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Professional Accounting
Research Group

**PARG RESEARCH
DISCUSSION SESSION**

When

Monday,
November 24, 2025 13h00-14h00 EST

Where

In-person NI3030 + Zoom
(contact: parg@sprott.carleton.ca)

Counter-Accounts in Accountability Relationships: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Reporting on Rio Tinto's Destruction of Indigenous Heritage Sites at the Juukan Gorge

Dr. Merridee Bujaki, Carleton University

Dr. Bruce McConomy, Wilfrid Laurier University

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ABSTRACT

We analyse accountability relationships in media reports regarding the destruction of the Juukan Gorge heritage site by mining company Rio Tinto in May 2020. This event triggered an accountability crisis for Rio Tinto, and for the mining sector more broadly. The Juukan Gorge caves in Western Australia are of cultural and heritage significance to Indigenous Australians, yet no laws were broken when they were largely destroyed by Rio Tinto. Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) is used to examine 182 text-photo pairings ("multimodal accounts") in reports from global news outlets that address the incident, to gauge the ethical philosophies underpinning responses of various stakeholders. MCDA involves assessing how texts and accompanying photos interact to reflect power and accountability relations. We find four key stakeholder groups represented in multimodal counter-accounts about the destruction of the Juukan Gorge: Indigenous communities, Rio Tinto, government and the mining industry. Each stakeholder group is represented differently from an ethical philosophy perspective and within the accountability relationships that connect them. Rio Tinto is striving to repair its damaged reputation as a corporate citizen; the mining industry is self-interestedly seeking to avoid having Rio Tinto's actions limit the industry's future opportunities; the government is attempting to build bridges among the various stakeholders; and Indigenous communities are searching for restitution, remediation and an equal partnership with mining companies as a way forward.

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