



Copyright © 2017 International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences (IJCS) – Official Journal of the South Asian Society of Criminology and Victimology (SASCV) - Publisher & Editor-in-Chief – K. Jaishankar ISSN: 0973-5089 January – June 2017. Vol. 12 (1): 98–110. DOI: 110.5281/zenodo.345718 / IJCS is a Diamond Open Access (Authors / Readers No Pay Journal).

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Framing Terrorists in Canada: A Comparative Analysis of Two Shootings

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Abstract

Framing of criminal violence has taken on a particular and troubling trajectory with regard to terrorism. Despite the lack of a universal academic definition of terrorism, both the news media and political leaders regularly frame certain violent offences as terrorism while excluding other similar events. This work will use two similar Canadian incidents of violent crime to explore how one was framed as terrorism, while the other was not. In doing so, this work will demonstrate how this distinction is often based on subjective and troubling judgements by those in a position to directly benefit from the use of the label of terrorism.

Keywords: Criminal Violence, Terrorism, Media, Politics, Canada.

Introduction

Much academic ink has been spent on trying to construct a comprehensive definition of terrorism. Presumably this effort has been expended in hopes that the definition will allow for informed, concise debate that limits undesirable influences (xenophobia, racism, etc.). Unfortunately, the events of September 11, 2001 pulled the definition exercise into the public and political realms before any universal definition was accomplished. Academically though this exercise has increased doubt about the veracity of the threat of terrorism. Rather academics have warned about over-reaction and over-reach of political and legal use of the term terrorism. Critics felt that legally defining terrorism would not only be difficult, it could prove dangerous due to the subjective nature of the term. Consequently when, in 2002 the Canadian government passed the Anti-Terrorism Act (2001) there was a great deal of concern as to how the definition of terrorism would be operationalised not only by legal practitioners but by media and political actors.

This article will address two important questions for Canadian terrorism studies. Firstly, how do Canadian media operationalise the label of terrorism? An analysis of the media framing employed to cover two violent Canadian events (the Moncton shootings and the Ottawa Shootings) will be used to address this. Secondly, did the legislated definition of terrorism influence the operationalisation of the label of terrorism in Canadian media? To

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set the stage for this research, Canada's legislated definition of terrorism is explored to clarify its parameters.

Defining Canadian Terrorism

For the first time in Canadian legislative history, the ATA (2001) defined terrorism. The purpose of this exercise was to set terrorism offences apart from regular criminal justice offences. Accordingly offences that fulfill the criteria set out as 'terrorist activity' in the ATA (2001) will be punished to a greater degree than similar offences not considered under the ATA (2001). Essentially, violent acts of terrorism will receive more punitive sentences than other similar or even seemingly identical offences. For instance a thrill-seeking gunman who attacks a public space would face more lenient treatment than a gunman that falls under the ATAs criteria of terrorist activity as listed below:

Section 83.01(i) of the ATA (2001) defined terrorist activity as committed:

(A) in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause, and

(B) in whole or in part with the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public, with regard to its security, including its economic security, or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or to refrain from doing any act, whether the public or the person, government or organization is inside or outside Canada, and

(ii) that intentionally

(A) causes death or serious bodily harm to a person by the use of violence,

(B) endangers a person's life,

(C) causes a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or any segment of the public,

(D) causes substantial property damage, whether to public or private property, if causing such damage is likely to result in the conduct or harm referred to in any of clauses (A) to (C), or

(E) causes serious interference with or serious disruption of an essential service, facility or system, whether public or private, other than as a result of advocacy, protest, dissent or stoppage of work that is not intended to result in the conduct or harm referred to in any of clauses (A) to (C), and includes a conspiracy, attempt or threat to commit any such act or omission, or being an accessory after the fact or counselling in relation to any such act or omission, but, for greater certainty, does not include an act or omission that is committed during an armed conflict and that, at the time and in the place of its commission, is in accordance with customary international law or conventional international law applicable to the conflict, or the activities undertaken by military forces of a state in the exercise of their official duties, to the extent that those activities are governed by other rules of international law.

The definition as set out above quickly became controversial. Academics, legal professionals and civil liberty activists all vocalised their critiques of the new definition. Generally those concerns can be categorised into three areas categories. Firstly, there was

concern with the breadth of the definition which would include unlawful protests. In response the term 'lawful' was removed from section 83.01(1)(b)(ii)(E):

(E) causes serious interference with or serious disruption of an essential service, facility or system, whether public or private, other than as a result of lawful advocacy, protest, dissent or stoppage of work that is not intended to result in the conduct or harm referred to in any of clauses (A) to (C).

Secondly there was concern about the impact that the definition would have on specific racial communities in Canada. Finally, the motivation clause included in the definition was widely criticised as it would require policing agencies to investigate a suspect's political, ideological and religious background. It was feared that the already broad definition would result in the further marginalisation of racial and religious minorities.

On March 29th, 2004, Mohammed Momin Khawaja was arrested for allegedly aiding Muslim terrorists in the UK and became the first Canadian to be charged with terrorism offences under the ATA (2001). Khawaja's trial began in September, 2006, preceded over by Ontario Superior Court Justice Donald Rutherford. Khawaja's Lawyers argued specifically against the constitutionality of section 83.01 of the ATA (2001).

...particularly critical of the breadth of clause 83.01(1) (b) (i) (A), that the act be committed, "in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause," and again for the use of "in whole or in part" in 83.01(1) (b)(i)(B), arguing that virtually any act will be at least in some part for such purposes, and that a partial intention, no matter how small, is inadequate to circumscribe the area of risk and leaves the legislation excessively broad. (R. v Khawaja, p.17)

Justice Rutherford concurred with the defence on this point:

s. 83.01(1)(b)(i)(A) infringed freedoms guaranteed under s. 2 (a), (b), and (d) of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms -- Appropriate remedy was to sever s. 83.01(1)(b)(i)(A) from rest of legislation -- Inevitable impact of including "political, religious or ideological purpose" requirement in definition of "terrorist activity" would be to focus investigative and prosecutorial scrutiny on political, religious and ideological beliefs, opinions and expressions of persons and groups both in Canada and abroad -- There would inevitably be chilling effect -- There would be indirect or rebound effect, as individuals' and authorities' attitudes and conduct reflected shadow of suspicion and anger falling over all who had apparent connection with religious, political or ideological grouping identified with specific terrorist acts -- This amounted to prima facie infringement or limitation of freedoms of conscience, religion, thought, belief, expression and association, such that would have to be justified with reference to s. 1 of Charter -- Infringement could not be justified in free and democratic society pursuant to s. 1 of Charter. (R. v Khawaja, p.1)

Justice Rutherford further questioned the need for including motivational clause:

I can see no compelling benefit or justification for the political, religious or ideological motive provision in clause 83.01(1)(b)(i)(A) that can be weighed against its freedoms-infringing impact. It is therefore not a proportional limitation on guaranteed freedoms. The provision is not, in my view, sustainable under s. 1 of the Charter, is inconsistent with it and is therefore constitutionally invalid. (*R. v Khawaja*, p.40)

In response to the defence motion that the legislation was not consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Justice Rutherford severed section 83.01(1)(b)(i)(A) from the ATA (2001) but not the entirety of the legislation as hoped for by the defence. In actuality the severance of section 83.01(1)(b)(i)(A) removed the onus on the Crown to present additional evidence linking Mr. Khawaja religiously, politically, or ideologically to terrorism in order to prove motive. The result was that the harsh penalties associated with terrorism offences remained intact but the burden to provide additional evidence to prove terrorism as a motive was removed. On appeal by the Crown, the motive clause was reinstated by the Ontario Court of Appeal. The Court found that freedom of expression does not include acts that include threats of violence. It also increased Khawaja's sentence from ten years to life. In December, 2012 the Supreme Court of Canada reaffirmed the Ontario Court of Appeal decision.

Media and the Enforcement of Knowledge

This article will now turn its attention to two violent Canadian events widely covered by the Canadian news media to explore how 'terrorism' is operationalised by the media. The first event is the shooting of multiple Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers in Moncton, New Brunswick (June 4, 2014); the second event chosen is the shooting at the National War Memorial and Parliament Hill in Ottawa (October 22, 2014). These two particular events were chosen because of the widespread coverage they garnered in Canadian news media and their inherent similarities.

This article uses news media organizations as data sources that employ specific structures called 'frames' in order to reinforce notions of terrorism common in Canadian society. "News Frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of framing is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events" (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003, p. 10-11). Framing analysis is the process of examining the frames that are used in the construction of the news' image of an event. Yet, this is just a basic understanding of news framing as Vultee (2006) states that frames are used to activate processes of attribution (heuristic cues) of social issues to generalized explanations that match what is seen as the dominant view (in society) of the issue. An example of the employment of heuristic cues is that "when [news] media language paints the Arab and Muslim worlds as uniquely prone to political violence, then, it is not merely choosing one facet of a narrative to highlight; it also helps ensure that facet is the most readily available to the audience" (Vultee, 2006, p. 322). In making certain that particular narratives are made easily available for an audience, a dominant discourse that is already present in a society can be perpetuated.

Another layer of framing analysis is that the frames themselves, be it a word or a sentence may seem less significant at first glance but one must take into account the larger overall picture. In the public's eye a certain word, key concept, or stock phrase may trigger memories of past events in the news media that were overwhelmingly accepted as a terrorism event. "Within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of...social constructivism. Mass media actively sets the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events" (Tuchman, 1978 as cited in Scheufele, 1999, p. 105). The news media relies partially on what their audience has learned, constructed or has learned about terrorism from previous exposure to the subject matter. In relying on the previously constructed knowledge, the news media often aims to perpetuate familiar preconceived notions of terrorism; thus perpetuating the dominant discourse that surrounds the topic of terrorism found in a society.

The data for this study has been drawn from three Canadian national news media sources. The study examines all of the news articles (electronic) that pertain to the two events for a period of one week before and after each event. Also from the aspect of being manageable, limiting the data collection from the Canadian news media sources so that a qualitative analysis is feasible.

The three Canadian news media outlets chosen for this study are; the National Post, the Globe and Mail and CBC News. These three Canadian news media sources were selected because they are nationally recognised news media outlets. These news media outlets are also widely available through the internet and have easily accessible media archives. The dataset will include editorials and lead articles but will exclude letters to the editor. Letters to the editor were excluded as they do not necessarily represent or frame an event in ways which the news outlet wishes to frame that particular event.

When searching for news articles that pertained to the Moncton shootings the following terms were used; *Moncton Shooting*, *Moncton*, *Shooting*, and *Justin Bourque*. When searching for the news articles that pertained to the Ottawa and War Memorial shootings, the following terms were used; *Ottawa shooting*, *Ottawa*, *Shooting*, *Zehaf-Bibeau*, and *Parliament*. The total number of news articles collected from the National Post was 61. The Lexis-Nexis database was used to collect the news articles for The Globe and Mail and the CBC News. The search for The Globe and Mail generated 54 news articles in total and the search for the CBC News generated 114 news articles. After reviewing the news articles for The Globe and mail, an additional four news articles were discarded because they were not relevant to either shooting. This left a remaining 50 news articles to analyse for The Globe and Mail. In reviewing the CBC News articles, it was found that 26 news articles were either similar to another article or they were not primarily concerned with the Ottawa or Moncton shootings. This left a remaining 88 CBC News articles.

The following section will discuss the events themselves and then the results from the analysis of news articles from the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News. A total of 199 articles were analysed for this study. The results are broken into three themes: the framing of risk levels and fear, followed by the framing of terrorism by use of language and then the construction of the 'Other'. Each theme is further organized with subheadings for the Moncton shootings and the Ottawa shooting.

The Framing of Two Canadian Tragedies

On June 4th, 2014 in Moncton, New Brunswick, Justin Bourque, a self-proclaimed Libertarian and gun enthusiast was seen walking around a neighbourhood in Moncton with two long guns. Callers to 911 observed that he appeared to be “on a mission” (RCMP 2015) leading to extra RCMP officers responding to the call. In total twelve officers responded and set up a perimeter around a stretch of forest where Bourque had been. Bourque was able to use the cover of the trees and neighbourhood yards to repeatedly ambush RCMP officers and disappear back into cover. Bourque shot and killed Constable Geveaudan around 7:47pm, Constable Ross at 7:49pm, Constable Doug Larche at 8:07pm; two other officers were shot and wounded: Cst. Éric Stéphane J. Dubois and Cst. Marie Darlene Goguen.³

When asked by police what motivated the shooting he stated that he was “retaliating” against the Government of Canada which he felt had become too repressive (CBC 2014). The post shooting RCMP Independent review also found that:

Justin Bourque decided to kill police officers to make a statement about government being too powerful and police being government’s enforcers. He wrote about his political views on Facebook and told his friends and family. While he was killing police officers he told civilians that he was only harming, “government officials” and later stated, “bring me more cops.” During his post-arrest confession he talked of his political motivation and ideology.

Bourque’s motives were clearly political and the severity of his attack was intentionally lethal. In other words, killing and wounding the officers was an act of political violence. This means that Bourque would have qualified as a ‘terrorist’ under Canada’s Anti-Terrorism Act (2002).

The second event to be discussed here is commonly known as the Ottawa Shootings (October 22, 2014). Michael Zehaf-Bibeau (a convert to Islam) shot and killed Nathan Cirillo, a member of the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves standing guard at the War Memorial in Ottawa, Ontario at 9:52am. Zehaf-Bibeau then stormed the Parliament of Canada shooting a police officer in the foot before being shot to death by a number of police and security officers. Determining the motivation of Zehaf-Bibeau was difficult from the beginning. Zehaf-Bibeau, as it turned out was homeless, suffering from drug addiction and desperate to leave Canada but was prevented from doing so. The shooter made a short video prior to the shootings but the RCMP refused to release the video in its entirety to the public and to the Parliament of Canada until May 29th, 2015. However, his troubled past led to questions from political opposition parties about the legitimacy of labelling the event as a terrorist attack.

Framing of Terrorism

The framing of risk levels and fear in news media from the United States has dominated the portrayal of terrorism since 11 September, 2001 (Altheide, 2006). The use of fear and framing of risk is also used by other Western news media sources. Of note is the lack of analysis of Canadian news sources and their framing of terrorism. The

³ A detailed account of the event and the shootings can be found in the RCMP Independent Review (Moncton Shooting): <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/moncton/moncton-macneil-eng.htm#desc>

following is just that, a Canadian analysis of the framing of fear and the framing of risk in possible terrorism related violence.

In regards to the National Post, the use of frames that involved risk and fear were quite pronounced in comparison to the other two news media organizations. A noticeably large portion, (49%) of the National Post's articles were devoted to a discourse on the topic of security, and more importantly, the lack of security that was in place in Ottawa prior to the shooting. One example of the headlines they used to project threat levels is from 28 October. "Threat assessment agency warned last year Ottawa was a 'rich environment' for a possible terror attack" (Bell, 2014). In regard to the framing of fear, news articles in the National Post used eyewitness accounts from the two separate shooting sites. The National Post were quick to use the accounts of terrified Members of Parliament in order to exploit the fear felt on that day in Ottawa.

The Globe and Mail also used the framing of risk levels and fear in their news articles. Although not as frequent as the National Post, 42% of The Globe and Mail articles focused on the security (and lack thereof) found in Ottawa. The news articles were similar to the National Post, as most detailed the movements of Zehaf-Bibeau and relied on various government and non-government security experts. When it comes to the framing of fear, the Globe and Mail also used eyewitness accounts to produce a framing of fear. The Globe and Mail used the firsthand account of their reported Josh Wingrove, who was in the Parliament and filmed the last moments of the attack on his cell phone.

The CBC News was different than the other two news organizations as they included stories that covered the topic of security however, there were not as emphasized. After analysing the news articles, the CBC News was found to focus more on the aspect of fear and loss. They accomplished this with similar techniques as the other two news organizations, through eyewitness accounts. One noteworthy fact is that the CBC News gathered reactions to the shooting from Ottawa residents, drawing on the fear that was felt from regular citizens.

In comparing framing of threat levels and fear of the Ottawa and Moncton shootings, some conclusions become apparent. In considering the media articles that pertained to the threat levels in Ottawa versus the city of Moncton there was an identifiable difference. Ottawa, as the capital region of Canada, was the subject of more news articles focused on the threat of violence and potential attacks. In fact, some articles discussed prior assessments from organizations that spoke of the possibility of an attack increasing the sense of inevitability and clandestine risk.

In the wake of the Moncton shooting, the employment of frames of fear and shock were greater in frequency than the framing of risk. It was not the city of Moncton itself that was framed as the intended target of a gunman; rather members of the RCMP were the intended target. The Moncton shooting was an attack framed as an unexpected violent event that blindsided the community. No prior warning signs were discussed in any of the media reviewed for this article much less one motivated by ideology.

As Woods (2007) noted in his work, the selection of specific types of sources by the media can be used to manipulate the overall perceived risk or threat levels. With articles that discussed risk levels in both the Ottawa and Moncton shootings, a variety of expert opinions were not canvassed. The three news organizations generally stuck to interviewing RCMP officers or representatives of the Prime Minister's office. Coverage of the Ottawa shooting minimised dissenting voices that questioned the validity of the

terrorism label. Susan Bibeau (Michael Zehaf-Bibeau's mother) and the NDP opposition party in parliament were the only two voices that raised the question of mental health in relation to the gunman.

Academic voices were completely excluded when discussing the shooting in Ottawa. The Moncton shooting, on the other hand, garnered some academic analysis as the National Post consulted academics in two articles. The first article on June 5th gave insight into the mind and motives of Justin Bourque from a Western University (Ontario) professor Michael Arntfield. Arntfield stated that the shooting perpetrated by Justin Bourque was an act of domestic terrorism (Brean, 2014 June 5). The second article included discussion from Jack Levin (a professor at Northeastern University in Boston), Kim MacInnis (who teaches at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts) and James Alan Fox (a criminologist at Northeastern University in Boston). These three academics did not deem that Justin Bourque's actions were an act of terrorism but instead classified him as a mass murder (Brean, 2014 June 6).

The framing of fear was present in both news articles covering the Ottawa and Moncton shootings. In media coverage of both events, news organizations relied heavily on eyewitness accounts in order to create a discourse of fear around both of these shootings. In the articles that focused on the Ottawa shootings, more individual narratives of fear were shared whereas in the case of Moncton, the narrative of fear was placed at the community level. When it comes to the framing of risk levels and fear in these three Canadian news organizations based on this framework alone, it is difficult to predict if an event will be classified as an act of terrorism (as Ottawa is classified) or as a mass shooting like Moncton.

1. Operationalisation through Discourse Analysis

a. Ottawa shooting

An analysis of news articles focused on the Ottawa shootings revealed that there was intended use of specific words and phrases to frame this event as an act of terrorism. The National Post employed specific words and phrasing that reinforced the perception that the shooting in Ottawa was in fact a calculated terrorist attack. Articles that explored the motives behind the attack repeatedly quoted experts, such as the RCMP, that stated that the attacks were politically and ideologically motivated, thus reinforcing the spectre of terrorism. The Ottawa shooting occurred only a few days after another alleged ISIS inspired person had run down a military member in Quebec. In keeping that event in mind, the National Post often framed, in the form of leading questions, the motives of Zehaf-Bibeau. Many articles focused on his conversion to Islam and his speculated radicalization. These articles used words such as "radicalized", "jihadist", "lone-wolf", "extremist" and "violent zealots". Beyond this, the Prime Minister's Office played a key role in framing this as an act of terrorism. Statements from the Prime Minister, or his office could use the term terrorism or terrorist when referring to the shooting or when the referred to Michael Zehaf-Bibeau.

The Globe and Mail was similar to the National Post in their use of specific terms to frame the Ottawa shootings as an act of terrorism. The Globe and Mail relied on government agencies as experts able to determine whether or not the Ottawa shooting was an act of terrorism, or by a person who had mental health issues. In the days following the shooting, many of the descriptions used to identify Zehaf-Bibeau were similar. "...

[Zehaf-Bibeau] described as a 32-year-old drifter with ‘extremist beliefs’ who was seeking to travel to Syria”⁴ (Freeze & Carlson, 2014 October 24). By mentioning Syria, the Globe and Mail further corrupted the perception of Zehaf-Bibeau as there was a pre-existing concern in the news media about Canadians responding to the call of jihad and traveling abroad to join ISIS/ISIL. For this reason it may have been convenient to include the idea that Zehaf-Bibeau wished to travel to Syria as to frame this event as a terrorist act. Examples of other language used by the Globe and Mail to frame this event as a terrorism act were: “Canadian extremist”, “terrorism”, “terrorist”, “domestic radicalism” and “radicalized terrorist”.

The CBC News did not differ much in terms of the use of language to describe the Ottawa shootings. Similar to the previous two news organizations, the CBC News relied on government agents or the RCMP to obtain most of the information that it used to frame the attack. Some terms used to describe the Ottawa shootings or the gunman were; “radicalized”, “extremist”, “ISIL-inspired terrorist”, “terrorist attack” and “high-risk”. In the framing of this event, the CBC news along with the two other news organizations used similar language and relied on the same sources in order to obtain information about the Ottawa shootings.

b. Moncton shooting

Unlike the shootings in Ottawa, the shootings in Moncton were not framed by the news media as a terrorism act. The National Post down-played the idea that Justin Bourque was connected to any larger organizations who’s motives would be to terrorize a population (Brean, 2014 June 6). The National Post included descriptions of Bourque that characterised him as a militant but stopped short of calling him an extremist. Some of the words that were used to describe Justin Bourque or his actions were; “criminal”, “calm”, “gun-nut”, and “anti-establishment”. The only mentioning of the word terror was used in a description of what one citizen of Moncton felt when they were under a city-wide lockdown.

The Globe and Mail, similar to the National Post avoided using language that would frame the Moncton shootings as an act of terrorism. The Globe and Mail did mention Bourque’s ideological beliefs with regards to government and described him dressed in military camouflage but by no means did they conclude or even discuss the possibility that the event was terrorism. They looked to the RCMP and the Prime Minister once again to frame the shooting. The RCMP would refer to the event as “criminal”, “a mass shooting”, “a worst nightmare” and the Prime Minister called it a “tragedy” but no language common to the framing of terrorism was employed.

The CBC News in their coverage of the Moncton shootings did not differ from the previous two news organizations. The CBC News employed terms such as “shooting spree”, “shootings”, and an “attack on police officers”. From the standpoint of all government agencies, this shooting spree was not a terrorist attack. The Moncton shooting, was framed by the CBC News as an event that terrorized the Moncton area for multiple days. Instead of questioning or asking other experts that were not linked to a

⁴ This assertion turned out to be false as Zehaf-Bibeau really intended to travel to Libya, the birth place of his father. He was denied travel documents prior to the shooting incident.

government, the CBC News had decided that this event was just some gun-nut that had finally snapped and decided to start shooting police officers.

An analysis of the media framing of both the Ottawa and Moncton shootings revealed a stark difference in how the two cases were framed. In regards to the Ottawa shootings terminology that is now often associated with terrorism, such as “jihad” and “Islamist extremist” were a constant when describing Michael Zehaf-Bibeau or the actions he took on that day. In contrast to this, the main terms applied to Justin Bourque or his actions were “gunman”, “shooter” and “shooting”. The language used in articles to describe the Ottawa shootings were terms that are strongly connected to religion whereas the terms in the Moncton shootings are not centred on a religion or ideology. In the case of the Ottawa shooting it can only religion did not play a major factor in motivating Zehaf-Bibeau, but the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News employed language that linked him to religious fanaticism and ISIS/ISIL. In the coverage of Zehaf-Bibeau, terms connected to the religion of Islam and Muslim peoples as a group were continuously being connected back to basic understandings and framing of terrorism (Kabir et al., 2012; Vultee, 2006). The framing of terrorism through the use of specific language in Canadian news organizations appears to match the general tendencies found by studies of other Western news sources in that the language of terrorism has become strongly connected to Islam (Altheide, 2007; Brown, 2011; Kabir et al., 2012 & Vultee, 2006).

2. Othering

a. Ottawa shooting

The framing of terrorism by news organizations is a relatively new area of study. One important aspect that is examined in these studies is that they often look into the construction of terrorism. These studies look at how terrorism in the western media is constructed through an orientalist lens (Altheide, 2006 & 2007; Brown, 2011; Mahony, 2010; Vultee, 2006). The theme of construction of the ‘other’ is an important component to terrorism studies and this article. When analysing the National Post articles that reported on the Ottawa shooting just under half of the articles made note that Zehaf-Bibeau was a convert to Islam, or related the shooting in some way to Islam.

In just under half of the articles that gave coverage to the Ottawa shootings The Globe and Mail made mention of the religion of Islam or connected terrorism, Muslims and Zehaf-Bibeau together. In terms of constructing the ‘Other’, The Globe and Mail went farther than the National Post. In one of his press releases after the Ottawa shooting, Stephen Harper vowed that there would be “...no safe haven for those who would bring ‘savagery to our shores’” (Chase, 2014 October 23). The term, domestic terrorism, is noticeably absent from the majority of the news articles linking the Ottawa shootings to the Islamic faith. CBC News often links Islam to radicals, extremists or terrorism. Furthermore, many of the news articles that focus on Zehaf-Bibeau’s past bring up his conversion to Islam, and the time he spent in western Canada, homeless and often sleeping in mosques. One narrative that is different from the National Post and The Globe and Mail is that the CBC News data contains many interviews and statements from prominent members of the Canadian Muslim community. These interviews often involve members of various Canadian Muslim communities condemning the actions of Michael Zehaf-Bibeau.

b. Moncton shooting

After analysing the news articles from all three news organizations, it is clear that the Moncton shootings were not framed to promote ‘othering’. Between the National Post, The Globe and Mail, and the CBC News only two news articles briefly mention religion. When religion is mentioned, it is as a passing thought that constructs Justin Bourque’s past life as a child and is not considered a main factor in motives of the attack. This is completely different than the consideration given to religious factors in the Ottawa shootings. The main discussion around the Moncton shootings seem to revolve around questions of mental health with a secondary and much smaller discussion about ideology and motives behind the shooting spree.

Discussion

In the news articles that focused on the Moncton shootings, the religious affiliation of Justin Bourque was only mentioned twice. The first instance was in reference to his family’s church and the second instance was when an article discussed Justin Bourque’s upbringing. In the context of these two articles, the brief mentioning of his past religious affiliation was used in order to humanize Bourque. To give the impression that he was a regular Maritime native who had seemed to have lost his way somewhere later in life. The talk of his religious background was meant to help cement his Caucasian, Canadian identity. This is in complete contrast to the construction of Michael Zehaf-Bibeau where religious affiliation was mentioned repeatedly to alienate him as an ‘other’.

The construction of the ‘Other’ played a key role in how Western countries; (1) understand Muslims and the Middle East through acts of terrorism (Mahony, 2010), (2) proceeds to define groups ‘other’ than themselves (Altheide, 2006) and thus defining what it means to be Canadian, and (3) over represent one group with a particular kind of activity (Brown, 2011) all while constructing all Muslims as the dangerous ‘Other’ (Kabir et al., 2012). A large proportion of articles from all three news organizations featured ongoing references to Michael Zehaf-Bibeau’s religion. It was often featured as a defining characteristic and motivating force in his life. It was reported by all three news sources that Zehaf-Bibeau was trying to reacquire a passport so that he could leave Canada to travel to the Middle East. The failure to obtain this passport was framed as a secondary reason why Zehaf-Bibeau decided to carry out a shooting on Canadian soil. This kind of reaction to not being able to obtain a passport would seem unnecessary to a reasonable person. The acknowledgement of his desired destination (the Middle East) coupled with the repeated highlighting of Zehaf-Bibeau’s faith and the pre-existing threat of home grown terrorism all contribute to frame Muslims as dangerous as others.

It should be noted that in analysing the three different news organizations, CBC News by far did the most to counteract the framing of construction of the ‘Other’. CBC News in the coverage of the Ottawa shootings and the after impact of the shooting that was felt across the country had numerous articles to counter the main narrative of Islam as a source of violence. The CBC News accomplished this by interviewing leaders in Muslim communities from across Canada. Their message to the Canadian public was that the stereotyping that occurred in the news media after the Ottawa shootings is not an accurate portrayal of the Muslim community as a whole. These experts dissuaded the idea that all Muslims resort to violence to solve their issues and that people who identify as Muslim should not be seen as an outsider population within the borders of Canada.

Conclusion

This work has addressed two important questions for Canadian terrorism studies. Firstly, it demonstrates that Canadian media have operationalised the term “terrorism” in such a way that it cannot be applied uniformly based on a transparent consideration of facts of a case. Rather, with a few exceptions, the term has become tainted by seemingly xenophobic considerations of extra-judicial factors such as race and religion. The consequence of this is that mass violence by white offenders is treated as simple, albeit tragic, criminality (first degree murder, etc.) while mass violence committed by Muslim offenders solicits the label of terrorism. Even the CBC who openly questioned the terrorism label in the Ottawa shooting did not, in any meaningful way question why the Moncton shooting was not considered or prosecuted as terrorism.

The second research question addressed in this work (did the legislated definition of terrorism influence the operationalisation of the label of terrorism in Canadian media?) also leads to some troubling findings. Interestingly one of the initial critiques of the legal definition of terrorism established by the Canadian Government in 2002 came to fruition in the media’s use of terrorism. Critics warned that the motive clause in the definition would result in a ‘racial profiling’ effect. At the time, those critics warnings were directed toward the potential for police to abuse minority groups, little attention was given to the potential for mainstream media to also racially profile in their reporting of violent incidents. It is not clear, even doubtful that the news organisations analysed here consulted with legislated definitions of terrorism, but rather took their lead from government representatives who supplied politically useful narratives. This was done with minimal analysis of political agendas or critique of messaging. Consequently, in coverage of both the Ottawa and Moncton shootings, critical or academic voices were barely present. Although this study cannot be used to generalize about all Canadian news organizations, the research points to some disturbing trends in the media coverage of mass violence and the willingness of the Canadian government to establish narratives on terrorism based on racial difference.

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