Lower Mainland television stations."*

[*"Police seek assistance to end standoff," Vancouver Sun, 7 September 1995 B1*]

There were two instances when the RCMP demanded *CBC Television* video-tapes with legal search warrants. On 23 August 1995, a few days following the airing of a segment from the video-taped program, *Defenders of the Land*, provided by Gustafsen Lake supporters, the RCMP presented a warrant to the *CBC* Vancouver headquarters for this video-recording. On 6 September 1995, the RCMP demanded all of the video-tapes which were taken inside the camp by the *CBC* camera crew. According to RCMP

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<sup>128</sup> A test of this argument (although a supposition) would be to imagine a reversal of players and locations. I am predicting that, if the camp supporters held press conferences in the hotel conference room, and the RCMP held press conferences at the vacant service station, the status hierarchy would most likely be reversed—or, at least, create a sense of discontinuity.

sources, the police confiscated the material because they lacked physical evidence for a criminal investigation. They wanted confirmation of the identities of the people in the camp, the number and type of weapons, and scenes that showed the terrain and defensive positions that the people inside might take against RCMP officers. The video-tapes provided scenes which had useful evidence for laying criminal charges. One video-tape clip showed a couple of people in the camp shooting at an RCMP helicopter. Another clip captured some people in the camp, unselfconsciously walking around with weapons. A few of these weapons appeared to be AK-47s.

The journalists felt that handing over the material put them into a position that breached a trust with their sources. One journalist recalled that the individuals who brought the video-tape to the Vancouver *CBC Television* studio naively believed that the information would cast the people inside the camp in a favorable light. It was as if they were not aware that the video-tape contained incriminating evidence against their group. A journalist commented that the RCMP exploited a trust between the *CBC* crew and the people in the camp that had allowed them access. *"They showed more—damning stuff of the Natives, but they still had the respect of the Natives. The CBC had the tape of them shooting at the helicopter..."*<sup>129</sup> *They [the RCMP] go through every shot on the tape that was there—that the CBC cameraman took—'cause it's used as evidence—and that's a whole different story, whether that's right or wrong, or whether they used the crew's access to get in there—I have a real hard time with that. But they were in no position to argue—'cause the cameraman could've been taken from the line, arrested."* [Interview with journalist, anon] Ironically, the confiscation of media products lent credibility to Wolverine's earlier accusation to a journalist that the media were "spies working with the police and that they would take notes and deliver them to the police."

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<sup>129</sup> *CBC Television* had purchased this video-recording from a free-lance photographer from the Gustafsen Lake camp.

## Summary and Remarks

The following analysis considers the negotiation forms and processes involved in the confiscation of video-taped materials of the camp. The representatives from the camp voluntarily turned over their video-taped program, *Defenders of the Land*, to the *CBC* television outlet. At the time, the camp representatives did not sign a waiver to acknowledge the risks for broadcasting this video-tape. This is not a standard procedure for the *CBC*, nor is it for most media. At the very least, the negotiation between the television crew and the people at the camp at the minimum involved the tacit permission for the crew to film the camp. According to media convention, subjects are solely responsible for their behavior while on camera.<sup>130</sup> The negotiations between the media outlet and the camp (or its representatives) involved reciprocity: the people would gain some media attention, and the media out would have a potential news story. However, the video recordings contained valuable information that could assist the police in their investigation, information that the police could not have produced themselves. According to the journalists who were involved, the video recordings taken by the media outlet were not intended to record illegal activities, nor did the producers anticipate that they would be obliged to turn the materials over to the police. The final negotiations for information took place between the RCMP and *CBC Television* news in Vancouver and at Checkpoint 17. Both instances were legitimate appropriations by the RCMP of all of the video materials. Consent from the camp was not required for the release of these materials. The media outlet was forced to comply with the RCMP demand for the materials or face further legal consequences. At the same time, the RCMP appropriation of the video-tapes put the television outlet in a position where it appeared that they had become an arm of the law. For the public broadcaster, the lines between itself and the RCMP had become blurred.

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<sup>130</sup> Permission for media to film is implied with the understanding that the sources know the camera is in their presence. As a rule, subjects do not preview raw footage. Media frown upon this practice because it might invite news sources to attempt editorial control, which the media outlet wants to avoid. Nor would it be appropriate for the journalists to warn the sources to conduct themselves any differently because the camera is filming them. This would be considered media tampering with the news event. This information and the policies and practices of television news production were confirmed with *CBC Television* producer Sue Rideout in a telephone interview, 7 June 1999.

The media's objectives to gather and present news, and the RCMP's objective to conduct a criminal investigation, overlapped in the case of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Although the media outlet may not have deliberately compromised the camp, the outlet's inability to protect the tapes did jeopardize its sources. In both of these situations, once the television outlet had possession of the video property, the people in the camp relinquished control of it. At the same time, it appears that the television outlet did not have much control of the video property either.<sup>131</sup> The above analysis is not an attempt to minimize the known facts that the people in the camp were in possession of illegal weapons, that they shot at police helicopters, or that they shot at police officers. It is not to suggest that the police, as law enforcers, should not benefit from the assistance of citizens in conducting investigations, especially when evidence is at a premium. The complication is that the media, particularly the *CBC* as a public broadcaster, is supposed to be independent of political or legal authorities. The RCMP confiscation of the video materials created a relationship where the outlet became an extension of the law enforcement agency. The structural features between the police and the media during the Gustafsen Lake standoff will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

### **Media and the Meeting at Alkali Lake**

A meeting was called for the 17 bands of the Shuswap Nation on Thursday, 7 September at Alkali Lake. This gathering was partly in response to an invitation from the RCMP for assistance from Native chiefs and elders to facilitate the resolution of the conflict. The purpose of the meeting was to plan for and organize a team of intermediaries that would speak with the people in the camp, as a strategy that might promote a peaceful

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<sup>131</sup> According to *CBC Television* producer Sue Rideout, there have been a few cases of law enforcement agencies demanding their media materials. The *CBC* does not relinquish these unless there is a subpoena, and they consult with their legal department to ensure that there is no alternative recourse. Ms. Rideout also stated that, in recent years, the courts most often side with law enforcement on the issue of confiscating media materials for investigations. Under similar circumstances for an unrelated case, the *CBC* attempted to withhold the release of the media materials, but failed. The public response to the *CBC* was in support of the *CBC* passing over materials without contest. Ms. Rideout stated that it is a sensitive issue with the *CBC*. At stake is the *CBC*'s need to maintain its integrity as a public broadcaster, and not become an extension of law enforcement. (telephone interview, 7 June 1999)

settlement.<sup>132</sup> Alkali Lake has the distinction in the area as becoming a “dry” reserve which has taken a pro-active stance on the alcohol addiction that plagued their people for many years. The gathering at Alkali Lake gave some members of the media opportunities to meet local Native people and participate in some of the spiritual ceremonies. The introduction of Native intermediaries into the conflict gave the media a contrastive frame to the RCMP for the characterization of the activities behind the barricades and the welfare of the people at the camp.

At Alkali Lake, the Native community set the agenda and conventions of the event, which obliged the police and media to comply. Journalists were not allowed inside the meetings, which at one point included elders and the police, and then strictly Native people. The local Native interpretation was that the conflict was “*a Native problem for which a Native solution*” would be found. Three of the journalists were invited by the Shuswap community to witness and participate in the pipe ceremony preceding the talks.

The local Shuswap people invited some of the journalists to sweat lodge ceremonies. **Had you ever been to one before?** “*No—it was interesting—there were a whole bunch of sweat lodges going at the same time ..Once you have experienced it, you would have trouble believing that—there would be any other way to actually go about trying to unite people and—I mean within that community.*” [Interview with journalist, anon] One radio journalist, after several requests (and after participating in a succession of sweat lodges that day), was given permission to record a 40-second segment of the sweat lodge ceremony for a subsequent news broadcast. More than a year later, the journalist recalled this to be a highlight of covering the standoff, and he found it emotionally moving to participate in a Native spiritual ceremony.

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<sup>132</sup> According to Superintendent Olfert, this initiative was particular to the Gustafsen Lake standoff because the RCMP “barricaded situation” model advises against allowing any third party to enter the barricaded area. Such a practice is discouraged because of the risks of the third party becoming the victim of a hostage taking.

The meeting at Alkali Lake provided opportunities for journalists to speak with Native people on a less formal basis. *“So those of us who were at Alkali, who were fortunate enough to get stuck out in the sun and have to stand around and—eventually, the Indians started to take pity on us, and they would chat with us... This is how it transpired: I asked them, ‘Look, I don’t understand what you are doing here. I want to report on it accurately, I want to be able to explain to my readers what it means that you are doing. Can you explain to me the conditions and the roles that you are going through here?’ And as soon as they could see that I was interested in what they were doing, they were willing to tell me. And eventually they—a group of them came out and said, ‘Well, if you want to come in and watch the ceremony, then you can watch the ceremony. No tape-recorders, no notes, no nothing. They came and they set us in a certain place and we ended up—I think eventually—ended up participating... Even the RCMP officers there... also ended up participating in the ceremony. After that we were excused, and it continued on... They were nice people. Sweet, really gentle people. And you have to respect that. Later on they insisted we go on a sweat lodge, so we did a couple of sweats... You could understand the pressures that were being exerted on the community, and the way for them to resolve their problems was not going to come through a conflict with the RCMP. It had to come through a different resolution through their own community. And that’s I think what eventually did settle the dispute.”* [Interview with journalist, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

The meeting at Alkali Lake between Native leaders, elders, and RCMP officials was a strategic situation that shifted the news event to a peaceful, Native community setting. It was not structured and predictable according to media protocols, RCMP timelines, or the interpretive frames heard so far. For the journalists, some of the positive outcomes of the Gustafsen Lake standoff were the experiences of meeting some of the local Native people, and being invited to participate in traditional ceremonies at Alkali Lake. Cultural and community sensitivities had to be considered during the journalists’ negotiations with

the Native people. Such interactions may have challenged mutual stereotypes, and it helped the journalists to appreciate the difficult position of Native communities in this conflict. Although the dominant frame of the media coverage continued to come from the RCMP characterization of the standoff, the seedlings of a rapport between Native people and the media cannot be discounted. The journalists' narratives of their interactions at Alkali Lake were not the product of a schedule of interview questions, but were initiated by the journalists themselves. The fact that the Alkali Lake experiences still held significant meanings for the journalists more than a year later provides a striking contrast to the spectacle of violence and war rhetoric in the news stories at the time.

### **The Inclusion of Native Intermediaries**

*"Matthew, president of the Shuswap Nation tribal council,<sup>133</sup> said earlier Sunday that significant progress had been made in talks between the elders and rebels. He said the site of the stand-off has evolved from 'a defence-oriented camp to a peace camp.'"* ["Hopes falter for deal with rebels" *Vancouver Sun*, 11 September 1995 B1]

*"B.C. Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh was unimpressed. 'A peace camp does not have AK-47s; peace campers don't shoot at the backs of police officers,' he said. He said he welcomes the elders' involvement 'if they are attempting to defuse the situation, disarm these individuals, turn them over to the police, let the law take its course.'"* ["Native leaders tightlipped after meeting" in the *Times Colonist*, 11 September 1995 a1 (reprinted in the *Globe and Mail*)]

*"Matthew also tried to clarify his weekend comments referring to the occupation as a 'peace camp,' despite the shooting incidents. He said the term was meant to hark back to the site's previous use as a venue for sacred sundance ceremonies."* ["Three natives shot in firefight" in the *Times Colonist* 12 September 1995 a1 (reprinted in the *Globe and Mail*)]

Native elders, on the invitation of the RCMP, initiated talks inside the camp in an attempt to settle the dispute peacefully.<sup>134</sup> The intermediaries were respected elders and chiefs

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<sup>133</sup> Chief Nathan Matthew corrected this information, saying that he was the Chairperson, not the "president."

<sup>134</sup> Normally, the RCMP do not allow anybody to go beyond barricaded perimeters because of the potential for hostage taking. Another measure that broke with the "barricaded situation" model was that the intermediaries also brought grocery staples (such as flour and potatoes) to the camp. According to a few of the journalists (and news reports at the time), the RCMP interpreted the supply of food as diminishing the incentives for the people in the camp to surrender.



from a variety of Native communities. Nathan Matthew, Chief of the North Thompson band and Chairperson of the Shuswap Nation, was one of the Aboriginal chiefs who attended the meeting at Alkali Lake. He described his involvement during the standoff, and also the relations with the RCMP and the media. “...*things at GL had escalated. We wanted a non-violent resolution...*” Several teams were established from the people who attended the meeting at Alkali Lake, and Chief Matthew was to be one of the media liaisons at the press conferences. The discussions ended between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m., and then another ceremonial sweat was held.

According to Chief Matthew, once the Native mediation teams had been established, they set up at 100 Mile House. The police briefed them daily. The main intent of the intermediaries was not to deal with the media, but to establish contact with the people in the camp. However, the committee of chiefs and elders decided that they needed to have contact with the media because of the way that the RCMP was characterizing the situation. Consequently, there was considerable time spent “*strategizing how we could cool the situation down and support a peaceful resolution.*” Chief Matthew considered the relationship between the intermediaries and the other First Nations supporters as “*good.*” “*We had our own briefing session with them in the space we had across the lane from the hotel.*” Chief Matthew said that the tasks of arranging for delegations into the camp, communicating with First Nations individuals and organizations, reviewing legal options, and maintaining an organized intervention were “*hectic and exhausting.*” He did not go into the camp himself, but performed other tasks, including providing many of the press releases at the Red Coach news conferences.

**From what you heard from those who went into the camp, what was the mood like inside the camp?** “*Very defiant, growing tension. We thought we had discussed with the RCMP that their goal was to contain the area—but the RCMP was increasingly moving in—tightening the perimeter... We had a concern that the RCMP were doing more than containing the area—we knew that this could lead to violence with the increasing*

*ension.” Can you compare the tensions in the camp with those from the RCMP? “Couldn’t tell [did not associate with the RCMP]. We didn’t talk to the top RCMP negotiators, we only held discussion with Montague—the RCMP PR man. Toward the end, most of our discussions took place at the RCMP [makeshift headquarters, behind the 100MH detachment], not at the Red Coach Inn. Things at that time were happening very fast.” What did the Native negotiating team think of the blowing up of the truck? I understand that there was a [group of elders] waiting to be cleared to go into the area. “This was a place where we really felt a lot of betrayal by the RCMP. We had put a group of our own people at risk. They [the RCMP] didn’t tell us everything was booby-trapped.” What about the incident the following day—when the person walking toward the lake was shot at? “We didn’t learn about that until later that evening—the RCMP didn’t confide in us…”*

One of the comments that Chief Matthew made at the press conference the day prior to the firefight was that the intermediaries were in the process of turning the camp into a “peace camp.” I can remember you referred to the protesters having a “peace camp.” *“This was to counter the actively aggressive nature of the RCMP [referring to the tightening of the perimeter around the camp]. The media portrayal of Gustafsen Lake was that it was a war zone—they [the media] lapped it up—the blood and guts. We thought that we could [turn this negative image around] if we referred to the camp as a ‘peace camp.’” Did your negotiating team ever have discussions with Mike Webster? “Never saw the RCMP strategists—never knew till later that the RCMP had a psychologist.”*

Chief Matthew described the press conferences and the self-monitoring they did while providing information to the media. *“A lot of attention was paid to the television cameras. We would give our media releases after the RCMP gave theirs. There were never any questions after, so we left. Our version was not the same as the RCMP. We became even more cautious when we felt the RCMP were putting on even more pressure*

*on the people inside...” Did you think the Native negotiating team was given fair access to the media? “We didn't engage in protracting a dialogue with the media. We didn't initiate any comment. We became very aware that the RCMP was orchestrating the event to the media. They said one thing—then did another. They weren't supposed to put on any more pressure on the people in the camp, but they did. We wanted a buffer zone, but this was continuously being diminished. Both sides were armed to the teeth—well, the army was anyway.”* Although Chief Matthew was unable to monitor the news during the time he was directly involved, he was concerned about how the event and the people inside the camp were being depicted by the RCMP and the media. [Interview with Chief Matthew, 17 February 1998]

### **Summary and Remarks**

Chief Matthew presented the media with an interpretation of the camp as a “peace camp” that contradicted what both the RCMP media liaison and the provincial attorney general had been conveying to the media since the Williams Lake press conference. The prospect of re-conceptualizing the camp as a “peace camp” dramatically opposed the prevalent “law and order versus criminals” frame. It is not likely that the attorney general was aware of the rationale for the introduction of the “peace camp” depiction. However, the Attorney General’s response implied a rebuke toward any interpretation that did not support the one provided by the RCMP.

Chief Matthew’s narrative also shows the sensitivity required by the group’s spokespersons during the press conferences. The intermediaries did not feel that it was prudent to divulge everything that they saw or heard from the camp. According to Chief Matthew (and other unidentified sources), they were operating on the assumption that certain disclosures to the media might jeopardize the RCMP allowing them to stay connected with the people at Gustafsen Lake. The intermediaries believed that a link between them and the camp would offer the greatest possibility for a peaceful resolution, and provide the people inside with a degree of insurance for their safety. In order to

maintain this relationship, the intermediaries had to exert caution in their statements to the media while, at the same time, offering a non-police perspective.

Although they remained in this secondary media role, the Native spokespersons were able to provide a different view of the camp than that offered by the RCMP. They gave information that the people inside might not have shared with the RCMP negotiators, or that the RCMP negotiators would not want the media to learn. The media input from the Native intermediaries became an avenue for contesting the RCMP characterization of the 11 September fire.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The unifying theme in this chapter has been the analysis of the complexities of the negotiations between media and sources in the struggle to contribute to the framing of the news stories. Sources do not have equal abilities or status to influence news stories. In the case of the Gustafsen Lake news coverage, the RCMP had the greatest status by being the law enforcement agency called in to investigate various weapons and shooting offences. Their status was also marked by the fact that they were the only group with specially trained staff and a set of codified protocols to deal with the media. Another advantage of the RCMP was that they had a media plan from an early point in the dispute. In addition, the RCMP, more than any of the other stakeholders, were systematically monitoring the media coverage, as well as public opinion. All of these factors provided the RCMP with superior resources to deal with the media. Compared to the other groups (the camp, the supporters, and the intermediaries), who seemed to be operating on a more ad-hoc basis, the RCMP were by far more sophisticated.<sup>135</sup>

A central consideration for media sources was impression management, both for

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<sup>135</sup> By sophisticated, I am referring to the social status, structural and tactical power to orchestrate and control events, technology, training, and a shared linguistic code system between the RCMP media personnel and the journalists. This issue will be raised in Chapter 8.

themselves individually, and for the group or ideology being represented. I consider in this study that all sources (save, at this point, the people inside the camp) had a degree of control over their impression management. However, not all sources used this to their best advantage. During the Gustafsen Lake standoff, impression management also hinged on being validated by authority figures, such as the RCMP, or community leaders. Akin to the proximity to the RCMP was the importance of sharing the same venue to provide news information. Thus, the supporters' request for their own venue for press conferences may have contributed to decreased attention from the media.

Another aspect of impression management was the ability of groups to control their stock of information going to the media. For Sergeant Montague, the goals for his media plan included maintaining police security, supporting RCMP morale, and ensuring favorable public opinion. Nonetheless, the RCMP were unable to fully control police information, whether over radio-telecommunications or through its members speaking informally with the media. Until the RCMP established secure radio-telecommunications with the camp, there was a potential for a breach in their security. The closed-door meeting provided the media liaison with an opportunity to use the RCMP power and influence to dissuade the media from publishing from this source. Because of the illegality of the practice, compliance was practically assured. For Chief Matthew, the goals for the press releases from the Native intermediaries included providing a more humane perspective of the camp and maintaining support from the RCMP as intermediaries. This meant that the Native spokespersons had to be selective in what they told the media in order to portray a contrasting image of the camp that did not interfere with the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The intermediaries had an advantage because they were in a monopoly position in terms of being able to communicate to the outside world what was transpiring inside the camp. The RCMP could not always secure their radio telecommunications from the media. The Native spokespersons did not depend on radios for their interactions with the camp, and therefore they were in a better position to control the information going out to the media than the RCMP. The following chapter identifies how this may have worked to

the advantage of the RCMP. Contrasting with the other media sources, current information about the people in the camp was in the hands of the police. This shift of information control to the police increased the likelihood of unfavorable media characterizations of the people at the camp, because details about the camp and the activities behind the barricades would be from a law enforcement perspective. Another development that signified the camp's loss of control of their information was the confiscation of video-taped recordings taken of the camp from *CBC Television*. The video materials offered the RCMP incriminating evidence of illegal activities and identified people in the camp.

On the other side of the negotiation were the media. Media appreciate material from their sources that make their news gathering easier. Conversely, they are critical of information that is irrelevant, unreliable, vague, and difficult to quote. Ironically, the journalists found controversial and mercurial lawyer Bruce Clark furnishing some of the most satisfying media copy during the standoff, although the media (in general) did not present him in a positive light. At the same time, many of the difficulties for the media during the Gustafsen Lake standoff centered on insufficient information provided during the RCMP press conferences. Journalists sought out a variety of supplementary sources to provide background information or to assist in questioning RCMP spokespersons, but this did not provide the depth of information required for such a serious conflict. A reverse situation occurred during the media coverage of the 4 September 1995 shooting incident, with RCMP press releases offering information and full explanations before they were verified, resulting in media misrepresentations of the episode and the camp. From these examples, it could be assumed that, ideally, media should witness the events they report. However, the news coverage of the media witnessing the arrival of the APCs suggests that a critical evaluation might have addressed deeper issues of the underlying circumstances of the event. This will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

This chapter also identifies occasions when the negotiation of information between the media, the media sources, and the RCMP was connected to the RCMP operation. The *Vancouver Sun*'s decision to continue publishing unauthorized police information was the most obvious case of the media appropriating police property, although other outlets also used various unofficial sources to supplement their news coverage. The RCMP engagement of the radio journalist to act as a messenger appears to have been part of a successful ploy to neutralize the lawyer, Bruce Clark, from interfering with a police-negotiated settlement with the camp. The means involved the initial coercion of a journalist to help to nudge Clark into a position where this strategy could be instituted. The initiative exacted a commitment and, ultimately, a professional liability greater than the journalist originally realized. Another instance of the media coverage connecting with the RCMP operation was the RCMP confiscation of video materials of the camp from *CBC Television*. In this situation, the *CBC*'s advantage over other media outlets for access into the camp was exploited for law enforcement purposes. This compromised the *CBC*'s detachment from the RCMP operation. The above cases show that the lines between the media and the police were not definitive, a structural characteristic of the standoff that will be discussed further.

The outcomes of how information was negotiated between the RCMP and the media include the various shooting incidents on 27 August, 4 September, and at Checkpoint 17. The RCMP media team attempted to convey information that maintained favorable impressions of themselves and to convince the public that they were in control of the situation. Despite this, the narratives and facts surrounding the shooting episodes all underscore the extent of the stress from within the RCMP. The impression management strategies, implicit or admitted to in these incidents, reveal a pattern in the media portrayals that are confirmed in the newspaper coverage. Events most likely covered in the news include shooting incidents that appeared to be initiated from the camp (as opposed to the "friendly fire" at Checkpoint 17). Another characteristic is that these news stories presented the RCMP as being in control and showing restraint and, conversely, the

people in the camp as being dangerous and criminal. The topic of patterns of representation will be discussed in the next chapters.

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On the afternoon of Monday, 11 September, a meeting of British Columbia Native chiefs at Merritt was attended by 75 Natives representing 25 bands, including a delegation from the Native intermediaries. The press release issued after the meeting stated that "*the people at Gustafsen do have our support.*" Some of the delegates expressed their anger regarding the police handling of the standoff. They recognized that there might be repercussions if the standoff ended in bloodshed.<sup>136</sup> While this meeting was taking place at Merritt, the most violent episode of the standoff was unfolding at Gustafsen Lake.

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<sup>136</sup> The information integrated in the above narrative about the meeting at Merritt is taken from the interview data with Chief Nathan Matthew, elder Bill Lightbown, and the newspaper story, "Three rebels feared hurt in wild shootout," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A1.



## Chapter 6

### “Out of Control”

**I saw the tape of the blast and it looks pretty scary, because the smoke was incredible. “That’s not smoke—it’s dust.” It was dust?! “It was dust on the dusty road, ya. Ya.” Not smoke? “No. No. A little bit of it would be smoke, but that was all dust...” It didn’t look like dust to me, Peter. [I laughed] “Oh, ya. Well, some of it was going to be smoke, but most of that was dust—we know THAT because we tested it out there. We—we—but we didn’t expect that much dust.”**<sup>137</sup>

The firefight of 11 September 1995 and the shooting episode of 12 September 1995 offered the greatest contrasts of media coverage during the standoff: saturation and silence. The firefight was the most violent event during the standoff. It was also the occasion for the most damaging media portrayals of the people in the camp. In contrast, the RCMP never reported the shooting episode of 12 September 1995 to the media. The two incidents were among the occasions when the RCMP operational plan and its internal network of communication had a direct impact on the media coverage of the standoff. Considering the above, this chapter examines how the two final shooting incidents in the standoff came to be represented in the media.

This chapter examines the process of exchange between the media and their sources during the crisis period of the standoff. Aspects of information control take a heightened importance for players who have invested heavily in representing themselves in the media as being exemplary in conduct during situations that may damage their reputations. The RCMP media strategy in response to the 11 September firefight demonstrates this

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<sup>137</sup> This dialogue is taken from the interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997. In this conversation, I am referring to the RCMP wescam video that shows the camp truck explosion. Sergeant Montague is basing his assessment on the RCMP simulation of the explosive device on another vehicle after the actual firefight. Ours were not the only contrasts in the interpretation of this blast. Honorable Mr. Justice Josephson in the Reasons for Judgement describes the outcome of the detonated explosive on the vehicle as “a large cloud of dust.” (Docket: X043738, New Westminster Registry) On the other hand, in the Petition for the release of custody of Joseph Adam Ignace, the defense council describes the explosion as causing “a great deal of smoke.” On the same page, the statement by Staff Sergeant Debolt, who was at the scene, also references “a cloud of smoke.” (Petition, p. 11, No. X043738 New Westminster Registry)

point. The RCMP strategy was to counter potential negative public feedback on any offensive measures enacted by the police against the people in the camp. Yet, the negotiation of this information with the media was complicated by the intermediaries' objective to counter the RCMP's vilification of the people at the camp. The context of the media also figured into the negotiations. This is because, at this point in the standoff, the media's receptivity for information with these sources was primed by their starvation for fresh news, constant deadlines, and competition with other outlets.

One of the byproducts of the exchange of information between the RCMP media personnel and the media was the negative stereotyping of the camp. Although this commenced at the Williams Lake press conference with the RCMP use of the term "terrorism," subsequent characterizations from the RCMP were more subdued, until the crisis of the 11 September firefight. This episode induced the articulation of an RCMP typology of the camp as being comprised of criminals. This chapter tracks the process of media stereotype construction from the RCMP operational plan up to the point that it was transmitted to the media.

### **Firefight**

**11 September 1995:** *"The day starts quietly, with another delegation going into the camp. But shortly after the native Indian negotiators emerge, gunfire erupts."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3]

**11 September 1995:** *"Police and rebels in shootout after explosive device damages a camp truck. Police say rebels claim a woman in camp was injured, a man missing."* ["Anatomy of the B.C. standoff," *Toronto Star*, 18 September 1995 A4]

### **Preamble to the Firefight**

According to my interviews with Sergeant Montague and RCMP psychologist Dr. Webster, part of the RCMP strategy to end the standoff was to gradually tighten the perimeter around the camp, and create a pressure for the people inside to leave. The conflict management strategy was for the ERT to apply consistent pressure in conjunction with the RCMP negotiation efforts. The idea was to make it easier for the people in the camp to leave, and difficult for them to remain inside. The day before the firefight, the

RCMP negotiators had allegedly notified the camp that the perimeter that separated the camp's "safe zone" from the "no-go zone" would be tightened. This would render the well and the firewood out-of-bounds. This initiative is consistent with how the RCMP respond to "barricaded situations" in urban settings: by cutting off access to heat and electrical power, a pressure is created for the barricaded party to surrender. The RCMP argued after the firefight incident that the water in the lake was safe to drink, and in their interpretation, the camp was not being deprived of a fresh water supply. There is no information available as to who in the camp received the message about the new perimeter or whether everyone in the camp knew about this change. The Report to Crown Counsel indicates that one of the individuals (shortly after the final arrests) advised police that Wolverine did not tell the others about the restricted perimeter.

The primary controversy during the trial testimony regarding the 11 September firefight and the shooting incident the following day was that the ERT were given orders to "shoot to kill."<sup>138</sup> According to Superintendent Olfert, the ERT command may have altered the "terms of engagement" at about this time, but he flatly denied that there was a general "kill order," as such.<sup>139</sup> Based on interviews with Superintendent Olfert and Sergeant Montague, it seems that the ERT initiatives were not made known to them at the time of the standoff. Sergeant Montague and Superintendent Olfert recall that the basic plan was

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<sup>138</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* news story during RCMP testimony at the trial states: "RCMP snipers using a laser-equipped rifle were given the green light to shoot to kill native Indians at Gustafsen Lake last year, according to court testimony. "It was my view that our members were in danger and they were to take whatever action they felt appropriate," said Vancouver RCMP Inspector Roger Kemble, the field commander at Gustafsen Lake. He testified at the trial of 14 native Indians and four non-Indians, who are charged with offences ranging from mischief to attempted murder, that he gave ERT members the authority on Sept. 10 to shoot any armed Indians." Excerpt from "Snipers at Gustafsen able to 'shoot to kill'," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 1996 A17.

<sup>139</sup> The following is from the transcript of my interview with RCMP Superintendent Olfert: Tell me about this idea that there was a kill order that came out in court. "Ya, it came out in court. Absolutely LUDICROUS! If there was a kill order, there would have been bodies all over the place. Because that could've been fulfilled just—immediately. Immediately. Absolutely. And I wasn't the front line ERT commander. I—but that sort of command would've come from me. And it can't happen. There would be terms of engagement—and I don't know—in their briefings, like what their commanders, maybe to the members said, 'if under these circumstances, this is where you're at, this is what the terms of engagement would be.' But as a general kill order—sorry, non-starter. Can't happen." [Interview with Superintendent Olfert, 17 February 1998]

that, if given the opportunity, the truck would be disabled and the occupants arrested, and they would not be allowed to return to camp.

### Interpretation of the Episode

The firefight had a witness with a visual record: the RCMP wescam<sup>140</sup> aerial video-recording that was shown as evidence at the Gustafsen Lake standoff trial.<sup>141</sup> The episode began at about 2:00 p.m. on a Monday afternoon (11 September 1995) as the intermediaries were preparing to drive to the camp for talks. Before they were cleared by the RCMP to enter the perimeter, gunfire erupted in the direction of the camp. The entourage was kept back and one of the elders had a heart attack.<sup>142</sup> It was confirmed during the trial that three people with a dog had set out with the truck to bring back some water, in anticipation of the arrival of the intermediaries.

The RCMP wescam aerial video-recording provides an eye-witness account of the truck explosion, and activities that took place immediately afterward. *The truck from the camp can be seen driving around on a dirt road, and at some point, an explosion occurs. A large, dark plume of oily smoke billows up approximately 30 meters.*<sup>143</sup> *The video shows that the smoke is very dense, blocking the view of the truck for several seconds. A light-colored dog can be seen immediately emerging from the back of the truck. The dog runs away from the truck. An APC is seen ramming the front of the truck, pushing the front of the truck into the cab section. The dog is shot several times and is last seen lying on the ground.* [Interpretation of the RCMP wescam video-recording, S. Lambertus] According to George Wool, senior defense council, the explosion sent the truck's battery several

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<sup>140</sup> "Wescam" is name consistently used in media and court references to the RCMP aerial video recordings.

<sup>141</sup> I have excerpts of two shooting incidents recorded on RCMP wescam aerial videos. These were included in the Vancouver East Community 4, *Nitewatch* production entitled, "Gustafsen Lake," which was broadcast in Vancouver, January 1997.

<sup>142</sup> The Shuswap elder who suffered a heart attack was a brother of Percy Rosette. He did recover. This is taken from the news story, "Snipers at Gustafsen able to 'shoot to kill'," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 1996 A2.

<sup>143</sup> I confirmed the height of the smoke with defense council George Wool.

meters down the road, and it blew the oil pan out: “*that’s a substantial force.*” [Interview with George Wool, 29 May 1997]

The remaining part of the account is a synthesis of the Report to Crown Counsel and trial testimony. One of the male and the female occupants ran into the forest toward the lake. They began swimming across the lake toward the camp, and an APC moved into position to attempt to arrest them. Warning shots were fired at the couple, and they were ordered to surrender with their hands above their heads. At some point, the woman was shot in the arm while she was in the water. Gunfire from the treed area was directed at the ERT members standing in the APC, and they ducked inside for safety. The APC moved into the vicinity of the shots being fired and began chasing an armed male, who was on foot. This man was later identified as Wolverine, one of the camp leaders. The APC became disabled—the reason that was released after the standoff was that it became inoperable after driving over a tree that damaged the steering mechanism underneath.<sup>144</sup> The armed man (Wolverine) allegedly fired at the APC and then made his way back to camp. The shift of attention from the APC toward the armed man provided the male and female the opportunity to swim across the lake and return to camp. Many shots were heard, and eventually the disabled APC was hooked up to another APC and towed to safety. It was established in court that much of the gunfire during the episode might have been the result of crossfire between the ERT officers firing from two APCs.<sup>145</sup> The fracas lasted about 45 minutes.<sup>146</sup> At the end of the firefight, the RCMP retrieved a loaded AK-47 rifle and a hunting rifle from the truck, and an ammunition clip was found on the ground

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<sup>144</sup> Superintendent Olfert described the situation of the APC that was disabled as a “pandemonium.” There was a barrage of bullets striking against the metal exterior of the APC, resulting in a deafening racket. A police dog inside the APC was biting at the ERT members and attempting to bite the flying bullet casings as the members were returning fire.

<sup>145</sup> George Wool argued during the trial that much of the gunfire came from occupants of two APCs unwittingly firing at each other. Their positioning in the dense brush kept the APCs out of view from each other.

<sup>146</sup> According to Superintendent Olfert, the shots fired by RCMP were aimed high in the air to avoid casualties. This can be substantiated with the fact that only one person was wounded, despite “thousands of rounds” being fired. During the fieldwork at Gustafsen Lake, I walked through the firefight area and saw what appeared to be a rust colored “graze” mark, about four meters high, on a trunk of a tree. This was the only possible evidence of gunfire in the area that Steven Frasher and I found two years after the firefight.

nearby. Neither the RCMP nor the camp knew the whereabouts of one of the male occupants of the truck. One of the passengers from the truck was wounded. The dog was killed. The truck from the camp was destroyed, and an APC was disabled.

### **The Press Conference**

Just before the news broke about the firefight, some of the media were checking out a press release from one of the camp supporters. The statement to the press was that a local citizen, Michael Exeter, agreed to present a petition from the Gustafsen Lake camp to the British House of Lords.<sup>147</sup> As it turned out, news of the shooting between the ERT and the camp occupants eclipsed this story. Many of the journalists, as well as supporters, heard fragments of information over the scanners and radio-telephones that afternoon, and they knew that something serious had taken place.<sup>148</sup> The journalists had to wait several hours for the press conference to confirm any information. The press conference, held in the early evening following the firefight, was a scene of electric tension. The room was packed with journalists, as well as supporters and various Native people concerned about the situation. Hotel staff said that the RCMP had about 10 fully armed RCMP personnel waiting behind the meeting room and in other rooms in the hotel, in case the press conference got out of hand. However, this information could not be confirmed by police sources. A few journalists recalled that it appeared to them that Sergeant Montague came into the room with a police escort.

The following is a composite of recollections of the press conference after the firefight.  
*“Sgt Montague liked to play to the mood—on a good day, he was in a good mood, bad*

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<sup>147</sup> Steven Frasher had just spoken to Michael Exeter when news of the shooting between the ERT and the camp was made known. During the early part of the standoff, Michael Exeter, spiritual leader of the “Emissaries of the Divine Light” and the 8<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Exeter, agreed to present a petition to the British House of Lords. He made the stipulation that Wolverine, Grand Chief Mercredi, and Sergeant Montague must agree that this was an acceptable course to take. According to Steven Frasher, editor of the *100 Mile House Free Press*, Michael Exeter did not claim to have any special connections with the Queen or the House of Lords, and the petition would simply be on the parliamentary record. Nothing further ever came of this.

<sup>148</sup> One journalist recalled, “*what I [could] tell from the radio transmissions—there was a helluva lot of somethin’ flyin’ out there, because BOTH sides were breathless, and goin’ nuts—like—STOP! STOP! STOP ALREADY!! ...It was quite something to hear first-hand.*” [Interview with journalist, anon]

*day, a bad one, an out of control day etc. After the so-called firefight, he was very serious. My impression was they had been caught off guard—he was very serious.”* One journalist remembered: *“The press conference took place late in the day—the cell phones ‘went for a dive,’ with all of the media trying to access their desks at the same time. He came across like they’d screwed up—it’s like when someone knows they have done something wrong, and they’re trying to put their best face on—that’s how it came across. They tried to show they had been on a defensive course, that they had come under a hail of bullets after the truck had blown up. We never heard about the dog [being shot], it was probably not significant at the time. We were told that thousands of rounds were fired, and that the officers barely came out alive, and that the shots were coming from all sides, and there had possibly been one injured, and that possibly one person might leave [the camp]. I had a sense that Montague was covering up, we always know they wouldn’t tell the good stuff, [but on this occasion] we had the sense that things got out of control—that’s what scared us... We had no sense that the RCMP had everything under control. I don’t think they were equipped for the situation.”* [Interview with journalists, anon]

### **Information Control**

In order to understand how the police and the media negotiated the news story, the frames of the RCMP media liaison and the media need to be considered. As evidence to the crisis of the firefight situation, the RCMP reversed its usual tactic of dispersing sparse information to the media and, on this occasion, released extensive details of the action behind the barricades. However, it will be shown that some of the information was released before it was verified. This information is identified with an asterisk (\*). A synopsis of the information provided in the *Canadian Press* story from the *Globe and Mail*, 12 September 1995, follows.<sup>149</sup> Verbatim excerpts of the news story are italicized.

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<sup>149</sup> The *Globe and Mail* news story was reprinted from “Three natives shot in firefight,” in the *Victoria Times Colonist* 12 September 1995 a1. Similar *Canadian Press* versions of this story appeared on the same day in the *Edmonton Journal*, “Natives wounded in firefight,” A1; *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, “Natives wounded in shootout,” A1; *Regina Leader Post*, “Gunfire at BC native protest,” A1; *Winnipeg Free Press*, “Natives hit in shootout,” A1; *London Free Press*, “Three natives shot in BC, rebel leader tells police,” A9; *Toronto Star*, “BC Indians, RCMP trade fire at camp,” A10; *Montreal Gazette*, “Three Indians injured in shootout with Mounties outside B.C. camp,” A6; and the (*Newfoundland*) *Evening Telegram*, “Natives shot

(Refer to Appendix 5 for the full *Globe and Mail* account, and Appendix 6 for the *Vancouver Sun* account.)

1. \*Three Natives were shot during a firefight using armored personnel carriers outside of an armed camp.
2. The RCMP negotiators established contact with Wolverine, but Wolverine said that nobody from camp was willing to leave.
3. Marlowe Sam, one of the intermediaries went into the camp a few hours later.
4. Sergeant Montague identified, “[F]or reasons of public interest, the RCMP is now compelled to inform the public as to whom we are dealing with at the camp. There’s a criminal agenda which is continually being advanced by the criminal element in that community,” he said. “They have usurped any legitimate goal and objectives of the local people with their own self-serving criminal agenda.”
5. Sergeant Montague advised that the “gun battle” began when the camp truck drove outside a “no-go” zone.
6. Gordon Sebastian, another intermediary said that the RCMP knew that the people in the camp were preparing to meet the elders.
7. The camp truck became disabled when it drove over “an early warning device.”
8. \*When this occurred, two or three people carrying weapons escaped from the truck and ran into the bush.
9. \*An APC (Bison) suffered mechanical difficulties “when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault rifle, Montague said.”
10. \*Another Bison had to be called in, and both of these vehicles “came under heavy fire” so police started shooting back, he said.”
11. Police recovered an AK-47 and a hunting rifle from the truck.

Other information released to the media included the RCMP interpretation that the camp had a “criminal agenda.” In support of this frame, the RCMP media liaison announced the criminal backgrounds of some people associated with the Gustafsen Lake camp as

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in gunfight,” A1. *Calgary Herald*’s. “Three natives shot, rebels say,” A1, incorporated accounts from the *Canadian Press*, the *Vancouver Province* and the *Vancouver Sun*.



evidence. I posit that the RCMP control over much of the information was directly connected to an impression management strategy, and this can be traced back to the RCMP media plan. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

The following is an excerpt from the *Vancouver Sun* account of the firefight, which contains the RCMP radio-telecommunications. (Refer to Appendix 6 for full account.)

*“After the gunfight, Montague said, RCMP contacted the camp and spoke to Jonesy Ignace, who goes by the name of Wolverine. Ignace told the RCMP that three people were injured, including an unarmed woman. When RCMP asked Ignace to return everyone to the camp so the injured could be removed, Montague said Ignace told them ‘nobody was going to leave the camp.’ Wolverine let fly a string of expletives and accused police of betraying their promise not to hurt the campers. ‘You murdered one of our women, you bastards,’ he screamed over the phone. ‘It’s payback time, you motherf—ers.’ (Ignace later referred to three people being injured—not killed—in the firefight.) Police asked if anyone in the camp wanted to come out, but Wolverine said no one would leave. Later, Percy Rosette, one of the spiritual leaders in the camp, accused police of double-crossing the campers. ‘Everything went wrong with your people. It was a bomb,’ he said. ‘You people started firing first again. Your people sent bombs.’ He said no one would come out now because they believed the police would kill them. Still later, another person in the camp, who refused to identify himself, picked up the phone and told police to back off or they would be killed. ‘I’ll tell you something before you tell us. You are going to listen. That wasn’t very nice what you done, and you better expect we are going to engage you. We are not going to back down. All you f—ing people get out of here now or we’re going out*

*now and you'll be answering for a lot of shit, and this will spark the fire worldwide.'"* [*Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A1<sup>150</sup>]

The *Vancouver Sun* account is unique among others carried across the country. It features a speech event that otherwise would have remained private between the RCMP negotiators and the camp (except for several individuals in the local vicinity eavesdropping with radio-telephones). The passage with the protesters recreates a drama that the police in the press conference do not mention. This narrative includes social actors not previously heard, making allegations against the police in the heat of the moment, using discourse not staged for the public. The segment is spliced into the news story so that the reader is drawn into the scene. The inclusion of this excerpt in the firefight news story focuses on specific individuals in the camp and their responses to the crises, rather than promoting a generalization that is dictated by the police. The audience reach of this news story was primarily limited to the Vancouver area and parts of British Columbia.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The above news stories provide contrasting interpretations of the news event. Some of the reasons why the accounts were so different may stem from choices made about information sources, selecting and representing information, editorial policies and the target audience. The *Canadian Press*, as a co-operative news service, provides news stories to up to 90 newspapers across Canada.<sup>151</sup> These stories are expected to be able to blend in with the editorial perspectives within the client newspapers. Therefore, challenges to law enforcement, and breaking the law by incorporating unauthorized news sources, would be considered inappropriate. The status of the news sources is found in the hierarchical ordering of information in the news story. It privileges the quotations from the police spokesman, with a placement closest to the headlines. Conversely, the

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<sup>150</sup> This is taken from the news story, "Three Rebels feared hurt in wild shootout," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A1.

<sup>151</sup> This is number of newspapers that were part of the *Canadian Press* co-operative news service at the time of the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

Native sources and their information are located further down the story, making the information more likely to be cropped if a client newspaper warrants it. According to the *Canadian Press* journalists, their use of stock phrases allows for the continuity of the story line from one day to the next. It also cuts back on composition time, making it easier for journalists to meet deadlines. Time deadlines are more restrictive for a news service than they are for individual newspaper journalists because they serve newspapers in several time zones. *Canadian Press* journalists mentioned that it would be difficult for them to avoid using stock phrases under the circumstances they faced during the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

The *Vancouver Sun*, on the other hand, has a large provincial audience and the financial resources to defend their actions in court, if need be. According to *Sun* editor Gary Mason, it has a reputation for challenging government and police authorities. Because of its reputation for investigative news coverage, journalists are encouraged to incorporate a critical approach in their news stories. Their identification as *Sun* staff allows them to tailor their materials to its news values and to have greater control over the published product of their news story than those journalists employed with a news service. The audience reach and potential impact of the *Sun* would include a large audience in British Columbia, but little or no audience reach to other parts of Canada.<sup>152</sup> Although the news story offered the greatest contest to the RCMP definition of the situation, its potential for influence competes with accounts from other media outlets, and informal news sources, as well as the interpretive frame of individual audience members.

### **Issue of Corrections**

The release of unverified information led to significant contradictions between the media coverage and the actual incident. These concerned the descriptions of how the truck

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<sup>152</sup> On occasion, *Vancouver Sun* news stories are reprinted in other newspapers belonging to Southam Incorporated. In my interviews with *Vancouver Sun* staff, the potential for sharing its news stories with other newspapers does not influence the *Sun*'s editorial decisions. The above mentioned *Vancouver Sun* news story of the 11 September 1995 fire was not reprinted (in whole, or in part) in any of the 17 newspapers in the cross-Canada sample incorporated for this research.

occupants exited the truck and how the APC became disabled. The Report to Crown Counsel confirms that the people were unarmed when they left the truck, and that the APC became inoperable after driving over a tree. The findings of the newspaper accounts are detailed in Appendix 7. Of the 18 newspapers across Canada incorporated for this study, 14 printed stories specifically about the firefight.<sup>153</sup> All of the newspapers advised that the occupants left the truck with weapons. The *Calgary Herald*, *Regina Leader Post*, *London Free Press*, *Vancouver Sun*, and *Vancouver Province* mentioned that the occupants fired at the RCMP when they emerged from the vehicle. Thirteen newspapers reported that the APC was disabled due to gunfire, coming from either the occupants in the truck or from the camp. The *London Free Press* did not refer to the armored personnel carrier. The *Victoria Times Colonist*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Gazette*, and (Newfoundland) *Evening Telegram* quoted Sergeant Montague saying that the gunfire was specifically from an AK-47 assault weapon. None of the 18 newspapers (during the period of the standoff) corrected the misinformation about the occupants. Nor was there a correction to explain the reason for the APC being disabled during the period of the standoff.<sup>154</sup>

The dependability of the information regarding how the people exited the truck and what caused the APC to become disabled was not questioned in the newspaper stories in the research sample. However, the description of “thousands of rounds of ammunition” became a topic in subsequent news stories in the preceding days in various media outlets.

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<sup>153</sup> The *100 Mile House Free Press* is a weekly newspaper, and printed the firefight story on 13 September 1995. All of the other news stories were published 12 September 1995.

<sup>154</sup> A *Vancouver Sun* story printed two days after the firefight seemed to both support and hedge on the notion that the APC had been disabled because of gunfire. The story states, “the 13-tonne vehicle, which is armed with a 7.62-mm machinegun, has some parts that are vulnerable to small-arms fire. Police have not said how the APC was knocked out.” This is taken from the news story, “Military hardware now RCMP tools as Mounties try to resolve siege: ERT: militants’ camp reported to be heavily fortified” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1995 B1. A correction about the disabled APC was published after the standoff: “It was earlier reported that one Bison was disabled by gunfire. But the vehicle’s transmission box was likely disabled after the Bison drove over a tree, Montague said.” This is taken from the news story, “A-G defends airing of records: Dosanjh says RCMP action spurred by public safety issue,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 21 September 1995 A3.

The journalists in this research confirmed that RCMP did not advise them of corrections during formal press conferences, which were televised. Sergeant Montague asserted that he corrected the information regarding the “armed and shooting” description of the truck occupants. He cited that the evidence for this was that the media did not report this detail in subsequent accounts. He asserted that he corrected the information in an informal manner.<sup>155</sup> *“Everyday, the media were all staying at the same hotel, and I was having breakfast, lunch and dinner with them—I mean—well, I couldn’t get rid of them, I couldn’t shake them, I wasn’t trying to. My job was to be there and be available to them.”* Sergeant Montague said that he had been originally advised of the erroneous information about the truck occupants, but that the next morning, the RCMP dog-master advised him that the report gave a different story, and that *“they weren’t armed.”* Sergeant Montague explained that he corrected this in the morning, but he did not repeat the announcement during the following press conference. This was because *“there was no reason to, because we had already advised everybody...”* Of the 18 newspapers sampled in this research, only the *Regina Leader Post* story (from *Canadian Press*) specifically mentioned that Sergeant Montague corrected his previous announcement of “thousands of rounds of ammunition” to “several hundred rounds” being exchanged.<sup>156</sup> This confirms that the *Canadian Press* journalist at the news site included this update, but that client newspapers in the sample may have deleted this detail. According to the media liaison, a week after the firefight he learned that the mechanic repairing the APC found that the mechanical failure was not due to gunfire, but from the APC mowing down a tree. [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997] By the time this was known, the RCMP attention was focused on the resolution of the standoff and the arrangements for the people to exit the camp.

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<sup>155</sup> A review of the media materials concurs that subsequent news stories did not include the same detailed description of the truck occupants leaving the truck armed and firing weapons. This supports the RCMP media liaison’s contention that corrections were made informally, and the media immediately complied.

<sup>156</sup> The inclusion of Sergeant Montague’s correction is taken from the news story, “Gunfire at BC native protest,” in the *Regina Leader Post*, (CP) 12 September 1995 A1.

## Release of Criminal Records

The RCMP release of the names and criminal records was another aspect of information control that contributed to the media characterizations of the episode. The media outlets that published or broadcast the names and criminal records include the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Vancouver Province*, *BCTV*, *Newsworld*, and *CKNW Radio*.<sup>157</sup> Yet, the information was intimated (in a general sense) before the firefight standoff. According to one reporter, Sergeant Montague made a passing reference to criminal backgrounds during the flight to the Williams Lake press conference. During the trial, a training video was shown with Sergeant Montague telling two radio reporters that most of the people in the camp “had been convicted of murder.” Sergeant Montague testified that the statement was “obviously a mistake on my part...I shouldn’t have said convicted of—capable of, but not convicted of.”<sup>158</sup>

Central to understanding the RCMP’s press release outlining the criminal records to the media is that the announcement was anticipated in the RCMP media plan. The RCMP made informal comments regarding the criminal backgrounds to the journalists from the RCMP earlier in the conflict.<sup>159</sup> According to Sergeant Montague, the strategy to publicly announce criminal records was included in the media plan, (documented in a memo dated 1 September 1995 and discussed during a strategy meeting on that day. The memo suggests that the RCMP profile the criminal elements in the camp during a press conference. “*Now we did that on September 11. This was written on the first of September, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September we did implement that particular action.*” Sergeant Montague asserted that the announcement of the information was justifiable because of the seriousness of the situation. It was imperative that the public be aware of the lack of

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<sup>157</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Province* named individuals and their criminal records as provided by Sergeant Montague at that press conference. The *Calgary Herald* named three individuals, but none of the criminal records.

<sup>158</sup> This quotation is taken from the news story, “Records exaggerated: Mountie admits making ‘mistake’ in radio interview,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 12 February 1997 A11.

<sup>159</sup> This is based on interviews with journalists who recalled that Sergeant Montague alluded to criminal backgrounds of the people associated with the camp enroute to the Williams Lake press conference on the RCMP airplane.

legitimacy of the group. *"We had to bring the focus out in the event that the RCMP had to make a physical move, and go in there and with fire power, so that people wouldn't think that we're going in there to deal in a violent nature with innocent people, unarmed people and people who were really trying to advance an agenda regarding a Sundance or a spiritual situation..."* According to Sergeant Montague, the Federal Privacy Act states, *"that—a person's right to privacy is basically excluded when interests of the public overrides it... And in our opinion, the public interest over-rode the right of privacy here."*<sup>160</sup> Sergeant Montague denied that the release of the juvenile record was inappropriate because it was used to *"advance a criminal investigation."*<sup>161</sup> He went on to explain that, *"Of course it's in our policy manuals that we will respect the privacy of all individuals, and—you cannot release the record of an individual unless there's a specific purpose to do it. It's the same thing with dangerous sexual offender alerts or pedophile alerts that—when the interests of the public is paramount, and it over-rides the person's right to privacy—the section in the Federal Privacy Act applies to that in Section 8 subsection 2 m. And that's what we relied on, and that's why we did it."* [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]

Journalists discussed the releasing of names and criminal offenses: *"It was information—we took it at face value—didn't question it—it was a clear motive—[the police] wanted to*

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<sup>160</sup> The Information and Privacy Handbook, Second Edition from the Ministry of Government Services, Province of British Columbia, (January, 1995) in (25.1) states that, "Whether or not a request for access is made, the head of a public body must, without delay, disclose to the public, to an affected group of people or to an applicant, information (a) about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people. or (b) the disclosure of which is, for any other reason clearly in the public interest." It also states that, "Where the public interest requires that the head disclose information to the general public, the head ensures that the information is released in a manner designed to reach the public at large." At the same time, (15.1) pertains to disclosures harmful to law enforcement and states: "The head of a public body may refuse to disclose information to an applicant if the disclosure could reasonably be expected to...(g) deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or impartial adjudication." The Policy and Procedures Manual, Section C.3.12, that cross-references Section 25, states that a "test of significant harm or public interest" be made prior to the disclosure.

<sup>161</sup> The juvenile record announced was for breaking and entering, aggravated assault, possession of a weapon, and bestiality. This was published in the news story, "Criminal records detailed" in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A2. The journalists I spoke with said that the "bestiality" charge was one of the most memorable of all of the convictions read out that day, and that this became the source of many jokes within the RCMP and the media.

*show people in a negative light—nobody was puzzled.” One of the names and records released pertained to a juvenile crime, and the journalist noted that he “didn’t notice at the time—to my shame, didn’t know until just recently...I don’t think anyone noticed...that’s what happens when you get a bunch of over-stimulated reporters in a room and throw a lot of information at them. There is a compulsion to publish information—no question about not using it—it wouldn’t have occurred to us not to use it.” A frequently cited reason for the publishing of the names and criminal records was the scarcity of information, [after the barricades went up] “We were so starved for information, we were so happy to get something [relating to the press conference where the names and criminal records were released]...we didn’t even question the ethics—we were just starved for information. Even the editors, they said it was OK to print this, they said the [people in the camp] were thugs and the public has a right to know.” One journalist admitted that normally their outlet refrains from publishing such information: “Under normal circumstances, we don’t—especially if a person is charged with a criminal offense, or about to be charged, we refrain from mentioning their criminal record, because—it’s prejudicial. And it could cause a mistrial.” Another journalist found that the RCMP release of criminal records was typical for organizations that are sophisticated about public relations and have professional spokespersons: “They tend to put a spin on things that might not be there. So while—personally, I think—I definitely—I guess it seemed that they were trying to struggle to gain control over the situation which they didn’t have. But within the context of the way people work with the media—it’s kind of not—not the most amazing things. It’s just one of those things that happens.... But to rattle off the names—the way he did—did take us by surprise...But, certainly some of the charges that were read off had nothing to do with the standoff, and were meant to severely inflame public opinions about some of the individuals in the camp. Some of the charges got to be quite the jokes around town...”[Interviews with journalists, anon]*



The announcement of the names and criminal records also included people not in the camp at the time, and one individual who claimed to have never been in the camp.<sup>162</sup> A few of the journalists remembered that Johnny Guitar, named as one of the criminal elements in the camp, was a spectator during the press conference. *"I recalled that so-called Johnny Guitar was actually standing there in the news conference when his name was read out." So, what did you think? "It was a mistake by the police. I don't think that they were trying to manipulate when they did that. I can accept that—knowing them, knowing who they are and knowing how they operate that they—I can accept their explanation..."* John Hill, who had been mentioned in the list, was not in the camp at the time. During a telephone interview with a journalist, he denied the relevance of his former prison record and accused the police of a "smear campaign" by releasing the criminal profiles of people involved in the dispute.<sup>163</sup>

The RCMP media liaison stated that the seriousness and violence associated with Hill's and Guitar's criminal records were indicative of the potential for violence from the camp. Although Hill was not in the camp at the time of the fire, the RCMP were aware that he was leading the camp during the early stage of the conflict. Sergeant Montague stated that Guitar was at the Adams Lake and Douglas Lake protests, and that RCMP

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<sup>162</sup> These individuals included Johnny Guitar, John Hill, and Arnold Williams. According to defense council George Wool, the announcement of criminal records began with Johnny Guitar's information, and that Guitar had the most serious criminal records of all of the individuals identified during that press conference. Guitar claimed that he had never been at the camp, although he had participated in other Native blockades. Johnny Guitar was not among those arrested for the standoff at Gustafsen Lake, nor was he ever charged with any offences relating to the standoff at Gustafsen Lake. One news story noted this inconsistency: *"One of those identified, John Guitar, appeared before reporters to refute Montague's suggestion he is involved in the standoff... Guitar said he had never been to Gustafsen Lake and is considering legal action against the police for releasing his criminal record. Asked to explain the apparent contradiction, Montague said police intelligence had placed Guitar in the armed camp at Gustafsen Lake."* (this is taken from the news story, "3 more militants surrender to police: Soldier injured by stun grenade," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1995 A1.) Johnny Guitar was later arrested for possession of an AK-47 assault weapon at the end of September 1995 with one of the Gustafsen Lake defendants who was released on bail. This information is taken from the news story, "Gustafsen sundancer arrested again," in the *Vancouver Sun* 2 October 1995 B1. Defense council George Wool confirmed, for this research, that Arnold Williams, another individual who had his criminal record announced in the press conference, was not in the camp at this time either.

<sup>163</sup> This is taken from the news story, "Native leaders fear rise in violence," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A2.

intelligence associated Guitar with the dispute at Gustafsen Lake, even though he was not physically at the camp.<sup>164</sup> "So, no—we didn't inadvertently say anything about somebody being in the camp when they weren't. We knew who was in the camp." He stated that the press conference distinguished that "these people are NOT in the camp. That Hill WAS in the camp, and a person like Guitar is not in the camp—he's here..."<sup>165</sup> So no, we didn't—put out any sort of information which wasn't ACCURATE with respect to those criminal records." [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]

To summarize, of the nine individuals identified in the newspapers as having criminal records,<sup>166</sup> four of these were never arrested or charged in conjunction with the Gustafsen Lake standoff. One of these four individuals was never proven to be in the camp. Two people who were not arrested were associated with the most serious crimes and their names and charges were announced first. Thus, of the 18 people charged at the conclusion of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, five of their number were identified as having previous criminal records, although one of those named it turns out did not, in fact, have one. Another member of this small group had previous convictions for theft and contempt of court relating to a logging protest in British Columbia.<sup>167</sup> The 13 remaining adults

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<sup>164</sup> Sergeant Montague's grouping of Adams Lake and Douglas Lake blockades with the Gustafsen Lake standoff appears to contradict his comments made to reporters earlier in the standoff. "Sgt. Peter Montague said the situation at Gustafsen Lake is different from other standoffs involving B.C. natives earlier this summer at Douglas Lake Ranch and Adams Lake..." *With Adams Lake and Douglas Lake, there are legitimate native concerns that were addressed under due process in the courts.* Montague said. "Those positions had the support of most of the native community. At Gustafsen Lake, they have no support whatsoever." This excerpt is taken from the news story, "Indian rebels plan to 'leave in body bags'," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1995 A1.

<sup>165</sup> Sergeant Montague's distinction between people inside the camp and those who were not during the press conference for the television coverage was not confirmed in 14 newspaper outlets or by any of the interviews with journalists (including television journalists) who described the 11 September 1995 press conference.

<sup>166</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Province* did not provide identical lists of names and criminal offences, although they both identified seven individuals. After eliminating duplications, nine names and associated records were published in the newspapers. The news stories of the criminal records include: "It's a rogues gallery, cops say," in the *Vancouver Province*, 12 September 1995 A5; and "Criminal records detailed," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A2.

<sup>167</sup> The individual who was reported to the media as having previous convictions for fraud and theft voluntarily came out of the camp the night following the firefight. During his initial court appearance, he shouted in court that he did not have a criminal record or a tendency toward violence. This information is taken from the news story, "Rebel natives charged," in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 September 1995 a2

included wives who were with their husbands, Native and non-Native supporters, environmentalists, and human rights activists. One of these people was an occupant in the truck at the time of the fire. After the conclusion of the standoff, British Columbia Attorney General Dosanjh and Sergeant Montague defended the release of the criminal information.<sup>168</sup>

### Smear Campaign

Allegations of a smear campaign had been made since the media coverage of the fire, and this issue was raised again during the trial.<sup>169</sup> Sergeant Montague explained that the idea was to make the public aware that Gustafsen Lake was not a legitimate protest. This idea was brought forward during a strategy meeting on 1 September as a suggestion from Superintendent Olfert.<sup>170</sup> It was during this meeting (that was video recorded and became trial evidence), that Sergeant Montague was heard to say, “smear

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(CP). The error in the RCMP identification of this individual and the associated criminal record was discussed in court. While on the witness stand, Sergeant Montague testified that “he had no idea whether or not such a record existed.” This is taken from the news story, “Story of the standoff at Gustafsen Lake,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 21 May 1997 A6. The second example identifies the only person in the camp with a previous record that related to behavior during the trial proceedings of an unrelated protest. This information is found in the news story, “Criminal records detailed,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A2.

<sup>168</sup> Shortly after the conclusion of the standoff, the Attorney General defended the release of the criminal record to the media. “I think this is public information in the sense that the convictions occur in a public and open court,” Dosanjh said Wednesday. “To that extent, the record is always public.” The RCMP decided to release information on criminal records for public safety, he said, noting police were unable to contain the huge area surrounding Gustafsen Lake until the final few days of the standoff.” Sergeant Montague also justified the releasing of the criminal records, “The RCMP stands by all its public statements.” These comments are taken from the news story, “A-G defends airing of records: Dosanjh says RCMP action spurred by public safety issue,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, Thursday, 21 September 1995 A3.

<sup>169</sup> According to lawyer George Wool, the RCMP requested and obtained a court order forbidding the discussion of the training tapes, which were viewed in court, and prohibiting public viewing. In Wool’s opinion, “withholding this evidence is not appropriate for a liberal, democratic society.” Furthermore, he considered that the reasons behind the RCMP request were because “the public may look at the tape and decide RCMP media relations is a fraud,” and “the RCMP is afraid the content is so persuasive that it is going to hurt them.” [Interview with George Wool, 26 May 1997]

<sup>170</sup> This research confirmed with Superintendent Olfert that, at the time of his request for a smear campaign, he was unaware of the RCMP policy manual regarding media releases. However, he was certain that the release of the criminal records and the abrogation from the policies were discussed by the strategy committee.

campaigns are our specialty.”<sup>171</sup> Although he insisted that this comment, recorded on the video-tape, was intended to be facetious, Sergeant Montague did not deny that there was a “smear campaign” during our interview. *“But I don’t mention ‘smear campaign’ in my media plan—but you can interpret it—by putting out criminal records we were smearing these people’s reputations—you can say that, and you’d be justified in saying it. But—we’re not running a smear campaign, we’re running a truth campaign—the brutal truth—it’s never been done before—and we know that people are going to be some ticked off, but—there’s gonna be—there will be repercussions—but we’re going to do this so that the public know what we’re dealing with.”* Sergeant Montague explained that the strategy was about *“reducing their credibility.”* He described it as *“all part of a psychological warfare—you bet it was.”* It was not an initiative that was a response to a crisis, rather, *“It was well thought-out, not done in a hap-hazard manner—we carefully talked this out.”* The media plan was presented to Superintendent Olfert on 1 September 1995, but *“we didn’t use it until the 11<sup>th</sup> of September—because we didn’t want to use it? The only time we used it was because of the gunfight.”* It WAS because of the gunfight? *“Oh, absolutely—the September the 11<sup>th</sup> gunfight?”* Yes. *“Absolutely.”* OK. *“Now we realized that, you know—if this thing gets out of control—the public HAVE to know what we’re dealing with here. We’re not dealing with a bunch of innocent people in there, and this is no Sunday school picnic.”*

Sergeant Montague read from the memo that he prepared as a media plan, which explained that the RCMP had interpreted the agenda being promoted from the camp *“is one of violence being promoted by Wolverine and his thugs.”* (Refer to “Issue Two” of

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<sup>171</sup> During the trial, evidence from the RCMP training tape was presented showing a six-minute portion of an RCMP strategy meeting. In the meeting, Sergeant Montague is heard making the comment, *“smear campaigns are our specialty.”* The “smear campaign” remark was widely covered in the media during the trial. News stories that discussed the “smear campaign” include: “Mountie regrets ‘smear’ remark,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 21 January 1997 A9; “2<sup>nd</sup> cop backs away from earlier words,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 23 January 1997 A11; and “RCMP say talk of smear campaign ‘in jest’,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 23 January 1997 B2.

memo, found in Appendix 8.)<sup>172</sup> It was important for the RCMP to make the public aware that *“our actions are being precipitated by the criminal actions by proven criminals, before the force makes any physical move.”* Sergeant Montague said that the impetus to utilize the strategy presented itself *“when that gunfight happened.”* He also said that the public advisement of the criminal elements in the camp was important for the morale of the ERT, who were aware of this information. *“They all watch the news—and they say, ‘thanks a lot—FINALLY—someone is telling it like it has to be told.’”* Sergeant Montague believed that the announcement would reduce any public criticism of the RCMP operation. He said that if the people in the camp did not have criminal pasts, the RCMP would have conceptualized the dispute much differently. Sergeant Montague explained that having a criminal record and continuing to resort to violence, *“It’s an indication that the person has an attitude, and is an indication that the person is still defiant of the law, and will go to any measures that he wants to or she wants to go to—by taking the law into their own hands.”* Another little-known fact at the time was that the RCMP were receiving faxes and telephone calls from various groups and organizations supporting the camp, warning the RCMP of dire repercussions *“if anybody lost their lives.”*<sup>173</sup> The RCMP were worried about an influx of supporters that would *“make the situation worse again. And we didn’t want that. All we wanted to do was—resolve it in a peaceful manner... and then start dealing with the issues—because we knew that there would be a lot of issues to deal with.”* [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]

### **Summary and Remarks**

The RCMP provision of details of the firefight press conference provided content that was sensationally charged for the media coverage. The sudden shift in the RCMP information management from cautious fragments to full details was not particularly questioned by the media at the time. The firefight press release more than satisfied the coverage needs of the journalists, which was the most pressing issue for them. The press

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<sup>172</sup> Sergeant Montague read from the RCMP unclassified memo, 1 September 1995. Excerpts of this memo are found in Appendix 8.

<sup>173</sup> This was confirmed by non-police sources.

conference of the firefight was a dramatic event and the information was tailored to commanding the top story and the dominant frame of the event. The extraneous details served a rhetorical function in the RCMP interpretation of the situation because they accentuated the drama of the news narrative, and they added to the impression of reliability of the RCMP account. I propose that the errors in the information were likely believable to an uncritical audience because the descriptions were consistent with previous RCMP portrayals of activities associated with people at the camp. The RCMP's press release announcing the firefight was loaded with negative character judgements of the camp, and other inferences that promoted the character of the RCMP. Conversely, the RCMP press release avoided references that would have drawn any public sympathy toward the people in the camp.

For the media, the situation at the firefight press conference was the most important happening since the standoff began, requiring speed and focus to get the stories ready in time for the deadlines. Compared with other press releases, there was more information given out, and there was little time for the journalists to consider the appropriateness of the information. They were "starving for information," and the RCMP news conference offered the promise of a "feast." Most of the journalists assumed that the facts provided were accurate, although several recalled sensing that the RCMP media liaison was covering up some elements.

There were challenges to the RCMP press release at the scene of the press conference. The first was the questioning of the quantity of gunfire by the Native spokesperson, suggesting that the RCMP description was an exaggeration. The second was the discovery that one of the people identified as a criminal was in the audience. The third and perhaps the most compelling challenge to the RCMP definition of the situation was found on the police radio-telephone communications with the camp shortly after the firefight. This was heard by many local civilians and the journalists. However, the *Vancouver Sun* was the only mainstream media outlet to include transcript excerpts

within the firefight news story. Aside from these, the basic facts of the situation could not be further investigated by reporters. Other than what was overheard from the police radio-telephone, and the comments from the intermediaries who could only hear some of the gunfire, there was no way to verify the RCMP's depiction of the confrontation.

The manner in which RCMP corrected information to the media reveals a contradiction in the application of the justification for providing information "for reasons of public interest." RCMP informal requests to journalists to correct or to omit certain details in future news stories is not equivalent to a formal public notification of a correction through the media. If corrections are not conveyed at the podium where the original press release took place, the errors are not publicly acknowledged with the same vigor and legitimacy as the original mandate of releasing information "for reasons of public interest." Informal notifications reduce the significance of the errors, and members of the media are less likely to report these because they were not provided within the context of quotable, official information. In addition, it cannot be assumed that the public would take note of subsequent omissions of erroneous details. Future news stories would more likely offer summaries, and not such details, so the news practices in themselves might have suppressed erroneous details. If corrections were provided to the media outside of a press release situation (such as described by Sergeant Montague), these occasions likely excluded spectators as witnesses. This live audience would have included family and friends of those inside the camp, people who would have been keenly interested and affected by the corrections. That the changes were seldom acknowledged in the media materials implies that the media and police were possibly in collusion to withhold information that might be important to the public. Casual corrections do not provide a record for police accountability to the public, as a television broadcast would have allowed. A situational analysis of the motivation "for reasons of public interest" that was used for the announcement of the criminal agenda and criminal records finds the application of this motive to be inconsistent. This is because the RCMP disregarded a parallel obligation to correct information previously announced.

The RCMP's use of information control as a tool for impression management included the release of criminal records and announcement of a criminal agenda in the camp. These implied several messages that elevated the stature of the RCMP and denigrated the camp to the public. First, the people in the camp were criminals and dangerous and, by implication, were not worthy of public sympathy. Second, the police up until this time had withheld this information, which is another demonstration of RCMP restraint. Third, the knowledge that dangerous criminals were inside the camp justified the RCMP actions as being appropriate. According to the RCMP media liaison, the announcement of the criminal records was to influence the media audiences. I suggest that one of the audiences was the camp itself, through the *CBC Radio*. The announcement dealt several blows to the camp: it destroyed their credibility, and also challenged the loyalty and credibility of the people who were sympathetic to them. Releasing this information to the public was also an affirmation of the RCMP, whose safety and activities in the operation were, in part, responses to the appreciation of criminal elements associated with the camp. The erroneous information, the announcement of a "criminal agenda," and the release of criminal records were consistent with previous thematic portrayals of the people in the camp as being armed and dangerous. More significantly, at the firefight press conference, the characterizations were supported by substantive information that generalized extreme characterizations of a few to the entire group.

### **Stereotype Construction**

In this study, I propose that the firefight press conference was a strategic situation where the RCMP media personnel announced a stereotypical assessment of the camp as being criminal. Stereotype themes had been developing during the course of the standoff. The generalization of the camp began at the Williams Lake press conference with the media advisement that the shooting activities and weapons in the camp were "acts of terrorism." Subsequent press releases of shooting incidents maintained a frame of "law and order versus criminals." The firefight press conference was a situation in which the themes



were formally articulated in the RCMP press release, and this was carried over in most of the resultant news stories. These negative stereotype characterizations originated with the RCMP operational plan and then extended to the RCMP media plan during the firefight press conference. From there, they were incorporated into the news accounts.

In order to appreciate some factors that may have led to the RCMP stereotyping of the camp, a basic understanding is that, at the heart of many stereotypes, is a kernel of truth (Lippmann: 1961). For the RCMP during the Gustafsen Lake standoff, one kernel of truth was that some people associated with the camp had criminal records, or they were connected with a crime. Two of the most outspoken people in the camp (also identified as leaders at the camp), were both associated with serious crimes. A few of the other people inside the camp also had various criminal records. Another kernel of truth was that, up until this point in the time of the standoff, there were several shooting incidents associated with the camp, and there was evidence that camp members possessed illegal weapons. These crimes were under RCMP investigation. I will now demonstrate how these kernels of truth came to define the entire group at Gustafsen Lake.

The RCMP operational plan and their media strategy memo point toward a transfer of a stereotype construct of the camp from the RCMP to the media. The RCMP correspondence, legal documents, and interviews with senior police officials confirm that the RCMP operation relied on a negative typology that generalized all of the people at Gustafsen Lake for planning purposes. The RCMP depiction of the camp's activities as "terrorist" provided a schema that could anticipate adequate provision for the safety and security needs of the RCMP and the public. At the Williams Lake press conference, the categorization of "terrorism" was based on the nature of the weapons and the shooting incidents that were under investigation. Less obvious at the time was that the police had also made a connection between these offences and other crimes associated with certain members of the camp. According to the police, the previous criminal involvement influenced their interpretations of the shooting episodes. The RCMP associated the

criminal activities with an assessment that the camp had little regard for the law. In the situation of the protest at Gustafsen Lake, the assessment was that criminal activities would likely reoccur, and that there would be an increased potential for injury and death. The shooting at the ERT reconnaissance member, at RCMP helicopters, at the RCMP officers wearing flak jackets, and (assumed) at an RCMP patrol vehicle likely validated this criminal categorization. From a law enforcement perspective, “terrorist” and “criminal” reflected the instability of the situation, the lawlessness of the people, and the potential for injury and loss of life in the event of a confrontation with police. The RCMP operation required that the characterization of the camp be reduced to the lowest (and worst) common denominator of behavior in order to make them conceptually manageable for planning and strategizing. This contention is supported by Sergeant Montague’s assertion that, *“We’re not dealing with a bunch of innocent people in there.”*

The RCMP strategy memo of 1 September 1995 more concretely demonstrates the categorization of people in the camp. (Refer to Appendix 8.) Issue two of the memo is entitled, “Wolverine and his band of thugs.” The strategy memo identifies Wolverine and the RCMP media liaison’s interpretation of Wolverine’s involvement at Gustafsen Lake. The references in the memo to the group of people in the camp depicted them as “thugs” and “proven criminals.” The memo recommends the need for the RCMP to make the public aware of the “criminal actions of proven criminals.” There is no provision for defining or explaining the majority of the people in the camp, who do not fall within this category. In effect, the RCMP labeling renders these people invisible. The RCMP extended this reduction to the firefight press release.

I find that the RCMP media strategy carried out during the firefight press conference categorized the entire group at the camp by the activities and criminal records of a few. The articulation of the “criminal” theme, with the announcements of “criminal element” and a “criminal agenda,” along with proof from criminal records, added to the sensationalism of the press release. The description of the truck occupants being armed

and firing weapons, and the APC becoming disabled after coming under heavy gunfire from the camp, complemented the RCMP interpretations of the group. Yet, if the RCMP had notified the journalists of only the verifiable facts of the firefight, I postulate that the vilification of the people would have been significantly reduced. For this reason, the RCMP's failure to amend inaccuracies to the media (as soon as errors were discovered, and when public interest was greatest), and occasions when the RCMP informally apprised the media of corrections, all contributed to the construction of media stereotypes.

Lastly, the electronic media and print media with their wide audience reach, magnified the stereotype characterizations. The timing of the release of the criminal records, and pairing this announcement with an important breaking news event, also figured in the sensationalism of the news characterizations. It is my assessment that the firefight would likely have been a front-page news story (or a top story for radio and television) even without the advisement of the criminal agenda and criminal records. Press announcements of previous shooting incidents paled in comparison with a gun battle that involved "thousands of rounds." However, the inclusion of the criminal theme and criminal records accentuated the news appeal. This is exemplified by the *Vancouver Province* and *Vancouver Sun* making the criminal records news stories in themselves, and by a few outlets including this information in their news accounts, when their conventions would normally prohibit this. The role of competition between media outlets also increased the likelihood of the media representing the incident as fully and as dramatically as was provided in the press conference. At the same time, the media ultimately chose how they would present the news, whether it was to be a top story with live television coverage of the press conference, or a front page newspaper story. For the negotiation of the information regarding the firefight, the RCMP media plan was geared to satisfy media demands with information that was extreme in its content. This initiative promoted media stereotyping at the level of national media saturation. The criminal stereotype that was formally articulated by the RCMP to the media built on a pre-existing

stereotype schema of “criminal Indians.” The discussion of media stereotypes will continue in Chapter 8.

### **Walker Incident**

**12 September 1995:** *“A member of the encampment walking to the dock to wash in a ‘no shoot’ zone is fired upon by two RCMP members, who testify they were shooting to kill.”* [chronicle, *Vancouver Sun*, 21 May 1997]

This incident was never reported to the media during the standoff. It was brought to public attention by the media during the trial, when the RCMP wescam video was shown in court. The Report to Crown Counsel does not reference the incident in its chronology. However, the report does refer to Wolverine, commenting after his arrest that “someone had got shot when he was down by the lake, trying to get some water.” This incident contradicted the assurances of safety that people inside the camp received after the trauma of the firefight.<sup>174</sup>

In the RCMP wescam video of this incident (which was included in the Nitewatch program), the following action takes place. *It is a sunny morning, and a male individual is seen walking along a dirt road surrounded by open field, toward the lake. He is attired in a jacket and casual slacks. The walker casts a long shadow as he saunters down the road, with his hands clearly at his side. The individual is seen removing his jacket, and he throws it over his left shoulder. He steps off the road, and begins walking across an open field. After several steps, a gunshot blast lands between his feet spraying up dust. He runs back toward the road, dropping his jacket. Two more gunshot blasts hit the dust near him. He lies down on the ground without moving.* [Interpretation of the RCMP wescam video, S. Lambertus] Although three shots were fired from high-powered weaponry about 1000 metres away (just over one-half mile), the individual was not

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<sup>174</sup> According to Shelagh Franklin, who was one of the people inside the camp at the time, the RCMP negotiators assured the people in the camp that they would be safe to go to the lake to get water and to wash. This information is taken from “Gustafsen Lake” from the Vancouver East Community 4 program *Nitewatch*, broadcast in January, 1997.

harmed.<sup>175</sup> He lay on the ground for several minutes, then he returned to camp, presumably without further incident.

According to the evidence presented in the trial, the individual was described on the ERT radio communications that morning as wearing camouflage clothing, face paint, and that he was holding a rifle at “port at arms” position and stalking the RCMP. The ERT radio transcript, which was presented in court and printed in newspapers, relates how officers across the lake decided to deal with this individual. In the radio transcript presented in court, one officer asks another, “Can we get authority from Zulu to make his day unpleasant?” An authorization is given over the radio to shoot at the person. The ERT member testified in court that his orders were to shoot to kill. It was conceded during the trial that (although this was not immediately visible in the wescam video) the man did have a rifle slung over his shoulder, but he was casually walking and not stalking. It was also determined in court that the individual was walking within the agreed-upon safe zone, but this was not communicated to the officers who fired the shots. The senior RCMP officer who gave the authorization to shoot told the court that he based his decision on events from the previous day (the firefight) and the previous shooting incidents with RCMP members.

During the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the shooting incident with the walker was a “non-event.” When the episode was made public several months later, it raised questions as to whether the episode was deliberately withheld from the media liaison to keep it from the public for as long as possible. During the interviews for this research, both Sergeant Montague and Superintendent Olfert denied any deliberate media plan to withhold information from the media about this incident. They both advised me that they were not made aware of the incident until several weeks after the standoff.

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<sup>175</sup> The shooting distance was confirmed in the *Vancouver Sun* editorial 13 June 1997 A 20.

Sergeant Montague explained: *"I had found out about that particular event about mid-October. I was never told about it. I was never told to deal with it. I don't think a lot of people even knew. I didn't until—I mean, the RCMP were forthright about it at trial, and they stood up there and said why they did it—and—but it was nothing that I ever had to deal with. I—matter of fact, when I heard about it in October, I said, 'Are we talking about the same event here? Why wasn't I told? Like, what happened here?'"* [Interview with Sergeant Montague, 27 May 1997]

Similarly, Superintendent Olfert was not advised of the incident until several weeks after it occurred. He stated that the orders to shoot came from the ERT command that was operating from Camp Zulu: *"I wasn't a part of that decision."* He said that the decision would have been made by the senior officer at the site, *"I'm not going to second-guess him."* Superintendent Olfert explained that ERT senior officers traditionally use their own judgement on how to deal with specific situations. Ideally, the efforts of the negotiators and the ERT were being balanced to contrast the "velvet glove" with the "iron fist." Superintendent Olfert (as well as trial evidence) advised me that the ERT had their own assignment, one that was separate from that of the RCMP negotiators. He stated that the way in which the communications worked between the various components of the operation, the ERT did not report their activities until well after the standoff. [Interview with Superintendent Olfert, 17 February 1998]

At the same time, as mentioned in Chapter 5, Native media liaison Chief Nathan Matthew learned of the walker episode that same evening, but none of the Native spokespeople or intermediaries made any statements to the media at the time. According to Chief Nathan Matthew, the intermediaries did not want to advise the media of this sort of information because it might compromise their strategic role between the camp and the police. Consequently, the power of the RCMP to control and select information to apprise the media was left unchallenged.

### **Summary and Remarks**

In this episode, the flow of information within the RCMP organization became an inadvertent mechanism for the RCMP's information control with the media. Based on the interviews with Sergeant Montague and Superintendent Olfert, there was not an automatic flow of information within the RCMP operation between the ERT and the other levels. It is apparent that the ERT report of the incident was for the RCMP institutional needs and the pending trial, but not for the media. The lack of communication at the level of the Superintendent of the operations and the media liaison meant that the media were never informed during the standoff. The RCMP media liaison can only make statements to the media about events that he knows had occurred. The same conditions existed for the RCMP Superintendent, another media source. The media could only publish or broadcast news about events in the camp that were advised by the police. Consequently, there was no news coverage of the incident until the trial.

There were consequences from the internal communications of the RCMP regarding this incident, which extended past the RCMP. According to the trial testimony, the incident contributed to dissension among the ERT members.<sup>176</sup> In the RCMP media plan, the "non-event" meant that the casting of the people inside the camp as criminals the previous day was not contradicted with this news. Since the information was not released to the RCMP media liaison or the media, the media did not have to repair inconsistencies in the news story narrative, which had consistently portrayed the camp people as aggressors. By the time the information was made public, the standoff was over, and concerns for a mass convergence of Native people in support of the camp had long past dissolved. The lack of media coverage (during the standoff) of the shooting episode underscores the distinction between the realities that existed on either side of the barricades. It also points to the institutional mechanisms within the RCMP that determined how much of the reality behind the barricades it would share with the public. The void in the news coverage can be understood as an outcome of a lack of media

witness, the intermediaries controlling their information, and the RCMP controlling their information through their own communications channels.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The shooting incidents discussed in this chapter are two critical situations in the standoff, which revealed two extremes in the RCMP's negotiation of their stock of information with the media. For the firefight, there was an abundance of information made available, and for the walker episode, the RCMP were unable to provide any information whatsoever. In the first case, the police exercised their power to define the situation by releasing privileged information and unverified details, several of which were later identified as erroneous. In the second case, internal channels of communication within the RCMP prevented any information from being released. Yet, the latter can still be interpreted as the police defining the situation: silence is in itself a message. The police responses to both situations were consistent. The response (or lack of one) to the media maintained the positive public image of the police, and the criminal characterization of the people inside the camp.

The police information negotiated during the firefight press conference had the greatest authority in the framing of the news stories of the firefight, although there were other sources available. The radio-telephone conversations refuted aspects of the police side of the story, but only the *Vancouver Sun* incorporated excerpts of these into its news accounts. The intermediaries also offered a challenge to some of the RCMP information, and they presented a more humanistic concern for the safety of the camp. In spite of that, the RCMP had the unquestioned status as a law enforcement agency, a status that carries

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<sup>176</sup> The morale of the RCMP was also discussed in the coverage of the trial in the news story, "RCMP considered asking military to take over at Gustafsen," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 April 1996 A1, A18.



with it the public's trust that they will provide accurate information. Evidence of the power of the RCMP was their power over the information. The RCMP offered the most complete account of the episode, and it was worded and presented in such a way as to have a greater news appeal than anything that the other media sources might offer. A lesser factor was that televised broadcasts of the press conference showed the conventional sequencing of the RCMP appearing before the Native spokespersons. This ordering of sources was replicated in the newspaper accounts, and provided a hierarchical structure of news as well as reflecting the hierarchical social status of the media sources.

The journalists' narratives suggest that the intensity of composing breaking news stories for looming deadlines curtailed their abilities to critically assess the press conference and the information that the RCMP provided about the firefight. A factor that promoted the inclusion of criminal background information into news accounts was that this came from an official RCMP press release, made equally available to all media outlets. The criminal records had enormous news appeal. Highly competitive outlets would more likely choose to incorporate these details rather than hold back, allowing competitors an edge. The choice of incorporating this information rested with the individual outlets, and some media had pre-existing policies and conventions that prohibited this practice. However, for some of these outlets, the authority of the police provided the legitimacy and the permission to break with these conventions. Only a few journalists at the time questioned the ethics of publishing the criminal records and, in one case, an editor's judgement that the public had a right to know prevailed.

The data collected have allowed me to examine the RCMP's stated rationale to the media "for reasons of public interest," for the announcement of a criminal agenda, criminal elements, and criminal records. The interview data, the RCMP memo of 1 September 1995, and the discourse analysis point toward the criminal theme as being a gambit for the RCMP to maintain public approval. The RCMP had been aware since the early days

of the standoff that there were people involved with the camp that had been associated with serious crimes. The RCMP held back from relaying the specific details to the media until they could be used for maximum effect. The firefight presented such a situation. Considering the “velvet glove and the iron fist” approach taken to end the standoff, the RCMP would have to expose part of the “iron fist” to the media in order to explain how the violence erupted. The RCMP strategy plan anticipated this, and had information that would be used to offset the negative impact on public opinion if the RCMP used force against the camp. Thus, the criminal information took the form of secret ammunition, to be used only under extreme situations. Sergeant Montague’s admission that the situation had gotten out of control is an indication that the release of the information was intended to get the situation back under control. Considering the above, the impetus for the RCMP announcement was likely an impression management strategy to repair potential damage to the RCMP’s reputation rather than for “public interest.”

A situational analysis of the RCMP announcement of the criminal elements and identifying criminal records is that it formally articulated the RCMP interpretive frame employed in their operation. The past records of individuals associated with the camp provided background information about the camp for the RCMP members. It is a standard practice among law enforcement agencies to become cognizant of these details. This information is used to assure the safety needs of the officers and the planning of the police operation. At the same time, such a frame requires that, in the case of the people at Gustafsen Lake, the group was defined in terms of their worst predictable behaviors. The information helped police to assess the potential danger of the situation, and to take precautions for their own safety while containing and defusing the situation. However, a logic proposition was subtly implied when such a frame was conveyed to the media: if individuals were convicted or associated with criminal activities in the past, then this implies their group’s common guilt in the current criminal investigation. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, this RCMP media strategy did not anticipate various other ways

that media audiences might internalize the information, or how the criminal details promoted conditions for stereotyping people beyond the sphere of the camp.

Despite the quantity of information that the RCMP provided to the media about the firefight, many suppositions and theories continued to circulate years after the standoff. A few days after the incident, one of the ERT officers, who was inside the disabled APC, gave his story to the media, describing to them how the assault was like being in the Vietnam War.<sup>177</sup> Some of the people that I interviewed also volunteered various interpretations of what had happened, although I did not talk with anyone who was actually there. There were claims that Wolverine attempted to fire a gun directly into openings in the APC in order to kill RCMP officers. There were allegations that the RCMP violated international human rights by using land mines, one of which was believed to have caused the explosion with the truck. Another theory was that, although only one AK-47 was found by the investigators in the camp firepit, other AK-47s were melted down into an unrecognizable mass prior to the conclusion of the standoff.<sup>178</sup> Some people speculated that the dog, which had been a companion of the group and was not threatening ERT officers, was killed in order to demoralize the people inside the camp. More than one interviewee suggested that, considering the mood at the time, there would have been a greater public outcry if the police had announced that they killed a dog rather than an Indian. To explain the surprisingly little evidence of gunfire originating from the camp, there was a theory that the people in the camp had metal detectors that they used to find and conceal their bullets and casings after shooting incidents.<sup>179</sup> Considering the strength of the convictions behind several of these assertions, it would be difficult to

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<sup>177</sup> "Two-hour shootout likened to Vietnam: ERT officer describes gunbattle: Gustafsen Lake," in the *Vancouver Province*, 19 September 1995 A10.

<sup>178</sup> When the newspaper stories and news sources provided details about weaponry used in shooting incidents, or suspected being in the camp, AK-47s were invariably mentioned, giving the impression that there were several of these semi-automatic weapons in the camp. The RCMP Report to Crown Counsel identifies that, before the barricades were set up, it was known by the RCMP that there were two AK-47s in the camp. One of these was in the back of the truck that was blown up.

<sup>179</sup> The RCMP investigation found fewer than 200 (I was unable to find the exact figure) shell casings associated with weapons fired from the camp. This low quantity was not anticipated by the RCMP. RCMP District Superintendent Olfert testified in court that between 10,000 and 20,000 rounds were fired by the RCMP during the 11 September 1995 firefight. This information was taken from the news story, "Police wanted 4,000 troops at Gustafsen," in the *Vancouver Province*, 8 January 1997 A4.

change what has become, for some, “the truth.” I consider that the lack of confidence in the media coverage (including within the media), and the lack of full disclosure on the part of the RCMP, contributed to these suppositions.

## Chapter 7

### “Media Circus”

*“It was like a grade 5 field trip, where everyone was holding onto a rope—‘stand here,’ ‘don’t stand here.’”*<sup>180</sup>

In the final phase of the standoff, the media and their sources adapted to a reduction in the stress of the situation as well as a reduction in the action. The media’s dependency on the RCMP for news was lessening, with more of a shift in focus to a “Native solution” to end the standoff. For the journalists, the range of news stories about the camp expanded with the availability of Native spokespersons, who provided information about the camp, and press conferences with Native spiritual leaders, who arrived to assist in the resolution. Several journalists felt that the tone of their news characterizations toward the camp softened, and their accounts were no longer dominated by police press releases of violent incidents.

For the first few days after the firefight, the negotiation of information between the RCMP media personnel and the journalists diminished considerably. Except for the occasional person voluntarily leaving the camp, there were few interactions reported between the camp and the RCMP. Still, the police media personnel used this time to reassert their presence in the news narrative by implementing the final strategies from the RCMP media plan of 1 September, which would provide full media coverage of RCMP resources. In addition, the RCMP media personnel offered other news gathering opportunities related to the investigation of the camp, signifying a reduced level of tension and a more relaxed hold on police and camp information. Thus, during this slow period of the standoff, the RCMP media personnel allowed select openings in their previously withheld information, allowing their interpretation of the situation to remain in the forefront.

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<sup>180</sup> This quotation is taken from an interview with one of the journalists who covered the RCMP media tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp six days after the conclusion of the standoff.

### ***CBC Radio Announcement of the Surrender Message***

**13 September:** *"Indians agree to surrender after radio broadcasts of message from Chief Antoine Archie of nearby Canim Lake band assures they will not be harmed if they put down their guns. But only Indian negotiators leave the camp."* ["Anatomy of the B.C. Standoff," *Toronto Star*, 18 September 1995 A4]

After the firefight, there were few developments to report, and a winding-down process characterized the dispute. The tension of the firefight abated with the help of Marlowe Sam, a spiritual leader from the Pentiction Band, and member of the Native negotiation team, who began bringing people out of the camp. The intermediaries and the RCMP negotiating team arranged for visits by Native spiritual leaders. Arvol Looking Horse, a Dakota Sioux and Keeper of the Sacred Pipe, arrived with an entourage. He held a press conference at the Red Coach Inn and then spent an afternoon at the camp.<sup>181</sup> A few hours before Arvol Looking Horse's visit, Marlowe Sam brought someone out of the camp, who reportedly relayed a message from the camp to the RCMP.<sup>182</sup>

In response, Sergeant Montague asked one of the *CBC Radio* reporters, Conway Fraser, and Chief Antoine Archie to comply with a proposition from the camp.<sup>183</sup> The request was to broadcast a message from a respected chief to the camp that assured them of safety and respect if they came out voluntarily. Montague explained that the chief did not necessarily have to be someone who was an advocate of the camp. Sergeant Montague told Fraser that he could play an integral part in ending the standoff but he would not provide the details until they arrived at the (Gustafsen Lake) RCMP Operations

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<sup>181</sup> It was identified that John Hill, the 1995 Sundance leader at Gustafsen Lake, and David Seals, another Native individual, provided the RCMP (before the barricades were set up) with a list of people who they believed could act as intermediaries. This list included Arvol Looking Horse and John Stevens. The RCMP media liaison, Corporal Ward, stated that the RCMP were unable to contact John Stevens until the final week of the standoff. Native intermediaries contacted Arvol Looking Horse to provide spiritual guidance for the camp. This information is taken from the news story, "RCMP told to send in medicine men 3 weeks ago, Indian says," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1995 B2.

<sup>182</sup> I confirmed that an individual did come out of the camp early that afternoon.

<sup>183</sup> The information and quotations regarding the airing of the CBC message are taken from the radio program, *Now the Details*, broadcast by *CBC Radio*, 17 September 1995.

Command Center, located behind the RCMP detachment. Once there, Sergeant Montague explained the circumstances to Fraser and Chief Antoine Archie and advised that the message had to air at 3:00 p.m., less than 30 minutes away. The proposition was that, if Fraser agreed to broadcast the message, he would have a news scoop, and he could be the radio representative in the media pool later that evening to witness the surrender. When Fraser asked Sergeant Montague why they did not put the message over the radio-telephone, he was told that *"We want to do it on CBC Radio, because CBC Radio is the only reception that they have in at the camp."* In addition, the camp wanted to hear the assurances on the public record. Fraser advised Sergeant Montague that he could not make the decision to cut into regular broadcasting, and insisted on calling his superiors in Vancouver. While speaking with Jeffrey Dvorkin from the *CBC Radio* office in Vancouver, Sergeant Montague also revealed that Wolverine had been monopolizing the radio-telephone. The surrender message broadcast over *CBC Radio* would ensure that everyone in the camp would hear it. Sergeant Montague gave Dvorkin about 10 minutes to make a decision. In the end, the *CBC* reluctantly approved. Chief Antoine Archie composed a surrender message and asked Sergeant Montague to check the message over to make sure that it was worded to the satisfaction of the RCMP. The message was recorded, and broadcast at 3:00 p.m. Sergeant Montague received word that the camp did not hear the message, so the *CBC* was asked to play it two more times during the next hour.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> The following is the *CBC* announcement, beginning with the introduction by the *CBC* news announcer (in bold): *"There could be a major break-through at the armed standoff at Gustafsen Lake. Police say the Native people in the camp are ready to lay down their arms and surrender. Conway Fraser is at the RCMP headquarters, and joins us on the line. Conway, what are police saying? 'Well, Bob, police are saying that a demand has come out of the armed camp that if the Native people hear a certain message from a respected chief from the Shuswap Nation, they will lay down their arms and come out. Now CBC plays a role in this, in that the occupants out at the camp can only pick up CBC Radio. So this is basically their only link to the outside world. So here now with that message, and with me is Chief Antoine Archie of the Canim Lake Band, who will speak first in Shuswap, then in English, to the people in at the camp. Here's Chief Archie... [Chief Archie speaks, beginning in the Shuswap language, conveying greetings, then switching to English] 'People who have come out of the camp have been treated—have never been mistreated, and have been treated with respect. If the rest of the camp come out, they will be treated with dignity and respect. The RCMP have lent their support for this. I will personally be at the RCMP station, or wherever—to greet you on your arrival.'* [Chief Archie closes with another assurance in the Shuswap message.] [Fraser:] *'Now that was Chief Antoine Archie of the Canim Lake Band, and just to reiterate, that message was going out to the Native people at the Gustafsen Lake camp and—what we are getting now is*

After the broadcast of the message, the RCMP media liaison called a meeting with the mainstream media. During this meeting, a media pool was selected: one television, one radio (Fraser) and one newspaper representative to act as observers for the surrender. In answer to journalists' questions about how this radio message fit in with the camp visit by Arvol Looking Horse, Sergeant Montague told them that it was a "co-ordinated effort."<sup>185</sup> They were taken past Checkpoint 17 and held there until the RCMP at the line received further instructions. However, the RCMP received word that no one from the camp was coming out that evening. **What was the response from the RCMP at the time?** *"Frustrated, I think. Because there had been a lot of work gone into trying get this particular deal arranged—and it didn't take place...He [Sergeant Montague] seemed angry—I can't remember exactly what he said, but he was angry."* [Interview with journalist, anon]

The anticipated surrender failed to materialize. Among the 18 newspapers incorporated into the study, the CBC broadcast and aborted surrender provided front-page news stories in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, and the *London Free Press*.<sup>186</sup> One journalist recalls, *"At one point it became clear that we nearly had a break. It all fell apart on that one day...and we ended up sitting outside the RCMP station listening to the radio—actually, I think the Indian families by that time were—a lot of them were gathering on the lawn, and were listening to our radios, listening to the transmission—it was a really bizarre circumstance. There was a call that went into the camp...we ended up hearing part of what was going on. The families were sitting on the*

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*that they are almost prepared to lay down their arms and surrender, based on what they heard from Chief Archie. And that's it from here—from RCMP headquarters, in 100 Mile House, Bob..."* [announcement replayed on the CBC Radio program, *Now the Details*, broadcast 17 September 1995.]

<sup>185</sup> The following is the news story quote from which this information is taken: *"Chief Arvol Looking Horse, a man native spiritualists equate with the Pope, was in the camp yesterday and was aware of the broadcast. 'You could say it was a co-ordinated effort,' said Montague."* This is taken from "B.C. standoff appears close to quiet end," in the *Globe and Mail*, taken from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 September 1995 a3 (CP).

<sup>186</sup> The news stories include: "Standoff at critical point," in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 14 September 1995 A1; "High hopes for end to standoff dashed as deal struck with rebels falls through," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 14 September 1995 A1; "Bloodless end appears close," in the *Calgary Herald* (CP), 14 September 1995 A1; "B.C. natives agree to quit," in the *London Free Press* (CP), 14 September 1995 p.1.



*outside of the lawn. It became—it was a crestfallen circumstance, in which everybody sort of—when it became evident that today was not going to be the day. Everybody had expected it, everybody was hoping for it—and when I say everybody, I mean the families. Media, it didn't matter to us, we had a story.*” [Interview with a journalist, anon] At the checkpoint, one of the RCMP officers said to a journalist, as the media pool briefly stopped in on the way to the surrender point, *“This is not going to end tonight. This is nowhere near ending tonight. This is not going to happen’... And, of course, the media got all turned around and went back. And one of the RCMP guys said, ‘Phhh—told you, didn't I? This was just a show, this was just a big show...’”* [Interview with journalist, anon] One of the intermediaries, Gordon Sebastian, noted that the reason why the people would not come out was because it was growing dark.<sup>187</sup>

Several journalists at the time questioned the ethics of the *CBC* broadcast, how the *CBC* was coerced into submission, and the implied relationship between the *CBC* and RCMP in collaborating with the airing of the surrender message. Some journalists commiserated with the difficult choice that the *CBC* was forced to make under extreme time constraints. They considered the broadcast *“absolutely overt manipulation of the media,”* which had the media *“sitting around scratching our heads over this one.”* One journalist said that he was immediately suspicious when the RCMP approached the *CBC* journalist: *“I knew Montague but [nobody wanted] to hear me...Everyone felt uncomfortable about this.”* Some journalists observed the reactions of the supporters, who were upset over the choice of Chief Antoine Archie to provide the surrender message: *“He got ripped [Chief Antoine Archie], because he went on the air. They thought he was a patsy for the cops...And it sort of didn't work. It got everybody riled up. Got the other side just saying he wasn't the spokesman for the—for that side. He was basically a—sort of a—sort of like a—status quo kind of Native. Status quo with the treaty process...the talk after—at*

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<sup>187</sup> Gordon Sebastian's remark alluded to the increased risk of violence if the full visibility of the people in the camp and the arresting officers were not possible. The quotation was taken from the news story, “Standoff at critical point,” in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 14 September 1995 a1.

*the gas station they were upset and that 'this move can totally backfire and make the dispute getting worse' ... 'This is not the guy.'*" [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### Summary and Remarks

From the perspective of *CBC Radio*, the request to broadcast the surrender message was highly contentious, and was the topic of the *CBC Radio* program, *Now the Details*, a radio program that discusses media issues.<sup>188</sup> The program included interviews with *CBC Radio* journalist Conway Fraser, *CBC* executives Jeffrey Dvorkin and Robert Sunter as well as Sergeant Peter Montague. Dvorkin stated that he felt quite uncomfortable with the request and the pressure from the RCMP to comply. He pointed out that the *CBC* was ready to help out, but he felt that the integrity of the *CBC*, as a public broadcaster, was compromised by complying. In his interpretation, *CBC Radio* had become "agents of the RCMP." There was no time to preview the message, he had no idea what was being said in Shuswap, and he had to trust the reputation of Chief Antoine Archie that the Shuswap content was appropriate. Dvorkin said he felt that the proposition from the RCMP media personnel was manipulative and coercive: he was told by Sergeant Montague that "lives [are] at stake," and "we didn't have any choice in the matter." He described the lack of free will at Gustafsen Lake and that, at *CBC*, they make "informed choices," but this was not the situation in the broadcasting of the surrender message. *CBC Radio* was not given enough details to make an informed decision, but was "held accountable for what we were putting on the radio—that was wrong—I hope there will be strong protests made... toward the RCMP." Dvorkin related how Conway Fraser was temporarily pulled off the story because "we should not be reporting on ourselves."<sup>189</sup> For Robert Sunter, the executive who made the final decision, and Conway Fraser, the journalist who was originally approached, the pressure of having to make a decision within a short period of

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<sup>188</sup> The narrator began the program by asking the question, "Did the people's broadcasting corporation become the RCMP Broadcasting Corporation last week in British Columbia? Well, what would you do if the police said, 'We need your co-operation. You could help end the standoff at Gustafsen Lake.'" This is taken from the *CBC Radio* show, "The cops, the natives, and the CBC," aired during the program, *Now the Details*, 17 September 1995.

<sup>189</sup> Fraser successfully challenged his superiors' decision to remove him from the story.

time was the toughest part of the negotiation. Sergeant Montague was also interviewed during the program to explain his perspective on the situation. He stated that the surrender message was a suggestion initiated by someone from the camp brought out by Marlowe Sam.

The following is the transcript of the radio interview between Mary Lou Finlay, host of the program, *Now the Details*, and Sergeant Montague:

*"Did you tell them it was urgent—it couldn't have gone out at 4:00? 'Yes, we told them it was urgent.' And did you give them a sense that it was life and death? 'We—well—life and death—no, we didn't do that. We told them that it was a real possibility that this would end the armed standoff. And, I suppose when you—if you talk about it like that, if we could end it in a peaceful manner, as a result of a short conversation on CBC Radio, rather than the alternative—which may have to be at some point in time—I mean, there wasn't any down-side to doing this.' Who asked that it to be repeated three—twice? 'I did.' Not the Natives? 'No, we wanted to make sure they heard it—and it's a good thing we did, because they didn't get it on the first broadcast [cleared his throat] their batteries were low, or—something like that—but they caught it on the second broadcast.' Now, did you think the CBC would comply with your request? 'Yes.' Why? 'We didn't even give it a second thought.' Because it didn't strike you as an extraordinary request—that they would turn over their airways, in effect to you, at the behest of people, that—what you describe as criminals. 'Mmm. Oh, no—not—at all. I mean, we firmly believed that this was going to work. There were three or four communications with the camp after that message—and everything was extremely positive. That it was going to happen. And then all of a sudden, the last communication we had with them—there was a change of mind, or they decided that they weren't coming out. And going to CBC with that request—we would have been, I think—well, I think that the Canadian society would have been aghast, had CBC rejected the thought of doing that—in light of*

*everything else that has gone on in the last two months.*” [transcript from *CBC Radio* program, *Now the Details*, broadcast 17 September, 1995]

Sergeant Montague said that under similar circumstances he would make a similar appeal again. He reiterated that it was because *CBC* was the only station heard at the camp—that it was not about the RCMP taking over the airwaves, or favoritism, or taking advantage of a particular airwave. “*That had nothing to do with it.*”

There were many inconsistencies found by the journalists and the camp supporters regarding the surrender message over *CBC Radio*. The choice of Chief Antoine Archie as the “respected chief” was considered contentious by several supporters and some media. It was common knowledge that the people inside the camp were antagonistic toward him.<sup>190</sup> Some of the supporters of the protest were suspicious that the broadcast was another RCMP initiative that allowed the RCMP to appear proactive in the resolution of the dispute. They thought that this was a façade to characterize the people at the camp as unreasonable and belligerent when no surrender was forthcoming, contrasted by the pains taken by the RCMP to make the arrangements in good faith. Many people found it inconsistent that, if the camp had initiated the request, they would not have made the effort to listen to the radio at that time. Still, the *CBC* broadcast was soon forgotten. Neither the Native intermediary, who allegedly brought someone out from the camp with the request, nor any of the people arrested, discussed the *CBC Radio* announcement to the media during or after the standoff.

The repercussions for the *CBC* amounted to some of the journalists questioning the *CBC*'s ethics, but once the circumstances were made known to them, nothing more was said. However, Chief Antoine Archie inadvertently became embroiled in the media coverage of the message, and the dissention between the camp and the local Native leadership invited criticism from those that supported the camp. Chief Archie, during his

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<sup>190</sup> RCMP Psychologist Dr. Mike Webster recalled that Chief Antoine Archie was the closest chief they could find who could speak Shuswap.

interview for this research, indicated that he did not question whether the RCMP or the camp initiated the request for the radio broadcast from a respected chief. He took the RCMP at their word. He recalled some of the repercussions: *"I read a lot of people were cheesed off because I made those comments in Shuswap. And they were saying, 'Who the hell knows what the hell he said? Nobody knows what he said!'"*...Chief Archie translated in English what he said in Shuswap: *"[I] told them, 'I am talking to you positively and not negatively. And I said 'They're not going to ill treat you—they're going to treat you with respect. They will not hurt you, or do you any harm—If you come out.'"* [Interview with Chief Archie, 25 July 1997]

If the original request for a radio message assuring safety and respect was initiated by the camp, it was never confirmed by any of the journalists with whom I spoke. Neither did I find any record to confirm the origin of the request within the media products during or after the standoff. Although the RCMP media liaison claimed that *CBC Radio* was the only radio station transmission that the camp could hear, Steven Frasher (from *100 Mile House Free Press*) and I tested a radio at the site. We found that it would have been possible for the message to be heard over *CKBX Cariboo Radio*, another "AM" station. However, since *Cariboo Radio* is a privately owned outlet, the negotiations with the RCMP might not have entailed the same ethical principles as the public broadcaster, *CBC*.<sup>191</sup> A *Vancouver Sun* news story published shortly after the conclusion of the standoff included statements from Native spiritual leader Arvol Looking Horse, who was inside the camp when the surrender messages were broadcast. He stated that the RCMP had not told him about the radio broadcast before he went into the camp. At three o'clock, when the first message was broadcast, he and the other people in the camp were in the middle of a religious ceremony. During this visit, the people decided that they would leave the camp after three days. Arvol Looking Horse is quoted (referring to the

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<sup>191</sup> This point was made by the *CBC* executives interviewed during the program *Now the Details*, on *CBC Radio*, 17 September 1995.

RCMP): "They never gave me enough time...I was shocked when I heard (the broadcast). They did not tell me what they were going to do."<sup>192</sup>

The case of the *CBC Radio* broadcast was another situation of blurred boundaries between the police and the media. In this situation, the negotiations involved the co-operation of a radio journalist, a local Native chief, and media executives. Thus, contrary to Sergeant Montague's assessment, the announcement did have negative repercussions. Some of the media called into question the trustworthiness of the chief to provide an appropriate message in Shuswap over the airwaves. The involvement of the local chief also rattled the sensitivities of the local Native communities and the camp's supporters.

The RCMP's involvement of *CBC Radio* presented two occasions when their negotiations with a media outlet were put on the public record. The initial product of the negotiations was the broadcast of the surrender message. Later, a radio program assessed the context of the surrender message broadcast with interviews with some of the key players. This second account revealed many of the negotiation strategies used by the RCMP media personnel. The police made promises of rewards to the radio journalist for his co-operation to broadcast a message, allegedly that was requested by people in the camp. Time constraints impeded thoughtful consideration and extensive consultation at the Vancouver office. Lastly, the RCMP's appeals to the outlet's moral obligations made it difficult for the executives not to comply. The *CBC* executives considered the request coercive, but they felt trapped, having no other alternative but to broadcast the message. The ingenuity of presenting the contextual account of the news story was that it gave the media personnel an opportunity to express their concerns to the public, and the RCMP media liaison was allowed to respond. In this way, the hidden aspects of issues of power, domination, and ethical conflicts between the media outlet and the RCMP became another dimension of the story. This will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

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<sup>192</sup> This quotation was taken from "RCMP told to send in medicine men 3 weeks ago, Indian says," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1995 B2. Arvol Looking Horse's account contradicts Sergeant Montague's explanation at the time of the *CBC Radio* announcement.

## **Media Tours of Camp Zulu**

**15 September 1995:** *"RCMP takes selected media on a tour, but swear the reporters to secrecy, holding tape and film for later release. The Vancouver Sun does not take part in the tour."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 21 May 1997 A6]

*"I just got a call on my cell. He [Montague] said, 'Be at the airport at 2:00 with a cameraman.' That's all, and, 'Don't talk to anybody.'"* [Interview with journalist, anon]

The RCMP media liaison arranged for television crews to fly into Camp Zulu on Thursday, 15 September. He told the television crews to meet at the police headquarters for a mysterious news release, and not to tell anybody. One journalist remembered the excitement of getting a scoop: *"I mean, seriously, if it's your competition that's going to find out, and you've got the jump on your competition because of—whatever reason you don't know why—believe me, you're not going to tell anyone...I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm being let in on something and we got to go and find out what it is! I mean, you're not going to say to all the competition, 'This terrible thing has happened. I've been given this secret something or other but, of course, I won't go because you weren't invited.' Of course you go."* [Interview with journalist, anon] At the same time, journalists were become critically aware of the dynamics that had been evolving: *"...And that whole aspect of deals made secretly points to a control-oriented operation."* Several of the print journalists became incensed over being left out. In response, Sergeant Montague arranged for a media pool for the following day. The *Vancouver Sun* declined and made other arrangements. The journalists allowed into Camp Zulu were told that they could not publish or broadcast stories about the camp until the standoff had concluded. The RCMP collected the video-tapes and the rolls of film before the journalists left Camp Zulu. They said that the materials would be temporarily "embargoed" for security reasons. Some of the RCMP at Camp Zulu were unappreciative that the media were allowed inside to ask questions and take pictures. One journalist who went into the camp recalled, *"Suddenly, Montague says, 'We have to get out of here.' Because a lot of the cops that were up there were very displeased with this media circus that was suddenly happening in their camp."* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

While the RCMP media liaison may have assumed that he was providing the journalists with a story opportunity, the fact that they could not use the photographs, films, and interview tape right away devalued them. By the time that the materials were released to the media, the story had become “old news”: *“One thing the RCMP never understood through the whole thing was the competition in the media. They didn’t understand the fact that doing the interview then, then sharing the information after the whole thing was over, was useless, the tape was useless...it was old news—nobody cared about it anymore. To address this point, we did feature stuff...like the ERT interview...”* [Interviews with journalists, anon] The interview with the ERT member, who had been inside one of the APC’s at the time of the firefight, provided an emotionally powerful war image of the conflict.<sup>193</sup>

The *Vancouver Sun* hired a helicopter to fly a photographer and a journalist over Camp Zulu as soon as the journalists found out that the television crews were being flown in. Once in the air, the chartered helicopter pilot received a message that the RCMP had doubled the perimeter of its secured airspace, forcing them to turn back. Nevertheless, the journalist was able to view Camp Zulu and the Gustafsen Lake camp. The following is how the *Sun* characterized the aerial view:

*Over-all, the Gustafsen Lake site looked more like a pleasant camping ground than a heavily fortified complex. Well out of sight from the sundance grounds the police staged their latest round of patrols at base Zulu. And beyond a road blockaded by police cars and concrete barriers, the media waited for the latest news release. [Vancouver Sun, 18 September 1995 A3]<sup>194</sup>*

According to a *Vancouver Sun* journalist, who was irate over the exclusive television coverage, *“We felt that we were being frozen. And that they knew that if a print reporter went in...a reporter could talk about it differently, and would have a different level of*

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<sup>193</sup> One of the news accounts of the ERT member’s description of the firefight is in “Two-hour shootout likened to Vietnam: ERT officer describes gunbattle: Gustafsen Lake,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 19 September 1995 A10.

<sup>194</sup> This news story excerpt was taken from “Selected media get look at Zulu: RCMP allow trips into forward base of operations,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 18 September 1995 A3.



*information. Just as the photographs that our photographer did over Zulu showed, that there were a number of—there was a different number of Bison actually in the camp than we had been told had been brought in. And so there was a view that you couldn't necessarily trust anything they said. And I think eventually that's the way we felt about it—was that we'd been lied to, and that we had not been kept informed—we had been kept informed to their point...The argument that I use is that I understand that the RCMP have a reason to do what they do. When they do their hostage negotiations, or when they're in a situation like this, you expect them to not tell them everything. But you don't expect them to lie to you and to manipulate the situation. And I think that's eventually what I think we concluded was happening... "[Interview with journalist, anon]*

The *Vancouver Sun* maintained its professional boundaries from the RCMP by hiring its own helicopter. It was also the only news story about the media tour to Camp Zulu that was critical of the RCMP providing such a media opportunity. The *Vancouver Sun* journalists felt that the media tour of Camp Zulu was contrived and another example of how the RCMP attempted to control the news narrative.

The feature interviews with the ERT member who was part of the firefight added to the war drama—and it may have contributed to the skewing of the representation of the standoff. After the standoff, more of the journalists began questioning how the RCMP led them to news stories as a way to control the characterization of the event. Several months later, one reporter compared perspectives with another ERT member who was also involved in the firefight. The journalist paraphrased the officer's response: "*Well, I guess people just react differently to different things'... He said that before they ordered the army vehicles, they'd done intelligence—they knew exactly what sort of fire power that they were looking at. And they ordered vehicles [APCs]—that wasn't going to be—you know, those bullets were not going to pierce.*" The journalist's impression was, "*They FOUND the most over-reacting guy to do the interview—'cause my guy said 'Huh?' You know, he said, 'We knew what they had for weapons, we knew that in that APC we were perfectly safe. I mean, the only way you were going to get hurt was if you*

*were stupid enough to stick your head out! There was no problem—I don't know why those guys were so excited!"* The journalist cynically stated that the sanctioned interview was a case of *"we found the guy who was going to go hysterical for ya, to make it sound as bad as possible."* The journalist said that the interviewed ERT member seemed quite sincere, but that his response may not have been representative of how other ERT members recalled the situation. [Interview with journalist, anon] Another journalist came to a similar conclusion: *"The cops got what they wanted...but so did media—the very fact that we used it [the APC interview] made it gospel—the RCMP knew that."* [Interview with journalists, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

Although many journalists were eye-witnesses to the RCMP temporary installation at Camp Zulu, other than the account by the *Vancouver Sun*, there was little critical evaluation in the other news accounts that they had been "led" to the news story. I posit that it was an event constructed by the RCMP. The RCMP media personnel had created this news opportunity by limiting access to television, and even compelled the *Sun* to cover Camp Zulu in some way.

The RCMP rationale to the journalists for the visit was that the establishment of the camp was unique in the RCMP history, and it would be good to have this on the public record. Yet, "full media coverage" of RCMP resources had been suggested in the 1 September RCMP media strategy memo. (Refer to "Issue Three" in Appendix 8.) The memo states a concern that the "public must see that the RCMP is capable of flexing its muscle but will only do so if necessary." The memo implies that media coverage of RCMP equipment and facilities would be efficacious for public relations because it might instill public confidence in the RCMP handling of the situation. With the hindsight appreciation that the tour to Camp Zulu was a public relations initiative, was the tour a news event? And, was this appropriate for such a highly charged conflict situation?

### **Media Coverage of the End of the Standoff**

**17 September 1995:** *"A dozen people leave the camp after the month-long standoff. They are all arrested. In total, 18 people face charges ranging from mischief to attempted murder."* [chronology, *Vancouver Sun*, 21 May 1997 A6]

After a few false alarms of surrenders and a trickle of people leaving the camp since the firefight, the day that the remaining people left the camp was anti-climactic. John Stevens, the Gustafsen Lake Sundance spiritual leader, visited the camp for a few hours, and then the remaining people agreed to come out. The police were careful to explain to the media that this would not be called a "surrender" because the negotiators were trying to preserve as much face and show respect for the group. Some journalists were hesitant to become too excited about the rumors of resolution, in case it did not work out as planned. They were told by the RCMP that the camp occupants would be taken to the airport at 100 Mile House. The media would be *"allowed to observe the helicopters landing and people being taken to police cars—that's what happened."* More than one journalist said that Sergeant Montague assured them that there would be a media witness to the arrests. But, according to one journalist, on the day the arrests were made, Montague told reporters, *"That was never in the plan—and you know it.' He denied he ever said it. There were no media present—[for the arrests]—[I]—don't how people were treated."* Several journalists gathered in the Red Coach Inn parking lot waiting to hear the final word. They had been told at around two o'clock in the afternoon that the release would take place in two or three hours.

The public and the media gathered at the 100 Mile House airport, where they watched the helicopters land with the people from the camp. The journalists were given a slightly better view, being allowed closer to the heliopad than the public. *"We were sort of cordoned off in a little area that we weren't allowed to leave...It was a section where we could stand and watch the helicopters arrive."* The public, consisting mostly of Native people, had begun to line up along the fence next to the airport well before the estimated time. There were few non-Natives in the gathered crowd, and few townspeople were there. One journalist recalled meeting a reporter and a photographer from a Native

newspaper, who had just arrived from Milwaukee. People were happy that the standoff had ended without loss of life or serious injury, and it was an emotional time for the supporters, families, and Native intermediaries. Some of the reporters attempted to interview the Native people as they were waiting. One of the journalists observed that he was being trailed by a Native male who seemed to intimidate people into not speaking. *"As soon as they saw him, they shook their heads and said they didn't want to talk to me...I did meet two Native people who were kind of appalled by the Gustafsen standoff, and didn't think that—didn't support it at all what was happening there. And I think it was people like that they didn't want me to talk to."*

The largest helicopter of the fleet, called the "big red tomato," was the first of the shuttles to land, and supporters began waving eagle feathers and beating drums. Some stood on top of vehicles to get a better view. One journalist, who was admittedly skeptical of the people involved in the protest, recalls: *"They were cheering. They were cheering the people in handcuffs. They were cheering the prisoners...It was a mixture—it was like, 'right on!—up the pigs' kind of thing. Which was—I thought it was unfortunate."* The final helicopter that held Wolverine and Percy Rosette made a more theatric approach to the airport. Instead of flying in directly, like the others, this one flew over the adjacent marsh area, allowing better visibility for the crowd and waiting photographers. According to the journalists, when Percy Rosette and Wolverine got off the helicopter, the emotion peaked, with loud cheering and waving of eagle feathers.

For many of the reporters who gathered at the airport, this was their first chance to see the people from the camp in person. One reporter commented on the appearance of some of the younger people: *"They looked like kids, a lot of them,"* while another described them as a *"sad, rag tag group that were brought out."* **Did they seem violent to you?** *"Well, they weren't in a position to seem violent, they were under arrest, they were surrounded by police, they were handcuffed. They were—they seemed—pretty beaten when they were brought out."* [Interviews with journalists, anon] The news accounts provided an array of

perspectives from Native and non-Native leaders, RCMP officials, and private citizens. There was a consensus of relief that the standoff ended peacefully. Nevertheless, there were mixed reactions concerning the conduct of the camp, the RCMP, and the politicians. [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### **Summary and Remarks**

The scene at the airport marked the transition from the end of the standoff to the beginning of the long judicial process that lay ahead.<sup>195</sup> Once in police custody, the camp members were about as inaccessible to the media as they were when they were behind the barricades. However, the media coverage of the helicopters landing with the people from the camp did offer an opportunity for the journalists to interview people with a variety of perspectives.

The visual effect of seeing the people who had occupied Gustafsen Lake for a month (and for some, longer), handcuffed and brought to waiting police cruisers, fit the script for a “criminal versus law and order” theme. Still, the presence of cheering supporters and comments from several Native leaders, who voiced criticisms of the RCMP and the politicians in their handling of the situation, provided contrasting frames. The RCMP’s comments at the subsequent press conference shifted away from interpretations of the camp to advising the media of the arrest protocols and trial appearances. At the press conference, the RCMP officials acknowledged the assistance from various Native leaders and groups in reaching the resolution, and they commended the efforts of their officers and the restrained approach that they took to the conflict.

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<sup>195</sup> Of the 18 people who were arrested, two were charged with attempted murder. The remaining 16 individuals were charged with mischief and trespassing. After the arraignment, most of the defendants were immediately released on bail. The convictions and sentences were as follows: all attempted murder charges were dropped. Wolverine received the longest sentence, with four and one half years for mischief endangering life, and other offences; the other sentences ranged from three years to six months for convictions of mischief endangering life, possession of weapons, mischief and trespass. Wolverine was released on parole on 28 January 1999.

Under “normal” circumstances, the scene at the airport and the press conference would have been the culminating news story for the journalists, and they could return to Vancouver. Although most journalists did leave 100 Mile House, several of them returned six days later. The RCMP media personnel invited them on a final tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp for a news story that did not require any time-limited embargoes, and that promised ample photographic and filming potential. The tour would also quench the curiosities and imaginings of the journalists about the camp, which had been off-limits for three weeks.

### **Media Tour of the Camp**

**24 September 1995:** “*I’ll let the people of British Columbia be the judge of whether those who occupy—illegally—private land and then shoot at police officers at sight and hunt them and actually aggressively pursue them to kill—whether they’re heroes or zeroes.*” *Dosanjh said.*<sup>196</sup> [“Gustafsen Lake Aftermath,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1995 B1]

In the interim between the surrender and the media tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp, the RCMP forensic team combed the area, searching for weapons, bullet shells, and casings.<sup>197</sup> Shortly before the arranged tour of the camp, some of the media flew to the airport in the RCMP jet, along with Attorney General Dosanjh, while a few other journalists made their own way from Vancouver. Some of the media that covered the standoff were unable to attend.<sup>198</sup>

More than one journalist described the media visit to the camp as a fully controlled situation: “*When we were with the police, it was like a grade 5 field trip, where everyone was holding onto a rope—‘stand here,’ ‘don’t stand here.’*” The police led the walking

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<sup>196</sup> The quotation is from British Columbia Attorney General during the media tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp at the end of the standoff.

<sup>197</sup> The following news excerpt details the weapons found in the camp. “*In the foxhole at the foot of a tree they found 10 guns, a bow and three arrows, and a powerful pipe bomb. In a firepit, they found the remains of an AK-47 assault rifle, a Lee Enfield and an FN assault rifle.*” This information is taken from, “GUSTAFSEN LAKE AFTERMATH: Standoff site has foxhole, bunker,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1995 B1.

<sup>198</sup> Some outlets did not send journalists to the tour of the camp because of the expense already incurred covering the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Details of the costs are discussed later.

tour, pointing out various defensive constructions and sites of media documented confrontations. The process of seeing these features, and listening to the explanations offered appealed to the imaginings of many people making the tour. While reflecting afterward, one journalist discussed how the tour affected his news account: *"I think described it as looking like some kind of—like a guerilla camp or something—you know, which—in retrospect, I kind of I shudder at—because that's a really loaded term." But why wouldn't you use the term 'guerilla camp'?* *"Well, because I've never seen a guerilla camp. I mean, [how] do I know [what] a guerilla camp looks like? It was sort of my image of what—so—that's a term that I thought maybe I shouldn't have used."* *Did it look like a frightening camp?* *"Ya, there is no question. It was crude, but I think it had the potential for being quite deadly."*

Some journalists openly joked about how the RCMP restricted their movements during the tour. *"All the media had to drive in together, and they were all going—'BAAAA! BAAAA!' Making these sounds of cattle, 'MMOOO!' because they all got to stay together. We were making sounds like cows—moving around—'this is a hole,' 'this was the tree' 'this was the...'—ugh—this is nothing new! And so, Peter would get into these holes—'This was a foxhole.' In fact, I found out later [from] some of the Natives that some of them WERE, you know, protective foxholes. But some of them were also built for winter. The logs—you cover them and you climb inside them.<sup>199</sup> Sure, the inside of a car looks like it could be for shooting out of too, but it could also be for staying warm and dry. I mean...there's a couple of things that—I knew were misleading. Now, there was a cache of guns under a tree—covered with a board. There's no argument there."*  
[Interviews with journalists, anon]

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<sup>199</sup> A participant in this study, who had been in the camp before the 1995 Sundance, advised me that a few of the structures were built prior to 1995. These were traditional dug-out shelters, called "kee-kwu-lee." The name of these structures is taken from Chinook Jargon, and has several orthographic representations. The RCMP leading the media tour presented all of the dugouts at the Gustafsen Lake camp as being built for the purpose of strategic defense related to the 1995 standoff.

Several of the reporters questioned the necessity of the Attorney General's presence during the tour. A few interpreted this as a way to publicly reinforce the necessity of such a large police presence. *"But, I mean, when you looked around the camp, it was pretty piddly...again, and this is the thing, it goes back to what I was saying before—with the—it's not a black and white story, right? And it never was..."* Some of the journalists felt that he was making a pitch about how the public should interpret the actions of the people in the camp. *"Were these people heroes or zeros—you be the judge,' kind of thing—which kind of strikes me as the kind of thing—that's not real—people don't speak like that—you know, I guess he's the Attorney General. But—he's kind of known as a guy who is ready with a quote on anything, you know."* Another journalist stated, *"We didn't need him on the tour...What the hell? He'd never been in there before. Montague'd never been in there. Dosanjh had never been in there."* Some of the journalists considered his presence to be a political appearance, timed for the upcoming provincial election. *"Well, they certainly don't want to have it clouding election time. They didn't want to have this goin' on, or too fresh."* Another journalist referred to the Attorney General's appearance at the camp tour as *"running in to shoot the wounded at the end."* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

Defense lawyer George Wool was also critical the role of the Attorney General in the media coverage, and his appearance at the camp. *"Well, he made the very fatal error of actually involving himself. He involved himself in the process, which he ought not to have done. He should NEVER have been flown around in an RCMP plane, and making comments about evidence or comments about what did or did not happen. That's inappropriate for an attorney general. Because his role in our society is to protect the rights of all people—at all times. Not to be selectively seen as supporting one side or the other, or making comments to the effect that 'there is no other side to the story.' It's inappropriate. It's not an appropriate position for an attorney general."* [Interview with George Wool, Defense Council, 26 May 1997]



## **Denouement**

The day after the tour, two of the journalists drove back up to the camp. *“There wasn’t a single policeman [around] And we drove back in—just to—I want to spend a little time of my own in there, lookin around.”* How did you feel about that? *“Oh, I felt like I was trespassing. I felt like I was—we never did go over to the sacred circle. Just—you know, we sat on the logs a bit. And we were surrounded in cattle! A day later—not 12 hours later—after the media tour. Five hundred head of cattle...”* [Interview with journalist, anon]

## **Summary and Remarks**

The tour of the camp was the finale of the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, with the RCMP providing the journalists with an opportunity to see the camp. For most journalists, this was the first time they saw the camp, and they had no other frame with which to interpret what they saw. However, the police-guided tour offered a view through the eyes of criminal investigators. Although the people from the camp had been arrested, and most were released on bail, the RCMP provided the media with information that would later be presented during the trial as prosecuting evidence. This included a walking tour of the sites of shooting incidents, strategic pits that offered tactical advantages, and a hide-away for a cache of weapons. Sergeant Montague read off a list of weapons found on the premises to the group of media who were gathered near the place where they had been stored. For many of the journalists, it was easy to accept in full value how the RCMP portrayed the camp.

Still, even for those journalists who were skeptical of the tour, the task at hand was to report what they saw and what the police and the government official told them. The RCMP and the Attorney General were offering information and quotations that could produce important news accounts. There were no alternative sources available at the tour to challenge how the information about the camp was characterized. There was no time for the journalists to return to town and seek out anybody who could offer another perspective of the camp. Only a few of the journalists commented that the camp tour

predisposed the media to promote a guilty verdict on the people in the camp. Consequently, the media coverage of the camp tour did not reflect any critical assessment of how the media event was constructed and an evaluation of the players who were being served or abused by this news opportunity. Thus, in spite of the joking resistance offered by the journalists, they were still being “led” by the RCMP media personnel during this tour.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The final week of the standoff provided several opportunities for the RCMP to maintain the ruling definition of the situation by offering news gathering opportunities to the media. This was a period when the RCMP relaxed control over information and details about their operation and the investigation. The RCMP’s demonstrated enthusiasm to conduct media tours of the RCMP Camp Zulu, the shot up RCMP vehicle, the camp truck, and the Gustafsen Lake camp were more typical of a victor of a war than for police engaged in the process of an investigation.

The media tours and pools arranged by the RCMP offered a service to the media: the police opened a window for the media to police information, allowing public access to details and RCMP working conditions that were previously withheld. In creating these news gathering opportunities, the RCMP helped feed the insatiable “media beast” a form of compensation for their starvation for news that characterized much of the standoff. The tours also portrayed the RCMP as being transparent to the public, although RCMP documentation cites that the motivation for these occasions served as a public relations function for the RCMP in order to maintain public approval. In spite of the Native intermediaries and arrival of spiritual leaders, who provided variation for the news narratives, the RCMP remained center stage in the final phase of the standoff and maintained the focus on their definition of the situation.

In the analysis of the situations of the *CBC Radio* message, the tours of Camp Zulu, and the Gustafsen Lake camp, it appears that the role of the RCMP expanded to include the creation of news events for the media. In effect, the RCMP were telling the media what the news was going to be. The RCMP's authoritative news appeal, their wealth of information, and the journalists' ever-present hunger for news ensured that these events would be given media attention. Exciting images of RCMP resources, battle stories with heroes, and viewing defensive structures at the camp were media spectacles that became news events in themselves. The interview data with the journalists suggest that the media could not ignore the availability of these news gathering opportunities. The RCMP were the most powerful media source, and competition between outlets ensured that police information retained a high value. The investment by the various media outlets of labor and coverage hooked the media into covering the story until its natural conclusion. The media could not easily afford breaks in the flow of the story, and any developments, even those that may have been artificially constructed, became viable news that might satisfy their audiences. Indeed, several journalists found that the RCMP "tours" had more news appeal than the staid police briefings, which were far removed from the actual scenes of the standoff.

However, these constructed news opportunities were (with the exception of the *Vancouver Sun*'s coverage of the fly-over of RCMP Camp Zulu) not covered with a critical view. There were few, if any, struggles or maneuvering between sources and the media because the RCMP were the only source of information, and the RCMP arranged for the media opportunity. The media's passivity and willingness to follow along made them ideal conduits of the RCMP perspective. Earlier in the standoff, the RCMP were displaying weaponry which had been confiscated from people associated with the camp. This was followed by periodic viewing of material evidence associated with the violent incidents, and culminating with the camp. By offering journalists these eye-witnessing opportunities, the media provided the public with information about the police

investigation in advance of a trial. Yet, other than providing graphic displays, the tours and media access to evidence offered no advancement for the news event.

Despite the diminished tension between the camp and the police, the RCMP provided news gathering opportunities that maintained a focus on the criminality of the camp and the war conditions endured by the police. Several journalists felt that their accounts during this time toned down the negative characterizations of the camp. Nonetheless, the RCMP continued to dominate the news narrative with powerful images and language depicting the camp as being volatile and dangerous.

## Chapter 8

### Terms of Engagement

*“Out-of-towners were telling us what was happening here!”<sup>200</sup>*

This chapter provides the analysis of three aspects of the news coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. First is an examination of select audience responses to the media coverage. Second is the concluding discussion of the construction of media stereotypes. Last is an analysis of the structural relations that contributed to the media characterizations.

Audience feedback is another component of the ethnography of communication aspect of this study. Appreciating how media audiences evaluated the news “performances” is an indicator of some of the outcomes and a validity check for the analysis of the context and products of the news. In this study, “audience” is considered in two ways. Audience evaluation is regarded from the perspectives of leaders of those who were “on stage” during the event. Chief Nathan Matthew, lawyer George Wool, and Superintendent Olfert expressed concerns regarding the potential harm to the public identities of the people (or institution) whom they represented due to audiences reacting to sensationalist media coverage. Actual audience responses are derived from participants in the research who lived in the local vicinity. Audience interpretation of media messages requires each individual to evaluate the media messages within a frame of prior experiences, attitudes and beliefs, and what is perceived about the players and the situation portrayed in the news. In this way, multiple interpretations of the situation are possible. Large audiences may reach a consensus opinion, but there are always potentials for segments of the audience to evaluate media messages much differently than the majority of people. What set the media audiences surveyed in this study apart from “typical” audiences (if there is such an entity) were their differing resources and abilities with which to evaluate the news stories. Some audiences were close enough to the situation that they became

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<sup>200</sup> This quotation was taken from an interview with a resident of 100 Mile House in July, 1997.

peripheral players in the media coverage. This increased their interest in how they, or their group, were characterized in the press. For some of the people in the Native and non-Native communities in the area, there were concerns that the behaviors and beliefs of a few people might be stereotyped as being representative of the whole group. In this situation, there were few options to control or correct this information to the media.

The second topic for analysis is the context and products of media stereotyping, which draws from ethnography of communication, and addresses theories concerning media coverage of minorities. Several factors contributed to the construction and dissemination of media stereotype characterizations of the people in the camp. During the standoff, visual, verbal, and written communications lacked variability in expression due to the context of the coverage, news production practices and conventions, and external influences. For long-term news events, such as this standoff, limitations such as these posed serious obstacles that led to repeated patterns of representation, contributing to stereotype depictions. At the time, language was one of the aspects of the coverage over which the journalists had control. Yet, as will be demonstrated, there were still some limitations inherent in language itself, as well as in news production practices. The journalists' accounts contextualize the quantitative analysis of stereotype labeling, the predominant linguistic feature in the newspaper stories in the Canada-wide sample.

The final analysis is taken from the structural theory that underpins this study. The application of this theory reviews the structural relations that developed between the media and their sources during the standoff. As previously identified, the camp, Grand Chief Mercredi, Bruce Clark, camp supporters, and Native intermediaries negotiated information with the media, and each of these sources had varying potentials for swaying public opinion. However, none these media sources were able to sustain much opposition to the RCMP frame of the standoff. I consider that the predominant and consistent relational elements that influenced the media coverage were those of the RCMP media personnel, the media, and the internal relations within the media. Various structural

aspects of these relations are examined in light of how they contributed toward the media characterizations.

### **Audience Responses to the Media Characterizations**

I begin this discussion with three individuals, who, because of their leadership roles in relation to the specific players in the conflict, were particularly concerned how unfavorable audience impressions from the media coverage might damage the reputations and credibility of the groups that they represented.

#### **Chief Nathan Matthew**

Chief Nathan Matthew of the North Thompson Band was skeptical of the media coverage. Indeed, one of his primary functions as a media liaison for the Native intermediaries was to counter the RCMP portrayals to the media. **How would you characterize the RCMP portrayal of the dispute to the media?** *“I felt the RCMP put a deliberate negative spin on this for their own purposes. They really overplayed their hand. I felt that if they would have come to us in the beginning—a resolution would have been possible. There are also problems on our side—traditional chiefs versus elected chiefs—I’m elected—this creates a tension among us.”* The characterizations that the RCMP gave the media concerning the camp may have strained relations even further between Native groups. At the same time, he found that Natives were also stereotyped. *“The RCMP really put a negative slant [on the protesters]—the old stereotype ‘vicious Indian.’”* Chief Matthew also questioned the necessity of the manpower and equipment, since these also lent to the sensationalism in the media. *“Why did they need so many troops and armored carriers?”* He found that *“the media were all out for the excitement—the blood, the guts, the drama—that’s what I was really upset about. The media played up the violence.”* [Interview with Chief Matthew, 17 February 1998]

## **Defense Council, George Wool**

Defense lawyer George Wool was concerned about the media coverage and the potential impact on a fair trial for the defendants. This became one of the essential areas onto which he directed his defense research and strategy. Wool used television and newspaper stories from the Vancouver area to compare the facts with the media coverage. He said that he formed his initial personal opinion of the conflict since the Williams Lake press conference, when the RCMP *“paint[ed] the Natives, if you will—as terrorists.”*<sup>201</sup> He said that once he was acting as a council to some of the defendants and he learned that *“the RCMP withdrew that internally, because we found notes of the RCMP command to tell Montague to quit using the word ‘terrorists.’”* According to Wool, the RCMP media strategy was so effective that *“when we went into the trial—we had our hands—one hand behind our backs, in the sense of a fight, because—it had already been decided—by the vast majority of people, that you had here—‘bad people,’ ‘good people’... And so—you start with this case—the media coverage was, I think, excessive, and I think it was very effective.”* Wool talked about establishing the media coverage as a primary concern during the trial *“to try to set out the point that the RCMP created the media, the publicity. And I wanted to get that out very quickly, so that the jury would understand that the police didn’t go into this thing as an impartial group, attempting to gather evidence of a crime. They went in as a large media campaign, to first create these people as ‘bad’ or ‘terrorists’ and then, later, gather the evidence. So, my strategy was to get that point out rather quickly. Because I felt that the trial—the further it went on, the jury should have that point, and fast.”*

Wool had several concerns over the RCMP’s release of inaccurate information to the media and failures to make corrections. *“What frightens me is the RCMP—and the media—They never checked out alibis, or attempted to verify accounts. The RCMP were more interested in getting news releases than verifying authenticity. Police lost sight of*

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<sup>201</sup> Ironically, Wool was in the Cariboo area during the standoff, and he noticed then how the media were portraying the event and the people involved, and the responses of the community that he was visiting.



*their role in the justice system.*"<sup>202</sup> In Wool's estimation, the Gustafsen Lake was a "police constructed event...I would say probably—100 per cent. 100 per cent." In his estimation, the Williams Lake press conference was "a self-created crisis" that prevented a pre-arranged settlement meeting, which would have taken place a few days later. A former RCMP Staff Sergeant, Wool considered Gustafsen Lake "an embarrassment," and a departure from the values that he considers the foundation of the RCMP role. "The most important thing you learn [as an RCMP member] is that you are the eyes and ears of the court—you have no responsibility to the media. There is an honest professional deference [between the two institutions], the media is to provide a check on the RCMP, the RCMP is to represent the law." He raised the question, "How close should the press be to the RCMP?" In Wool's estimation, the Gustafsen Lake standoff was a situation in which the press and the RCMP became too close.<sup>203</sup> [Interview with George Wool, 26 May 1997]

### **RCMP Superintendent Olfert**

According to RCMP Superintendent Olfert, the RCMP faced a dilemma of conducting a criminal investigation of serious weapons offences without access to a crime scene and scant physical evidence. Because of this, "we might have had trouble with convictions." Abandoning the standoff was not an option, and the RCMP were committed to ensure that the weapons, and the offending parties were removed from the camp. "So—you know—that was an extremely unusual situation, calling for some unorthodox methods that—you could throw out the rule book. And we threw out the rule book on

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<sup>202</sup> George Wool said that the RCMP Operational Manual regarding media relations was not brought up in court as a defense argument. He said that the RCMP would have counter-argued that the uniqueness of the Gustafsen Lake standoff precluded the reliance on such protocols. According to Wool, "the RCMP testimony—started with the—'this was an unusual event' kind of approach. And this was a different situation—and they had to adapt. So there was sort of a rationalization developed by the RCMP." [Interview with George Wool, 28 May 1997]

<sup>203</sup> George Wool also noted that the negotiation tactics used by the RCMP during the Gustafsen Lake standoff were based on an American policing model for conflict negotiations. His evaluation of the strategy is that the application of this model at the Gustafsen Lake standoff was counterproductive, because it actually aggravated violent responses from the camp. Wool assessed this model was particularly unsuitable for negotiations for Native people, and that the American police framework is not appropriate for a Canadian context. [Interview with George Wool, 26 May 1997]

*EVERYTHING—not just media. On EVERYTHING. Like, we did things that—heretofore would have violated probably operational manuals in all kinds of respects.*”<sup>204</sup> Another concern was the impression that the RCMP discriminated against the Native people involved in the standoff. According to Superintendent Olfert, *“There’s two levels of policing—like, one for whites and one for Natives. And I think that the cultural impact on Native policing is on a much higher plane than it is for whites. Like, you have to be very sensitive and careful. And—there will be the exception—but it’s a rare exception when members don’t realize that—you best be on your best behavior because—you’re just opening the door to too many things here.”* RCMP Superintendent Olfert received feedback reports about the effects of the standoff and the media coverage on the RCMP members. *“I don’t know of how many on the other side, but a lot of members’ lives have been affected forever. And some actually had to leave the force because of their involvement in this—in this situation.”*<sup>205</sup> He learned that after the standoff, some of the officers had to seek counseling for sleeplessness and other stress-related conditions, all attributed to the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Superintendent Olfert described the logistics of containing the area with significantly fewer personnel than what a military operation would ordinarily require. This was information that could not be relayed to the media at the time. *“Because...usually in an investigation where we involve our tactical teams, we have total control—isolate an area, contain it, set up perimeters, no one goes in, no one goes out here.”* Gustafsen Lake is a rural area that was difficult to contain without massive manpower. *“One military consultant told us that for them to contain the area, they’d need two battalions—and we were trying to do something with about—you know—three hundred or four hundred members, and not all of them deployed at any given time.”*

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<sup>204</sup> With regard to the RCMP/Media Relations protocols, Superintendent Olfert stated, *“I didn’t read that [document] at all.”* [Interview with Superintendent Olfert, 17 February 1998]

<sup>205</sup> Switlo (1997) states: *“RCMP Emergency Response Team members disclose that prior to being dispatched, they were told to make sure that they had their Wills in order and to take care of any personal business necessary in the event that they would not return. These members were working long hours, sleeping as little as three hours at a time, with no days off. They were exhausted and edgy and as a result very volatile. They feared being ‘scalped’ in the middle of the night should they sleep. These men were subjected to psychological manipulation designed to facilitate their co-operation in the slaughter of those at the Sundance site. It was intended that it not take much to set them off.”* (1997:24)

Aside from insufficient personnel, there were concerns for safety. *“So they’re out there in the bush, not knowing if they’re going to be hunted or not, you know. And that sort of thing played on the members’ minds under pretty tough climatic conditions too.”* The stress, temperature fluctuations, length of shifts, and logistics of accommodations created the most difficult working conditions ever experienced by the RCMP members.

Added to the above circumstances was that the media coverage was the only source of information about the standoff for many of the families of RCMP officers. In many instances, it was impossible for the RCMP officers to contact their families to advise them of what was happening. *“The family at home—sees the media coverage, and those members that have been shot at and the vests protected them, and information is not getting back to the families—where their loved ones are, and what they’re involved with.”* According to Superintendent Olfert, several members of the RCMP were pressured by their families to leave the force because of perceptions that the conditions were so dangerous. At least one officer left the RCMP for this reason. *“So—those sorts of things were really, really tough on the members. And it—just never came out—you know—that sort of story.”* Superintendent Olfert referred to the Gustafsen Lake operation as a *“logistical nightmare.”* Internal communications were insufficient to update families on what was happening. *“In an ideal world, what we would have probably is at least on each shift, one information person that does nothing but—you know, contact families and make sure that the whole unit knows what’s going on. But because things escalated so quickly, and we just extended our resources to the max—Right—these sorts of things weren’t done. In retrospect, we’re looking back now and saying—‘Well, you know, that’s probably an area that...’ We didn’t realize the impact of this thing, really, until it’s over.”* [Interview with Superintendent Olfert, 17 February 1998]

### **Summary and Remarks**

Although the above reflections represents perspectives of only three important players in the standoff and the trial, there is a sense of the diverse negative, immediate and long-

term, effects of the media coverage. The co-construction, by the RCMP and the media, of the characterizations of the camp had the potential of stereotyping and generating a public outcry for retaliation against the camp and Native people in general. The RCMP lack of regard for the veracity and ethics of the information released to the media potentially threatened the defendants' rights to a fair trial. Yet, corrected information for the jury represents only a fraction of the people who were potentially misled by the media coverage.<sup>206</sup> Distortion of the event in the media also conveyed an unrealistic sense of fear and danger for families of RCMP, who had no other sources of information. This circumstance revealed a recursion between the RCMP press releases, the media coverage, and police families as a hidden media audience.<sup>207</sup> The feedback responses to the RCMP Superintendent about the RCMP families suggests that similar stress might have been experienced by families of the people in the camp, who also depended upon the media for developments of the situation. Thus, the sensational media coverage that promoted vilified stereotypes, accentuated violence and danger, and generated public outcries for police reprisals were potentially harmful to the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp. In addition, the above narratives point toward wider, socially disruptive impacts for Native and non-Native relations, RCMP morale, and public trust in the Canadian law enforcement and the media.

### **Local Audiences**

100 Mile House and the surrounding Native communities were the closest to the standoff, and how it was resolved would influence local Native and non-Native relations, as well as a collective historical memory, for years to come. In terms of the impact of the media coverage, one could surmise that they were standing on "ground zero." If the situation did not end peacefully, this would be the region most closely associated with the standoff,<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> The lack of corrections of misinformation to the media was exacerbated by the lack of media attention to the trial proceedings.

<sup>207</sup> By hidden audience, I am referring to the idea that this is not an audience that might be ordinarily singled out for special consideration.

<sup>208</sup> This assertion is based on the association that people have made with the 1993 standoff at the Branch Davidian Compound, transferring the location and the tragedy with the closest urban center, Waco, Texas.

and most likely the epicenter of any damage to social relations between communities after the police and the media left.

### **Chief Antoine Archie**

According to Chief Antoine Archie of the Canim Lake Band, many of the people living on the reserve were embarrassed and angry about the conflict, as well as how the potential repercussions and associations of the conflict were being tied erroneously to their community. The media coverage increased the amount of attention given to the dispute and the aims of the camp, which most Native people in the area dismissed as lacking legitimacy. Chief Archie was one of the first Native leaders to speak with the media during the beginning of the dispute. *"I talked to those reporters outside—with no backing or anything like that, and I gave them my side of the story—where I stood. I wouldn't back down, with these guys [at the camp]..."* He also felt that he had been *"criticized by some of the media that I had looked up to and respected."* This was concerning his use of the Shuswap language in the *CBC Radio* message. *"And—You want to talk?'...I won't even talk to them."* He described the media "circus" when the journalists arrived at 100 Mile House en masse. *"[They] were so excited when things were happening. When things got quiet, they [the media] started interviewing one another. We'd pick up the Vancouver Sun and these people they were interviewing were [other] reporters! They were interviewing one another for awhile, for a couple of days..."* For a lack of things to do [we both laughed]. *"...But Steve [Frasher, of the 100 Mile House Free Press] kept an eye on things..."* Subsequent to the standoff, he and other local chiefs were pressured by other Native groups to make public statements in support of the Gustafsen Lake camp. Much of the rationale for joining their ranks was on the basis of the way in which the camp was treated by the RCMP, and the RCMP's use of the media. Chief Archie refused to do this because *"they're not heroes,"* and there were many instances of disrespect from the group in the camp toward the local elders. *"I have to cut through the bullshit before I give anybody my support, and I don't think that a lot of people [did] that."*

Overall, he did not consider the media coverage of the standoff to have hurt the treaty process. He believed that one of the reasons was that he and Chief Agnes Snow, of Canoe Creek, were consistent in their comments to the media. *"Anytime we got interviewed by anybody there, they'd ask us what our stand was, we'd said, 'We're going to negotiate. We're in the treaty process, and we're going to negotiate.' We kept on repeating that all through that—all through that standoff."* He found that his media celebrity was most evident when he went to 100 Mile House. *"The publicity? It was hard for me to live with for a while, there, right? Going to town—like, if I wanted to eat out—it was tough to walk into a restaurant—people, oh—you know—'Gustafsen Lake this, Gustafsen Lake that...' All of this, eh?—People I didn't even know."* Chief Archie recalled that one of the biggest concerns during the standoff was the potential for somebody to die. This was especially evident after the shooting death of Dudley George at Ipperwash, Ontario. *"We didn't want anybody to get killed. We didn't want any RCMP to get killed. We didn't want anyone of that group to get killed—because they would've. Because there are groups who would have made it some of their agenda—a later agenda. We wouldn't have had control over what happened after that."* [Interview with Chief Archie, 25 July 1997]

### **Ranch Owners Lyle and Mary James**

For Lyle and Mary James, the media coverage was not an important issue. During the standoff, they frequently obtained the local newspapers and occasionally newspapers from Vancouver. They do not own a television. Lyle James did not feel bombarded by media attention during the standoff, although he did grant some interviews. Since the couple did not follow the media coverage very closely, they were unable to evaluate how close it came to their understanding of the situation. James knew that the RCMP has since been criticized for their handling of the standoff, and acknowledged that *"probably they did make some mistakes."* At the same time, *"I sure would not discredit the RCMP in any way. AND—the RCMP handled it very well in the way it was done—that there was no loss of life whatsoever."* He recalled that *"there was an AWFUL lot of tension in 100*

*Mile House at the time.*” Despite the furor of the standoff, they described how they made positive connections with Native people: *“Some, we wouldn’t have met otherwise.”* [Interview with Lyle and Mary James, 27 July 1997]

### **Media Audience from 100 Mile House**

The local people that I talked to consisted mostly of people in the hospitality industry, and shopkeepers. These were non-Native people who had lived at 100 Mile House between five and twenty years. 100 Mile House was in the media spotlight for almost a month during the standoff. The standoff was the talk in coffee shops, barbershops, and generally everywhere in town where people gathered. *“We sold out of newspapers daily—no matter how many we brought in. And everybody—EVERYBODY was buying newspapers.”* Only a few residents attended the press conferences. *“You could sense—you would have one group there, one group there, and the media in the middle. There was a lot of tension. And you could see the potential that, if things got out of hand here and in the community, that you would have a very serious situation. So, one has to acknowledge and admire the players—whatever segment they represent, for maintaining a certain control in that sense.”* According to some of the people I talked to, local people were not approached by the media—unless the journalists *“thought there was a story.”* A local souvenir shop did a brisk business making commemorative “Camp Overtime” Tee shirts for several of the members of the media as well as the visiting RCMP.<sup>209</sup> At the conclusion of the standoff, Staff Sergeant Sarich of the 100 Mile House RCMP detachment placed a full-page “thank you” in the *100 Mile House Free Press* to the residents of 100 Mile House and local communities.

Yet, many that lived in the vicinity felt disconnected from the standoff. The majority of the people inside the camp were not from the area, and the only significant change in

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<sup>209</sup> The souvenir Tee shirts designed at this shop for the RCMP included the RCMP logo, and identified the particular RCMP division. A generic version for the media featured a dollar sign (\$) with an arrow struck through it, with a mock insignia “Gustafsen Lake Detachment.” Another Tee shirt that was for sale (but not at this shop) featured a picture of an Indian status card, with the Monopoly board phrase as the inscription: “Get out of jail free.”

town was the visibility of the RCMP and the media. The news accounts sometimes differed from what the local people heard on the scanners, or from occasional veiled comments made by the RCMP officers, who were guests. There were times which the news accounts over the television and in the newspapers held little information. *“Actually, we would get a real chuckle out of—you know—like the reports that nothing was happening—desperate attempt to try and make something happen on the media! You know—through innuendo—or something like that—so that it made good copy.”* Television coverage, using visual shots of the town as a backdrop, provided a limited perspective. Many of the people considered seeing their town on the television news as *“weird.”* *“Especially they did a lot over the top—they parked at Exeter—at Exeter Road there, over top of the fields. So, you see the field all the time, instead of the town, really... It was like—there wasn’t that much really of the town. They parked where the golf course is, and they looked out over the field, and, ‘this is 100 Mile!’”*

Several people considered the police involvement and the media coverage of the standoff as *“overkill.”* *“We got a lot of misinformation, and they were telling people—the police were making up stories about what was going on—a lot of it. Mind you—we heard—we were listening on—like, through the scanner.”* Local residents heard many conversations over the scanners, including some in which they heard Wolverine cursing at the RCMP negotiators. *“I think that the police did a good job in a lot of ways.”* Not everyone agreed with the police restraint toward the camp. One comment I heard during the fieldwork was, *“I don’t care if it’s the Natives or whites—I don’t care who it is—if something like that happens—I’d go in and blow them away. I mean—I wouldn’t be playing games like they do. And it was a big game.”*<sup>210</sup> It did not make sense to several of the people that it took 400 RCMP to contain and diffuse a situation involving 21 people. The most lasting image, and a sign that things had gotten out of control for some of the residents, was when the APCs were brought in. The people I spoke with considered that the money

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<sup>210</sup> During the fieldwork, I learned that there were also strong negative sentiments about the camp expressed by members of the local Native communities, and that the chiefs had to reason with them.



spent on the standoff and the trial did not reflect the kinds of criminal charges and jail sentences laid against the people who stood trial for the standoff. There was a perception that something was seriously out of proportion. *“And—I mean, the money that was spent was stupid. And—when it’s all coming around now—well, a lot of them have been charged with mischief, and none—and a lot of not really serious things.”* One of the residents thought that the large media presence may have delayed the resolution. *“You take a situation like that—and if you took the media out of it—and say that—it just happened here, and it didn’t hit all the news, or gained the notoriety—it would’ve been gone in two days.”*

The local schools attended by Native and non-Native students addressed the conflict by discussing the issues with the students and providing them with various perspectives. According to one teacher, this was important because *“her students came into class knowing only the picture painted by the media” and this caused tension between Native and non-Native students.*<sup>211</sup> Chief Archie said that the people living on the Canim Lake reserve were embarrassed that their children, attending school in town, would have to endure potential taunts and criticisms from the other students. In addition, he recalled that some of the Native students attending the school located across the street from the RCMP Gustafsen Lake Operation Command Center overheard “army” personnel making racist comments. *“They could talk any way they wanted, and nobody could stop them.”*<sup>212</sup> [Interview with Chief Archie, 25 July 1997]

Relatives and business associates from outside the vicinity contacted some of the residents to clarify the impressions from the media coverage. There were questions as to whether the residents were wearing flak jackets, whether the schools were disrupted, and whether the town was barricaded. Some of the local businesses were directly affected. *“I*

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<sup>211</sup> This is taken from the news story, “Schools urge sensitivity over standoff,” in the *100 Mile House Free Press*, 13 September 1995 p.4.

<sup>212</sup> There was a small facility for the Canadian Armed forces established adjacent to the temporary RCMP Operations Command Center at 100 Mile House. Both of these were located across the street from a local school.

*had salesmen phoning up to see if they could GET into town—because they were afraid the roads were all blocked, and they wouldn't be able to get near. I mean—the media coverage made it sound like it was RIGHT in the middle of town!”* There were a few hotel cancellations from Europe because of the perception (from the news) that the volatile situation was so close to the town. It was also common knowledge in the town that some of the people in the camp were slipping out after the barricades went up, and some of them mentioned this to the RCMP. However, none of the people that I spoke with were afraid, even those who lived outside the town. Before the standoff, few townspeople drove on the forestry road to Gustafsen Lake, except for occasional fishing.

Some people were worried that the street demonstrations (protesting the standoff) would give the impression that the townspeople were part of this group. *“I didn't recognize ONE SINGLE FACE! And nobody else I talked to recognized a face.”* A few people said that there weren't any locals at the demonstration, but there were comments that a few people with intemperate views were seen there. One person said that, *“We know all of the Native leaders, and the band and that—I mean, they get along with everybody. Nobody has ever had a problem, and they still don't have a problem. But the way the media was written up, and the radio—you'd swear 100 Mile was against the Natives. And none of these people—like you looked on the news—like—do you know anybody?”* The people who came from out of town to protest the standoff were not necessarily appreciated. *“Because it put us too much on the map. I mean, we got to be known—! IT WASN'T A GOOD NAME! [laughs] And it wasn't really something that we really—it's not a-noisy town.”*

One person told me that the news coverage was so extensive that, *“out-of-towners were telling us what was happening here!”* Nevertheless, the local resident did not agree with, or appreciate, the perspectives. One of the outcomes of the standoff is that some of the local people are more conscious of media representation. *“Because, I mean, before you took it at face value—what it was—you know—that they were reporting, what was*

*happening. But now—it's sort of—you know—it's this—it's still the same—you know—from out-of-towners doing this, or is this the locals, or—you don't really know if what you're reading is what's happening.*" For several of the residents, their trust in media credibility (with the exception of the local newspaper) diminished as a consequence of the coverage of the standoff. [Interviews with some residents of 100 Mile House, July 1997]

### **Local Media**

*The 100 Mile House Free Press* had several advantages over the other media who gathered to cover the standoff. Aside from having reported on the Sundance since 1993, the newspaper staff were familiar with the early seeds of the conflict, and watched it escalate. There was an awareness of the sources that knew the background, and those sources that made themselves available for interviews but who interpreted the conflict in terms of contentious issues or political agendas. The local newspaper did not use unauthorized police telecommunications because the staff knew it was illegal. According to editor Steven Frasher, *"We had the ability and stand back and refuse to be spoon fed—and take a week's worth of what was there and choose what was the most pertinent, or what was missed by others."* They monitored the accounts from other outlets, but tailored their account according to specific editorial objectives. *"We felt for the long-term—more than the day-to-day, play-by-play sort of thing. It was more important for us to explain 'what's happening—WHY,' and try to put it in a context of—what is this going to mean for us as a community—both Native and non-Native, and working together after this is all over."* Frasher explained that, for the *100 Mile House Free Press*, any one of the incidents, such as Grand Chief Mercredi's visit or the shooting incidents, would have been front page stories. But, during the standoff, there were times when a week's worth of stories occurred on a single day. *"We had a real challenge to try to be fresh when WE hit the streets—our once-a-week shot—on Wednesday morning."*

As a weekly newspaper, the *100 Mile House Free Press* news stories of specific shooting incidents and developments were up to six days old. The coverage of the dispute focused a wider net of local sources than other media and, occasionally, comments from the Attorney General. The newspaper provided more interviews with the Native chiefs in the vicinity than other newspaper outlets in this research. The accompanying photographs of the camp were published only during the time that media access was available, and they were not included later in the standoff as “file photographs.” Other pictures included scenes from Checkpoint 17, media sources, the bullet-riddled RCMP vehicle, the spectators at the 11 September firefight press conference, and the surrender scene with the helicopter flying overhead with Wolverine. In contrast to how other newspapers in the sample presented the firefight story, the *100 Mile House Free Press* headline was “Bullets shatter peace prospects.”<sup>213</sup> However, the large photograph to the left had nothing to do with the standoff: it was a scenic picture of a rainbow over rustic log buildings at the 108 (Ranch) Heritage Site. Frasher said that the choice of picture was deliberate, “*We did this because the local people were choking on what was happening—we wanted to lighten it up.*” The local newspaper’s coverage of the standoff differed significantly from other newspapers. One reason was that it was not as dependent upon RCMP press conferences as the other outlets. Another reason was that the editor set specific objectives early in the conflict to cover the event without disrupting the relations between the local communities. A comparison of the use of labels between *100 Mile House Free Press* and 17 large newspapers across Canada will be discussed later in this chapter.

One aspect of the RCMP media operation that struck Frasher as being unusual was when the RCMP displayed evidence that incriminated the camp for engaging in illegal activities. “*They hadn’t gone to trial yet, and yet they’re publicly exposing all the evidence against them—the police argued it was a public safety issue—but again, you see how far out [the camp] was.*” Frasher mentioned that, at 100 Mile House, the local

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<sup>213</sup> This headline appeared in the *100 Mile House Free Press*, 13 September 1995 p.1.

RCMP detachment and the newspaper consider themselves responsible in ensuring that trial evidence or investigations are not compromised with the release or publication of inappropriate information. *"How are we better serving our community by doing that?"* Frasher did not have difficulty being asked to withhold publication for security reasons, *"but it's another thing to lie to me."*

Frasher considered the standoff *"a story that we're going to be watched for."* It was going to be part of the provincial and national history, and the town's media coverage would be part of the historic record. *"We've got to get it right—we can't afford to get it wrong. We don't want to come across looking like 'Mayberry RFD.' And—at first bite, a lot of the big media tended to look at us that way."* He believed that the story had deeper implications that went beyond 100 Mile House. Frasher reflected that, *"Many people in town—to this day—can't appreciate THAT kind of pressure that the RCMP was under—that even if one of those people were seriously hurt or died out there—that would be a cloud that would affect that operation, affect the Native communities HERE, that had nothing to do with the people that were in that camp. And it would have put a cloud over this community that we'd never get rid of. And to that end, I think it's really admirable that—whatever forces were in play that kept that kind of conflagration from happening—are to be applauded, from whatever side they're from."* [Interview with Steven Frasher, 23 July 1997]

### **Summary and Remarks**

Local residents were probably the best civilian audience that could critically assess the media coverage of the standoff. The people were familiar with the area, and if they had been keeping up with the local news, they would have had prior knowledge of the Sundance and some of the incidents that took place in previous years. But the factor that most distinguished this audience from others was that many of the people were listening to police communications from radio-scanners. A few people employed in the hospitality industry heard hints of information from RCMP officers with whom they had regular

contact as clients. These unauthorized sources provided the residents with a comparative basis to judge what they were obtaining from the media. All of the people that I spoke with concluded that the “outside” media exaggerated the situation. They, unlike other audiences, noticed the efforts made by the media to fill news gaps when there were no developments that had to do with the dispute. However, only a few identified that the RCMP press releases contributed to the way the news accounts dramatized the event.

Ethnographic interviews and casual conversations with people in town identified little evidence of any of them being fearful of the camp. Other than an occasional fishing trip, few people traveled down the forestry road that led to Gustafsen Lake. The residents did not seem overly concerned that a few people from the camp were slipping out from behind the barricades. Part of the reason was that the people most likely to successfully escape were from the local vicinity, and familiar with the area. Nobody regarded these individuals as particularly threatening. The large number of police staying in town also contributed to the sense of security. I found that the most frequent reason given for the local community’s lack of fear was that Gustafsen Lake is 35 kilometers from town. Thus, the issue of public safety was one raised by the RCMP during the standoff, based on the RCMP evaluation of the situation and not necessarily informed by reactions of people in the town.

A common concern among the residents was how their town was represented by the large media outlets from outside the vicinity. The people in 100 Mile House could not escape the media spotlight: anything and anyone in town that might be connected to the conflict was a potential news story. To the media and the supporters (from various perspectives) who came to the town because of the standoff, the standoff might have appeared to be a Native versus non-Native, or a Native versus police, conflict. Nevertheless, many of the people understood that this was a simplistic interpretation. Most of people from local Native communities, as well as from the town, did not support the Gustafsen Lake camp. A few citizens of 100 Mile House voiced their opinions to the media, and the media also

covered the street demonstrations that attracted people from other parts of the province where there had been Native blockades. These demonstrations also created a potential source of conflict with supporters and families of people in the camp who congregated across the street at the Red Coach Inn parking lot. The spectacle of non-Native people carrying signs and placards, and making comments to the media, was an embarrassment for those who did not share these views. This raised concerns that the media attention might stereotype the town as being racist. Some of the residents sensed that journalists from outside the region did not make clear that the “outsiders” and local people being interviewed were not representative of the values and sentiments of everyone who lived in 100 Mile House.

Despite some of the journalist’s attempts to avoid presenting the town as the site of the standoff, several people found, from outside contacts, that the media (particularly television) gave the impression that 100 Mile House was under siege. This left the residents to smooth over the misunderstandings with extended families, hotel guests, and business associates living outside the area. If they had never reflected on it before, the local audience learned about the power and authority of the media during the standoff. The people I spoke with seemed to be jaded from the experience, and most viewed the media more critically than they did prior to the standoff.

### **Stereotyping in Media Products**

The discussion of media stereotyping in Chapter 6 traced the phenomenon back to the initial Williams Lake press conference and the RCMP media strategy memo of 1 September, 1995. This topic continues, with examples of stereotype characterizations found in the media products. The material evidence of media stereotyping considered in this discussion includes photographic and film representations of the conflict as well as written representations.

Photographic and film representations of the standoff consisted of those that were taken before the barricades (that were retained for later use when access was impossible), and those that were taken afterwards (that were limited to specific sites). The latter group included Red Coach Inn press conferences, the street in front of the hotel, the view of the town from the golf course, the airport, and Checkpoint 17. According to one television journalist, once the barricades were established, providing accompanying film footage for television coverage was difficult. *“In television, with no pictures you’re in tough—only have Montague’s face, file pictures, spectacular shot of APC rumbling down the dusty road in the early morning.”* In order to refresh the audience’s memory of what the camp was like, television outlets *“used the same pictures we took of the camp over and over again.”* Similarly, newspapers also showed pictures of the camp, long after access had been cut off. Other visual representations included shots of armed ERT members in town, RCMP officers at Checkpoint 17, helicopters flying overhead, and convoys of police vehicles and unmarked supply trucks as they headed past Checkpoint 17. The police also invited media photograph and film opportunities. These included the shot-up flak jackets and the RCMP Suburban; an exclusive tour of Camp Zulu (originally for the television crews, then extended); a media pool for a surrender (that was aborted); and, after the conclusion of the standoff, a post-investigation police-guided tour of the Gustafsen Lake camp.

My findings are that the visual component of the media coverage promoted a war-time theme, emphasizing the power and pride of the RCMP, and the dangerousness of the situation and the people in the camp. This was partly due to the circumstances of the RCMP requirements for containing the area and resolving the situation, and of the media demands for coverage. However, the lack of alternative media opportunities also created a poverty of visual representations of the news event. *“It was a hurting story for pictures—bad for TV—because, like it or not, TV reaches more people than anybody, and we were probably in the worst position to do those stories—because we had no information, no pictures—we couldn’t even bullshit our way around our lack of*



*information because we had no pictures.*" [Interview with journalist, anon] One of the remedies was to use video footage and photographs on file. I propose that these contributed to the development of patterned representations of the conflict and the people involved. The repetitive use of sensational scenes (the most likely to be remembered by the media audience) would most likely contribute to how the event would be conceptualized by an audience. In addition, the effect of the video footage and photographs, accompanied by corroborative verbal and written media communications would likely accentuate this theme.

Since the media products in this research were taken primarily from newspaper sources, this will be the primary focus for discussion of the written representations. Newspaper stories are most amenable to reinforcing stereotype themes through repetitive language use, including stock phrases and narrative themes and labels. The repetition of certain news elements, which link stories from one episode of a news event to preceding ones, contribute to the formation of a coherent news narrative of a developing event.

Stock phrases included tallies of shooting incidents from the camp to the RCMP, time markers, and summary explanations of the situation, most often found at the end of the stories. The following stock phrases are taken from the firefight news story, "Three natives shot in firefight" from the *Globe and Mail*, 12 September 1995. These phrases were circulated (with periodic adjustments) within *Canadian Press* accounts across Canada for most of the standoff. "*It was the seventh time police have been fired on.*" This phrase constitutes a form of score keeping, although it is one-sided. In this case, it includes a shooting incident that did not happen, and other incidents that had yet to be proven in court. During the course of the standoff, there were no tallies ever published for the RCMP. "*The standoff entered its fourth week Monday in the confrontation between the armed aboriginals and police surrounding the remote piece of ranchland the natives claim as sacred aboriginal territory...*" This stock explanation opens with a time marker that reinforces how long the dispute has lasted. The explanation over-simplifies the

dispute. Not all the people in the camp were Native people. The police, by far, outnumbered the camp, and were better armed. The emphasis on the “sacred territory” was the rationale for land ownership, but the explanation did not allude to the camp’s challenge to the provincial treaty process. The repetition of such a phrase would have a reinforcing effect on the narrow definition of the situation, which pitted Native and non-Native interests against each other. Stock phrases were employed by journalists because they saved time during the composition stage. Tallies and time markers were ways of extending the news narrative from a previous account to the current one. They explained the conflict with an economy of verbiage, while assisting audience understanding. However, simplicity came at the cost of misrepresenting the complexity of the situation and the people involved.

Thematic repetition in the news stories was assisted by the consistency with which the RCMP dominated the frame of the news accounts. Labeling is another aspect of language use that contributed to stereotype characterizations. The news excerpts previously presented, and those in the footnotes, show that the terms “rebels,” “renegades,” and “squatters” were inserted in headlines, lead-ins, and news narratives. The labels provided thumbnail sketches of the people at the camp, and circumvented long explanations of their identities, when time and space in media products were at a premium. Nevertheless, these words were not neutral and, at the time of the standoff, they cast a meaning of negative pre-judgement of lawlessness, falling in line with the RCMP definition of the situation.

### **Language Issues**

Journalists from print and electronic media discussed their choice of terminology for the camp and the extent to which this was important during the standoff. Some of the outlets had a policy of language use regarding Native people even before the Gustafsen Lake standoff, and journalists found that editors quickly changed any deviations from what was expected. Some outlets debated the language used to identify the people in the camp,

so that it would be consistent throughout the coverage. *"You know, this whole debate was one we all had. At some point in time, somebody was favoring calling them 'campers' and everyone sort of, like, laughed at that one—like no, they're not campers..."*

Another factor was that the people in the camp were referred to (especially at the beginning of the conflict) in strong terms by the RCMP to the media. *"You're getting your information from police, or politicians, getting your descriptions of the people and what's happening, and you tend to pick up their descriptions."* All of the journalists recalled that the RCMP introduced the label "terrorism," the strongest language to describe the activities of the people in the camp, during the Williams Lake press conference. *"They had created an impression that there were—that these were people who were volatile and violent...as a matter of fact, that's what marked the beginning of the full coverage of the event, was when police held this news conference."* The journalists commented on the influence of that press conference on the media coverage: *"The RCMP started calling [the people in the camp] 'terrorists'—it jumped right out at me. From the beginning this set the tone. It biased the tone against the people in the camp. I never once used the word 'terrorist.' It is inflammatory and didn't help understanding the issue."* [Interviews with journalists, anon] Nonetheless, few of the journalists questioned the contradiction between the RCMP's language and their action: if the camp was so dangerous at the time of the Williams Lake press conference, why did they allow the media access to the camp for the first week?

Several journalists considered the intensity of the language used by the RCMP media sources tacit permission to use whatever language they wanted. According to one journalist, *"But certainly, once the words 'terrorist' and 'bestiality' start getting thrown around, you have to decide whether you're going to let that influence you or not."* Some (from print and electronic media) admitted using "terrorists" in their news accounts of the early part of the standoff. One journalist said that it was easy to justify this characterization because of the shooting incidents early in the conflict and the guerilla-

warfare attire worn by several of the young men at the camp. Wolverine's manner toward the media and his language were other influences, "*Wolverine was very belligerent.*" Wolverine's use of "body bag" "*is the kind of phrase the media would repeat in reports—it showed where Wolverine was coming from.*" One journalist said that *CBC Radio* ended up deciding on "Natives in the camp and non-Native sympathizers" and similar phrases. *Canadian Press* journalists said that they selected "rebels" because it was not as extreme as "terrorists." A few journalists commented that it was difficult to find neutral descriptors that would allow the audience to make up their own minds.

Language was most noticeable for journalists who returned to Vancouver and saw subsequent news stories being filed by their colleagues. "*I would hear editors talking about getting some of that language out and replacing it—or, more often the case, you'd hear the next day in the post-mortem of the newspaper editors saying, you know, 'Why are we doing that? What are we calling them that for?'*" **What would you suggest would have been more of a neutral way?** "*I called them 'protesters.' I think I tried to stick to that word—the protesters.*" However, at times even this word did not seem to provide a good fit: "*accepting the police word that two of their members have just been shot in the back, while they tried to protect two unarmed forestry workers—protesters doesn't seem an adequate word to describe those guys who would shoot like that, if in fact that happened.*" Occasionally, conversations overheard from the police radio-telecommunications might generate sympathy, but at other times, "*you'd hear stuff that would make your blood run cold because it seemed to be so violent in their nature, sometimes. So, it was a real emotional mix for anybody covering that, I think, at least for me, anyway.*" Of the journalists interviewed, only one of them held the belief that the politicians and the media neutrally represented the people in the camp.

A few news stories included comments from Native people about the way in which they were being portrayed in the media. In particular, they found the identification of the camp as being comprised of terrorists, extremists and squatters offensive and misrepresenting: "*I do not think we are really squatters or trespassers on our own land.*" [Union of B.C.

Indian Chiefs president Saul Terry, quoted in the *Vancouver Sun*, 29 August 1995 A3<sup>214</sup>] Some comments concerned the release of criminal records and their connection with Native people who have prior records, but who were not involved in the standoff:

*Bill Lewis, a Metis who supports the rebels at Gustafsen Lake, said he was particularly incensed when the RCMP released old criminal records of native Indians there. "I have a criminal record, but I am an ex-criminal," said Lewis. "They always forget the 'ex' part. I guess it's my ex-file." He cited the devastating situation on reserves, which, he said, leads to social problems like alcohol and drug abuse as the reason many more native Indians have criminal convictions than the broader community. [Vancouver Sun, 13 September 1995 B4<sup>215</sup>]*

Journalists covering the standoff from 100 Mile House recalled that the people at the camp and their supporters became upset with the media's use of "rebels." *"They didn't like us calling them 'rebels.'" Why? "They felt they weren't 'rebels'—they were defending their own land."* Some of the journalists acknowledged that the use of inflammatory language was excessive. *"I felt we (the media in general) overused 'rebels'—I avoided it as much as possible. I didn't use 'armed' at first, until it was obvious the people in the camp were using them."* The term "squatter" was used by several of the journalists, although they knew that some people disagreed with its appropriateness in the situation. Some journalists considered the people at the camp to be squatting on the rancher's property, but they also knew that the camp believed that all unceded land in the province belonged to Native people.

There was a concern over the language used in the stories, revealing a creeping bias, and some tried to use terminology that was relatively neutral. Several journalists appreciated that choice of language is a central aspect in objective journalism. One reporter

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<sup>214</sup> The full quotation is: *"Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs president Saul Terry said chiefs from his organization have asked the Cariboo Tribal Council and the RCMP if they can do anything to end the crisis. Terry argued native Indians occupying part of the ranch should not be viewed as terrorists or extremists. 'I do not think we are really squatters or trespassers on our own land,' he said."* This is taken from the news story, "Radicals to reap support in shootout, leaders warn," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 29 August 1995 A3.

<sup>215</sup> This excerpt is taken from the news story, "RCMP accused of bid to smear Indian rebels," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1995 B4.

remembered, *“Every once in a while, we were told [by the editors] to tone down the language.”* Some journalists also noted that the RCMP also tempered their language, and tried to play down references to people in the camp, probably to the other extreme. At the mid-point of the standoff, *Vancouver Sun* dropped its use of “sundancers.” According to one of the *Sun* journalists, this was because it was no longer certain that the conflict was about a sundance anymore. Another reporter felt that the insistence of his editor to use “rebels” and “renegades” was *“wrong, wrong, wrong... I don’t refer to people as rebels. That’s a loaded term...I think I eventually gave in and ended up using it that way, but I tried not to do it very often.”* The reporter explained that, *“If we have biases, reporters are usually very careful not to let that creep out. And that’s guarded and held quite close to the chest. Because if you let it creep out, and it creeps in your copy, you lose your integrity. And if you lose your integrity—that’s the only commodity that I have, and you don’t want to lose that. I’ve long given up the concept that I am an unbiased person. I have biases. We all have them. Now, the question is, can you be fair in the stories that you write? And that was the important thing here.”* One journalist recalled being aware of how language was being used to sensationalize the camp, *“We heard all of these stories that the people in the camp were connected to U.S. militia groups. I flipped off—oh c’mon—these people are just a bunch of rag tags, they are not organized, they are not militant, they are just people!”* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

Many of the journalists found the labels convenient, and they saved time. All of the media covering the standoff faced the pressure of deadlines, *“so, you have a tendency as a reporter to fall into a short-hand—in choosing words and things like that.”* For journalists filing more than one story per day, it eliminated time having to spend on composition. The use of computers was particularly helpful with this. *“When you do two or three stories a day on your laptop, you’re storing them all the time on a disk, so if you’re doing any story—I would-I think everybody would do this—call up a previous story, so you don’t have to keep re-punching the background...I guess some of the stock adjectives, phrases were there [too.]”* Timesaving strategies were especially important

for *Canadian Press* reporters, who faced a hypothetical “deadline every minute” by having to feed news stories to several time zones. On occasion, this meant that there was no time to compose the story on a computer, and the reporter dictated the breaking news over the telephone to the editor in Vancouver to “top up” the basic story. In the discourse analysis for this study, I occasionally found labels in direct quotations of media sources. More often, I found labels inserted into indirect quotations in newspaper stories. The inclusion of these terms appeared incoherent when paraphrasing media sources that were sympathetic toward the camp. In such cases, the labels appeared to be an imposition of the journalist’s representation of the media source. The journalists who were asked about this agreed that this was an “*inappropriate*” practice. The label “rebel” frequently appeared in newspaper headlines. Headlines traditionally economize language for minimal space which is how one journalist explained the frequent appearance of “rebels” during the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Headlines are authored by editors, who also face deadlines, as well as being disengaged from the scene of the story: “*And we complain about headlines all the time, reporters do, like, you know, ‘Why did you put that headline on my story for?’ kind of thing...*”<sup>216</sup> [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### Summary and Remarks

The terms used to portray the people in the camp, “rebel,” “renegade,” and “squatter,” had aspects of meaning that seemed to accurately describe the situation and the people involved. The camp defied the RCMP, and some of them denigrated the legal system, distinguishing themselves from the mainstream, signifying themselves as “rebels.” Some of the people in the camp were filmed carrying illegal weapons and shooting at a helicopter. There were witnessed shooting incidents, one that could have been fatal to police officers. Furthermore, some of the people in the camp dressed in a manner that suggested guerilla warfare. These behaviors could be deemed “renegade.” The people

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<sup>216</sup> One example of a headline misrepresenting a news story during the Gustafsen Lake standoff was an account of a traditional sweat ceremony that took place at Alkali Lake. The news story respectfully described the activities, but the headline that was composed in Vancouver was entitled, “Natives Steamed,” reflecting the tabloid’s penchant for the sensational. This was found in the *Vancouver Province*, 10 September 1995 A8.

occupied land that was part of Lyle James' ranch, and they refused to leave, like "squatters." In this light, the terms of reference used to describe the camp seem appropriate.

However, the "fetter" of language (Sapir 1921) is exemplified in the creation of stereotype labels. Meanings associated with a concept cover a broad spectrum, but once committed to a word, many of the nuances are lost. Thus, language is not always adequate to the task of fully expressing one's thoughts or experiences. The articulation of words is the capping result of information processing, and words are necessary for categorization and labeling. "Rebels," "renegades," and "squatters" classified everyone at the camp into rigid characterizations.

I assert that the terms may not have "fit" the description of everyone in the camp. Most of the people in the camp had never been convicted of a crime, and they believed that their stand was morally righteous. The associated behaviors implied in the meanings of the labels were ultimately questions for the court to decide. Yet, during the standoff, these terms conveyed that a judgement had already been made. There is an implication of a judgement of collective guilt imbedded in the meaning of each of the three labels. Reconsidered in this way, I propose that "rebels," "renegades" and "squatters" were extreme characterizations, and over-generalized the complex composition of the camp. The labels could not convey exceptions and limitations. It was an "all or nothing proposition." The imprecision of the language distorted the reality of the complex composition of the camp. I argue that the media's employment of these labels was an example of media stereotyping.

The media made choices in the language that they used to characterize the people in the camp. The decision to use these terms rested on the individual journalists and their superiors to employ language that was consistent with the interpretive frames, conventions, and policies of the individual outlets. Still, they were influenced by



powerful media sources, established editorial policies, and ad-hoc decisions made at the time by the journalists and editors. For the journalists who were writing to deadlines, these three terms could be, and were, used interchangeably. Labels saved time because they avoided lengthy explanations of the composition of the camp and some of the behaviors alleged and witnessed by the media. The words conveyed powerful images of the camp to their audiences. The repetitive use of the terms assisted in the coherence of the news narrative about the standoff. It is unlikely that many of the journalists who incorporated these terms into their news accounts considered that they were reinforcing a negative stereotype that had racial overtones. Unless they identified themselves as Native, or were particularly sensitive to how their stories would be received by their audiences, journalists would not have any idea about how these terms inflamed Native people, regardless of differences in ideology.<sup>217</sup> It is also doubtful that they considered that the terms fulfilled the negative side of a thematic dichotomy promoted by the RCMP: “law and order versus criminals.” Thus, if objectivity (defined as avoiding representations that are evaluative) was a goal for the journalists, their choice of terminology to describe the camp would be one indicator of how committed they were to this goal.

### **Stereotype Labels in Newspaper Stories**

The following is a quantitative analysis of the use of the labels “rebels,” “renegades,” and “squatters” in 17 newspapers across Canada. I added *100 Mile House Free Press* to the sample during the fieldwork. Table 8.1 provides the tallies of usage within the news narratives, and indirect quotations for each of the newspapers. Labels used in direct quotations by the media sources have been excluded. Table 8.2 breaks down the figures in order to distinguish news stories authored by staff reporters from news stories authored by *Canadian Press*.

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<sup>217</sup> Although there were Native journalists from Native media outlets that covered all or part of the standoff, only one of the journalists interviewed mentioned having Native ancestry. He did not disclose this to his colleagues at the time of the standoff.

The people inside the camp were collectively described in most newspaper stories, found in the 17 Canada-wide sample of newspapers, by terms that conveyed an imagery of volatility and lawlessness. While “militant” was used on occasion, the most frequent terms in all of the newspapers to describe the occupants of the camp were “rebels”, “renegades” and “squatters.” Media sources occasionally incorporated these to refer to the people in the camp, but the labels were mostly found in headlines, story narratives, or in indirect quotations of media sources.<sup>218</sup> Initial newspaper stories about the conflict at Gustafsen Lake contained few of these three terms in the news stories in mid-August. However, within a week of the press conference at Williams Lake, the labeling became prevalent. At first, these terms were used as collective nouns: “the rebels”, “the renegades,” “the squatters.” Very quickly, the label “rebel” became linguistically productive in news stories, expanding the descriptive possibilities, and extending the terms from the people in the camp to the lawyer Bruce Clark, who claimed to represent them. Subsequent news stories began referring to “rebel natives,” “aboriginal rebels,” “rebel camp,” “rebel demands,” “rebel crossfire,” “rebel protesters,” “rebel truck,” an “armed rebel standoff,” and a “rebel lawyer.” To a lesser extent, there were “renegades,” “native renegades,” “renegade leader,” and a “renegade lawyer.” “Squatters” was also used on occasion, but the label was not elaborated much beyond “squatters”: “about two dozen squatters,” “squatters’ camp,” “squatters’ armed camp,” and “rebel squatters.” The general ratio of the use of “rebel” compared to “renegades” and “squatters” was about 6:1.

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<sup>218</sup> During the first week after the Williams Lake press conference, most of the occasions when the labels were used were in quotations from media sources, and these sources included some of the Native leaders in the province. These references showed the Native media sources using the labels to distinguish the people at Gustafsen Lake from other Native people. However, I found that, after that initial week, direct quotations of this sort all but disappeared, and the media itself became the most prolific users of the labels.

**Table 8.1**  
**Labels in News Stories and Embedded in Indirect Quotations (IQs)**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>No. of Articles</b>	<b>% (x/529 stories)</b>	<b>Labels</b>	<b>IQs</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% (x/1689 labels)</b>
1. Vic TC <sup>219</sup>	30	5.6	84	23	107	6.3
2. Van Prov <sup>220</sup>	64	12.0	121	24	145	8.5
3. Van Sun <sup>221</sup>	83	15.6	191	25	216	12.7
4. Calg H <sup>222</sup>	37	7.0	96	14	110	6.5
5. Ed J <sup>223</sup>	46	8.6	136	17	153	9.0
6. Reg LP	14	2.6	49	3	52	3.0
7. Ssk SP <sup>224</sup>	19	3.6	45	16	61	3.6
8. Win FP	28	5.2	74	7	81	4.8
9. Lon FP <sup>225</sup>	26	4.9	89	14	103	6.0

<sup>219</sup> Out of the 30 stories published in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 18 were authored by CP, 10 stories were written by staff reporters (8 invectives, 0 IQs), and 2 stories combined authorship from staff reporters and CP (4 invectives, 3 IQs).

<sup>220</sup> Sixty-two out of the 64 stories from the *Vancouver Province* were authored by staff reporters (116 invectives, 22 IQs). One story was combined in the *Vancouver Province* and CP (1 invective, 1 IQ) and the other was from CP.

<sup>221</sup> Eighty-two out of the 83 stories from the *Vancouver Sun* were authored by staff reporters (185 invectives, 25 IQs). One story was from CP.

<sup>222</sup> The thirty-seven *Calgary Herald* stories were taken from a variety of sources: 24 from CP; 7 from the *Vancouver Sun* (10 invectives, 0 IQs), 1 story was from the *Ottawa Citizen* (3 invectives, 1 IQ), 1 story was authored by a staff reporter (1 invective, 0 IQs), 4 stories combined CP, *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Vancouver Province* (12 invectives, 1 IQ).

<sup>223</sup> The forty-six *Edmonton Journal* stories were taken from several sources: 30 stories were from CP, 8 were from the *Vancouver Sun* (21 invectives, 3 IQs), 2 were from the *Vancouver Province* (4 invectives, 0 IQs), 1 story combined CP with the *Vancouver Sun* (0 invectives, 0 IQs), and the remaining 5 stories were from staff, *Edmonton Journal Services*, and *Southam Press* (11 invectives, 3 IQs).

<sup>224</sup> Two stories from the *Saskatchewan Star-Phoenix* were from staff and free-lance journalists (5 invectives, 0 IQs), the remaining 17 stories were from CP.

<sup>225</sup> The *London Free Press* published 24 stories from CP, 1 story from the *Vancouver Province* (1 invective, 0 IQs) and 1 story from *Southam Services* (0 invectives, 0 IQs).

Newspaper	No. of Articles	% (x/529 stories)	Labels	IQs	Total	% (x/1689 labels)
10. Tor Star <sup>226</sup>	25	4.7	73	8	81	4.8
11. G & M <sup>227</sup>	80	15.1	250	58	308	18.2
12. L Dvr	1	0.1	1 [rebelle]	0	1	0.05
13. Mont G <sup>228</sup>	22	4.1	70	11	81	4.8
14. Hal CH	6	1.1	21	6	27	1.6
15. Charl G	18	3.4	47	12	59	3.5
16. NB T J <sup>229</sup>	6	1.1	4	0	4	0.2
17. St J ET	24	4.5	84	16	100	5.9
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	<b>529</b>		<b>1435</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>1689</b>	
18. 100MH FP <sup>230</sup>	32	5.7 (x/561)	7	0	7	0.4 (x/1696)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>561</b>		<b>1442</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>1696</b>	

<sup>226</sup> The *Toronto Star* stories were taken from several sources: 18 stories were from CP, one story was from the *Vancouver Sun* (0 invectives, 0 IQs), 1 story combined CP with the *Toronto Star* staff (3 invectives, 1 IQ), and 5 stories were from staff (0 invectives, 0 IQs).

<sup>227</sup> The *Globe and Mail* published 66 stories from CP, 12 stories from the *Victoria Times Colonist* (5 invectives, 0 IQs), 1 story from the *Winnipeg Free Press* (5 invectives, 0 IQs), and 1 story combined several sources (0 invectives, 2 IQs).

<sup>228</sup> The *Montreal Gazette* published 18 stories from CP, one story from the *Ottawa Citizen* (3 invectives, 1 IQ), 1 story from the *Vancouver Sun* (8 invectives, 0 IQs), 1 story that combined staff and CP (3 invectives, 0 IQs), and 1 story was from staff (0 invectives, 0 IQs).

<sup>229</sup> The *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* was the only newspaper (besides *100 Mile House Free Press*) in this sample that did not include stories from CP. Instead, 2 stories were from *Southam Press* (3 invectives, 0 IQs), 2 stories were from *United Press International* (1 invective, 0 IQs), 1 story was from *Reuters* (0 invectives, 0 IQs), and 1 story was from staff (0 invectives, 0 IQs).

<sup>230</sup> Because the *100 Mile House Free Press* publishes on a weekly basis, the final story date is 20 September 1995. Other newspaper stories are taken up to 19 September 1995 inclusive. All of the stories published by the *100 Mile House Free Press* were composed by staff journalists.

## **Analysis**

In this study, repeated patterns of labeling allowed for a measurement of one example of stereotyping of the people in the camp. Some newspapers relied on stereotype labels to characterize the protesters more than other newspapers did. One explanation is that newspapers that published a greater number of stories more likely incorporated a greater number of labels. It will be shown that this pattern was not consistent. In addition, the data show a disproportion between the ratio of total stories published compared with the ratio of total labels, indicating fluctuations in reliance of label usage. Newspapers with the greatest difference in the ratios, indicating a greater proportional reliance on labels, include the *Victoria Times Colonist*, *London Free Press*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Montreal Gazette*, and *St. John's Evening Telegram*. The *Vancouver Province*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* used proportionately fewer labels when compared with other newspapers. The *Vancouver Sun* and the *Globe and Mail* published the greatest number of stories, and they also had the highest frequency of labeling. However, the *Vancouver Sun* used a significantly smaller proportion of labels (12.7%) compared to the *Globe and Mail's* (18.2%), which used the highest proportion of labels in the Canada-wide sample.

By far, the lowest usage (relative to the number of stories published) is found in *100 Mile House Free Press*, with seven occasions within the 32 news stories published during the standoff period. "Renegade" was found in two separate captions of photographs, and once in the body of a news story. "Squatter" was used once in a headline. "Rebels" was incorporated in three news accounts of the conclusion of the standoff. Although other occasions of labeling the camp (most often as "renegades") were found in editorials, these were excluded (as were editorials from other newspapers) from the tallies. However, it might be argued that the news stories in the *Free Press* were different from the daily news published by other outlets. The local news accounts combined synthesized episodes from the previous week with interviews, press conferences, and coverage from other media products. Still, the significantly lower total confirms the effectiveness of an

editorial policy as being sensitive regarding the representation of the conflict to support positive relations between the local Native and non-Native communities. Combined with other practices to minimize sensationalism and to reduce the potential for conflict between local Native and non-Native communities, the editorial goals of the *100 Mile House Free Press* demonstrate similar restraint by avoiding language that could promote stereotypes.

### **Labeling in *Canadian Press* News Stories**

Table 8.2 identifies the number of labels in news stories imbedded into indirect quotations (IQs) in those stories entirely authored by *Canadian Press*. The *100 Mile House Free Press* has not been added to the list of newspapers because the newspaper did not use any stories from *Canadian Press*. The inclusion of the local newspaper would have distorted the sample of media outlets from large Canadian urban centers. In addition, none of the news stories that were a composite of *Canadian Press* accounts and other media sources have been included because of the difficulty in determining the source of the labeling. For comparative purposes, I put the *Canadian Press* data in the numerator, in a ratio form, with total *Canadian Press* and non-*Canadian Press* data in the denominator for each of the newspapers.

**Table 8.2**  
**Labels That Distinguish News Stories Authored by *Canadian Press***

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>CP Articles/ TOTAL</b>	<b>CP Labels/ TOTAL</b>	<b>CP IQs/ TOTAL</b>	<b>Total CP Labels/ TOTAL</b>	<b>% CP Articles</b>	<b>% CP Labels</b>
1. Vic TC	18/30	71/84	20/23	91/107	60%	85%
2. Van Prov	1/64	4/121	1/24	5/145	1.6%	3.4%
3. Van Sun	1/83	6/191	0/25	6/216	1.2%	2.7%
4. Calg H	24/37	70/96	12/14	82/110	65%	75%
5. Ed J	30/46	100/136	11/17	111/153	65%	73%
6. Reg LP	14	49	3	52	100%	100%
7. Ssk SP	17/19	40/45	16/16	56/61	89%	92%
8. Win FP	28	74	7	81	100%	100%
9. Lon FP	24/26	88/89	14/14	102/103	92%	99%
10. Tor Star	18/25	63/73	7/8	70/81	72%	86%
11. G & M	66/80	240/250	56/58	296/308	83%	96%
12. L Dvr	1	1	0	1	100%	100%
13. Mont G	18/22	56/70	11/11	67/81	82%	82%
14. Hal CH	6	21	6	27	100%	100%
15. Charl G	18	47	12	59	100%	100%
16. NB T J	0/6	0/4	0	0/4	0	0
17. St J ET	24	84	16	100	100%	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>308/529</b>	<b>1015/1435 (70%)</b>	<b>192/254 (75%)</b>	<b>1206/1689</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>58%</b>

## Analysis

Table 8.2 distinguishes the labeling found in *Canadian Press* news stories. During the period of the standoff, *Canadian Press* produced 58% of the news stories that yielded 71% of the labels across Canada. The *Canadian Press* also authored 75% of the labels imbedded in indirect quotes. Newspapers such as the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*, which drew from a variety of sources or combined various stories, were more likely to minimize the labels in the editing process. However, if newspapers were generally reliant on *Canadian Press* for news accounts, the labels remained, unless they were edited at the local level. Local-level editing appears to be the situation in the newspapers that relied on *Canadian Press* stories east of Alberta. The *Toronto Star* data also support the heavy usage of invective labeling by *Canadian Press*. There is a significant reduction of labels with staff-authored accounts that corresponds with the time when the newspaper sent in its own reporter to cover the story. The quantitative results of the *Toronto Star* are consistent with the newspaper's moderate representations of other minorities in the news. A contrast in the maritime newspapers is found in *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal*, which did not publish any *Canadian Press* accounts and had few labels,<sup>231</sup> and in other maritime newspapers, which were entirely reliant on *Canadian Press* and featured significant labeling. Last, the *Globe and Mail* demonstrates the compounded effect of labels occurring with multiple news stories from *Canadian Press*. The potential impact of stereotype labeling is increased because the *Globe and Mail* is disseminated throughout Canada as a national newspaper.

## Summary and Remarks

Further comparisons of news stories authored by staff from individual outlets and by *Canadian Press* revealed several news production contexts that may have influenced the use of labels. One trend was an increased rate of use during periods of high activity.

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<sup>231</sup> None of the 6 stories appearing in the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* were from CP: 2 were from Southam Press, 2 were from *United Press*, 1 was from *Reuters*, 1 was written by *Telegraph Journal* staff. 3/1=4 invectives.



These included important developments in the police operation, the arrival of an important authority news source (such as Grand Chief Mercredi or Bruce Clark), and when tensions were high (especially after outbreaks of violence or foiled attempts at resolution). During these “peak” periods, more stories were written, increasing the likelihood that the labels would be incorporated. Conversely, as the tension decreased and resolution seemed imminent, the number of labels was reduced. Another pattern was that if only one story was produced, covering several incidents and developments, a complex story with multiple sources and themes was provided. This often featured an increased reliance on labels. Stories about peripheral activities and incidents, stories that featured less authoritative sources, and “human interest” stories tended to have fewer labels. These patterns of representation were confirmed with the newspapers in the cross-Canada sample. Another trend was that if more than one reporter from the same outlet was covering or writing stories about the event, the greater the likelihood of the appearance of labeling. The increased staff usually meant that more stories were published per day, and both journalists would have been influenced by the tension of the situation (although not necessarily to the same extent).

The data imply that some outlets either had an editorial policy or made a decision regarding the language incorporated in news accounts. This was also confirmed by interviews with *Vancouver Sun* and *Canadian Press* journalists. Similarly, the quantitative data and interviews with the editor of the *100 Mile House Free Press* reflect a decision to curtail the use of these terms. Likewise, this also appears to be the case with the *Toronto Star*, with its cessation of labeling during the time that its own journalist was covering the standoff. Yet, within the group of newspapers that employed *Canadian Press* stories, there was some evidence of editing at the local level, with identical stories published in several newspapers showing some variation on the incorporation of labels. Similarly, when news stories were the product of a synthesis of newspaper sources, evidence of editing labels (both insertion and deletion) was found. I learned from the interviews with the journalists that individual journalistic style (which was evident in

newspapers that rotated reporters) and editorial policies or newspaper traditions also influenced the frequency of negatively charged language. The *Globe and Mail's* record of label usage demonstrates the impact that the primarily *Canadian Press* stories, which ran concurrently, resulting in a pattern of high but stable use of labels, during the month-long standoff. In conclusion, the quantitative patterns of stereotype labels and the journalistic contexts suggest multiple reasons for their occurrences. The data also point to the effectiveness of editorial policies compared to occasional editorial attempts to neutralize the language. This suggests that prohibitive policies and conventions are also not as susceptible to external influences and news production pressures to engage in stereotype representations.

Lastly, it is important to note that the quantification of labels is only one measure of stereotyping in news stories. Headlines, story themes, rhetorical strategies, and grammatical structures used within the news narratives may also be scrutinized for other indications of stereotyping within media discourse. As previously discussed, damaging stereotype characterizations were also brought about by the RCMP labeling the people in the camp as "terrorists," as well as from unverified and exaggerated details from the RCMP media sources. Therefore, it was possible for newspapers that seldom used labels to exhibit other features that contributed to stereotyping. Still, a more likely case (demonstrated in this chapter by the contrast of *100 Mile House Free Press* and *Canadian Press*) is that the absence or prevalence of such labels is an indication of the potential of other stereotyping features.

### **Structural Relations**

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, I suggest that the relations that developed between most of the journalists, who traveled to 100 Mile House to cover the conflict, and the RCMP media personnel were carried over from Vancouver. Complimentary transportation for the media by the RCMP to cover news events (including Native blockades) was already an established practice. According to several Vancouver journalists, the competition between outlets for favorable rapport with the RCMP media

personnel established a pecking order within their group. Aside from these factors were the news gathering strategies and editorial positions that distinguished the more conservative outlets from those that took a critical and investigative approach to news coverage. The latter group often identified themselves as being the ones that the RCMP media personnel would most likely punish for their efforts. I posit that the relations between the Vancouver media and the Vancouver RCMP media personnel created a coherent link with the media coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff, beginning with the Williams Lake press conference.

Added to the pre-existing social dynamics from Vancouver, I found other contexts specific to the Gustafsen Lake standoff that contributed to the media characterizations of the conflict. These include the enactment of the RCMP operational plan and the RCMP media plan. There were also circumstances of the unfolding event over which neither the police nor the media had control, such as shooting incidents initiated by the camp and the logistics associated with the remote location. The RCMP barricades and the loss of media access to the camp increased the media's dependence on the RCMP, but decreased the opportunities for critical or investigative journalism. The "closed door meeting" presented a situation where the majority of the media conceded to relinquishing the police radio-telecommunications as an official source of information about the camp and the RCMP activities behind the barricades. It was also the occasion that underscored the power that the RCMP media liaison was prepared to exert over the media to curtail any information to the press if compliance was not forthcoming. The competition between the media for favorable status with the police media personnel perpetuated perceptions of an inner circle of "media favorites." At the same time, journalists faced a dilemma: *"If you try to get too chummy with the cops, you have this tendency to get yourself into a position of conflict...And, of course, you're relying on the police for all of your information by this time, right? So, are you going to burn your source?"* Some journalists, partly because of circumstances and partly out of choice, remained at a distance from the RCMP media personnel. It was difficult for them to accept that other members of the

media openly fraternized with a powerful media source during such a conflict. One of these journalists stated, *"I don't like getting buddy-buddy with authority figures—I have distant relationships. He [Sergeant Montague] didn't like it—that I didn't suck up to him, I didn't chit chat with him."* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

The RCMP scheduling and pacing of the RCMP press conferences contributed to the hold that the police had on the media, and their exhaustion kept them from seeking other sources outside of the immediate area. Journalists were afraid that they would miss an important breaking news announcement. This "reining in" of the media was noted by some of the reporters, *"Keep 'em all at one place at one time. And that's where you get the information—is the press conference—where everybody HAS to be there, you know."* RCMP information management meant that, on most occasions, they carefully doled out sketchy information to the media, and rumors and details from unauthorized sources were seldom, if ever, validated by the RCMP media liaisons. On the other hand, there was a pattern for the RCMP to report shooting incidents initiated by the camp, and the RCMP media personnel supplied the media with detailed accounts. The RCMP limitations to media access also included the formation of media pools, consisting of one representative from print, radio, and television camera to observe and record a news happening. Through media pools, the police controlled media movements and minimized the potential of alternative interpretive frames. Since the pool arrangements were to provide audio and video materials to the larger group, the gathering of news was conducted with a conservative style, rather than a critical or investigative one. A few journalists recognized the tactics as similar to ones used by the American military during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. *"...Basically, the more this thing dragged on, the more we really felt—it was—almost like the B.C. version of the Kuwait War. Where the...pentagon and the US government did such an unbelievable job of controlling the message. And the RCMP—it was a mini-version of that—that they were doing exactly the same thing, employing exactly the same strategy, in terms of controlling where the media could go, exactly the information that they were going to get on a daily basis, making sure that they didn't*

*have access to the opposing forces. So, I mean, that's why—the more we thought in those terms, the more that I got fired up.”* <sup>232</sup> [Interview with Gary Mason, editor of the *Vancouver Sun*, 6 November 1996]

The incorporation of the media into the RCMP investigation and operational strategies also blurred professional boundaries between the two groups. These occasions included the complimentary transportation; the confiscation of media materials; the engagement of journalists in police strategies; the “smear campaign”; the media tours; and the display of evidence under investigation. The interactions between the media and the RCMP media personnel point to the various ways in which the media facilitated the RCMP. News gathering opportunities initiated by the police may have been intended to assist the media. However, these favors made it difficult, even for outlets that normally avoid close identification with sources, to remain impartial.

#### **Tension of the Situation and Media Proximity to the Police**

The isolation of the journalists, who covered the same story for a month or several weeks with few breaks, created a situation where little details of the standoff became more important than they normally would. *“People became really obsessed with this whole little world around 100 Mile House. There WERE other things happening in the world.”* Of all of the media, only the local newspaper staff covered a variety of news events that were not related to the standoff. The other journalists were focused entirely on the standoff story, and for those who were not rotating shifts with colleagues in Vancouver, there were few opportunities to take a day off. Some of the journalists suggested that the combination of sustained attention to one story, exhaustion and responding to the stress of the situation accentuated the importance of the developments in the news accounts.

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<sup>232</sup> The RCMP media personnel held a media debriefing in Vancouver following the Gustafsen Lake standoff, which, the journalists were advised, was “off the record”. Some of the journalists recalled that the RCMP media personnel confirmed that they did employ some of the same media strategies used during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

It is my opinion that the tension experienced by the police, and the identification by some of the journalists with them, may have been another contributing factor in the media representations. The trial testimonies of several RCMP (including ERT) members revealed that they were unable to remain emotionally detached from the conflict.<sup>233</sup> This was also evident in the discourse of the media strategy memo that referred to “Wolverine and his band of thugs,” and in the RCMP officials who discussed how the violent incidents against their members affected many of their group. Some journalists considered that, *“The RCMP may have hyperbolated information during the peak periods of tension—as a natural response to stress, rather than as a media strategy.”* Another journalist recalled, after the flak jacket ambush: *“I heard cops saying, ‘I’d love to plunk one of those bastards.’”* One journalist stated that this tension was being conveyed in the RCMP press releases prior to the barricades being established: *“I had a real concern that this would lead to bloodshed. And so the tension grew through this thing. You had the sense (certainly through Montague) that it seemed a point of pride—that they [RCMP] couldn’t be seen to be backing down from this challenge to their authority... It became a bit of a concern that you could have some sort of state-sanctioned slaughter...”* [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### **Media Co-operation and Competition**

Co-operation and competition were evident in the relations between media throughout the standoff. Often, during major news stories, media observe what competitors select for their top stories, the type of information that is conveyed, and the angles of the various news accounts. Since the electronic media are faced with frequent deadlines throughout the day, newspaper journalists keenly attend to the coverage from television and radio, and this typified the situation for the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The uniqueness of the

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<sup>233</sup> One such example is from the trial testimony of RCMP Inspector Kemble, field commander at Gustafsen Lake. He acknowledged his authorization for ERT members to shoot at the individual walking toward the lake on 12 September 1995: *“It was my decision at that time, based on the events the day before, and the previous shooting of our members, I authorized the members across the lake to shoot at the individual walking...”* (excerpt of testimony presented during the program “Gustafsen Lake” from *Nitewatch, Vancouver East Community 4*, January, 1997).

Gustafsen Lake coverage allowed for journalists to develop closer friendships with colleagues and to share the media material in a manner that seldom occurred in previous news events. They commiserated with each other over the working conditions and the stress although the outlets that they represented were in competition. Yet, there were occasions when there were attempts to collectively respond to situations as a group in order to exercise greater leverage for the common good. Some of them considered staging a media boycott of the camp when the camp leaders refused them access. The idea was scrapped because they realized that the journalists that were granted access in the camp would not relinquish their competitive advantage over other outlets. Later in the standoff, the journalists who had been excluded from the television media tour of Camp Zulu confronted the RCMP media personnel, demanding a similar news opportunity. This resulted in a second tour, with a media pool. However, competition between journalists may have prevented them from developing a sustained, unified front to counter strategies employed by the RCMP media personnel to control the media. There was never a hint that some of the other journalists might join the *Vancouver Sun* in its bid to resist the RCMP media domination. To some extent, friction within the media may have been encouraged by the RCMP media personnel: *"Towards the end, I think it was almost a divide and conquer attitude among the RCMP with the media. By picking their favorites they could do it that way."* I also consider that competition was one of the main reasons why outlets remained committed to covering the standoff until the end, despite growing disenchantment that they were being exploited and the exorbitant expenditures on equipment and labor.<sup>234</sup> The competition between outlets ensured that none of them would abandon a story that rival outlets were providing to an audience. Thus, a combination of co-operation and competition between the journalists contributed to the

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<sup>234</sup> The media provided cost estimates for the RCMP Gustafsen Lake operation (about \$5.5 million) and the 10-month trial (at least \$1 million). However, journalists from television, radio, and print were reluctant to provide figures for the amount spent on the standoff news coverage. Estimates were that the *Vancouver Sun* spent between \$50,000 and \$60,000 on overtime and expenses. This represents a fraction of labor costs for the 50 to 60 media personnel at 100 Mile House. In addition to labor expenditures there were hotels, meals, and vehicle rentals. Media equipment costs included television satellite dishes, estimated at \$6,000 per hour. Journalists from several of the outlets acknowledged that the costs of covering the standoff influenced their employers to cover the trial only on a sporadic basis.

emphasis placed on aspects of the event, the news gathering opportunities, and the assurance that the media would remain committed to report on the standoff until its conclusion. [Interviews with journalists, anon]

### **Media Bias**

The journalists recognized that their own biases and editorial policies also shaped the way that they cast their stories. *"Some media threw their objectivity out the window. Once you stop trying...subjectivity lets loose."* Under the circumstances, with the RCMP having the legitimate authority to contain and resolve the standoff, conforming would not seem to be an unreasonable position for conservative media outlets. Although the RCMP controlled much of the information, individual outlets chose how to represent police information, and how to present the news story. Media independence from the police frame is indicative from their choice of language, details included in the narrative, (criminal records, inflammatory descriptions of violence allegedly perpetrated by the camp), and other attempts to balance the story. It was identified that media outlets that had a policy or a plan to regulate the type and presentation of news were less likely to conform to the pressures of publishing information as it was conveyed by the RCMP. However, even the persistent efforts of the media outlets (including the *100 Mile House Free Press*) could not have verified the accuracy of the details of the shooting incidents as they were provided by the RCMP media personnel. Therefore, all media outlets regularly covering the event contributed in some way to presenting a bias that favored the RCMP.

### **Media Empowerment**

Few of the journalists believed that they could have prevented being manipulated by the police during the Gustafsen Lake standoff story. Once committed to covering the event, journalists had to accommodate their coverage to the overriding circumstances of the RCMP instituting its operational plan. Press conferences, though usually weak on content, became important news events in themselves, rather than one source of news.



Throughout much of the standoff, *“The media was constantly thirsting for the ‘other side of the story.’”* Journalists were faced with a conundrum: *“If I knew something were to be a lie... I wouldn’t write it. However, if I’m told something is true, and I have absolutely no proof that it’s not, then you know, you’re going to write it.”* After the barricades and until the introduction of the Native intermediaries into the camp, the conflict was portrayed according to how the police were representing the situation. Although journalists realized that the conflict was more complex, for the most part they accepted the police version at face-value, and did not hedge what the RCMP had told them. *“There was still a belief that what the RCMP told you—if they—even if they weren’t telling you a lot, what they did tell you had to be the truth. That there was a reliance upon them—since they weren’t giving you anything anyway. If they did give you something, there was no point in giving it to you unless it was true.”* [Interviews with journalists, anon] For most of the journalists interviewed, taking the police perspective at the time was “common sense.”

The journalists’ narratives employed several stances, which positioned themselves in relation to the outcomes of the coverage and their assessments of their efficacy in the situation. Some wished that they had done more to challenge the RCMP side of the story. They admonished the police manipulation, identifying themselves as the unwitting victims: *“In hindsight—we got used tremendously—like a cheap hooker—thoroughly manipulated.”* A few directed blame on the fallibility of the media itself, *“I don’t believe everything I read in the newspaper, you know, so I have no—and I work for newspapers, so I hope people don’t.”* Others took a more philosophical approach that the manipulation of the media by the police is a normal situation. *“The cops always have the media as their plan. I mean, that’s a given...you shouldn’t be a reporter if you believe otherwise.”* Another reporter said that awareness of the manipulative situation still did not provide any strategies for resistance. *“You cannot be stupid and know what is going on—but it doesn’t mean you can do anything about it.”* This reporter hedged his accounts with *‘RCMP said,’* *“but it doesn’t do much—it’s gospel once you say it.”* Other reporters

considered that, if they had been more open with their audiences about how little information they had to work with and the questionable accuracy of some of this information, they would have felt more credible. Several journalists said that the most offensive part of the experience was how the RCMP media personnel had blatantly lied to them, and betrayed a trust that the media must have in law enforcement sources. *“Probably the most glowering thing is the fact that—while they’re talking about sanctity of life and a desire not to have violence, that they go ahead and try to kill somebody. I find that beneath their integrity, probably....But, in retrospect, I think they should have leveled with us, and said so...I think that they should have said—‘In the midst of all this, with the pressure, we made a mistake, and we did this..’”* [Interviews with journalists, anon] Several people from the media considered that their professional standards and ethics had been compromised in the RCMP media strategies, and they were irate long after the standoff. At the same time, the overwhelming response of the journalists was that they were not empowered (either individually, or their outlet) to extricate themselves from the domination of the RCMP media strategies.

### **Media Resistance**

A few of the journalists interviewed described creative approaches to cope with the lack of information about the camp and to maintain the flow of the news narrative. Most journalists attempted to balance the story with other perspectives. However, the *Vancouver Sun* offered the greatest contest to the RCMP official interpretations, but this approach initially involved testing, if not breaking, the law. The *Vancouver Sun* was also the most forthright in printing editorials relating to the circumstances of the RCMP operation, which circumvented media witnessing and greater investigative coverage. One *Vancouver Sun* reporter concluded: *“If I was able to go in today, knowing what I knew then, I would be far, far more aggressive with the police. And I don’t think any police officer’s life was put in danger by what we did. As a matter of fact, I think if we had done a better reporting job, there probably would have been less danger to the lives of the police officers. I think they sort of got—I think the RCMP got kind of out of control there,*

*with their big macho plans to stop things. And you know, had we been able to portray that at the time in the media, maybe somebody would have yanked their chains a bit, and have them back off sooner.*" [Interview with journalist, anon]

*Vancouver Sun* editor, Gary Mason interpreted the threats for publishing radio-telephone conversations as another means by which to level the competition between the media, and a way to prevent important information about the camp from getting out to the public. "My biggest...concern I had about the coverage in general was that we were only getting one side of the story. That was really the crux of our concern. Everything that we knew, heard, anything about that—was all coming through the RCMP." According to Mason, the *Sun's* coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff provided a sense of excitement, energy, and resourcefulness that is rarely sustained over the course of one event. "It did wonders for the morale of the newsroom. To see us going out there, way out in front of everyone else, and just saying, 'YES!' That's just great!" [Interview with Gary Mason, editor of the *Vancouver Sun*, 6 November 1996] Mason maintained that there was little or no real risk to lives because of the information being published, and that the public should have access to alternate perceptions of the situation, rather than those based on the police interpretations alone. The *Vancouver Sun's* publication of unauthorized material provided it with a competitive advantage over other media outlets, although there was a possibility of legal action from the RCMP. The newspaper's status as a powerful mainstream media outlet in the province was also a contributing factor in its decision to resist the RCMP's attempts to control the news stories.<sup>235</sup>

### **Cultural Misperceptions**

Several underlying cultural misperceptions emerged in the examination of the media coverage and the newspaper stories. The RCMP and the media have a common understanding of being representative of dominant mainstream culture and society. Many

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<sup>235</sup> At the same time, the *Vancouver Sun* also published the criminal records and incorporated stereotype labeling of the camp. Thus, the notion of "resistance" is in the strict sense of resisting RCMP attempts to control police information, but this does not entail resisting the dominant pressures to conform to the negative stereotyping of the camp.

Aboriginal people do not share this sense of inclusion. The challenge for the media was to accurately convey the meanings of the conflict that acknowledged cultural differences at a time of escalating tensions between Native and non-Native people.

The journalists from the large media outlets had a wide range of experience and knowledge about Native culture and issues. Similarly, the journalists were not equally at ease when dealing with Native people. Covering this news story did not allow for many occasions for media and Aboriginal people to develop relationships beyond a superficial level. One opportunity for cross-cultural sharing took place at the Alkali Lake meeting, when people from the Shuswap community invited journalists to participate in the sweat ceremonies. The news accounts in the data sample (with the exception of one headline) did (in my assessment) represent the participants and the occasion respectfully. Another occasion was when the media met Arvol Looking Horse, Keeper of the Sacred Pipe, whom many of the Native people venerate as the Aboriginal "Pope."

Still, research interviews and the newspaper accounts give evidence of journalists' cultural misperceptions about Native people and their traditions. There were news stories that implied that a spiritual "vision" to hold the Sundance at Gustafsen Lake prompted the standoff.<sup>236</sup> The cross-section of newspaper stories represented a theme of conflict between Aboriginal spirituality and western understandings of property ownership.<sup>237</sup> These representations of the conflict deviated from the RCMP frame, which according to Superintendent Olfert, was that the RCMP investigation concerned itself with weapons and shooting offences, and not the religious practices conducted at the camp nor the

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<sup>236</sup> One such news story states, "Rosette says he had a vision that the patch of lakeshore property, owned by rancher Lyle James, was sacred. He squatted on the site last winter." This is taken from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 September 1995 a3 (CP) (reprinted in the *Globe and Mail*). Another news story that makes this connection is "Standoff at Gustafsen Lake preceded by a vision" in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A3.

<sup>237</sup> The following example was previously identified as a reoccurring stock phrase in *Canadian Press* news stories. "The standoff entered its fourth week Monday in the confrontation between the armed aboriginals and police surrounding the remote piece of ranchland the natives claim as sacred aboriginal territory..." (I have underlined the phrase for emphasis). I argue that such phrasing pits western notions of property

dispute over land ownership. Although several journalists incorporated the perspectives of Sundance practitioners and academic sources to explain the Sundance ritual, some accounts associated the recent introduction of the Sundance at Gustafsen Lake (and its origins outside of the Shuswap tradition) with the questionable authenticity of the demands of the camp. This created an air of suspicion of the ritual being introduced into the Cariboo region, overlooking the contradiction that most local Sundance practitioners did not support the people holding up inside the camp. There were also news stories that emphasized the secretive and violent aspects of the ritual.<sup>238</sup> Language barriers also fed into mistrust, as exemplified with the concerns raised by members of the media about the appropriateness of the Shuswap message broadcast over the *CBC Radio*. It is reasonable to expect that none of the media understood the Shuswap language. Yet, the media's familiarity with the local chief who provided the message was likely within their control.<sup>239</sup> These misunderstandings contributed to media representations that encouraged intolerance against Aboriginal people during the standoff.

### Time Factor

The length of time of the news event may have been another element that shaped the media coverage. Nobody—police, media, or media sources—could have foretold from the early days of the conflict that a resolution would take so long to achieve. The duration of the standoff, deadline demands, and the tension of the situation wore the media down.

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against Native spirituality. This example is taken from the newspaper story, "Three natives shot in firefight," in the *Victoria Times Colonist* 12 September 1995 a1, (CP) and reprinted in the *Globe and Mail*.<sup>238</sup> One lead-in of a Sundance news account states, "The mysterious Sundance ceremony being performed by a native Indian group occupying part of the James Ranch in the Cariboo is a ritual only recently imported to B.C." The religious ceremony is explained by Gerry Conaty, senior ethnologist at Calgary's Glenbow Museum, but the emphasis in the story was on the body piercing, which is only one aspect of the ritual. The *Vancouver Sun* account states that Conaty "said he has witnessed one such Sundance and said he found the experience 'disturbing.'" This is taken from "Sundance ritual 'new to B.C.'" in the *Vancouver Sun*, 23 August 1995 B3. Another news story explains, "Local chiefs don't back their claims and the site has been used for sundances for only about five years." This is taken from "Blood spills in sacred circle - Sundance ceremony is at the heart of standoff at Gustafsen Lake" in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, 31 August 1995 a1 (reprinted in the *Globe and Mail*).

<sup>239</sup> That Chief Antoine Archie was a frequent media source for the *100 Mile House Free Press* is an indicator that the journalists from larger media outlets missed an opportunity to develop a rapport with the chief. Greater familiarity with the local chief and local Aboriginal sentiments about the standoff may have alleviated the media's concerns about Chief Archie's Shuswap message.

Some journalists were concerned that, over time, their stories might have conveyed a bias favoring the police because of their prolonged dependence on the RCMP for news stories. It seemed that the longer the conflict dragged on, the more of the media's resources were put to use by the RCMP for their operational plan. The length of the standoff corresponded with the length of time that the RCMP were the interpreters of the realities behind the barricades. Over time, the RCMP's abilities to convey accurate information to the media appeared to have decreased proportionately, culminating with their silence concerning the shooting incident with the person walking near the lake. My analysis of the impact of time on the media coverage suggests that it contributed toward the dramatization and police bias in the media portrayals. The prolonged standoff also lent itself to the RCMP co-opting the media resources for their operational plan. These findings point toward how institutional guidelines for both the RCMP and the media could have circumvented some of these outcomes. This will be discussed in Chapter 9.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The interviews with the Vancouver journalists found continuity with their relations with the RCMP media personnel during the Gustafsen Lake standoff and those in Vancouver prior to the standoff. This link was most discernable for media who had been sensitized to the way in which the media had been exploited in the past. The experiences of the standoff coverage served to intensify these perceptions. However, for those journalists who had previously accepted the situation of the media in Vancouver, the standoff and the trial created a shift in the level of trust afforded the RCMP media personnel. The contextual factors of the coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff affirms how strategic situations of social upheaval and tension (such as the Gustafsen Lake standoff) act as a catalyst for underlying relations to emerge. This was the situation for some of the players (at the time of the standoff), as well as for this research (as a social-science application). The connections to the past also suggest the coherence of historic social relations between players and the media characterizations of the current news event.

The structural analysis of the relations between the media and the RCMP, and conditions that permeated the Gustafsen Lake news coverage, point to similarities between media and military institutions during war-time situations. The supporting evidence for this includes the RCMP's attempts to control the media coverage, their extreme characterizations of the "enemy" to the media, and their discouragement of critical and investigative journalism. The latter raised alarms within the journalistic community. "[Montague] *just does not understand the role of media in a democratic society. Media acts as a check on the police—pestering the police is a good thing. Montague doesn't understand this—doesn't think it's a problem to take over access to sources. He just doesn't get it, and that scares me...*" There was a sense that, at the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the RCMP were not compelled to be accountable to the public, and could legitimately "*write their rules as they went along.*" Consequently, those journalists who were frustrated by this situation did not have anyone to whom they could lodge complaints. "*This goes back to the fundamental concern most people have—who polices the police? ...Who are you gonna phone? The mayor? The premier? The Attorney General?*" Contrasting this perspective is the one offered by the RCMP media personnel during the debriefing meeting in Vancouver. "*The RCMP referred to the incident as an example of how media and the RCMP co-operated. I'm not so sure. We knew we were getting a controlled version of reality—but no other reality was legally possible.*" Another journalist recalled that, at this meeting, the RCMP acknowledged that they disregarded their media protocols. They justified their actions with the "ends justifies the means" principle, that the standoff ended without injury or death. Their argument was similar to the idea, "*We pulled it off, didn't we?*" He left the meeting "*wondering if I was given the straight goods, or if I'm getting the stage managed version.*" [Interview with journalists, anon] It seemed that the debriefing was an attempt to placate the media and characterize the RCMP media relations at Gustafsen Lake as a success.

The cultural issues and themes found in the media representations and the news gathering context of the standoff offers an alternative analysis to explain the tenor of the media

representations. Journalists who lacked an understanding and an appreciation of Native cultural traditions were more susceptible to sensationalizing unfamiliar religious practices, making simplistic inferences, and representing Native traditions insensitively. The pace of the news coverage and the social distance that characterized (with some exceptions) the relations between the journalists and the Native people connected to the conflict prohibited cross-cultural learning. News accounts that associated Native spirituality as contributing to or causing the conflict fed into the already apparent suspicion, fear, and lack of empathy between Native and non-Native people. In this way, the media presented the conflict in terms of much larger (and more socially divisive) issues. The above mentioned cultural misunderstandings conveyed in media products can be attributed to choices made by the media. However, these misunderstandings offered a dimension of cultural and racial intolerance in the media coverage that went beyond the media supporting the RCMP's interpretive frame of the people involved in the Gustafsen Lake standoff.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The aspect of "audience" discussed in this chapter include those who were closely connected to the conflict because of vested interests due to group affiliation, social organization, and those who were connected because of their proximal relation to the conflict. The narratives from these research participants can be regarded as being similar to impact statements regarding the media coverage. Audiences actively evaluate news from the media by comparing it with personal knowledge, previous experiences, and other sources of information. The audiences considered here represent those that may have been compelled to take news accounts at face-value because there were no other options, and those who had insider information of the conflict to discern the extent of the distortions. There was a consensus that the media characterizations had gotten out of control and were excessive. This was reflected in the portrayal of danger and violence, in the vilification of the camp, in the loss of professional distance between the police and the media, and in a lack of regard for the people who were connected to the event



peripherally. For the most part, these audience assessments support the analyses of other data employed in this research.<sup>240</sup>

Local Native and non-Native communities shared the belief that they were at risk of being stereotyped. These communities were worried that a few people gaining media attention might be interpreted, by audiences outside the vicinity, as being representative of their group. For the Native communities, the potential source of stereotyping was the camp; for 100 Mile House, it was people who participated in the street protests, or who volunteered to express their opinions to the media. The people interviewed echoed similar social distancing of these “few” who gained media attention. The sources of the stereotypes were regarded as extreme in their responses to the conflict; they were marginal in the community or from the outside of the community but might be misinterpreted (by outsiders) as being local. Although the *100 Mile House Free Press* was able to make this discernment, the communities’ reputations were still vulnerable to being miscast by the outside media and their massive audience. False impressions would most likely occur because media outlets from outside of the community lacked familiarity with the local people and local values. The communities responded differently to this issue. The chiefs of Canim Lake and Canoe Creek bands consistently presented their communities’ political aims and values to the media as separate from those expressed by spokespersons at the Gustafsen Lake camp. However, the local residents did not attempt to counter misrepresentations with the large media outlets. Instead, they corrected erroneous impressions from outside the region as they became evident.

The organizational theme of insider and outsider, introduced in Chapter 3, is reprised in order to understand how the Gustafsen Lake standoff and the news story came to be directed (by police and media) from outside of the local sphere. As identified earlier, the

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<sup>240</sup> Two audience responses that I did not anticipate were those of the RCMP families and from the residents of 100 Mile House.

framework of the local Native communities regarding treaties, political organization, and means by which to accomplish change depicted an “insider versus outsider” distinction. Similarly, the RCMP and media can be conceptualized within this framework.

The local police and media had insider knowledge of the communities and were connected to the social network in the vicinity. They each defined the early days of the conflict based on local frames of reference. The shift from local to outsider perspectives occurred with the local RCMP calling for additional assistance. The decision to involve the media was made by RCMP personnel outside of the local sphere, and this required the co-ordination of RCMP media specialists from Vancouver. With the arrival of the police and media personnel, the event transformed from a local incident and news story to a serious criminal investigation and a national news story. This positioned the local police (by choice) and the media (by circumstance) at the periphery of the event. Both the police and media outsiders were in a transient relation to the town. The RCMP gathered to conduct the standoff operation and to create an organization and planning structure separate from the local RCMP detachment. The journalists from outside of the area were, for the most part, reporting to Vancouver and head offices in eastern Canada. These outsider counterparts were focused on the tasks required for their assignments, which were independent of local awareness or sensitivities. With demands for involvement in assigned work duties, there was little time to develop connections at the local level. The size of the police and media contingencies, the equipment brought in to facilitate their assignments, and their identification as members of their institutions, who were performing specific functions during the conflict, created near-separate perceptual universes from the local community. Thus, it is not surprising that the identities and values of the local communities were relegated to the periphery during the standoff. In many ways, the Gustafsen Lake standoff was a situation of “outsiders telling locals what was happening.”

The Gustafsen Lake standoff precipitated the eruption of (what I consider to be) some of the most vilifying stereotype schemas between groups during Canadian “peace time.” These cut along the lines of racial, institutional (RCMP, judiciary, and media), and political affiliations. Stereotyping in the media was identified in electronic and print media products. Current photographs and video footage of action sequences during the standoff were scarce, forcing repeated incorporations of dramatic shots, from earlier in the standoff, into television news and photographs for newspaper stories. “Terrorism” was the language used by the RCMP to describe the activities associated with camp during the Williams Lake press conference, which became the benchmark for the journalists’ language use. Over time, the language used to refer to the camp centered on the three labels: “rebels,” “renegades,” and “squatters.” There were some debates between journalists and their superiors over the appropriateness of using these terms to describe the camp, and some outlets avoided this sort of labeling. Yet, the print media samples in this research demonstrate that few outlets restrained this language for any sustained length of time. For several print journalists (at least), the use of these terms became part of their news production routines.

The analysis of the stereotype labels combines a quantitative aspect, that provides a breadth of understanding the Canada-wide usage, with an anthropological, qualitative aspect, that provides a depth of understanding the actual media framework. The quantitative analysis reveals patterns of use according to newspaper, region, editorial policy, and reliance on *Canadian Press*. Significantly, *Canadian Press*, despite its broad-base mandate to supply member newspapers with coverage of news events, is identified as being the greatest over-all transmitter of stereotype labels. However, the qualitative aspect of the analysis points to the actual news practices, policies, internal struggles, and other conditions of reporting that affected the *Canadian Press* as well as other media. The analysis of stereotyping also demonstrates the impact of the local editorial policy that consciously played down the sensationalism and the drama out of a concern for the future relations between Native and non-Native communities. This combination of quantitative

and qualitative analytical approaches provides a richer understanding of media stereotyping, one that may assist in future changes to media policies. This will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The reliance on stereotype labels underscores the power of news production practices and editorial policies to transmit stereotypes of a minority group in a conflict situation. I propose that when the media become oblivious to their repeated use of negative stereotype characterizations, the line between objective reporting and editorializing has become blurred. The *Vancouver Sun*, the *Vancouver Province*, and the *Victoria Times Colonist* have audience concentrations throughout the province of British Columbia. In my assessment, the labels promoted anti-Native resentments in a province that historically has been shown to harbor such evaluations. The *Canadian Press* dissemination of the stereotype labels was national in scope. Although the national impact of these characterizations would be more difficult to trace to the Gustafsen Lake standoff, the nature of such stereotypes is that they would be internalized and submerged, perhaps until another Native protest erupts.

The Gustafsen Lake standoff had the potential for Native people to unite in support of the protest, in spite of their political differences. This was because the mounting evidence of the RCMP's excessive use of force and questionable police practices against the camp overshadowed the premise that the RCMP investigation concerned illegal weapons and shooting incidents associated with the camp.<sup>241</sup> The media were also implicated in providing subtle reminders of where Aboriginal people are situated within the social hierarchy. Stereotype labeling was only one media practice that accomplished this.<sup>242</sup> The labels used in the Gustafsen Lake standoff media coverage—"rebel," "renegade," and "squatter" connoted a social positioning of the camp, reducing people into fixed

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<sup>241</sup> This shift was evident during the meeting of Native chiefs and elders at Merritt on 11 September 1995.

<sup>242</sup> Other examples of media stereotyping were previously discussed. These include invocations of an Indian War theme, exaggerations of violence perpetrated by the camp, repeated use of file videos and photographs that depicted the most sensationalized or violent aspects, and stock phrases that stereotyped the nature of the dispute.

characterizations, rendering them justifiably disposable if the situation warranted. Yet, the associated connotations of these terms are not so clear-cut that they would differentiate the people in the Gustafsen Lake camp from other members of Native communities where blockades or other protests have been held.

News stories that include stereotypical images and language that span several weeks at a time have the power to reinforce stereotype images that take on a life of their own, well beyond the event. As demonstrated in this chapter, a variety of stereotype images found within the media characterizations of the standoff were damaging to the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp, RCMP members' families, and local Native and non-Native communities. However, I propose that, in the larger picture, Native people across Canada have the greatest potential for long-term effects from the damaging stereotypes. Although, after the conclusion of Gustafsen Lake standoff, the labels all but disappeared from the media accounts, there is nothing preventing the media from reclaiming the labels for future Native protests. The coherence between the 1990 Oka standoff and the 1995 Ipperwash and 1995 Gustafsen Lake standoffs was established with early references to Oka. The Oka schema was transmitted through a media file photograph of a Mohawk warrior face to face with a Canadian soldier. The coherence between previous and current situations is also accomplished through the language used to portray the people involved. In this investigation, "renegade" appeared as a label associated with Native blockades in British Columbia prior to the Gustafsen Lake standoff.<sup>243</sup> "Rebels" and "renegades" were similarly used in news stories that covered the unarmed Native protest at Ipperwash, Ontario<sup>244</sup> and appeared to be part of a larger stereotyping complex for the several

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<sup>243</sup> The term "renegade" was found in the following news excerpt: "Renegade First Nations leaders who have walked away from treaty talks are travelling from blockade to blockade offering advice and muscle to help local native bands get what they want." This is taken from the news story, "Natives on rocky road of protest," in the *Vancouver Province*, 16 June 1995 A5.

<sup>244</sup> Although I did not conduct a formal quantitative analysis of the 1995 newspaper coverage of the Ipperwash, Ontario standoff, I found a pattern of labeling that favored "rebels" over "renegades" in the news stories authored by *Canadian Press*. A temporary break in the patterned use of these labels occurred on the day of the funeral of Dudley George. On this day, the *Canadian Press* news story used "splinter group" to characterize the people engaged in the standoff.

Native protests across Canada in the summer of 1995. The association of the terms with a few Native people involved in a contentious dispute might be offensive to some; nevertheless, they encouraged intolerance toward Native people in general. In the assessment of this study, the media's use of stereotype labeling for any minority is pernicious because it is impossible to control the limits of the generalizations and how they will influence behaviors and attitudes in the future.

In several ways, the circumstances of the event and the relations between the RCMP and the media (and within the media) that led to the police domination of the media characterizations of the Gustafsen Lake standoff were predictable. Some of the people in the camp did engage in serious shooting incidents, and these validated the RCMP's contention that the camp was dangerous. It is likely that large media outlets would have flocked to the region upon hearing that the RCMP had shifted their involvement from acting as conciliators in the conflict to investigating criminal activities. It is conceivable that the interactions between the camp and the media, and the media witnessing shooting incidents, would have diminished the reputation and credibility of the camp in the eyes of the media without any police interference. The RCMP employment of a "barricaded situation" model would have, in any event, prevented media witnessing. The potential and actual violence, as well as the length of the conflict, might have promoted extreme media characterizations. Media covering the standoff would have probably attempted to retain their niches for journalistic style and traditional perspectives in their news presentations. Because the RCMP were the most authoritative media source, and because they controlled the barricades, assured the likelihood that they would be the greatest influence on the news accounts. Furthermore, the RCMP's assessment of the weapons offences associated with the camp as the impetus for their criminal investigation was also predictable: a law-enforcement interpretive frame inherently rejects any other perspective. In summary, certain conditions were present that would have predisposed the media to represent the standoff within the RCMP-dominated frame.

Nonetheless, the RCMP and the media had the means to offset the tendency to engage in sensationalized and damaging characterizations of the standoff. I find that the primary catalyst that intensified the media coverage and promoted damaging stereotypes was the RCMP strategy to destroy the credibility of the camp. This was apparent since the time of the Williams Lake press conference. Added to this were the RCMP's emotional responses to shooting incidents; while not predictable, the inability to distance themselves from these incidents made them poor conveyors of information to the media. The media also contributed with the choices they made in covering the event. This included many of the media employing a narrative theme of "law and order versus criminals," which also promoted the construction of stereotypes to cast upon the players. In addition, journalistic passivity and acceptance of the RCMP frame was the rule rather than the exception among the journalists. These were the circumstances that this study has identified as being within the control of the RCMP and the media; each had a significant bearing on the media characterizations of the conflict. This will be discussed further within the recommendations in Chapter 9.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Rethinking Studies of Media**

This dissertation examined the underlying structural relations between the media and their various sources in order to understand the characterizations of the event and its players in the media products. The narrative tracked how the event grew from a local dispute to a standoff that involved the largest RCMP operation in its history. It also showed how the dispute was transformed from a local news story to national news event. News production processes, routines, and adaptations to the situation were examined to show how they influenced the news characterizations. The details of the event and the perspectives of journalists and their sources allowed for several strategic analyses of specific episodes at a micro-level and at a macro-level for the media event itself. These identified how the media and their sources competed and struggled for the controlling frame of the news accounts, and how the institutional factors subdued competition and promoted near-hegemonic dominance of the news narrative by the RCMP. The narrative also documented the underlying factors and processes of stereotype construction and the stereotypes within media products, which the media transmitted to a national audience.

One of the objectives of this case study has been to identify some limitations of textual analysis as a singular approach to media studies. Text-based media analyses are restricted, in terms of data in their ability to scrutinize and lack the appreciation of the contexts that underlie media representations. Studies of media that are limited to text and narrative analysis, such as Bird and Dardenne (1988) and Hall and O'Hara (1984), and even those that examine socio-political contexts of the news narratives as with Bennett and Edelman (1985), ignore the news production context of news narratives. These contexts are dismissed as either irrelevant, or assumed to be generic in terms of event, media outlet, and journalists involved. Consequently, when news production practices are assumed to be the cause of particular representations in the news, as with Grenier (1994); Harris (1991); van Dijk (1987,1988, 1989) and Fairclough (1989), these assumptions are not tested. Thus, the explanations do not consider the complexity of the circumstances



and the lived experiences of the news event that may be at play. Text-based media analyses that identify media practices as the source of stereotype characterizations often contradict themselves by stereotyping the media, noted also by Pickering (1995).

Text-based studies also offer limited responses to misrepresentations in media products. Text analyses that conceptualize media products as fiction (Hall and O'Hara 1984) and myth, (Bird and Dardenne 1988) remove accountability from media and their sources because in their view factual accounts are unimportant. In the hands of powerful institutional media sources, applications of strong intertextuality provide them with the legitimacy to distort reality and the unlimited potential to demonize the enemy. What is more, within this perspective, the evaluation of news in terms of truth, accuracy, and representational adequacy is considered irrelevant in the post-modern era (Hall and O'Hara 1983; Hackett and Zhao 1998). Traditional news discourse methodologies examine evidence of bias, ideology, and racism—but not truth as an independent reality. In the news, we learn of major disasters, social conflicts, and achievements in all facets of human experience, which influence how we interpret the world in relation to our personal social identities. The western legal system is built on the notion that there is an independent truth, and it seeks to separate realities that are true and factual from realities that are artificially constructed.<sup>245</sup> Truth has social and cultural relevance, and is central to the trust that news media establish with their audiences. News discourse methodologies that discredit or ignore the truth-value of news miss a component of the discourse that is tied to the norms of journalists in western democratic society. The truth-value of the news may be obscured when discourse analyses are limited to lexical or grammatical features that point to bias, ideology, and racism—when the media message itself is patently false. The determination of the truth-value of news discourse requires the analysis to move outside the text, affirming the existence of a real world, independent of the interpreters.

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<sup>245</sup> A convention within the western legal system is that before taking the witness stand, witnesses are obliged to take an oath to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Indeed, when witnesses are discovered to have lied while under oath, they may be charged with perjury, and face legal sanctions.

Text-based research is also limited in its ability to spearhead media reform. Media theorists such as Fairclough (1989) and Parenti (1993) have identified that high-ranking sources often carry the greatest influence in representations in the news. However, this is interpreted as an inevitable outcome of the hierarchy of media sources. More frequently, media studies recommend that audiences are educated in critical media literacy as a counter-measure. But, even critical literacy skills have their limitations. For example, in this case study, abilities in critical media literacy (without alternative primary sources) would not have been able to identify situations of erroneous RCMP information in the news. Neither would they have enabled the detection of all of the information that was exaggerated. Nor would skills in media literacy alert a reader to news events (for which there are no other sources of information) that have been excluded from the news altogether. Placing the locus for adaptation on the media audience for social transformation is also another way of accepting the status quo within the media industry. It shifts the responsibility away from the media organizations and their influential media sources to the consumers of their products.

The above synopsis suggests that text-based media studies have limited potentials for knowledge and social transformation. Media are a central force in disseminating social and cultural knowledge, and understanding the complexities of how media accomplish this is a form of empowerment. We live in an era in which institutions take greater control over their information, employing media specialists for the purpose of image management. This has had an influence on the news media. As Hackett and Zhao (1998) state, "More and more of what passes for news is, in effect, commercial and institutional propaganda..." (1998:178). The influences external to the news discourse that shape how media texts are constructed have become such common knowledge within the media profession that naive textual analyses are out of date. Therefore, studies of media must develop critical research paradigms, which investigate media contexts and media products in conjunction with the social realities that the products attempt to represent.

The second objective of this case study has been to demonstrate the benefits of an anthropological approach to studying media, one that considers the media texts as well as the social contexts that inform them. In the literature review, I identified research conducted by Gans (1979), Hackett (1991), and Robinson (1998), which combines contextual details with their analyses of news products. These studies affirm the complexity of news production factors and the particular circumstances that underlie specific media events and their representations. Context-based perspectives situate journalists as players, engaged in the social world that they interpret. The agency of journalists is revealed through their negotiation with sources to define the news event. The milieu of journalists, their routines, and the news event leads text analysis away from the supposition of explanatory factors by bringing the actual circumstances into the assessment. At the same time, the above-mentioned research, which combines text with context, has integrated these very differently. Gans (1979) keeps the content analyses separate from the discussion of the findings of the participant observation of the journalists. Consequently, the content analysis serves as a preamble for the participant observation, but there is little evidence of feedback between the two elements. Hackett (1991) puts greater emphasis on the context of the coverage than on the analysis of the media products themselves, and does not examine audience responses. Robinson (1998) integrates the analysis of media products with input from journalists and audience responses, but there is scant examination of the relations between the media and their sources. The above studies demonstrate how sociological and political sciences have integrated the text and context into media analyses. However, what this dissertation suggests is that an anthropological perspective also has much to offer studies of media, with a holistic program of study to further explore media contexts.

This case study of the Gustafsen Lake standoff exemplifies the anthropological perspective to study social behavior during a crisis situation. It takes a broad and comprehensive scope of this media event. It is a holistic program: investigating many aspects and perspectives of the event as well as how it was represented in the media. The

event is situated within its national, regional and local socio-historic contexts. The research method entails collecting media texts and a fieldwork component to gather ethnographic interviews. Although the journalists' perspectives are central to the ethnographic component, the investigation also incorporates important media sources, and members of the local community audiences. These interviews identified issues and aspects of the media coverage that influenced the direction of the study. The analysis involved searching for patterns of representations and of social behaviors. The representation of the findings include the voices of the research participants in order to convey how this event was actually experienced.

More specifically, the anthropological approach is based on Levi-Strauss' structural analysis. There are several benefits of a structural program to study media. It provides a framework to systematically investigate complex social phenomena. The distinction between surface and deep structures replicates how we understand media: what we hear, see and read in the news is a distillation of struggles between media and sources to define the situation, logistical contexts, production processes, and editorial policies that usually remain hidden from the public. This framework establishes triangulation with its suitability to multiple sources of data, theoretical constructs, and analytical techniques. Another strength is the validity offered with the dialectic between surface and deep structures that link the analysis of media products to the experiences of the journalists and their sources. Causal relationships, relations of power, processes that are passed between elements in the deep and surface structures, and temporal change within and between media texts and contexts may be viewed as a complex and dynamic whole. The unification of media texts and contexts acts makes it possible to discern patterns that otherwise may have remained unnoticed. Structural analysis also has the capability of identifying cultural meanings. At a micro level, cultural meanings (and how they are put to use) are found within the interview narratives and in the media discourse. In the larger picture, structural analysis of media representation may provide a snapshot of the ranking order of cultural values, and the social hierarchy itself. Structural analysis, although a

theoretical construct in itself, promotes theory building specific to the social phenomena being studied. It is a mode for discovery, rather than a formulaic guide. For example, in the examination of media, rather than applying *a priori* media theory to interpret the data, the patterns within the data are used to build on or challenge existing theory or, introduce new conceptualizations. In sum, structural analysis is an open-ended, inductive approach that is connected to the real world, making it a powerful heuristic tool.

However, the structural approach has inherent weaknesses. Levi-Strauss' structural theory does not have a critical component to examine relations of power, or make provisions for research that has potential for social transformation. Nor does it have the theory or methodology to assess news discourse or speech events within media products, or audience responses to media products. In order to compensate for these shortcomings, I incorporated additional anthropological theories and methodologies. Despite these accommodations, the structural program is still limited. Media texts in the surface structure may not be explained by anything located in the deep structure. Conversely, contexts in the deep structure may not have had any observable effect on media products. Because each news event and the relations that underpin each news event are unique, there will always be unknown or unattainable data and details. Consequently, connections between surface and deep structure may vary from case to case. In the end, I concede that total understanding is beyond the grasp of a structural perspective. Yet, this is a weakness of all social science paradigms.

I consider the structural approach best suited to questions related to accuracy and bias of media content. This application includes such cases as those cited by Herman and Chomsky (1988) where there were contradictions between media representations and reality. As demonstrated in this case study, this approach is appropriate for investigating media representations of members of minorities. However, the study of the relations between texts and media contexts has less relevance for questions restricted to media impacts on audiences.

### **Studies of Minorities in the Media**

This case study concurs with Parenti (1993) and van Dijk (1987) that news stories about minorities are a major source of stereotyping. In this media event, the stereotypes were often the co-constructions of the most powerful media source (RCMP media personnel) and the media, transferred during the process of negotiating information. To some extent, this was also due to a limited conceptual frame of mainstream journalists, as discussed by Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) and van Dijk (1987), who assess that news about minorities is reported “through white eyes.” However, it would be unfair to say that all of the journalists (television, radio, and print) were uniformly insensitive toward Native people. The journalists demonstrated a range of attitudes concerning Native people and cultures. In addition, the complexities of the conflict and the circumstances of the media coverage were also influential factors. A number of journalists believed that their attitudes toward the people in the camp had softened over the course of the standoff. And, contrary to many sociolinguistic studies of minorities in the media, I found that Native communities, leaders, and the camp demonstrated the agency to employ a number of strategies to control their media images. Still, these groups were at a distinct disadvantage because they were often struggling with the RCMP and the media for a greater influence on the dominant frame.

Media stereotyping was, in part, the result of journalists’ (and their superiors’) remoteness from their own diverse audiences. This investigation found that none of the journalists conceptualized a fictive audience, as described by Fairclough (1989). Rather, most journalists wrote for their editors and within the interpretive frames and traditions of their employers. This diminished their sensitivity to the social consequences of their stereotype characterizations. Similar to Lule (1997), this investigation assesses that a lack of sensitivity concerning diverse audiences by many of the journalists from the larger outlets inhibited a self-critical stance of their media characterizations. In addition, many

journalists from the large media outlets seemed to be perceptually unaware of their engagement in the process of building and transmitting stereotypes.

In conclusion, this case study opens up new considerations for sociolinguistic studies of minorities in the media, and challenges some of the stereotype assumptions about the way in which media constructs minority identities in the news.

### **Canadian Studies of Media and Aboriginal Resistance**

The Gustafsen Lake standoff was an anomaly among other Native conflicts in Canada. Unlike the 1990 Oka and 1995 Ipperwash standoffs, the Gustafsen Lake standoff did not result in changes of ownership of contested land. The resolution of the conflict did not alter the British Columbia treaty process. Instead, those people from the camp who were arrested were tried in a criminal court and convicted of a variety of offences. In this respect, I agree with Glavin's (1996) judgement that the dispute itself was insignificant. I submit that the ideological beliefs and the radical demands for terms of settlement by the camp spokespersons, the massive police operation launched to contain the situation, and the extensive media coverage inflated the conflict's importance in the press. In many ways, the event was like a circus. However, similar to Harris (1983), I submit that the implications of the struggle over media representation of the event may prove to be more important than the "war" itself. Dismissing the event as a circus disregards the harm done to Native and non-Native relations, to RCMP morale, to the media's confidence in the RCMP. All of these had the potential to diminish the public trust in the media and the RCMP.<sup>246</sup>

Similar to Grenier's (1994) analysis of newspaper discourse of the 1990 Oka standoff, I identified that most of the stereotypes from Gustafsen Lake cast the Native people involved in the conflict in a negative image. Likewise, I found that these stereotypes had spillover potential to the general Native population in Canada, particularly to those who

are, or will be, involved in protest movements. However, this case study cannot validate the application of Grenier's conclusions that the "power structure thesis," (exemplified by economic benefits to the media outlet) as the central media motivation for publishing disparaging characterizations of Native people. Although economic incentive was likely a factor for media outlets that covered the Gustafsen Lake standoff, several other context-specific factors led to negative characterizations of Aboriginal people during this standoff. I think that the difference between Grenier's (1994) analysis of media motivations and my work is that this research involved a fieldwork component, which involved the media directly.

The other major work on the Gustafsen Lake standoff (Switlo 1997) demonstrates how the epistemological framework in research focus and the selection of data leads to different considerations that point to causal explanations. Switlo considers the standoff within the historical and judicial frame of Aboriginal relations in the British Columbia interior. Switlo argues that to understand what transpired at Gustafsen Lake, one must situate the protest in light of the century and a half of exploitation and denial of human rights to Aboriginal people in the province of British Columbia. As evidence, Switlo combines details of the standoff with historical depictions of other incidents when Native people were abused by legal institutions, law enforcement agencies, governments, and non-Native people. There is significant discussion of the failure of the British Columbia treaty process to resolve issues of land and resources. Switlo does not validate the local Native communities' assessments of the Gustafsen Lake camp, nor does the author provide alternative perspectives of the events leading up to the gathering of the police and the standoff itself. Switlo's descriptions of the many sufferings of Native people, and how these tie in with the RCMP treatment of the people at the Gustafsen Lake camp, are an important framework for consideration. Still, Switlo's treatment of this standoff is not the only frame that one can use to examine such a complex dispute. By demonstration, this

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<sup>246</sup> I noted this particularly during the media coverage of the trial (when the media did cover the trial with regularity) when testimony concerning media misinformation and the RCMP "smear campaign" took place.



research examined the standoff as a media event. As an anthropologically-based investigation, I asked questions about patterns of representation, representational authority, and negotiation of information that required a somewhat different set of data. I found the standoff and the media coverage of this event had multiple factors to consider, revealing the complexity and contradictions in the conflict. The contrasts between the two studies mean that neither one can lay claim to omniscience, yet both seek the truth. In the end, we have each explored “other sides to the story.”

### **Toward a Democratized Media**

Herman and Chomsky (1988) warn that democracy is undermined when media elites treat media as a propaganda tool to control public perceptions of reality. They acknowledge that there are exceptions to their propaganda model, but argue that there is an over-riding trend for media to conform to conservative approaches to social critique. Still, Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model does not take into consideration journalistic practices, nor the particularistic nature of media contexts and relations between journalists and their sources. They do not test their model against actual audience responses to the media coverage of their case studies. I have addressed the deficiencies in Herman and Chomsky’s model in this anthropological study of media.

Although this is a case study of media coverage, it is more profoundly a story of manipulation of media. My investigation outlined how several groups attempted to sway the media portrayals. Nevertheless, the RCMP had the greatest status as an institution of law enforcement in this struggle to dominate the media characterizations. The RCMP’s status inherently provided them with the greatest structural power to organize and orchestrate media events, as well as the strategic power to alter the circumstances of the event that worked to their advantage in the media coverage. The discussion of the interplay between the contexts of the news gathering and the resultant media products demonstrates how powerful media sources constrain the structure of media characterizations. This anthropological case study finds that media control involves a

dynamic set of social relations that includes contradictions and chance circumstances. At the same time, there are measures that could have prevented the manipulation from occurring.

### **Recommendations to RCMP Media Relations**

The Gustafsen Lake standoff was a strategic situation in which the relations between institutions and groups of people came to the surface. The RCMP response to the standoff seemed to be consistent with the interpretation that social stability was threatened at a national level. This explains the lack of transparency to the media at the time. Although media relations was part of the RCMP “multi-faceted operational plan,” (confirmed by the senior RCMP officers interviewed) the media strategies and planning were under the aegis of the media personnel. The RCMP personnel inferred that their extreme interpretation of the situation justified their lack of compliance with established media guidelines. RCMP trial testimony and RCMP interviews suggest that the hectic pace of the RCMP operation might have contributed to poor channels of information leading to the RCMP media section.<sup>247</sup> During the trial, the police said that the standoff was a life-and-death situation, and this led to the several departures from standard police procedures.<sup>248</sup> It was also argued that unsubstantiated information was provided to the media in order to minimize the media’s talking to unofficial sources.<sup>249</sup> After a careful examination of the RCMP Operational Manual regarding Media/RCMP relations (Refer to Appendix 4 for pertinent excerpts), I propose that the protocols would have offered a framework for the RCMP to maintain their responsibilities to law enforcement while dealing with the media. I further posit that the protocols would have been especially appropriate under crisis circumstances.

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<sup>247</sup> Sergeant Montague’s testimony concerning his working conditions is found in the news story, “Second cop backs away from earlier words,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 23 January 1997 A11.

<sup>248</sup> This was discussed in the news story, “RCMP feared a ‘war’,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 9 January 1997 A8.

<sup>249</sup> Superintendent Olfert testified that the release of unverified information to the media was to “prevent reporters from talking to people on the street.” This is taken from the news story, “Mountie denies seeking deaths,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 7 January 1997 A10.

Based on my analysis of the media coverage, I predict that, if the RCMP media protocols had been followed, errors in press releases, misinformation, media access to trial evidence, and the strategy to conduct a “smear campaign” would have been checked. The protocols may have prevented media strategies from being influenced by the emotion and stress of the situation. They would have helped to offset the vulnerability of the media’s reliance on the RCMP for reliable information. The adherence to the protocols may have lessened the damage to the RCMP reputation when allegations of media manipulation were made public during the trial. These predictions can be tested against the outcomes of the media coverage during the standoff, which has been extensively detailed in this investigation.

In addition to the above comments, I found that the existing RCMP Operational Manual regarding Media/RCMP Relations does not address some of the other sensitive issues that surfaced during the standoff. In response, I recommend certain revisions to the RCMP media protocols:<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> The Media/RCMP Relations operational protocols were updated in 1997, 1998, and 1999. Significant changes relevant to this study include the following directives: “Cooperation with the media can result in accurate, balanced media coverage” (M/R D.1.); “Good communication with the media can often assist the RCMP in a police investigation, e.g. allowing an investigator to solicit information concerning suspects, victims or witnesses and educate or reassure the public” (M/R D.2.); “Do not speculate or offer your opinion. Stick to the facts” (M/R E.1.c.); “Always protect the integrity of the criminal investigation. Do not discuss or comment on ongoing investigations” (M/R E.1.e.); “When requested to facilitate media participation in special programs such as ride along, see I.1.1.1.d and I.1.1.2.a.2” (M/R E.2.). RCMP officers also have for their reference a media handbook, *RCMP and the Media: A Spokesperson’s Guide* (1998). In particular, the handbook advises that there is a potential for all RCMP officers to be called upon to deal with the media, and therefore the information contained in the handbook is relevant to all members. The handbook outlines how to build successful media relations, how to deal with crisis situations, and how to respond when corrections are required. The handbook also offers cautionary advice to consider how information may affect the general public before releasing it to the press. Neither the Media/RCMP protocols nor the handbook identify the diversity of Canadian society, and being sensitive to this in press releases. The Media/RCMP protocols do not discuss receiving informed consent from journalists if they are to be involved in investigations, nor do these documents discuss confiscation of media products, nor RCMP relations with the public broadcaster. The British Columbia Media/RCMP Operational Manual (which provides additional provisions to the general Media/RCMP Operational Manual) has not been updated since 1993. It does not identify special provisions for dealing with visible minority groups, other than to respect and use the most current politically correct vernacular to address the group identity. At the time of this writing, the Media/RCMP Operational Manual, *RCMP and the Media* (1998) and the British Columbia “E Division” Media/RCMP Relations Operational Manual are only available through the RCMP Access to Information and Privacy Branch, 1200 Vanier Parkway, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R2.

1. That a public review and formal guidelines are established to include a section regarding press releases appropriate for the diversity that exists within Canadian society. This should identify the need for greater sensitivities toward Aboriginal people under investigation. Such an inclusion would make the guidelines consistent with Canada's multicultural policy and the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which calls for media representations of Native peoples that avoid harmful stereotyping.

2. That a public review and formal guidelines are established concerning the professional distancing required between RCMP and media, and that this be specifically outlined so that each institution may conduct their professional roles without interference or coercion from the other. This review should include: specific policy statements regarding complimentary transportation for the media to policing situations; distinctions between public relations events and criminal investigations; use of punishment and reward in RCMP relations with media outlets; and involvement of media in the assistance of police operations. With regard to the latter, as identified in this study, there were several incidents that took place with journalists being embroiled in RCMP strategies. Often, these involved manipulative ploys to secure media compliance. This risked the reputations of the journalists, and ultimately that of the RCMP. The ethics of these practices should be assessed and made known to the public. To summarize, the RCMP media relations program needs to be reviewed to specify the appropriate professional distancing between the media and the police.

3. That the protocols be revised to include language guidelines for descriptions and labeling of people under investigation during press releases. As discussed in this study, extreme language used by RCMP authorities promoted extreme media coverage and negative stereotype characterizations. The media protocols should identify specific examples of appropriate use of language that does not offend minority groups, or inflame the situation or public opinion.

4. That the protocols be revised to include a discussion of audience sensitivity, as a separate discussion from the multicultural/Native media characterization issues in order to account for "hidden audiences," such as the families of RCMP members.

5. That RCMP personnel who provide media releases as a full-time or occasional duty to be fully aware and accountable for actions taken to ensure that the protocols are followed. This recommendation is motivated by the general lack of knowledge of the RCMP media protocols by RCMP officers who were part of the Gustafsen Lake Operational Command.<sup>251</sup>

6. That the RCMP provide copies of their media protocols to the media outlets with whom they have dealings, and make this document accessible to the public upon request

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<sup>251</sup> This finding excludes the RCMP Staff Sergeant at the 100 Mile House RCMP Detachment.

from any RCMP facility. The availability of this information will contribute to a climate of openness and trust between the RCMP, the media, and the public.

### **Recommendations to the Media**

In spite of their attempts to avoid becoming part of the news story, the journalists were active players in the event on which they were reporting. I posit that this was unavoidable. Aside from the media playing a role in the execution of the RCMP “multi-faceted operational plan,” the journalists’ interpretations of the situation required subjective judgements in choosing how to report the reality of the standoff. The recognition of the choices and options that journalists have in their representations of news creates an opening for media practices that empower the journalistic profession. It is my assessment that outlets that established guidelines and conventions concerning the representation of the conflict, the players, and their responsibility to the effects on future social relations were less susceptible to external influences to engage in inflammatory stereotype representations. Conversely, those outlets that did not have guidelines regarding these issues were more easily swayed by the RCMP information management strategies. In consideration of the above, I recommend the following:

1. That media outlets provide cross-cultural training for journalists to bridge understandings about Aboriginal cultural values and practices. This should include those journalists who author headlines.
2. That media outlets consciously avoid creating false dichotomies that perpetuate an “us against them” theme that surface particularly during social conflicts involving Native people. These false dichotomies (such as contrasting Native spirituality [or religious practices] against non-Native values), offer symbolic representations over which media have no control once they are published or broadcast.
3. That media outlets develop guidelines and news practices that minimize the construction and transference of stereotypes of Native people, which takes into account language and visual representations, and sensitivity to the diversity of media audiences.
4. That media outlets develop policies and practices that discourage the use of pejorative labels associated with Native people, which have a potential for stereotyping the entire group. It should be recognized that labeling minority group members fosters intolerance and social marginality that extends beyond those individuals in the news.

I have identified journalists' vulnerability to coercion by powerful media sources to represent an event and its players in a particular manner, as well as to become engaged in police strategies that conflicted with journalistic ethics. Hackett and Zhao (1998) critique the "regime of objectivity" that, nevertheless, pulls media in the direction of the state, "It risks becoming a pure information outlet for established authority" (1998:78). As an alternative, the theorists advocate that journalists engage in self-reflexive "critical realism," in which "discovering the real goes beyond gathering a quantity of accounts or immediately observable phenomena," searching for what "lies beneath the supposed facts..." (1998:130). However, this aspect of their model does not conform to the circumstances of the news coverage of the Gustafsen Lake standoff. The journalists' ability to search for an independent reality was severely curtailed; the world "out there" was not legitimately accessible or knowable. Opportunities for investigative reporting were similarly hampered. Therefore, the media's dependency on the RCMP for the only interpretation of reality put them under the RCMP's near-hegemonic control.

My findings are that the coercive relations between the media and the RCMP were also more apt to occur because of news reporting traditions that withheld contextual details of how media negotiated and interacted with their powerful sources. Yet, a few journalists and media outlets, on occasion, adapted to the situation by reporting on the context of the news gathering. This was previously demonstrated with the *CBC Radio* program, *Now the Details*, which discussed the ethical conflict that developed between *CBC Radio* and the RCMP. There were also news stories and editorials previously mentioned in the *Vancouver Sun* that critically examined some of the restrictions that their journalists experienced during the standoff.<sup>252</sup> These adaptive responses resonate with Hackett's and Zhao's call for journalists to be more self-critical in their news accounts, and openly situate themselves as players. This study supports these initiatives, and also recommends

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<sup>252</sup> These include "Reports gained by phone anger RCMP," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1995 A3; "Selected media get look at Zulu: RCMP allow trips into forward base of operations," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 18 September 1995 A3; and the editorial, "All the news that's fit to...be manipulated," in the *Vancouver Sun*, 22 September 1995 A18.

that media outlets develop regular programs for apprising audiences of news contexts, in addition to experimenting with news narratives that allow journalists to emerge as active players in the event that they are reporting. This would provide openings for media to use their power to uphold their ethics, and generate public debate. If media in general were to provide contextually-rich news, revealing the dynamics between the media and their sources, the extended audience reach might pressure news sources and media to become more accountable to the public. This may enhance the level of public trust in media and in powerful news sources. Contextual details relevant to how the media and their sources negotiate information may assist audiences to make better informed critical evaluations. Such news practices would promote a democratized journalism, and a more open society.

However, Hackett's and Zao's program of critical realism does not take into account the dynamics of democratic pluralist societies and the issue of media stereotyping minorities. News production practices, influential news sources, and the circumstances of this event influenced the media's employment of value-laden language and images. Due to natural cognitive processes of categorization and generalization, the language and images promoted stereotype characterizations of Native people. If media are committed to reducing or avoiding damaging stereotype portrayals, they require greater self-reflexivity to alert them of their biases, and thematic narratives in their reporting. This study demonstrates that even when individual journalists are more sensitive in their representations, they are not always supported by their superiors or peers. This suggests that effective and sustainable change is best accomplished at the level of media policy, otherwise, the potential and occasions for offensive minority stereotyping will remain unchecked. For these reasons, I endorse media to develop policies regarding the representation of members of minorities that are consistent with the ideals of a democratic pluralist society.

### **Summary and Remarks**

The above recommendations conceptualize the RCMP media relations program and news production practices as forms of social practice. Imbedded within are inferences of how these institutions situate themselves in the society that they serve. Both law enforcement and media are powerful influences in the construction of social identities, including the naming of society's enemies. Yet, neither institution can control the processes that symbolically link a typology or the labeling of a few, to members of an entire group. Therefore, these institutions need to be more aware of this phenomenon and its potential consequences in a democratic pluralist society.

In democratic society, transparency of police information enhances public trust in the law enforcement agency. This cannot be accomplished without the media. Media must also maintain a trust with their audiences that the information they supply is accurate. At this level, it appears that the relations between law enforcement and the media are symbiotic. In an ideal world, there would not be a conflict between these two institutions because they appear to have complementary goals. In spite of that, the relations between police and media are complex and multi-layered. One of the layers of the negotiations between police and media identifies that they each possess a different kind of power. Police have the authority and status to enforce laws and maintain social stability; media have the authority and the means to influence public opinion. In a democratic framework, the aspect of disproportionate, but distinctive, power is recognized within the functions that police and media serve in relation to each other in society. Police engage in law enforcement, but media serve as a check on the police's use (and abuse) of power. These respective functions are subverted when the distinctions between the two institutions are blurred. Consequently, democracy is eroded when this occurs.



## **Chapter Conclusion**

### **The Gustafsen Lake Standoff**

The Gustafsen Lake standoff marked the occasion when a group of Native people chose violence as a strategy for social transformation. The RCMP met this with a show of force and a threat of counter-violence. In the end, both sides claimed a victory: the intervention of Native elders was visibly contributory to the end of the standoff, and the RCMP were able to point to their having defused the situation without the loss of life. However, the cessation of overt conflict has not provided a satisfying closure. Local Native communities are still trying to distance themselves from the notoriety of the conflict. During the Gustafsen Lake trial, supporters of the defendants sought the help from several Native collectivities, including the local Native communities, and the National Assembly of First Nations, to demand an inquiry concerning the RCMP's excessive use of force during the Gustafsen Lake standoff. At the time of this writing, this has not happened, although a group of supporters continues to lobby for this goal.

There have been few Native protests in Canada since the 1995 Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash standoffs. However, many Native people continue to struggle with land and resource issues, poverty and limited life chances, institutional discrimination, and a growing population of disaffected youth. Recent government reports advise that Native militant groups are amassing illegal weapons and are continuing to be a serious national threat to stability, in spite of denials from Native leaders. Such reports anticipate future violent engagements with Native people and, perversely, make them perceptibly more probable.

Yet, the greatest threat to Canadian society may not reside with Native militancy and the violent response it engenders state agencies, but with the lack of commitment to change the institutional processes and social practices that affect the inequalities in the social system in general. The preceding examination reveals specific aspects within media and law enforcement institutions that require reform if equality of treatment for Native people

is to be achieved. However, media and law enforcement are only two components of a larger system. This suggests future studies of social institutions that demonstrate disparities between Canada's Aboriginal peoples and the rest of the Canadian public, such as the judiciary, education, corrections, and healthcare.

### **An Anthropological Approach to Study Media**

Media, perhaps more than any other institution in contemporary society, play a powerful integrative role in the relations of people and other institutions in the social structure. As an institution of symbolic systems, media characterize the struggles between groups and, at the same time, convey their own stake in representing conflicts. This necessarily means that media are vehicles of as well as a public witnesses for the forces of domination and resistance in society that are to be played out. Media also bear the dual nature of power and vulnerability: the power to dominate the meanings and interpretations of social life, and the vulnerability to be dominated by power-holders.

An anthropological study of media has the methodological and analytical tools to investigate the dominant norms and values, and to construct models of the kind of social world depicted. Anthropology can situate the synchronic "here and now" of the news story within a diachronic perspective of social history. Anthropology also has the investigative capabilities of ethnographic methods to identify differential power and the struggle for the dominant news frame between media and other institutions, groups, and individuals. Examinations of media that incorporate complex social realities that inform media texts contribute to socially relevant research. It is anticipated that further case study research, employing an anthropological program, will contribute to context-informed theories and understandings of media.

This dissertation contributes to media anthropology, structural anthropology, and anthropological linguistics. It provides a historic record of a significant Canadian Native conflict, told from the perspective of how it unfolded as a media event. This has been the

first study of the media coverage of an Aboriginal standoff that integrated textual and contextual data, as well as audience feedback. The findings build on theories of stereotype construction and media stereotyping. It also adds to the body of literature regarding the study of media, and media representations of minorities. Future research might consider cross-cultural studies of the media representation of Aboriginal peoples or other minority groups in other parts of the world, and media environments that have developed media practices and policies adapted to their pluralist societies.

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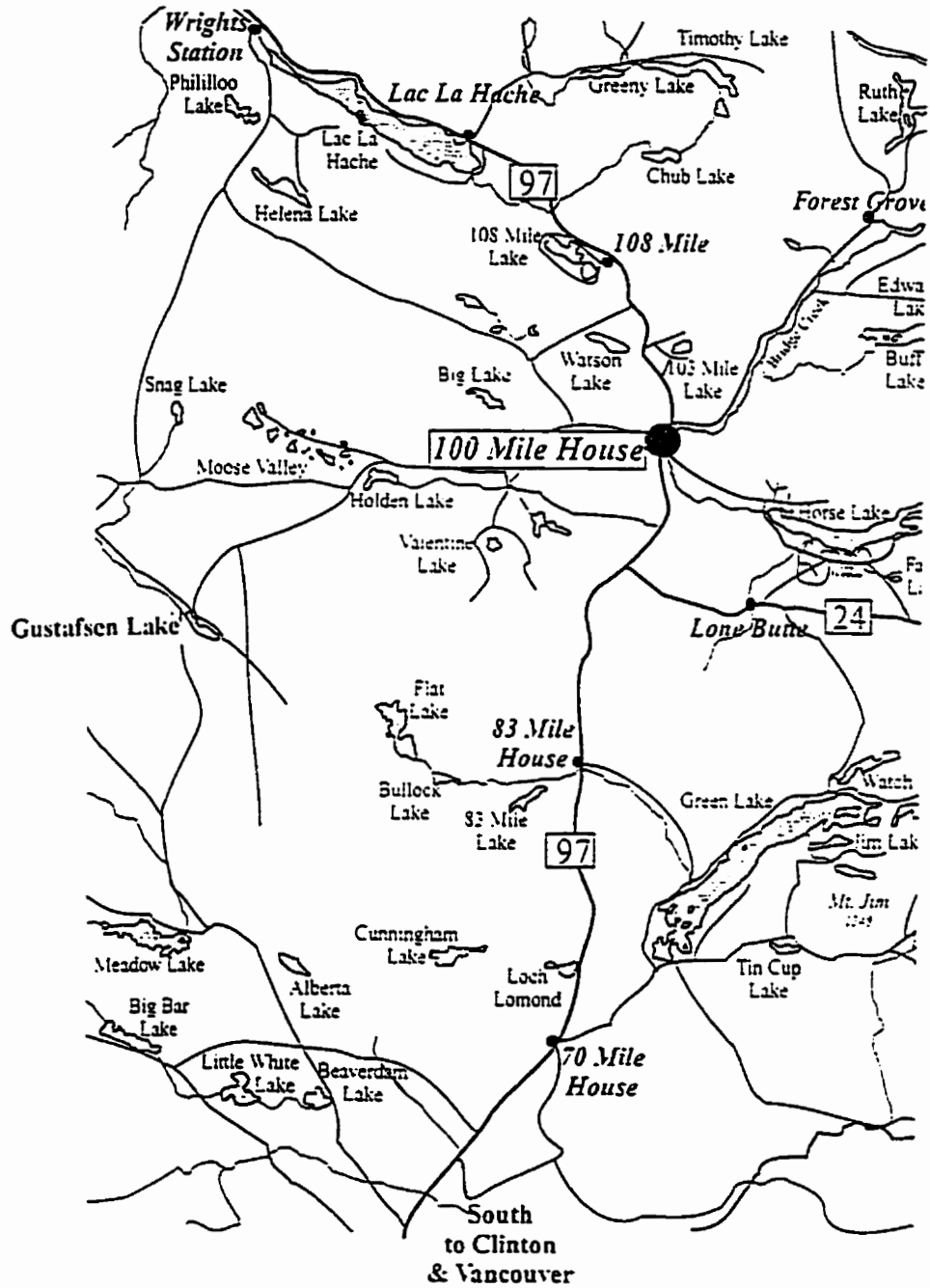
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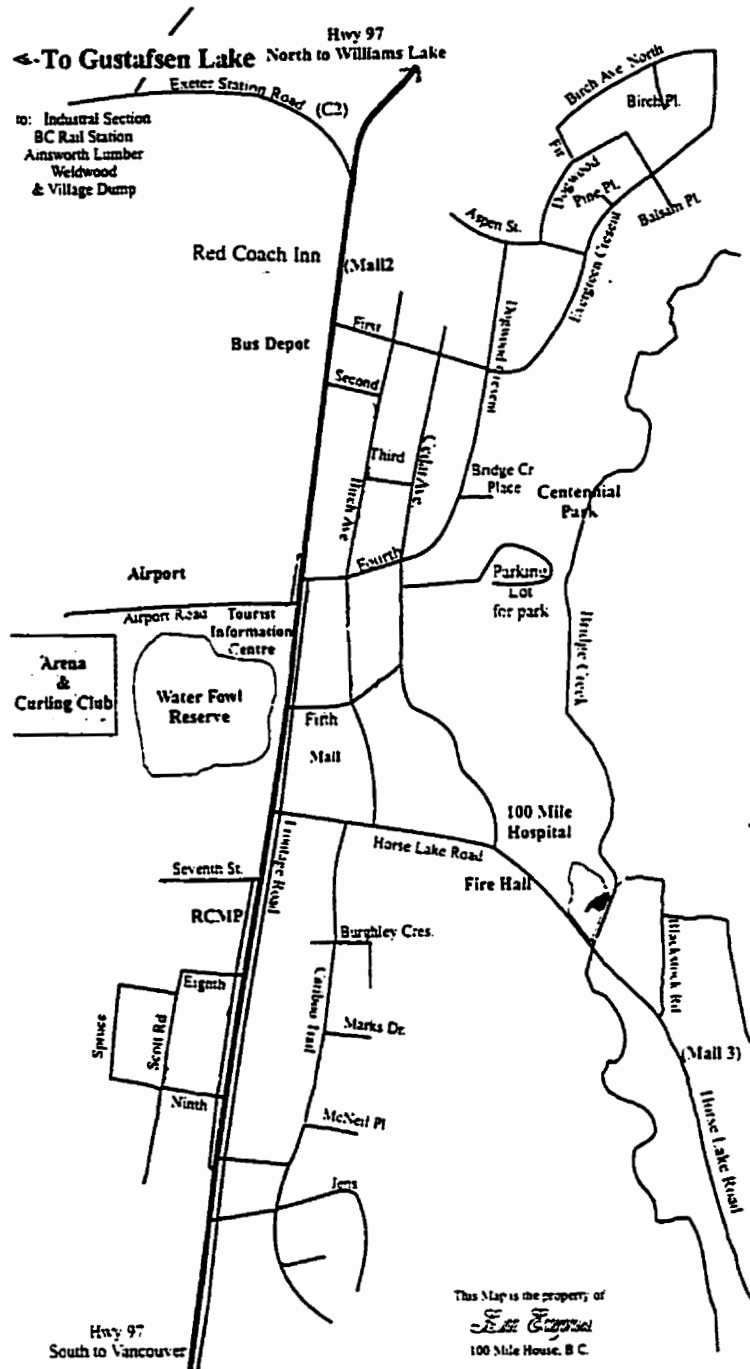
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**APPENDIX 1**  
**MAP OF THE GUSTAFSEN LAKE AREA**  
 (courtesy of Lunn Enterprises, 100 Mile House)



**APPENDIX 2**  
**MAP OF 100 MILE HOUSE**  
(courtesy of Lunn Enterprises, 100 Mile House)



**APPENDIX 3**

**Photographs of Grand Chief Mercredi at the Gustafsen Lake Camp  
(courtesy of the 100 Mile House Free Press, published 30 August 1995 pp.1,4)**





Free Press photo by Jonathan Green

Though wary of their chances of success, Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi and Gustafson Lake camp leaders William Jones "Wolverine" Ignace (left) and Percy (Belleau) Rosette shared a few laughs Friday.

**APPENDIX 4**  
**Excerpts from RCMP Operational Manual II.16 Media/RCMP Relations**

The following protocols are taken from the RCMP Operational Manual II.16 Media/RCMP Relations. These protocols were in effect at the time of the Gusafsen Lake standoff:

**Section C. 3:** A free flow of information between the RCMP and the media shall be carried out through a formal dialogue that is continuous, open, relevant, timely and reliable.

**Section C. 4:** The RCMP shall provide the media with prompt, courteous and impartial services in consideration of their needs, sensitivity to public demands, and protection of public and individual rights.

**Section F. 1 c.:** Keep a record of information given to the media to protect against misquotation, exaggeration or sensationalism.

**Section F. 1 d.:** Ensure that any information released to the media does not: result in injury, injustice or embarrassment to anyone, either innocent or accused; result in publicity that could affect the course of a trial; and contravene the provisions of the Privacy Act, Access to Information Act, or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Section G. 1. c.:** Do not prejudice future trials by: discussing evidence; referring to the character or reputation of the accused; discussing any previous record the accused might have. Section G 1.d. states "Do not release the name of a young offender."

**Section G 1.f.:** If deemed appropriate, display seized contraband... or other items to provide the media with photo opportunities, provided: 1. Continuity is maintained; 2. It does not violate an individual's rights under the Privacy Act; and it does not give the impression that an accused is being subjected to a trial by media.



**APPENDIX 5**  
***Globe and Mail Account of the 11 September 1995 Firefight***

THE TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

the following story is reprinted from:

**Times Colonist**

Tuesday September 12, 1995 a1

**Three natives shot in firefight - Nobody is leaving the camp, Mounties**  
Newswire

told, after battle with armored carriers - By Steve Mertl 100 MILE HOUSE, B.C. (CP) - Three natives were shot during a firefight Monday with RCMP using armored personnel carriers outside an armed camp in the B.C. Interior.

It was not known how serious their injuries were.

Rebel leader William Ignace, known as Wolverine, "advised our negotiators that three people were injured as a result of the gun battle," RCMP Sgt. Peter Montague told a news conference.

When RCMP suggested helping the wounded leave the camp, "his response was that nobody was leaving the camp and the conversation ended."

Monty Sam, a Shuswap native, went into the camp after the gun battle, said Sam's wife Jeannette Armstrong.

Montague identified some of the camp's leaders, saying that "for reasons of public interest, the RCMP is now compelled to inform the public as to whom we are dealing with at the camp. "There's a criminal agenda which is continually being advanced by the criminal element in that community," he said. "They have usurped any legitimate goal and objectives of the local people with their own self-serving criminal agenda."

The gun battle began when a pickup truck tried to go outside a "no-go zone" around the camp, he said.

But an aboriginal negotiator said police knew the pickup truck was coming out of the camp to meet native elders. "The RCMP were well aware that these people come out of the camp, come up to the road and sit awaiting the arrival of the delegation," said Gordon Sebastian.

The truck was disabled when it drove over an "early warning device" police had put in a logging road in the zone, Montague said.

The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said. A Bison armored personnel carrier on loan from the Canadian Forces then joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault rifle, Montague said.

A second Bison was called in but both vehicles "came under heavy fire" so police started shooting back, he said.

He said police recovered an AK-47 and a hunting rifle from the truck.

It was the seventh time police have been fired on.

Nathan Matthew, a spokesman for the so-called liaison group between the rebels and the RCMP said earlier that the squatters were looking for reassurance they won't be harmed if they give up and won't be abandoned when they face the justice system. "They must have some kind of safety provided to them," said Matthew, a member of the Shuswap Nation and chief of the North Thompson band. "There must be some reassurance that due process will be had for them."

The standoff entered its fourth week Monday in the confrontation between the armed aboriginals and police surrounding the remote piece of ranchland the natives claim as sacred aboriginal territory.

The liaison group went into the encampment Sunday and met with its leaders for several hours.

Matthew said the issues on the table are the safety and security of camp members, exactly how guns in the camp will be turned over and a guarantee of adequate legal counsel.

Meanwhile, B.C. aboriginal leaders were called to a meeting in Merritt on Monday to discuss the standoffs at Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash park in Ontario.

Chief Scotty Holmes of the Upper Nicola band said the native leaders would discuss ways of assisting in peaceful resolutions of both disputes.

Matthew made no mention of the rebels' core demands - that the Queen and British Privy Council review the traditionalists' claim to the site because they don't recognize the jurisdiction of Canadian governments and courts.

Matthew also tried to clarify his weekend comments referring to the occupation as a "peace camp," despite the shooting incidents.

He said the term was meant to hark back to the site's previous use as a venue for sacred sundance ceremonies.

LENGTH: Medium

CLASS: News

ACCESSION NUMBER: 00006049

DOCUMENT NUMBER: 950912TC001

## APPENDIX 6

### *Vancouver Sun* Account of the 11 September 1995 Firefight

#### The Vancouver Sun -- Final C

NEWS Tuesday September 12, 1995 A1

#### GUSTAFSEN LAKE STANDOFF

#### **Three Rebels feared hurt in wild shootout**

PETE McMARTIN; JEFF LEE

VANSUN

100 MILE HOUSE

STORY TYPE: NEWS; CRIME

LENGTH: Long ( > 700 )

SUBJECT: INDIANS; DEMONSTRATIONS; TRESPASSING; SHOOTINGS; CRIME;  
BC; RCMP

100 MILE HOUSE -- Police and native Indian leaders presented starkly different versions Monday night of a shootout that may have left three of the rebels at Gustafsen Lake injured.

The gunfight erupted about 2 p.m. as a negotiating committee from a native Indian liaison group approached the RCMP's final checkpoint into the camp -- a log barricade across the road.

Several hours after the gun battle, two rebels were arrested outside the armed camp and another man was reported missing.

Glenn Deneault and Edward Dick were taken into custody by police emergency response team members about 9:30 p.m., said RCMP Sgt. Peter Montague.

"They came out of their own accord; they wanted to come out and they did," he said.

The two men were escorted out of the camp area in a convoy of police cars to the RCMP detachment at 100 Mile House, where they were interrogated.

Montague also said that an unidentified woman involved in the afternoon firefight -- which earlier conjecture had as being mortally wounded -- had been hit in the arm and was receiving medical attention from rebels inside the camp. He said medical assistance offered by the RCMP was refused.

Deneault has previous criminal convictions for fraud and theft, Montague said.

Montague also said late Monday that another rebel went missing during the afternoon firefight. The man may have been hit by rifle fire of "unknown origin," he said.

The shootout was triggered when native Indians drove a red pickup truck beyond a perimeter police had warned them not to cross, Montague said.

"Yesterday, the occupants of the camp had been advised to stay within a confined area and that area was well described to them. The RCMP had tightened their security net, and they were well aware of that," Montague said.

"When the Shuswap representatives were approximately three kilometers from the camp, the same red pickup from the camp whose occupants had previously fired upon the RCMP helicopter, departed the camp and drove outside the restricted perimeter."

"Quite a ways" outside the perimeter, Montague said, the red pickup drove over an RCMP early-warning device "and was disabled."

Montague confirmed it was an explosive device.

He said the two occupants, or possibly three, jumped out of the truck and ran into the woods with their weapons.

"The RCMP pursued the individuals but discontinued the pursuit when the two individuals commenced firing upon our members. A search of the vehicle resulted in the recovery of two weapons, an AK-47 and a hunting rifle."

Montague said AK-47 fire from the native Indians disabled a Bison armored vehicle manned by RCMP emergency response team members. He said the number of rounds exchanged were in "the thousands."

Montague was asked why RCMP forced the issue with the rebels by tightening the perimeter on Sunday if negotiations were so close to reaching a peaceful conclusion.

"It was a very simple thing; they went beyond the perimeter and were told not to," he said.

"We drew a map for them. We showed them exactly where the perimeter was."

After the gunfight, Montague said, RCMP contacted the camp and spoke to Jonesy Ignace, who goes by the name of Wolverine. Ignace told the RCMP that three people were injured, including an unarmed woman. When RCMP asked Ignace to return everyone to the camp so the injured could be removed, Montague said Ignace told them "nobody was going to leave the camp."

Wolverine let fly a string of expletives and accused police of betraying their promise not to hurt the campers.

“You murdered one of our women, you bastards,” he screamed over the phone. “It’s payback time, you motherf---ers.”

(Ignace later referred to three people being injured -- not killed -- in the firefight.)

Police asked if anyone in the camp wanted to come out, but Wolverine said no one would leave.

Later, Percy Rosette, one of the spiritual leaders in the camp, accused police of double-crossing the campers.

“Everything went wrong with your people. It was a bomb,” he said. “You people started firing first again. Your people sent bombs.”

He said no one would come out now because they believed the police would kill them.

Still later, another person in the camp, who refused to identify himself, picked up the phone and told police to back off or they would be killed.

“I’ll tell you something before you tell us. You are going to listen. That wasn’t very nice what you done, and you better expect we are going to engage you. We are not going to back down. All you f---ing people get out of here now or we’re going out now and you’ll be answering for a lot of shit, and this will spark the fire worldwide.

Shortly after the exchange of gunfire, an ambulance entered the outer perimeter, but returned minutes later without any of the injured.

Police responded to the firefight by bringing in a large number of officers from the emergency response team.

The firefight came as the four native negotiators reached the inner perimeter at 2 p.m. One of the negotiators, Gordon Sebastian, said police were aware that a greeting party from the camp came every day to meet negotiators.

But when the Shuswap elders reached the meeting point, no one was there. Shortly after, “there was a large discharge and we felt the wind on our faces and clothes,” Sebastian said. “And then there was small calibre fire -- about 11 or 12 shots.”

He said they did not hear gunfire again until 2:15 p.m., “at the most, 60 rounds were fired.” He disputed the RCMP’s estimate of thousands of rounds being fired.

Police later yielded to demands from the camp to allow one of the negotiators, Sam Marleau, to return unescorted to determine what happened and who was injured. Marleau had not emerged from the camp late Monday.

Marleau's wife, Jeanette Alexander, another of the negotiators who had entered the perimeter, said the main objective of today's aborted negotiations was the placement of the perimeter.

She said the camp was cut off from water and firewood, and the people inside had wanted the border extended.

Montague refused to discuss the issue of the perimeter.

Rather, in a dramatic move, he read off a litany of charges and convictions against at least half a dozen of the main players in the camp, including Jones (Jonesy) Paul Ignace, Joseph Adams Ignace and John Hill, known as Splitting The Sky.

But Sebastian, a lawyer, publicly rebuked Montague and the RCMP for what he said was a public relations ``game" in talking about charges against the individuals.

#### ILLUSTRATION

**BILL KEAY/ Vancouver Sun/ ROARING PAST ROADBLOCK: ambulance speeds by RMCP at checkpoint on road to Gustafsen Lake rebel camp after gunbattle WOLVERINE**

CP

#### NOTE

Native leaders fear rise in violence, A2 Dosanjh sees peaceful end dimming, A3 Standoff preceded by a vision, A3

ID NUMBER: 9509120006

DOC. #: 950912VS006

**APPENDIX 7**  
**Details of the 11 September 1995 Firefight in Canadian Newspapers**

<b>Description of the truck occupants</b>	<b>Reason given for Bison/APC being “Disabled”</b>
<p>Victoria Times Colonist<sup>253</sup></p> <p>“The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”</p>	<p>“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault rifle, Montague said.”</p>
<p>Vancouver Sun<sup>254</sup></p> <p>“He said the two occupants, or possibly three, jumped out of the truck and ran into woods with their weapons. The RCMP pursued the individuals but discontinued the pursuit when the two individuals commenced firing upon our members.”</p>	<p>“Montague said AK-47 fire from native Indians disabled a Bison manned by RCMP emergency response team members.”</p>
<p>Vancouver Province<sup>255</sup></p> <p>“Montague said two natives ran into the trees carrying weapons with them, and began firing at officers.”</p>	<p>“He said RCMP officers came under such heavy fire that one of the APCs was disabled”</p>
<p>Calgary Herald<sup>256</sup></p> <p>“Montague said two natives ran into the trees and fired at officers.”</p>	<p>“Montague said ‘thousands of rounds’ were exchanged and one APC was disabled.”</p>

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<sup>253</sup> “Three natives shot in firefight,” in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, Tuesday, 12 September 1995 A1 (CP).

<sup>254</sup> “Three rebels feared hurt in wild shootout,” in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 September 1995 A1. The *Vancouver Sun* also named and identified seven individuals and their previous criminal records in “Criminal records detailed” 12 September 1995 A2.

<sup>255</sup> “Criminal agenda has shoved aside legitimate goals, cops say,” in the *Vancouver Province*, 12 September 1995 A5. The *Vancouver Province* also named and identified seven individuals and their previous criminal records in “It’s a rogues gallery, cops say,” 12 September 1995 A5.

<sup>256</sup> “Three natives shot rebels say,” in the *Calgary Herald* Tuesday, 12 September 1995 (VP, VS&CP) The *Calgary Herald* also published the names (but not the criminal records) of William Ignace, Joseph Ignace and John Hill in the same story.

Description of truck occupants	Reason given for Bison/APC being “Disabled”
<p>Edmonton Journal<sup>257</sup>  “The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”</p>	<p>“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault fire, Montague said.”</p>
<p>Saskatoon Star Phoenix<sup>258</sup>  “The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”</p>	<p>“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault fire, Montague said.”</p>
<p>Regina Leader Post<sup>259</sup>  “The truck’s occupants bailed out and opened fire on Mounties in a Canadian Armed Forces Bison armored personnel carrier.”</p>	<p>“The shooting was so heavy the military vehicle was disabled and another Bison had to come to the rescue. Montague said.”</p>
<p>Winnipeg Free Press<sup>260</sup>  “The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”</p>	<p>“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault fire, Montague said.”</p>
<p>London Free Press<sup>261</sup>  “Montague said police pursued the two or three people but stopped when they were fired upon.”</p>	<p><b>NO MENTION OF BISON</b></p>

<sup>257</sup> “Natives wounded in firefight,” in the *Edmonton Journal*, 12 September 1995 A1 (CP).

<sup>258</sup> “Natives wounded in firefight,” in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 12 September 1995 A1 (CP).

<sup>259</sup> “Gunfire at B.C. native protest,” in the *Regina Leader Post*, 12 September 1995 A1 (CP). This story was taken from a press conference later in the day that clarified information. There was a correction to the previous assertion that “thousands of rounds of ammunition” had been exchanged, which had appeared in other CP accounts.

<sup>260</sup> “Natives hit in shootout,” in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 September 1995 A1 (CP).

<sup>261</sup> “Three natives shot in B.C., rebel leader tells police,” in the *London Free Press*, 12 September 1995 A9 (CP).



**Description of truck occupants**

**Reason given for  
Bison/APC being  
“Disabled”**

Toronto Star<sup>262</sup>

“The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”

“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault fire, Montague said.”

Globe and Mail  
[printed (Nfld) Evening Telegram and  
Victoria Times Colonist [CP] versions.]

Montreal Gazette<sup>263</sup>

“The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”

“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault fire, Montague said.”

(Nfld)Evening Telegram<sup>264</sup>

“The two or three people in the truck then grabbed weapons and ran into the bush, he said.”

“A Bison...joined the fray but experienced mechanical difficulties when it was hit by fire from an AK-47 assault rifle, Montague said.”

100 Mile House  
Free Press<sup>265</sup>

“Two or three people in the truck grabbed weapons and fled the vehicle, Montague said.”

“When one of the Bison armored personnel carriers (APC) came on the scene it ‘came under fire initiated by the camp occupants,’ and was itself disabled.”

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<sup>262</sup> “B.C. Indians, RCMP trade fire at camp,” in the *Toronto Star*, Tuesday September 12, 1995 A10 (CP).

<sup>263</sup> “Three Indians injured in shootout with Mounties outside B.C. camp,” in the *Montreal Gazette*, 12 September 1995, A6 (CP).

<sup>264</sup> “Natives shot in gunfight,” in the *Evening Telegram* [Nfld] 12 September 1995 1 (CP).

<sup>265</sup> “Bullets shatter peace prospects,” in the *100 Mile House Free Press*, 13 September 1995 p.1.

**APPENDIX 8**  
**Excerpt from RCMP (Unclassified Memo) 1 September, 1995**

To: Supt. OLFERT  
From: Sgt. MONTAGUE

**Issue Two: Wolverine and His Band of Thugs**

Wolverine (IGNACE) is an advocate of violence in order to advance his political agenda. By definition, he is a terrorist. He attempted to promote violence at Adams Lake and was shunned by the local Natives. (End of Excerpt)<sup>266</sup>

**STRATEGY:**

The RCMP should send out a clear and concise message which will bring the proper focus to this issue. The agenda being promoted is one of violence engineered by Wolverine and his thugs. The public knows nothing about Wolverine et al and their criminal background. Before the Force makes any physical move the public should be made aware that our actions are being precipitated by the criminal actions of proven criminals.

**ACTION:**

At a media conference, profile the criminal backgrounds of the occupants.

**Issue Three:**

The RCMP has put an enormous effort into this operation. Remarkable restraint has been demonstrated. Considerable tax dollars are being spent.

**STRATEGY:**

The public should be made aware of this effort. The public must see that the RCMP is capable of flexing its muscle but will only do so if absolutely necessary. Presently, the public might be getting the idea that we are not capable of dealing with this impasse, thus their confidence in the Force could possibly be diminished.

**ACTION:**

Full media coverage of our resources. Not the operational plan itself, but just the resources. Manpower, ERT., PSD's, FLIRS, Helicopters, Communication Experts, Financial Support, Psychologist, Weaponry, Gas, etc. Provide the media the opportunity to see our new warehouse headquarters.

**(End of Excerpt)**

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<sup>266</sup> I have deleted the name of a second individual identified in the original RCMP memo for ethical purposes. This deletion has no bearing on the analysis in Chapter 6.

**Curriculum Vitae**

April 17, 2000

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**Education:**

Ph.D. Anthropology 2000, University of Alberta

Dissertation title:

*Terms of Engagement: An Anthropological Case Study of the Media Coverage of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake Standoff.*

Master of Education (Anthropology and Education) 1994, University of Alberta

Thesis title: *Breaking into School: An Ethnography of Inmates Attending Educational Programs.*

Bachelor of Education (with Distinction) 1992, University of Alberta (Intercultural Ed)

Bachelor of Arts (with Distinction) 1990, University of Alberta (History Major)

**Fellowships**

1998-1999 Social Science and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship

1998-1999 Walter H. Johns Graduate Fellowship

1997-1998 Province of Alberta Graduate Fellowship

**Scholarships**

1995 University of Alberta PhD Scholarship

1994 University of Alberta PhD Scholarship

**Conference**

**Scholarship**

1996 University of Wales Sociolinguistic Symposium Student Scholarship

**Travel Grants**

Clifford H. Skitch Travel Award 1996

Clifford H. Skitch Travel Award 1995

Gordin J. Kaplan Graduate Student Award 1994

**Honors**

- 1997            Research Communication Prize, Humanities and Social Science  
Category, U of A Graduate Students' Association

**Teaching Experience**

- 2000            Lecturer, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Alberta, "Introduction to Social and Cultural  
Anthropology" (Anthr 207)
- 1999            Lecturer, Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of  
Alberta, "Anthropology and Education in Canada"(EDPS 311)
- 1998            Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta  
"Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology" (Anthr 208)
- 1996            Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta,  
"Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology" (Anthro 208)
- 1996-1993      Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Alberta, "Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology"  
(Anthr 208)
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Educational  
Foundations, University of Alberta, "Introduction to Educational  
Foundations" (Edfns 101)

**Invited Lectures**

- 2000            "The Power to Define: Aboriginal Presentation and Representation in the  
Media." *Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Anthr 207)
- 1998            "Field methods: Use of Archival Material, with a Special Focus on  
Media." *Ethnographic Field Methods I* (Anthr 511)
- "Aboriginal Peoples and Mainstream Media in Canada." *North American  
Aboriginal Peoples* (Anthr 250)
- 1997            "Aboriginal Resistance: the Case of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake Standoff."  
*Anthropological Perspectives on North American Aboriginal Peoples*  
(Anthr 340)

“Aboriginal Resistance: the Case of the 1995 Gustafsen Lake Standoff.”  
*Native Land Use Research and Planning Department of Native Studies*,  
(NS 430)

1994 “The Politics of Literacy.” *Educational Foundations* (Edfn 493)  
Department of Educational

### **Non-academic Teaching Experience**

1989-1993 English Instructor, English Language Professionals, Catholic Social  
Services, and the YMCA in Edmonton, Alberta.

### **Refereed and Invited Publications**

(forthcoming) "News Discourse and Aboriginal Resistance in Canada," *Discourse and  
Silencing*. Lynn Thiesmeyer ed. London: Longman.

Lambertus, Sandra. 1997. "Psychosocial Dynamics of Inmate Speech Codes,"  
*Psychology and Education in the 21st Century, Proceedings of the 54th Annual  
Convention International Council of Psychologists*. Bruce Bain et al. eds. Edmonton:  
ICPress.

Suave, V., Warner, B., Malinowski, P., & Lambertus, S. 1995. *The English Shift:  
Canadian English for Hospital Support Staff*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall. (In addition to  
my contributions to this textbook, I investigated communication issues in the workplace  
as a framework for the instructional needs of the adult learners.)

Lambertus, Sandra. 1994. "Discussion Questions and Ethics and Consent Forms for  
Research Interviews," *Introduction to Canadian Education—Common Understandings in  
a Pluralist Society*. Readings compiled by P.T. Rooke with D. Schugurenski, used in  
*Educational Foundations* 101. University of Alberta.

### **Book Reviews**

Lambertus, Sandra and Michael Asch. 1998. Book Review of Northern Haida Songs by  
John Enrico and Wendy Bross Stuart. *International Journal of American Linguistics*. Vol  
64, No. 4, October, 1998.

### **Paper Presentations**

(forthcoming) Sandra Lambertus. 2000. "Negotiating Public Identities: Fieldwork in  
Correctional and Law Enforcement Institutions," 26<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Canadian  
Anthropological Society/Société canadienne d'anthropologie, University of Calgary,  
Calgary.

Sandra Lambertus. 1999 "Journalists as an Interpretive Community: Relations to Time and Narrative," 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Sandra Lambertus. 1999. "More Between the Lines: A Methodology for an Ethnography of a Media Event," 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Canadian Anthropological Society/ Société canadienne d'anthropologie, Université Laval, Quebec City.

Sandra Lambertus. 1997. "Image Accountability: An Examination of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples," Anthropology Graduate Student Conference, University of Alberta.

Sandra Lambertus. 1996. "Anatomy of an Armed Standoff: Press Coverage of Gustafsen Lake," Invited presentation for the session, "Discourse of Violence," 1996 Sociolinguistics Symposium 11, University of Wales, Cardiff.

Sandra Lambertus. 1996. "The Psychosocial Dynamics of Inmate Speech Codes," Invited presentation, 1996 Annual Meeting of the International Council of Psychologists, Banff, Alberta.

Sandra Lambertus. 1995. "Vygotsky In Jail: A Psychosocial Interpretation of Inmate Speech Codes," 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C.

Sandra Lambertus. 1994. "Doing Time and Trying To Go To School," 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Atlanta, Georgia.

#### **Poster Presentation**

Sandra Lambertus. 1997. Invited Poster presentation. "The Propagation of the Enemy Native Warrior Stereotype: from Oka to Ipperwash and Gustafsen Lake," Research Poster Presentation, Grad Week '97, University of Alberta.

#### **Conference Participation**

2000 Chair for the session, "Ethics in Fieldwork." 26<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Canadian Anthropological Society/Société canadienne d'anthropologie, University of Calgary, Calgary.

1999 Chair for the session, "Qualitative Research and the Family," at the Advances in Qualitative Methods Interdisciplinary Conference, Edmonton, Alberta.

1998 Invited Frucht Panelist, Frucht Memorial Lecture Series. "The Construction of a Media Stereotype: the Context of the Media Portrayal of an Aboriginal standoff," University of Alberta.

1997 Facilitator for the session, "Conflicts and Crisis," at the Graduate Student Research Conference, University of Alberta.

Session Chair for the session, "Learning from the Other," at the Anthropology Graduate Student Conference, University of Alberta.

**Association Memberships**

American Anthropological Association

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

Canadian Anthropological Society

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language