

Terrorist in the Eyes of Some: An Examination of the Quebec City Mosque
Shooting and the Christchurch Shootings

by

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Abstract

The rise in right-wing extremism and violence against religious and ethnic minorities in Western countries has sparked a debate around how mainstream news media label these incidents. Are they reported as shootings or acts of terrorism? Drawing on news media framing theory, I conduct a content analysis of three mainstream Canadian news publications to understand how they reported on the Quebec City mosque shooting in 2017, the Christchurch shootings in 2019, while using the Parliament Hill shooting in 2014 as a backdrop for my analysis. In this study, I found that while there are attempts to challenge the War on Terror frame that has dominated the news, there is still a reservation to apply the terrorism frame to white supremacist attacks, even when the perpetrators have been charged with terrorism.

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This thesis is dedicated to all the lives lost because of hate. May we learn lessons from your lives and your passing. It is also dedicated to my paternal grandmother who passed away during the final stages of my thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For centuries, journalism has been accepted as the foundation for a healthy, functioning democracy. This profession facilitated the democratic process through public discourse and functioning as the Fourth Estate or “watchdog” on systems of power (Conboy & Eldridge II, 2017, p. 165). Journalism carries out that function by setting the public agenda for what is salient and what is not—and language plays a role in establishing that. Language, therefore, becomes integral to news practice beyond the obvious fact of needing language to read, write and make meaningful sounds (Cotter, 2010, p. 24). Language is relevant in relation to the structure, the semantic and social meaning of the text; attitudes and decisions about language use; social reflexivity and worldview; the community beyond the newsroom; and display (visual, ideological, etc.) (Cotter, 2010, p. 24). Therefore, language in journalistic practice has the power to shape public discourse, set the agenda and make meaning of the world for its audience (Habermas, 1989; McCombs and Shaw, 2014).

In this thesis, I examine the development and evolution of language around extreme acts of violence. More specifically, I am interested in how the language around acts of terrorism and far-right attacks has changed, evolved or remained the same. Therefore, I look at how language—for example, terms like

'terrorism' versus 'hate crime'—are deployed to frame violent incidents committed by white supremacists versus Muslims. More importantly, I demonstrate how specific frames can be established through subtle variations in terminology and not only through more common terms like 'terrorism.'

In this thesis, I compare and contrast news coverage of media reports on two violent attacks against Muslims in Canada and New Zealand through a content analysis while using the Oct. 22, 2014 Parliament Hill shooting—where the perpetrator was a Muslim—as a backdrop for this study.

On January 29, 2017, a young man went into the Islamic Culture Centre of Quebec City and shot and killed six men. Similarly, on March 14, 2019, a man live-streamed his attack at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, which claimed the lives of 51 people. The coverage of these shootings ranged from describing them as shootings or hate crimes to labelling them as acts of terrorism. By contrast, in most cases where the perpetrators are Muslim, news media report the events as acts of terrorism.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to examine how news media reported on these two violent attacks against Muslims in Canada and New Zealand through a content analysis while using the 2014 Parliament Hill shooting in Ottawa—where the perpetrator was a Muslim—as a backdrop for this study. During the Parliament Hill attack, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau shot and killed a soldier at the War Memorial in Ottawa. This thesis is also interested in the disjuncture between legal definitions and frameworks of terrorism and its application in news media. The research focuses on coverage from the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Montreal*

Gazette and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) for a week following each attack. This research aims to understand how white perpetrators of ideologically-motivated crimes in Canada have been framed—and whether the ‘war on terror’ frame that has been used in the case of Muslim perpetrators is equally applied. More importantly, this study seeks to understand whether the legal classifications of crime or terrorism or murder are consistently reflected in the news framing.

The ‘war on terror’ frame emerged after the events on Sept. 11, 2001, when U.S President George W. Bush declared a global war on terror. Governments and news media alike then followed a jihadi-centric threat narrative, which influenced what constituted terrorism (Nash, 2021, p. 4). Echchaibi (2018) argues that the events of 9/11 thus became the only temporal frame through which Islam can be understood, and Muslims’ identities and experiences can be spoken about. It created a narrative in which Muslims were seen as the only suspects of terrorism, and terrorism can only be committed by Muslims.

1.1 Why this topic?

I remember the night of the Quebec City mosque shooting vividly. I was outdoors, had come home, and put my bag down in my room with my phone held in one hand. A notification from Apple News about a shooting at a mosque

in Quebec popped up on my screen. I run to break the news to my mother. Both in disbelief, I bring my computer, sit at the kitchen table, and spend the night following the coverage on Twitter and from Canadian mainstream news media. I immediately notice the disconnect as more details became available. What we call “Muslim Twitter” (a term referring to Muslims using Twitter) was calling it an act of terrorism. Meanwhile, Canadian newsrooms settled on labels such as “shooting” and “massacre” for the most part. This sparked a debate about language and what is labelled ‘terrorism’ and who is labelled a ‘terrorist’ in news media. While this debate is not entirely new within academia, I began debating the use of this term in my mind.

As an undergraduate journalism student at the time, I understood the process of reporting: collect the information, verify the facts, write the story, get it edited and then publish. I became frustrated at “Muslim Twitter” for labelling the attack as terrorism without knowing the facts. However, as a visibly Muslim woman, I know very well the weight and consequences this label and the ‘war on terror’ frame have had on Muslim communities in North America and the Western world. Muslims in Canada felt terrorized by the incident, but Canadian media did not reflect the terror they felt by holding back on framing the attack as such. Therefore, I chose this topic to understand better how significant that disconnect is between how an incident is perceived by the community it has impacted versus how the news media frames the incident.

1.2 Significance

The concept of terrorism and its framing has been extensively researched within the United States. While there is research on the framing of terrorism in Canadian academia, few have researched the framing of the concept pertaining to far-right and white supremacist attacks (Carver & Harrie, 2017; Ghaffar-Siddiqui, 2019; Kanji, 2018). Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand whether there is a default frame being used by Canadian media and whether the outcomes or functions of the justice system factor into which frame is used. This study is timely because, in 2017, police-reported hate crimes in Canada rose sharply after a steady increase since 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2017). The number of hate crimes more than doubled against the Muslim population that year and accounted for 17 percent of all hate crimes in Canada. The shootings at the mosques in Quebec City and Christchurch were significant hate crimes committed towards Muslims living in Western countries. Yet, most mainstream news media continued to report them as "shootings." Meanwhile, some mainstream news media used the term 'terrorist attack' or 'terrorism' to report on the Parliament Hill shooting in 2014, carried out by a Muslim-Canadian national of Libyan and French Quebecois descent. This thesis will attempt to understand the disparity between what we report as terrorism versus a hate crime or another violent crime and the significance of this terminology. Therefore, this research offers an alternative discourse to the collective perception of an act of terrorism versus an ideologically or hate-motivated crime. This distinction is important

because these decisions shape public discourse around hate crimes, their impact on religious communities, and public policy (Kanji, 2018).

1.3 Research questions and design

The purpose of this study is to examine how each of the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Montreal Gazette* and CBC News framed the violent events chosen for this research. More importantly, it attempts to understand how information flows between different social institutions and whether dominant frames in violent events persist or not. This considers how the ‘war on terror’ frame has evolved while understanding how rising white supremacist attacks are being framed in comparison. In this thesis, I work towards answering the following research questions.

My primary research question is:

1. How have each of the publications under examination framed the three violent incidents, and was the ‘war on terror’ frame deployed? My

secondary research questions are:

2. Are journalistic standards and practices for reporting on violence or terrorism applied consistently when the perpetrator was Muslim versus non-Muslim? Or were there moments of abandoning these guidelines?
3. Does legality play a role in whether or not the dominant frame is contested?

This chapter thus presents the research strategy used to respond to the research questions outlined above. It outlines the research method approach, which follows a qualitative content analysis. The following is the research design of this thesis.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is one of the numerous research methods used to analyze textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). It goes beyond counting words to extract meaning from large amounts of text (McCombs et al., 2014; as quoted in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of textual data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. In this thesis, I follow a directed content analysis approach. In essence, directed content analysis begins with an existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). The goal of the directed approach is to validate or extend a theoretical framework conceptually (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Hence, this study is qualitative insofar as it looks at the language used to establish existing frames, but it looks further into whether existing media theoretical frameworks are still applicable. Furthermore, content analysis allows me to extend conceptually to theoretical frameworks as it relates to framing. My research and qualitative content analysis are informed by critical work on race, representation and Islamophobia in

Canadian media. I draw on frame theory, critical race theory and Orientalism to inform and support my analysis.

Content Analysis Procedure

The unit of analysis in this research is newspaper and web-based texts produced by three mainstream news organizations in Canada—CBC News, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. CBC News is the public broadcaster in Canada with stations serving on all major platforms, TV, radio and web in English with a sister-network Radio-Canada serving in French. The *Citizen* is an English language daily newspaper with a circulation in the tens of thousands. Finally, the *Gazette* is an English-language newspaper in Montreal. Both the *Citizen* and the *Gazette* are owned by media conglomerate Postmedia, which presents both challenges and opportunities for analysis. In Canada, a handful of corporations control most media outlets and publications across the country (Jiwani, 2010). Jiwani (2010) suggests this creates a situation where it is not unusual for journalists and editors to toe the corporate line and privilege the ideologies of those in power out of fear of losing their job. This concentration, however, means that looking at a small subset of publications can also provide insight into general news frames that circulate in Canada.

I chose these news outlets for several reasons. The CBC was chosen because it is the national public broadcaster with millions of clicks and views on its online platform a day which potentially gives it the power to set the dominant frame used in the events. In this case, the absence of a paywall increases the number of readers as well as diversifies their demographic and political leaning.

The *Citizen* and *Gazette* were chosen for the proximity to Parliament Hill shooting and the Quebec City mosque shooting. This not only offers a plethora of articles to analyze but would also offer any potential insight into how proximity to events may influence the dominant frame. I chose them in particular because I focus on Canadian news media because there is scarce research on news media framing of violent attacks on religious and ethnic minorities in Canada compared to the American context. More importantly, I include a nonCanadian attack because it offers an opportunity of comparison to how Canadian media would frame a white perpetrator that was indeed charged with terrorism.

This provides an important point of comparison to whether news media will shift their framing if the *white* perpetrator was charged with terrorism compared to one who was not. In other words, will they use the 'war on terror' frame or not? The sampling of the chosen articles followed a purposive method. I initially inserted keywords or codes I was interested in analyzing, such as 'terrorism' and 'hate crime' into Nexis Uni. However, it became evident that this limited my research by potentially excluding keywords or codes that might surface. I then pivoted to searching for all articles in the location where each incident occurred within the timeframe of 7 days from the date of the event to avoid excluding any potential terminology or points of analysis. Any irrelevant articles yielded by the search were manually removed from the pool produced.

Purposive Sampling

The selection criteria for the samples were: they were published by the three publications under examination, they were published within the research's time period, they included a reference to the inductive codes terrorism and/or hate (crime/motivated/etc.). Considering that this is a qualitative study, samples were not selected to illustrate the frequency or quantity of the initial codes. Instead, samples were selected based on whether they answered one or more of the research questions.

The rationale for selecting the sample within a week of the incident is to establish the initial frame used by the respective news outlet. This helps establish what the frame was while controlling for any bottom-up frame contestation that the news organization might adopt. While this is an essential element to examine, the scope and method of this thesis do not allow for understanding how much the flow of information is contested. In Entman's (2003) metaphorical cascade, information flow can create frame parity within the coverage of violent events and contest the frames coming from the top of the cascade. Therefore, the time period for this study establishes whether there has been a departure from the dominant "all Muslims are terrorists" frame—by relying on previous studies and theories (Ghaffar-Siddiqui, 2019; Kanji, 2018).

Since this study examines the competition of frames and the role of the legal system, a total of 90 articles was selected, and ten news articles were randomly selected for each incident from each publication. I selected the articles by using Google's random number generator. I input the number of articles that

my research generated for each incident by the three respective publications. The number generated corresponded with the order of the article in the pool created in a digital file. I repeated this process nine times to generate a list of articles for each attack by CBC News, *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette*. This generated the 90 articles mentioned above. While this is a small sample and therefore not exhaustive, it still provides enough material to analyze to establish patterns and draw comparisons between publications. This is important because it demonstrates that despite being guided by the same journalistic standards and guidelines, Canadian news media still have a great deal of autonomy and in this case subjectivity in applying the 'war on terror' frame.

I arrive at the frames that are examined by using both inductive and deductive content analysis. I started off with the generic codes of 'terror' 'terrorism,' 'hate' and the difference between using 'allegedly' and not using it in the reporting. I then reach through the articles looking for other data or codes that might emerge from the articles. Considering Beydoun's (2018) work on the lone wolf classification, I found that lens and framing of violent attacks in the articles being examined. Finally, my humanization frame was something I noticed in the data through the differential language used. Therefore, I divide my analysis chapters into each of these frames by analyzing each of the three publications.

1.4 Limitations

A thesis of this scope can only add so much to the scholarship on this topic. This thesis examines a short period of time following each incident. Therefore, it is limited in its ability to show whether there was a shift in the frame after the seven days following the attack. Additionally, I was interested in understanding the initial framing of each attack across the different publications. Another limitation is that while this thesis will include analysis and opinion/editorial samples to give insight into the public framing of each attack, no interviews were conducted in this research. Not interviewing members of the Muslim communities in Canada and media personnel will limit the insight into the “why” part of the analysis. However, this will be mitigated through a thorough explanation of the news process from existing scholarship along with my insights as a journalist and my understanding of the Canadian news media landscape so far. Additionally, I will be relying on the Canadian Press Stylebook and any independent publications’ language guides to provide insight into the decision making process.

Another limitation of this thesis is that it focuses on written work only. Therefore, in the case of the CBC, the analysis will exclude the radio and TV divisions of the corporation. Within the CBC, there is collaborative work between all platforms, but a separate producer heads each platform. This limits the ability of this research project to apply the findings to the company as a whole. Finally, I am a visible Muslim woman who is a working journalist. At the same time, this might be a cause for subconscious bias in the research. I limit the bias by

injecting my knowledge solely about the practice of journalism and offering counter perspectives on the issue.

1.5 Chapter outline

The following is a blueprint of the study with a summary of what each chapter includes. The first three chapters include the theoretical and methodological components of this thesis which chapters three to six include the content analysis and core research.

So far, I have set the stage of my research by outlining by research questions, presenting the case studies I am focusing on, and outlining my methodology. It also includes the rationale and purpose of each step.

Chapter Two presents a literature review of the terrorism frame. The chapter presents a brief overview of the history of terrorism and the problem of definition that arises with that term. It presents a review of how the terms are defined within Canada's legal system. More importantly, it addresses how the public defines terrorism and hate crime can either diverge or converge from legal definitions or media framing. The goal is to provide foundational knowledge and raise questions around definitions.

Chapter Three outlines the existing journalism and communication scholarship on framing theory. Here, I explain the widely known yet important issue of the "Muslimization of Terrorism" in Canadian news media. This chapter explores the theoretical framework of frame analysis and explains the other

theories that will inform my analysis. This chapter also explains the various existing journalistic standards and practices for Canadian reporting on terrorism.

Chapter Four contains the first content analysis, which focuses on one of the three ways news media continue to maintain dominant frames or contest them. The chapter outlines the lexical dichotomies through which frames can be upheld. It centers around the concept of trial by media and how what might seem like a minor difference in terminology can have significant implications for frame analysis.

In continuing the focus on language, Chapter Five looks at one specific yet incredibly nuanced concept—the lone wolf. This chapter examines how the respective publications apply this concept to each perpetrator. This portion of the analysis concerns itself with how the subjective application of this concept reinforced the dominant frame by emphasizing or de-emphasizing a connection with a political/religious ideology or group.

Chapter Six examines the final way problematic dominant frames are either upheld or contested. This chapter explores the humanization frame as it pertains to victims and perpetrators. It attempts to understand if there has been a shift with how the perpetrators in relation to each other and in relation to their victims were framed and the resulting implications. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to understand if news media can likely humanize the perpetrator while simultaneously humanizing their victims if they are white.

This thesis concludes with a summary of the research findings and a discussion of those findings. What I found is that while there is a shift in

acknowledging the ideological motivations of white perpetrators, the 'war on terror' frame was still largely reserved to Muslim perpetrators of violence.

In essence, I am conducting a qualitative content analysis to understand how violent attacks by white perpetrators are framed. The research examines whether there has been a shift in the way terrorism is framed and how it is applied to white perpetrators. More importantly, I attempt to establish whether these frames are reinforced or challenged by legality. For example, if the perpetrator is white and charged with terrorism, will the terrorism frame be deployed, or will they be exempt from it? This thesis argues that while there is an acknowledgement of the terrorism charge and their extremism views, white perpetrators that were charged with terrorism were still rarely framed as terrorists. Therefore, this thesis expands on previous research on terrorism by examining how it applies in cases where the perpetrators are white and what factors are at play in establishing the frames.

Chapter 2: Tracing the linguistic, legal, and social definitions of terrorism

What is terrorism? Any discussion of this term must start with a definition, which means we can venture into a minefield of meanings, and the chaos extends beyond academia (Law, 2009, p. 2). Terrorism, as terminology and a concept, has evolved into a contentious, value-laden, and racially-coded term that has led to real consequences for Muslim communities across North America and beyond. The term, academically, legally, and colloquially has been a subject of debate because it varies across these realms and even within them.

Therefore, it becomes essential for this thesis to explore the varying definitions of terrorism and their contentions. Similarly, the conceptualization of hate crime also varies across legal, academic and colloquial definitions. More importantly, terrorism and hate crimes have been used interchangeably or as mutually exclusive terms among the public—and sometimes mainstream media—when faced with instances of hate-motivated crimes. So, it becomes crucial to explore the academic and legal debate around the terms, which have often hinged on the notion of intent and its presence or absence to classify it as terrorism or hate crime. More importantly, framing an event as terrorism both legally and colloquially has political and social consequences. Thus, the alignment between legal and colloquial framing of an event becomes important.

This chapter then presents the legal, academic, and social definitions of terrorism and hate crime and their points of contention. It also offers an overview

of the debate around the relationship between those two terms; are they close cousins or distant relatives? This chapter also illustrates the evolution of 'terrorism' from a term used to describe violence by the state against insurrectionists to a term that is highly contested and applied subjectively.

2.1 Linguistic and theoretical definitions of terrorism

The word terrorism lies in the word terror, which comes from the Latin word *terrere*, to "frighten" or "tremble." (Matusitz, 2012, p. 1). When the term is coupled with the French suffix *isme* (referencing "to practice"), it comes akin to "practicing the trembling" or "causing the frightening" (Matusitz, 2012, p. 1). Trembling and frightening here are synonyms for fear, panic, and anxiety—what we would naturally call terror (Matusitz, 2012, p. 1). The linguistic origin of the term is important to note because it emphasizes the psychological impact such as fear and terror, which is a critical component that distinguishes terrorism from other forms of crime such as assault and murder. This incitement of fear has also been largely overlooked in recent definitions of the term and almost detached from discussions of hate crimes against ethnic and religious minorities. However, Juergensmeyer (2003) suggests that what we constitute as religious or ideological terrorism can be seen as a performative and symbolic act to incite fear in the masses. The history of the word terrorism is also vital to understand.

The word terror is over 2,100 years old, and terrorism is an old tactic that existed before the world as we know it today (Matusitz, 2012, p. 7). However, the

word terrorism, in and of itself, was coined during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror in the early 1790s (Matusitz, 2012, p. 7). The Reign of Terror was a campaign of large-scale violence by the French state; between 16,000 and 40,000 people were killed in a little over a year (Matusitz, 2012, p. 1).

Maximilien Robespierre, a leader in the French Revolution, declared in 1794 that "terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible" (Matusitz, 2012, p. 2). However, years later, in 1798, the Académie Française, an elite French learned body on dealing with the French language, provided the first official French definition of terrorism and released a supplement for the dictionary (Matusitz, 2012, p.2). The term terrorism was defined as the "système, régime de la terreur" or the "government of terror." While the Reign of Terror was a statesponsored system of terrorism, there was a shift in modern times where terrorism became a term that denotes the killing, harm, or injury by nongovernmental political actors for various reasons—usually as a political statement (Matusitz, 2012, p. 2). Acts such as hijackings, shootings, and even bombings, however, were not always considered terrorism.

In August 1961, Leon Bearden and his sixteen-year-old son hijacked a Continental Airlines flight heading from Los Angeles to Houston, with scheduled stops in Phoenix, El Paso, and San Antonio (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 2). During a nine-hour standoff, Bearden demanded that the pilot fly to Cuba and later reported that he had hoped to sell the plane to Fidel Castro (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 2). The hijacking was later reported by the *New York Times* as a "wild adventure" rather than terrorism (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 2). Even as late as 1968,

the United States generally treated hijacking, or “air piracy,” as it was sometimes called, a routine domestic criminal matter (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 2). However, by the middle of the 1970s, this approach to bombings, hijackings, kidnappings, and hostage-takings shifted. These acts were not conceptualized as political violence tactics but rather something more threatening—terrorism (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, even though the first applications of the word terrorism were used to describe state violence against its domestic enemies, the term has become applied, by the state and mainstream media, more frequently to violence aimed at both the state directly or indirectly through non-state actors or civilians in the 20th century (Jenkins, 2020).

However, it was not until the events of 9/11 in 2001 that terrorism moved from the fringes of academia to a subject of significant attention (Silke, 2018, p. 1). Laqueur (1987) defines terrorism as the use of violence or the threat to use it, as a combat method, or a strategy of achieving specific targets. Laqueur (1987) maintains that terrorism is the use or threat of violence, a form of combat, or a plan to achieve particular targets. “It aims to induce a state of fear in the victim, that is ruthless and does not conform with humanitarian rules....publicity is an essential factor in the terrorist strategy” (p.143). Bruce Hoffman (2006) defines terrorism as:

Ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent, —or, equally important, threatens violence, designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond immediate victim or target, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell

structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity. (p.43)

Schmid and Jongman (1988) define terrorism as:

an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. (p.28)

Meanwhile, Rapoport (1977) defines terrorism as “the use of violence to provoke consciousness, to evoke certain feelings of sympathy and revulsion” (as quoted in Matusitz, 2012, p. 3). Alexander (1976) defines terrorism as “the use of violence against random civilian targets to intimidate or to create generalized pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals” (p. 14). Some scholars have defined terrorism without emphasis on political motivation, cause, or influence. Eid (2014) defines terrorism as the persistent, shocking, and premeditated threat, use of violence and coercion initiated or retaliated by and against governments, states, groups, or individuals resulting in injury, loss of life, or destruction of property, or terror, including psychological effects to gain wide ranging public attention beyond the targets (p. 26).

Other scholars such as Juergensmeyer (2003) conceptualize religious terrorism as “performance violence,” wherein events like 9/11 and the Air India

bombings are symbolic, dramatic, and theatrical. He suggests that terrorist acts are not necessarily tactics, but performative acts, in that they make a symbolic statement and are not done to achieve a strategic goal (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 125). “In some cases, acts of violence sends two messages at the same time: a broad message aimed at the general public and a specific communication targeted at a narrower audience” (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 125). Therefore, Juergensmeyer (2003) conceptualizes terrorism as a symbolic action with the intent to send a message beyond the targeted victims and to a global media audience with the *hope* that it would indirectly make a difference (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 127). Here, I find Eid’s (2014) definition of terrorism useful because it addresses the social impact that extends beyond targets of the actual attack. Considering the lack of action when events are not framed as terrorism, it ignored the impact that it has beyond primary targets. Conceptions and definitions of terrorism have often converged or diverged on the notion of intent—something that has proven challenging to identify and academically and prove legally. The intent, however, is not the only problem that arises in the study of terrorism.

2.2 Terrorism contested: The problem of definition

Ideally, any discussion or study of terrorism, its motives and inspiration, its character and mode of operation, political orientation, and long-term consequences should start with a precise and comprehensive definition of the

subject (Laqueur, 1987, p. 142). Terrorism and its conceptual problems, however, have not yielded to an accepted and agreed-upon meaning. Stampnitzky (2013) argues that despite 'terrorism' becoming a dominant framework for understanding illegitimate political violence, it is not a stable or fixed category. Instead, the debate around what is or is not terrorism is how we determine which sorts of violence are, and are not, illegitimate (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 10). Stampnitzky (2013) suggests that terrorism is a product of conflicts over knowledge production and becoming a socially constructed concept.

Stampnitzky (2013) maintains that the idea of 'terrorism' and terrorism experts was not thoroughly "disciplined," creating a "problem of definition," an ongoing series of conflicts over what terrorism is and is not (p.7). Norris, Kern, and Just (2003) argue that terrorism is essentially contested, value-laden, and open to multiple meanings located within broader cultural frames, making terrorism, to some extent, in the eyes of the beholder. Richards (2018) also suggests that terrorism is a highly subjective term but maintains that it is fair to suggest that most scholars of "terrorism studies" see themselves as studying a distinctive form of political violence that merits independent scrutiny. More importantly, this problem of definition has also been reflected in news media where it becomes unclear whether attacks like that of Alexandre Bissonnette's and Brenton Tarrant's constitute terrorism. This creates difficulties for news organizations and journalists to clearly and objectively frame violent attacks as terrorism.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of generating a universally agreed-upon definition of terrorism, developing a *conceptualization* of terrorism is still possible

(Richards, 2018, p. 13). Richards (2018) suggests that “perhaps the most fundamental obstacle of all, then, to agreed conceptualization has been the frequent deployment of terrorism as a pejorative label, rather than an analytical concept” (p.15). In the last 50 years, approximately, there appears to have been a degree of academic consensus on the essence of terrorism — a ‘shock value’ that entails the intent to generate a psychological impact beyond the targeted victims (Richards, 2018, p. 13). On the foundational level, definitions and discussions of terrorism include mainly actors (non-state state state-sponsored) and highlight its reliance on violence. Then, they move on to accumulate a few or many of its descriptions and characteristics: crime, warfare, psychological harm, fear, victims, goals, motivations, intimidation, etc. (Eid, 2014, p. 19). However, Richards (2018) suggests the next step is to focus on the *activity* of terrorism and should be understood as a particular *method* of political violence rather than conceptualized through who the perpetrator is or what the cause is (p.16). Focusing on the *method* does not suggest studying the different types or methods of violence itself but the intent behind the act of violence or threat of it— to generate a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims (Richards, 2018, p. 16). Therefore, when conceptualizing terrorism, there is no one doctrine, violent or otherwise, that can claim ownership of terrorism—it is a *method* of violence that has been perpetrated in the cause of doctrines (Richards, 2018, p. 17). I will be relying on Richards’s (2018) definition of terrorism for this thesis.

Terrorism, according to Richards (2018), is conceptualized as “the use of violence or the threat of violence with the primary purpose of generating a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims or object of attack for a political motive” (p. 19). However, since the birth of the term and concept of terrorism, nation-states took it upon themselves to create legal definitions and define terrorism within their criminal code, adding to the plethora of definitions of terrorism.

2.3 Defining terrorism in Canada’s legal system

Legal definitions of terrorism can vary considerably from one country to another, creating further confusion for Canadian newsrooms in defining and framing terrorism. For this thesis, I will look at the legal definitions of terrorism for Canada, the United States, New Zealand and their contestation points.

In Canada, section 83.01 of the Criminal Code (1985) defines terrorism as specific acts of violence to people or property committed “in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause,” with the intention of “intimidating the public [. . .] or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or to refrain from doing any act.” Therefore, it needs to satisfy three criteria under the law: serious harm against any person or property, intent to coerce or intimidate, and an “advancement of a cause” or ideological motivation.

However, some critics argue that ideological motivation is necessary for a violent crime be considered terrorism under the law. These criteria for an ideological (political, social, or religious) cause to be present can complicate prosecutions, distort trials, and encourage racial profiling (Douglas, 2010). Douglas (2010) argues that while violence motivated by ideology is more common than that motivated by hate, “there is no apparent reason why harm coupled with coercive intent should constitute terrorism when ideologically motivated but not when inspired by hatred” (Douglas, 2010, p. 311). This was the case with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) shootings in Moncton, New Brunswick, where three RCMP officers were shot and killed in 2014.

Despite the shooting fitting the Criminal Code definition of terrorism, a Public Safety Canada study reported in the *National Post* classified ‘violent extremist’ and ‘supremacist’ incidents (including the Moncton RCMP shooting) in a separate category from ‘terrorism’ (Kanji, 2018, p. 10). One explanation for this distinction is for an incident to meet the legal definition the perpetrator(s) must be “proven to meet the evidentiary standards of a court for conviction” (Nash, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, while terrorist activity is defined in the Criminal Code, ideology is not (Nash, 2021, p. 6). This lack of definition of what constitutes an ideological motivation leaves it up to legal experts, police, politicians and even the public to decide whether a violent incident like the Moncton RCMP shooting is ideologically motivated and therefore is classified as terrorism. Roach (2019), as quoted in Nash (2021, p. 6), suggests the “ideological purpose, objective, or

cause” aspect of the Canadian legal definition is very broad, and sometimes people overthink what constitutes ideology.

Canada’s legislative definition of terrorism has a complex genealogy. A definition developed by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was the basis for a recommended definition of terrorism for proposed United Kingdom legislation (Douglas, 2010, p. 295). The FBI’s definition was adopted by the United Kingdom parliament and became the basis for the definitions adopted for the purposes of the post-9/11 counter-terrorism legislation of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia; South Africa also has a similar legislative definition of terrorism (Douglas, 2010, p. 295). In the United States, legislation on terrorism branches into “international terrorism” and “domestic terrorism.” According to the U.S. criminal code, international terrorism involves three criteria: a violent act or acts dangerous to human life that is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States of any State; intent to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, government, or affect the conduct of government; and occurs primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States. The domestic terrorism definition has the same criteria, except it occurs mainly within the United States jurisdiction. While Canada’s Criminal Code does not distinguish between domestic and international terrorism, its definition of terrorism defines a terrorist activity as an act committed in or outside of Canada.

While New Zealand’s legal definition is not the focus of this thesis, it is still important to look at it briefly because it offers a point of comparison to the intent part of the Canadian legal definition. New Zealand’s Terrorism Suppression Act

(2002) defines terrorism as similar to the United States and Canada. The Act defines terrorism “as an act that causes death or other serious bodily injuries to one or more persons and destruction of property, intending to induce terror in a civilian population *or* to unduly compel or to force a government to do or abstain from any act” (Terrorism Suppression Act, 2002). The first intent in New Zealand’s legal definition—intention to induce terror—is critical to note because it is easier to prove than the intention to influence politics. For example, Brenton Tarrant, the Australian man who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, was charged with terrorism due to a slightly different legal definition in New Zealand. In Canada and the United States’ legal definitions, a person must have the intention in part or in whole to influence politics or commit violence in the name of a political or ideological cause to be charged with terrorism—inducing terror in a population without the intention to advance a cause does not satisfy the legal definition. The criterion of intent has been criticized and supported by terrorism scholars and experts because it can be hard to prove. Richards (2018) posits that if terrorism is ineluctably about the *intent* to generate psychological impact (terror and fear), perhaps the most fundamental challenge for the conceptualization of terrorism is proving the intent behind the act. The issue of intent surfaced in the case of Alexandre Bissonnette, the Quebec City mosque shooter, where police considered a terrorism charge but did not apply it. To lay terrorism charges, prosecutors had to prove that

Bissonnette's actions were committed "for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause" that had "the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public with regard to its security," as described in the Criminal Code. Richards (2018) suggests that the subjectivity in defining terrorism lies in who decides whether there is intent behind a violent attack. More importantly, since there are varying legal definitions of terrorism that are themselves subjectively applied, it becomes an important topic of legal and social debate of how these definitions are being used.

2.4 Public conceptions of terrorism

Considering the publicity of terrorism and its effect on the public, how the public understands terrorism becomes essential. Huff & Kertzer (2018) conducted a study on how the public defines terrorism by surveying 1,400 adults recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Huff & Kertzer (2018) assessed the attribute of incidents ordinary citizens use to define incidents as terrorism by presenting participants with a series of incidents with randomly generated features and then asking whether they would classify each incident as terrorism. The researchers manipulate attributes such as the tactics used, the target, the location, the actor, categorization of the perpetrator (Christian, Muslim, left-wing, right-wing, etc.), and the perpetrator's motivation (policy change, hatred toward the target, etc.). Huff and Kertzer (2018) also looked at the *effect* of each attribute using a relatively large number of experimental treatments. Huff and

Kertzer (2018) acknowledge that understanding how the public defines terrorism will not necessarily resolve the contentions mentioned above with defining the term but will instead help understand how terrorism works. As far-right violence increases in places like the United States, debates on whether to label terrorism or not emerge. The study by Huff and Kertzer (2018) found that the likelihood that ordinary citizens classify an event as terrorism is heavily dependent on relatively objective facts, such as the extremity and severity of violence employed (p. 69). The public is also heavily influenced by the description of who carried out the incident and why. For example, Huff and Kertzer (2018) found that acts are more likely to be seen as terrorism by ordinary citizens if carried out by organizations, less likely by individuals with a history of mental illness. Violent events were also more likely to be labelled as terrorism if they were carried out by Muslims, more likely if they were carried out to achieve political goals, and so on (Huff and Kertzer, 2018, p. 69). But, despite the public generally classifying events similarly to the formal classification schemes employed by different government agencies (e.g. requires political motivation), it also deviates in some ways (Huff and Kertzer, 2018, p. 69). There seems to be a disconnect between formal legal definitions and public intuition. The public does not need to see civilians targeted to label an event as terrorism—incidents motivated by hatred are just as likely to be seen as terrorism (Huff and Kertzer, 2018, p. 69).

Therefore, the Huff and Kertzer (2018) study suggest that violent incidents such as the Quebec City mosque shooting and the Christchurch shootings can either be viewed by citizens in line with legal definitions and label

them as a shooting or deviate and label them as acts of terrorism. Whether the public perceives shootings like the Quebec City mosque shooting as terrorism or not is contingent on the presence or absence of the two false narratives, “all Muslims are terrorists” and “white people are never terrorists” (Corbin, 2017, p. 457). The author locates these narratives in news, television and in governments. Along with the tendency to leap to the conclusion that Muslims were responsible for terror attacks, the news repeatedly linked “Muslim” with “terrorism” (Corbin, 2017, p. 460). In the early hours of the attack at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Quebec, some U.S. media (and one Canadian media outlet at least) reported that two suspects were in custody, one born in Canada and one born in Morocco, a Muslim-majority country. However, it later became clear that Mohamed Belkhadir, the Moroccan man, was a witness who called the police after hearing shots (O’Connor, 2017). The wrongful arrest, the reporting on it by the media, and labelling the incident as a terrorist attack (by some Canadian and American press) are clear examples of how readily the ‘terrorism’ label is applied to people with perceived Muslim identity, and how hesitant Canadian news media may be to apply the label to white perpetrators. It becomes one of many examples that shape the public’s perception of terrorism.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter established that terrorism has evolved from a concept that described state violence to highly contested and racially coded with no agreed

upon definition. The term's variability academically, legally and socially creates variability in how violent crimes are labelled and framed in the media (which will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter). This chapter also examined how these conceptions vary between the news media and the public. This is important because it addresses the subjectivity of the definition of terrorism in different realms. It also creates a point of comparison on how much weight does the legal frame carry in the news media context.

Chapter 3: Framing terrorism in the news media

This chapter examines how Canadian media frame violent incidents committed by Muslim perpetrators versus white supremacists and whether the acts were designated as terrorism. The designation is significant because political leaders and the judiciary represent terrorism as posing a uniquely existential threat to Canada, rationalizing an exceptionally pre-emptive and punitive response by security agencies and law enforcement (Kanji, 2018). Since media also contribute to the perceived level of threat through the frequency of reporting on and framing terrorism, it becomes imperative to understand the pattern of framing that Canadian media has employed (Karim, 2003). Therefore, this chapter will explore existing journalism and communication literature on framing theory and explain its relevance to the thesis project.

This chapter begins with an overview of framing theory and its importance in this context. Next, it explores the role media played in framing terrorism as a “Muslim problem” and excluding white supremacists from terrorism. This chapter aims to understand how framing works, its impacts, and the mechanisms in place that mitigate against or fuel problematic framing.

3.1 Framing theory and the news media

Framing theory, like terrorism, does not have a single agreed-upon definition used by academics, which is why Entman (1993) refers to it as a

“fractured paradigm” (p. 51). Goffman (1974) first introduced the concept of framing in order to help us understand how people make sense of their social environments. Goffman (1974) makes the distinction between natural and social frameworks. Natural frameworks identify events as they are “undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, ‘purely physical’” (Goffman, 1974, p. 22). This is important because in the context of this research, the frameworks deployed are social as in there is a person with motivation, intent and motivation behind them (Goffman, 1974, p. 22). Thus, social frameworks provide background information that helps the public make sense of the events presented to them and the world around them. These frames are often reproducible. Fleras and Kunz (2001) argue that:

Rather than representing something that is natural or normal about the world, newscasting constitutes a human accomplishment constructed around and negotiated by those with vested interests in preserving or promoting a particular point of view. In reflecting information that is anything but impartial but reflective of dominant values, news is created through a complex array of professional and aesthetic judgement, involving a process in which some events are ignored while others are angled-thus reinforcing the existing social and moral order. (p. 71)

Therefore, news frames and the process of journalism are both conscious and unconscious as in there is a consciousness in what is indisputable. However as Fleras and Kunz (2001) suggest, frames are developed through selection and organization of information and there is subjective or unconscious decision

making in how events are framed. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) define a media frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events...the frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p. 143). The organization of information in a similar way can be reproduced and the same controversy or issue is centralized over and over. Therefore, if a news media outlet frames the Muslim suspect as a terrorist in all violent attacks, other journalists can reproduce the same frame by organizing the information in a similar way making certain details more salient while ignoring others. The concept of social frameworks and frame analysis has been applied to news media and their role in setting the agenda. Entman (1993) explains that framing essentially involves selection and salience:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 51)

Within the mass media, journalists' perceptions and biases affect how information is presented in news stories through selection and salience. In this way, framing is a powerful tool that can define public debate and influence how the public perceives threats (Taylor, 2019). Gitlin (2003) suggests that journalists are or ought to be free from any outside forces whether it's political pressures or news executives—or any conscious or unconscious ideological bias the journalist might carry (p. 249). Tuchman (1978) expanded on this concept by looking at the news as a frame with a concentration on newspapers and

television as complex organizations “subject to certain inevitable processes, upon newswriters as professionals with professional concerns” (p. 1). Thus, Tuchman (1978) suggested how journalists frame a story is dependent on the fact the news is located, gathered, and disseminated by professionals working in organizations, making it inevitable that journalists draw upon institutional processes and conform to institutional practices. Those practices also include association with institutions whose news is routinely reported (i.e. government, lobbyists, etc.), making news a social institution and embedded in relationships with other institutions. Gitlin’s (2003) study of the relationship between the New Left movement and media highlights the association between two institutions. Gitlin (2003) argues the news media contributed to the fall of the New Left movement in the late 1960s through media frames which are defined as the “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of what exists, what happens, and what matters” (p. 6). Gitlin (2003) suggests that framing influence public perception of an event—in this case, a movement—but do not influence the *intensity* or *duration* of the frame (pp.141-142). The inability to measure the intensity or duration leads Gitlin (2003) to suggest that these impacts are made unconsciously (pp.141-142). This opposes the approach Goffman (1974) takes, which is that framing is done consciously. This thesis takes the approach that framing is done both consciously and unconsciously. This means that journalists and producers *may* consciously choose specific frames to present news based on established frames and narratives. However,

they are likely done unconscious of the *impact* these frames have on public perception and the material effect they can have on society at large and people.

Entman (2003), like Gitlin (2003), offers a similar approach to the relationship between social institutions like government and news media but through frame dominance and frame contestation. Entman's (2003) Cascading Activation theory suggests that the words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity to stimulate support of or opposition to the sides in political conflict. One can argue this also applies to social issues, policy, and more.

The framing of a given actor, issue, or event during a defined period can be arrayed along a continuum from total dominance by one frame to a completely even-handed standoff between two frames, known as frame parity (Entman, 2003, p. 418). Frame parity describes the condition that free press theories prefer: two (or more) interpretations of an event receiving something like equal play (Entman, 2003). However, to reach frame parity, the news must offer a *counterframe* to the dominant frame that combines a complete alternative narrative, a tale of problem, cause, remedy, and moral judgement possessing as much magnitude and resonance as the dominant frame (Entman 2003). The cascading activation model illustrates the flow of influence from each level in the existing networks of association: the government, non-government elites (exstaffers, experts, etc.), news organizations, the texts they produce (frames), and the public. Entman (2003) suggests that as with real-world cascading waterfalls, each level in the metaphorical cascade makes its contributions to the

mix and flow of ideas. Still, the ability to promote the spread of frames is also highly stratified. More importantly, moving downwards in the metaphorical cascade is relatively easy, but moving ideas from the public or news media to administration requires more energy (Entman, 2003, p.420). Therefore, ideas that come from the top of the cascade, “the administration,” is the strongest as “the president and top advisors enjoy the most independent ability to decide which mental associations to activate and the highest probability of moving their own thoughts into general circulation” (Entman, 2003, p. 410). In essence, the cascade theory clarifies that there is a hierarchy in which public opinion is typically a dependent variable. Still, it is not impossible or unlikely that the public influences the opinions of the administration or elites (Entman, 2003, p. 420). For example, after the events of 9/11, the message/frame from the Bush administration around intervention in Afghanistan and later Iraq dominated the news in America. The possibility that Saudi Arabia funded al-Qaeda or was partially responsible for 9/11 was primarily ignored by American news after a Thomas Friedman column appeared in the *New York Times* in 2001, suggesting that connection needs to be explored more by the media (Entman, 2003, p. 425). A search in the Nexis “Major Papers” library looking for all mentions of the word “Saudi” within five words of “terror(ism, ist)” yielded only 25 out of 110 results that explicitly made that connection (Entman, 2003, p.425). This is an example of how an administration’s framing of an event gets passed down to elites, media, and the public without enough contestation to create frame parity.

Entman's (2003) cascading model will become an essential tool in this study to understand how the subjective nature of defining terrorism and hate crime legally and socially will be what causes a frame to be contested in news media. However, it is essential to note that Entman's cascading model does not consider the proliferation of social media. Çeçen (2015) suggests that social media has provided those in the lower levels of the cascade (the public) the ability to create a flow of information, thus challenging the top-down model of framing. Social media change the flow of information and allow individuals to form their own frames (Çeçen, 2015). For example, with the rise of social media, politicians have immediate access to the public, surpassing the need for news media, thus communicating their frame uncontested. More importantly, one of the most powerful things about the internet, especially social media, is the ability for an individual to form their own frames (Çeçen, 2015, p. 366). For example, during the New Left movement, groups like the Students for a Democratic Society relied on broadcast media attention and framing of them to gain support (Gitlin 2003, p. 2). However, the rise of the internet and social media allowed social groups, and often extremist groups, to disseminate the frames with which they want to be seen directly to the individual (Marmura [2010] in Çeçen, 2015).

The competition between frames and the flow of information is pertinent for understanding how concepts such as terrorism are framed in news media. Since terrorism does not have a concrete definition, the way information flows in each metaphorical cascade will be highly subjective, which allows for one or few frames to dominate. Historically, 'all terrorists are Muslim' is the frame that

dominated and continues to be the dominant frame in most news media.

Therefore, examining frame parity and frame contestation when reporting on the three cases that follow will allow for a better analysis of the different ways the 'all Muslims are terrorists' frame still is the dominant frame in Canadian news media.

3.2 'War on Terror' in Canadian News Media

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration declared a 'war on terror' to justify security policies in the U.S. and military intervention abroad (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 85). It was both a rhetorical device and an ideological frame put forward indicating the tragedy required a war-like response against perpetrators and states (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 85). Lewis and Reese's (2009) study of how journalists defined and internalized the Bush administration's framing found that some journalists understand it is hard to define (p. 91). However, one journalist said:

I thought then and think now that to say war on terror is kind of a wink and a nod. We know what we're talking about here. We're not talking about a war on Basque ETA or the Irish Republican Army or another terrorist organization. We're talking about Islamists, Muslim jihadis. So why don't we say that, or why doesn't the government say that? I don't know.

(Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 91)

This demonstrates that there has been an internalization of this political and ideological framing of the 'war on terror.' In essence, these images about al-Qaeda and Islam became a tenet of this frame.

The Canadian government also followed a jihadi-centric threat narrative, which influenced what constituted terrorism (Nash, 2021, p. 4). Since the counter-terrorism system in Canada was designed under the threat of al-Qaeda, terror offences align historically with the tactics and behaviour of al-Qaeda inspired terrorists (Nash, 2021, p. 4). Compared to the more amorphous movements of right-wing extremism, these groups could be compartmentalized as a distinct set of actors causing 56 of the 58 terrorism charges laid in Canada against individuals were once who were inspired by al-Qaeda or Daesh (West, 2020, as quoted in Nash, 2021, p. 4). The "terrorist" label has therefore been readily applied to violent incidents involving Muslims or those linked to what has been referred to as "Islamic extremism" (Nash, 2021; Karim, 2003; Kanji, 2018, Pennington, 2018).

Some journalists were quick to point out that President Bush made the 'war on terror' his routine rhetoric forcing journalists to quote him either directly or indirectly. However, Littlewood et al. (2020) argue there is a "Muslimization" of the problem of terrorism in the public spheres, and there remains an 'us' versus 'them' aspect to discourse and action in the counter-terrorism realm (as quoted in Nash, 2021, p. 4). Considering Entman's (2003) cascading activation model, this "Muslimization" of terrorism frame gets passed down onto media through dominant frames from the government and judiciary. Karim (2003) suggests

journalists couch their reporting in narratives that adhere to dominant societal discourses through ritualized media operations. Karim draws on David Chaney's three forms of ritualized operations: (1) rituals which are to be reported; (2) there are ways of reporting which are themselves rituals; and (3) the medium itself maybe be a ritual or collective ceremony. Karim (2003) argues that the "war against terrorism" is one vital ritual in news media where good triumphs over evil (p. 27). For example, one frequent media ritual consists of reporting favourably on "sting operations" in which law enforcement agencies arrest terrorism suspects. Karim (2003) argues that this involves "symbolically asserting the legitimacy and efficiency of state agents' violence and de-emphasizing any impropriety on their part" (p.32). Karim (2003) uses the arrest of Fawaz Yunis as an example:

In September 1987, *The Ottawa Citizen*, using various American news sources, printed several stories on the capture of a suspected Lebanese hijacker, Fawaz Yunis, by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI has lured him into a trap with the pretence of conducting a drug deal. On September 18, the paper published an article on page A6 from *The Chicago Tribune* stating: 'Justice Department officials said Fawaz Yunis, 28, a Beirut resident, was arrested in international waters Sunday after he voluntarily boarded the vessel.' (p. 32)

Karim (2003) argues the journalist, in this case, seemed to be operating within the dominant model of law enforcement confronting "Islamic terrorists." Once more details about his injury during the arrest and differed from the "preferred

script,” the developments were no longer considered newsworthy (Karim, 2003, p. 33). Therefore, the ‘war on terrorism’ frame has become ritualized by repeatedly presenting the state’s actions as heroic, terrorists as villains, and the citizens as victims (Karim, 2003). These repetitive rituals, or practices, become the sides constructing the imaginary frame through which terrorism is reported.

Frame analysis of terrorism in Canadian media is relatively new and not extensive. However, some studies offer insight into how terrorism is framed. Carver and Harrie (2017) analyzed the Moncton shootings and the Parliament Hill shooting in 2014. The Moncton, New Brunswick, shootings were a string of shootings by Justin Bourque, a self-proclaimed Libertarian and gun enthusiast, who killed three Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers and injured two others on June 4, 2014. Carver and Harrie’s study explores an essential aspect of constructing terrorism frames—Othering. Carver and Harrie analyze data from three Canadian news media sources; the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail* and CBC News. The study found that there is a stark difference in how the two cases were framed. The reporting on the Parliament Hill shooting used terminology that is often associated with terrorism, such as ‘jihad’ and ‘Islamist extremist,’ which were a constant when describing Michael Zehaf-Bibeau or the actions he took on that day (Carver and Harrie, 2017, p. 107).

In contrast, the main terms applied to Bourque or his actions were ‘gunman,’ ‘shooter,’ and ‘shooting’ (Carver and Harrie, 2017, p. 107). The articles only mention Bourque’s religious affiliation twice, and the first instance was about his family’s church. The second instance was an article about his

upbringing and was used in a way “to help cement his Caucasian, Canadian identity” (Carver and Harrie, 2017, p. 108). Zihaf-Bibeau’s religious affiliation as a Muslim convert, on the other hand, was mentioned repeatedly to alienate him as an “Other,” according to the authors. Poole (2018) suggested the process of Othering takes place by individualizing the perpetrator by divorcing them from the wider Muslim community and appeasing any accusation of racism. The perpetrator is then linked to “radicals” outside of the country who “brainwashed” the individual, which links them to Islamic ideology, while simultaneously Othered by being located outside (Poole, 2018, p. 77).

Other studies (Kanji, 2018; Ghaffar-Siddiqui, 2019) looking at how violent incidents were framed in Canadian media also found patterns of Othering and observed that non-white Muslim perpetrators were much more likely to be labelled by their religion. Ghaffar-Siddiqui (2019) argues:

Due to the consistent focus on Islamic terrorism and other forms of ideological violence falling under the media and political radar, many have come to understand and accept that the ‘war on terror’ simply denotes a ‘war on Islam.’ A war that is fought in metaphysical and ideological spaces has no boundaries since over a billion Muslims practice Islam and exist all over the globe. The essentialist orientalist depiction of Muslims and Islam constructs them as the ‘Other’ (see Said, 1978); problematic ethnic or foreign groups, with differing values, belonging in foreign lands which need to be managed or tolerated in ‘our’ country. However, the threat of global terrorism collapses the perceived separation between ‘Us’

and 'Them' because nowadays 'They' are living in 'Our' communities. Although 'They' remain the 'Other,' there is a new sense of fear of 'Them' because they are now near 'Us' in 'Our' society. Therefore, the way in which the public understands 'Us' and 'Them' has been recreated to adapt to the new climate of fear. (pp. 74-75)

In essence, the Othering of Muslim suspects and framing this as a problem of religion has created a "Muslimization" of terrorism, or an internalization of the 'war on terror' frame by journalists which has narrowed the frames journalists use, making them unable to see terrorism as an act being committed by a white supremacist or a non-Muslim actor. Therefore, the ritual of framing terrorism as a Muslim problem creates the conditionality where the perpetrator must be Muslim for a violent act to be labelled terrorism in some mainstream media.

3.3 Hate crimes and lone wolves

The term hate crime or hate-motivated crime appeared in the news media when violent events such as the Quebec City mosque shooting, the Christchurch shooting took place, and the Atlanta shootings at massage parlours. However, framing an event as a hate crime can obscure essential elements. The Charleston massacre, where Dylann Storm Roof, a white supremacist shot and killed nine African-Americans at a church in South Carolina in June 2015,

spurred discussions among law enforcement and academics about using the word terrorism. Roof was charged and convicted with 33 counts of hate crime violations instead. Labelling the shooting as and charging Roof with a hate crime downplays its seriousness, according to former FBI agent Michael German, now a terrorism expert (Norris 2017). In Roof's case, many terrorism scholars acknowledged that his crimes fell within the widely-accepted definition of terrorism. Still, they deferred to the FBI as the arbiter of what is or isn't terrorism (Norris, 2017, p. 269). Norris (2017) argues that hate crime refers to unplanned attacks unconnected to broader ideological objectives. However, the Quebec City mosque shooting and the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand were planned attacks where the perpetrators had to obtain guns to carry them out. So, considering them hate crimes that are unplanned downplays the planning and intent to harm portion of the attack.

Taylor (2019) looks at how media framed the Charleston shooting compared to the Orlando shooting where Omar Mateen shot and killed 49 people at a gay nightclub on June 12, 2016. Mateen reportedly called the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Taylor (2019) conducted a text search for terms like 'terror/ist/ism' and 'hate' and 'hate crime/s' across a total of 257 articles about the Charleston attack and 422 articles on the Orlando attack. The data from the study support critiques of the conceptualization of terrorism in the media. More importantly, despite Norris (2017) demonstrating Roof's attack should be considered terrorism under federal law, Taylor (2019) found that in U.S. media, the attack was referred to as a hate

crime in 79% of the instances, which “skews data on who is committing acts of terrorism which compromises effective preventative responses by government,” and “deprioritized the investigation” (p. 238). In Roof’s case, most references to terrorism were around the debate to label it accordingly. For example, *The Washington Post* ran an op-ed with the headline, ‘Is an accused killer called a terrorist? Not if he’s white’ (Butler [2015], in Taylor, 2019, p. 236).

Alongside the variation between labelling the attacks mentioned above as either hate crime or terrorism, the attacks and perpetrators were also described as lone wolf terrorists and lone wolf killers. The designation of lone wolf killer or terrorist can be assigned both by law enforcement and news media. Lone wolf terrorism is characterized as an attack that is carried out by a person operating individually, who does not belong to an organized terrorist group, and their actions are carried out without direction from an external command or hierarchy (Spaaij, 2010 as quoted in Beydoun, 2018, p. 194). Beydoun (2018) offers another definition for lone wolf terrorism: “premeditated violence unleashed by an individual actor, driven by discrete held views or a cogent ideology espoused by an organization” (p. 4). Since the assignment of the lone wolf designation can function as: (1) a presumptive exception from terrorism for white culprits; and (2) a presumptive connection to terrorism for Muslim culprits, Beydoun’s (2018) definition gives primacy to ideology and premeditation, instead of a connection to a terror network that drives the narrative that terrorism is a uniquely Muslim phenomenon. Beydoun (2018) further explains the typology that outlines the four principal forms of lone wolf terrorism: (1) lone soldiers; (2) lone vanguards; (3)

loners; and (4) lone followers. Outside the framework of this four-part typology is the fifth and final classification, (5) lone wolf killers. Lone wolf soldiers are members of an organized terrorist group but act alone to further their group's ideological or political objectives. A lone vanguard is a lone wolf terrorist that chooses to act alone to advance an individual ideology without having ties to any terrorist group. Loners, on the other hand, are lone wolf terrorists that act alone to advance their individualized ideology, but they may also “lack the ability to build relationships with peers or mobilize others to their cause” (Beydoun, 2018, p. 197). Lone followers are lone wolf terrorists who follow a certain group's ideology but may lack the social competence to gain acceptance, and they seek that rank compared to the “loner” type. Finally, lone wolf killers are ones that Beydoun (2018) suggests are not investigated by law enforcement as a terrorist, or they might be dismissed as having ties to a terrorist group following an investigation. This type of killer might face criminal charges but is usually prosecuted beyond the parameters of terrorism. “Many white male mass killers, who account for 62% of mass shootings since 1982, are designated as lone-wolf killers because, in great part, the organizations that inspired the violence are not pegged as terrorist groups” (Beydoun, 2018, p. 200). These typologies are essential for this thesis because they will allow me to examine how the media and law enforcement classified/framed each perpetrator from the analyzed shootings.

Within popular discourse, these lone wolf tags are generally understood as an exception assigned to white culprits of violence to disconnect them from

the culpability of terrorism (Beydoun, 2018). However, it is not the lone wolf tag that creates the exemption or connection; Beydoun (2018) suggests race and religion become the loci whereby the designation is extended as connection or exemption from terrorism. Kanji's (2018) study comparing the representation of ideological violence by Muslim versus non-Muslim perpetrators in Canadian news media demonstrates that these patterns of race and religion becoming the loci is true. The study looked at coverage of violent incidents and plots in *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post* and the CBC between September 11, 2001 and July 2018. Kanji (2018) found that the racial and ethnic identities of white non-Muslim perpetrators were rarely mentioned compared to non-white Muslim perpetrators.

For example, when Zehaf-Bibeau's Parliament Hill attack coverage mentioned his ethno-racial identity, it primarily focused on his Libyan father and not his white Quebecois mother (Kanji, 2018). More importantly, Kanji (2018) found that violence by right-wing extremists and white supremacists was more likely to be represented as "individual and isolated occurrences, purportedly notable for their rarity, singularity and lack of coordination" (Kanji, 2018, p. 285). Beydoun (2018) argues that the possibility of guilt looms with Muslims just because they are Muslim while white culprits of violence are seldom guilty of terrorism, indicating that the predictive logic of counter-radicalization efforts is a new brand of religious and racial profiling. Therefore, incidents that colloquially or legally constitute a hate crime are often framed as isolated incidents, and their perpetrators are rarely described as terrorists.

3.4 Journalistic standards and practices for reporting on terrorism

Journalists in Canada often follow the direction of the Canadian Press Stylebook regarding the syntax and terminology used in reporting. Some newsrooms, like the CBC, draw on the Canadian Press Stylebook for direction but ultimately have their own language guide. Reporting on terrorism is one of many topics discussed in the Canadian Press guide to journalists.

The guide acknowledges that there are discrepancies in the way media define and interpret other activities where sometimes the word terrorist is used and other times, militant, guerrilla or even freedom fighter is used instead. “The perceptions of an activity can certainly be influenced by choice of language— ‘One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter,’ as the saying goes” (Canadian Press Stylebook, 2018, n.p.). The style guide also acknowledges there are multiple definitions of terrorism and that most of them incorporate the idea that it involves “the use of violence or the threat of violence to attain, political, ideological or religious goals” (Canadian Press Stylebook, 2018, n.p.). The standard advice for Canadian journalists and newsrooms, in this case, is to be specific in their choice of terms and to refrain from automatically labelling one side the terrorist since some definitions specify that terrorism is perpetrated against civilians, not military, targets. “We do not shy from the word terrorist, but we use it with caution” (Canadian Press, 2021). While the Canadian Press

Stylebook does not have direct instruction on the use of the term “hate crime,” it cautions against assuming a motive for a crime.

Many newsrooms across the country use the Canadian Press Stylebook, but some newsrooms have developed their own style guide for reporting on terrorism and other subjects alike. The CBC has an extensive guide for its journalists in which they are advised to avoid labelling any specific bombing or assault as a terrorist act unless the term is attributed (Swain, 2017 as quoted in Kanji, 2018, p. 274). However, in contravention of its own guidelines, the CBC labelled the non-fatal truck attack in Edmonton a terrorist attack in headlines without quotation marks or attribution (Kanji, 2018, p. 274). This is only one example of how editorial judgment has considerable influence on which frames are used, even in the presence of journalistic guidelines.

This thesis explores whether a violent incident is labelled as terrorism or not—which has an effect on what frame dominates in the news media. Framing theory offers a lens to analyze the sample articles in this thesis. Entman’s cascading activation model of media framing offers a strong foundation for analyzing the text by examining how much the ‘war on terror’ frame and narrative are passed down the metaphorical cascade. While it is limited because it does not consider the effects of social media on information flow, it still allows me to understand how much progress or lack thereof has been made related to the ‘war on terror’ frame that prevailed after 9/11.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of framing theory and its role in news media reporting on terrorism. I outlined Entman's (2003) Cascading Activation theory which provides perspective on how information (frames) get passed down to media and the public from government and elites. While his theory does not account for the effects of the internet and social media on developing counter-frames, it offers an important starting point, particularly for discussing legal discrepancies in charging Muslim versus non-Muslim perpetrators and the effect of media frames.

This chapter also addressed the Muslimization of terrorism that has developed as a result of media frames that create the perception that terrorism is a "Muslim problem." On the other hand, media framing of white non-Muslim perpetrators has demonstrated how race and religion become the loci through which non-Muslim actors are exempt from being terrorists. This is particularly true for the lone wolf designation that has either connected or exempted perpetrators from having connections to terrorist groups or being terrorists. Finally, this chapter concluded with a brief discussion of journalistic standards and practices when it comes to reporting on terrorism which will serve as a measure for whether journalists adhere to these guidelines or fall back into the dominant frame. Therefore, this chapter sets the scene to my analysis by outlining the existing frames in Canadian news media when it comes to terrorism and the journalistic standards around it. This will create the background for

analyzing the framing of the Quebec City mosque shooting, the Christchurch shootings and the Parliament Hill shooting/

Chapter 4: The dichotomies and binaries of violence

'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' is one of the most prominent phrases in scholarship and discourse on terrorism. This phrase often shapes the debate around who is considered a terrorist and who is not — in academia, politics and even news media. In this chapter, I begin by explaining language standardization in Canadian news media to explain the factors at play in the analysis. I center the issue of language standardization as a protection from the concept of "trial by media" in relation to crime reporting under the subsection "innocent until proven guilty." I then outline examples of lexical dichotomies found in reports on the Quebec City mosque shooting, the Christchurch shootings, and the Parliament Hill shooting. Looking at language variation in reporting on white perpetrators versus Muslim perpetrators such as the use of the terms 'extremism' versus 'terrorist' and 'suspect' versus 'accused gunman,' I establish how seemingly minor differences in terminology can have more significant impacts on framing. Therefore, as the terms used differ, their connotations also change.

4.1 Language use and standardization

At its core, journalism relies on language. While many consider the media's handling of language as innovative and laissez-faire, news media, in fact have a conservative attitude towards language use (Cotter, 2010, p. 187). This conservative or cautious attitude towards language appears in the form of language stylebooks. Cotter (2010) suggests that for decades, the Associated Press Stylebook functioned as the "journalist's bible" and still is the default throughout the profession in the United States. Similarly, the Canadian Press Stylebook functions in the same manner here in Canada. It serves as a tool that creates consistency and uniformity across the media landscape; it includes guidelines for something as simple as capitalizations and number formatting to more nuanced forms of standardization like language use. This language standardization in the news media emerges from both the larger social contexts in which outlets are embedded as well as the demands of news production (Cotter, 2010, p. 190). Therefore, news practitioners can both respond to socially motivated standardization pressures while simultaneously working actively to maintain and honour the "discursive metalinguistic norms and rules of their craft" (Cotter, 2010 p. 190). This balancing act is often reflected in regular (or annual) revisions of language stylebooks. For example, the Canadian Press Stylebook was recently revised to standardize the capitalization of 'Indigenous' and 'Black' in response to socio-cultural and socio-linguistic changes. However, when it comes to legal proceedings and reporting on crime, journalists tend to lean more towards honouring the metalinguistic norms and rules of the craft outlined in stylebooks.

This tends to emerge out of concern for the “trial by media,” which is a concept referring to a person’s legal proceedings potentially being impacted by media coverage. For example, this may include reporting in a way that presumes either guilt or innocence before charges are laid, or the trial begins. Thus, since crime reporting can be a legal minefield for journalists, a media outlet might run the risk of being sued for defamation if the reporting presumed guilt before a trial is concluded (McGuire & Whitbourn, 2021). So, it becomes essential for journalists to distinguish between facts and allegations. This is why stylebooks standardize the use of terms like “alleged” and “suspect” as legal protection from confirming an act was committed by a certain perpetrator before being proven in court. However, there are lexical dichotomies that tend to contribute to the framing. Lexical dichotomies are words that are seemingly close like ‘extremist’ and ‘radical’ but their application and meaning in fact create a dichotomy or binary opposites like ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ There can, however, be even more subtle variations in language use—such as using extremist versus terrorist—but these have a more significant impact on the frame. As my analysis will demonstrate, an attempt to create uniformity and fairness in news reporting has gaps that allow for these subjective and problematic frames to be upheld through these dichotomies.

4.2 Innocent until proven guilty

The Canadian Press Stylebook is the go-to reference book for journalists and newsrooms across the country codifying the standards and practices of

journalism. It includes both language standardization in terms of spelling and grammar and broader ethical rules for reporting. The stylebook emphasizes the importance of the presumption of innocence in its “Legal” chapter. “Every person charged and before the courts is entitled to be presumed innocent and to receive a fair trial. It is forbidden to publish anything that passes judgement on an accused, or that could hinder a fair trial unless it has been admitted in court as evidence” (Canadian Press, 2021, n.p.). Therefore, the common ways journalists protect themselves and ensure fairness and accuracy in reporting is to use the term ‘alleged’ or ‘allegedly’ as a prefix to the crime or perpetrator.

The term, however, has come into question in the #MeToo era, and has been heavily criticized when used before the word ‘victim.’ In that context, it implies the complainant’s account is not truthful or casts doubt on it (McGuire & Whitbourn, 2021, para. 17). The Canadian Press Stylebook also advises against using the term when it comes to victims of sexual assault because it implies a lack of credibility. However, in reporting on cases of ideological violence, the terms ‘allegedly’ or ‘alleged’ serve as legal protection before the charges are proven in court. This thesis, however, is interested in examining how the inconsistent application of these terms becomes the vehicle through which the “all Muslims are terrorists” and “no white people are terrorists” frames are reproduced and reinforced. Examining the reporting of CBC News, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette*, on the case studies of this thesis, it becomes evident that the term “alleged” and other linguistic variations serve as *tools* through which frames are used and upheld.

Before I delve into the analysis of this notion and how it is presented in my research it is important to note that the case studies in this thesis have some limitations and present some challenges. In the cases of the Quebec City mosque shooting and the Christchurch shootings —where the perpetrators are white —they were captured alive and therefore were subjected to the legal process. On the other hand, the Parliament Hill shooter — who was Muslim — was killed during the attack and therefore did not go through the legal process of a trial. This is important to mention because as mentioned above, “allegedly” is used in criminal proceedings or before a person is charged. More importantly, however, it can also be used in other contexts which I will explain later on. First, I will focus on the coverage of CBC News of the three incidents. Then I will look at the *Montreal Gazette*, followed by the *Ottawa Citizen*. While comparing and contrasting coverage is important, it will be presented in subsequent parts of the thesis.

For my analysis of these dichotomies and binaries in language, I used a word cloud/word counter as a tool. I wanted to understand how much the presumption of innocence was afforded to the white perpetrators versus the Muslim perpetrator. Creating word clouds (Appendix A-I) of all the articles on each incident by CBC News, it becomes evident who is considered the alleged suspect, gunman, etc. For Bissonnette, the CBC only used ‘allegedly’ once but was more likely to refer to him as the ‘suspect.’ Meanwhile, in looking at Tarrant, the perpetrator in the Christchurch shooting, the term ‘allegedly’ was referenced more often. For example, a CBC News article titled “Why the accused New

Zealand killer was fascinated with Serbia, Ottoman Empire,” uses the term ‘alleged’ or ‘accused’ before every reference to Tarrant. On the other hand, for Zehaf-Bibeau, the word allegedly emerges once. However, that reference is not addressing him specifically, but rather a suspected terrorist who reportedly left Canada to join Daesh as a fighter in Syria. For the white perpetrators, that presumption of innocence is afforded right away by virtue of language standardization and guidelines in journalism. To avoid libel or trial by media, CBC News journalists consistently referred to Bissonnette and Tarrant as either the ‘alleged suspect’ or the person who ‘allegedly’ committed the shooting or attack. However, Zehaf-Bibeau was directly referred to as the ‘gunman’ or ‘shooter.’ As mentioned previously, it is difficult to make a comparison in this case considering he was killed during the attack. Therefore, it was reported as fact, undisputable, without a trial or potential fear of libel. There are other ways however that the presumption of innocence versus guilt emerge that are important to note in the case of Zehaf-Bibeau.

In an article titled “Ottawa Shooting: Michael Zehaf-Bibeau made video, police say” there was a correction of record about his mother, Susan Bibeau’s testimony to the RCMP. The RCMP Commissioner told CBC Zehaf-Bibeau told his mother he wanted to go to Syria — which implies he wanted to join Daesh, a terrorist group. The mother denied the claim in a letter to the *National Post*. The RCMP later confirmed that they made an error transcribing the interview and Bibeau did not mention Syria. Zehaf-Bibeau had in fact told his mother he wanted to study Quran in Saudi Arabia. This is an important element of the story

to note because journalists are often advised against quoting or reporting hearsay. It becomes problematic in this case because it presumes guilt or implies association with terrorism. More importantly, the articles analyzed never prefix these reports with 'allegedly.' While it is not uncommon for journalists to make mistakes, and have to correct the record, in this case, it was important to preface this information with 'allegedly.' The actions did not need to be proven in the Parliament Hill attack, but without the suspect being alive to be interrogated or corroborate the fact (which was later corrected) that he wanted to go to Syria, it reinforces the 'war on terror' frame.

This distinction in the reporting becomes crucial to point out because of the operation of power and the interrelationship with language which must be considered in perspectives of the media and the justice system. Weber (1978), a German sociologist and political thinker, focuses on the corrective power of the state and how power is present in institutions or organizations (Statham, 2016, p. 18). Gramsci (1971) focuses on the concept of hegemony and the techniques used by dominant groups to pursue 'subordinates' to accept their socio-cultural and economic values. Foucault's instrumental work on power however takes a more complex view which sees power "as operational through society in 'discursive formation' through which the cultural formation of individual subjects emerge" (Statham, 2016, p. 21). Statham (2016) suggests that in a bureaucratically structured society, reporters will seek the viewpoints of police and other agents of the justice system on crimes or crime figures rather than socio-economically disadvantaged citizens who might experience them. Statham

also suggests that while now opinions can be sent through an email and information is posted online, the official nature of the sources is still ingrained years later. Therefore, the authority and power the RCMP have when it comes to being the source of information means that journalists may not have had the time or opportunity to corroborate the claims with Zehaf-Bibeau's mother. While the error did come from the police, the lack of mitigation through applying 'allegedly' or questioning the accuracy of the claims contributes to damaging and problematic frames. Statham (2016) suggests sometimes for media organizations and journalists to have the necessary access to information, there is a "tacit acceptance by reporters that this information is politically and culturally constructed to reflect favourably the institutional status quo" (p. 27). However, the variations were noted in the major terrorism/terrorist attack versus shooting dichotomy in the next section.

4.3 Terrorism, radicalization or extremism?

One of the important goals of this thesis is to determine whether the legal frame has any impact on the very ingrained 'war on terror' frame in news media. The reason the Christchurch shooting is an important component of this study is because the perpetrator was charged with terrorism, while Bissonnette was not, and Zehaf-Bibeau was legally framed as a terrorist despite not going through a trial. Therefore, in examining whether each respective publication labelled the incident as terrorism versus a shooting shows the frame is being contested. In

the previous section of the chapter, the occurrence of 'allegedly' versus its absence highlighted the functions and flaws of language standardization in news media. In this case, terrorism is also considered in language guides. As mentioned in previous chapters, the Canadian Press Stylebook tells reporters that "we do not shy away from the word terrorist, but we do use it with caution. There are always more neutral words available. Terms such as bombers, gunmen and killers also offer the advantage of being more specific" (Canadian Press Stylebook, 2021, n.p.). The Stylebook also tells journalists to be more specific about the type of crime whether it is murder, an assault, shooting, etc.

In examining the sample of articles chosen for this study, the terms 'terrorism,' 'extremism' and 'radicalization' appear in every publication's reporting on all three incidents. However, this study is not necessarily interested in the quantity of likelihood of each publication to use either term, but rather the context in which they emerge. The reason I examine these terms is because language and certain words evoke certain frames or reinforce their validity. Each of these words enforces a different way of perceiving each incident, the perpetrators involved and even the broader social impact or social problems that arise in the aftermath. Terrorism is understood as a violent act done entirely or in part for political or religious motivations established in the definitions chapter. In contrast, extremism and radicalization mean a person or a group who holds an extreme position of that from the norm. The reason it is important to examine these distinctions is that these frames have different connotations, which have public and political repercussions. Terrorism, for example, tends to create both

public and political response and extremism, on the other hand, is often treated as a less severe, social problem.

In looking at articles by the three publications, it becomes evident that in the case of the Parliament Hill shooting, the term 'terrorist,' 'terrorism,' or 'terror' emerged as a frame of the event and perpetrator himself. For example, an *Ottawa Citizen* article titled "A call for help from families shattered by radicalization; Parents of extremists urged to come out of shadows and help fight," speaks of Zehaf-Bibeau as someone who "terrorized the nation's capital" (Quan, 2014, October 25). On the other hand, when any variation of 'terror' is mentioned in the reporting on the Quebec City mosque shooting, the *Ottawa Citizen* reserved the term to either being quoted/attributed to politicians or members of the public. More so, the term also emerged as members of the Muslim community questioned why Bissonnette was not being charged with terrorism or when a politician called the event terrorism. A CBC article a few days after the attack quotes a Negi Gadab who was among a handful of people who attended prayers Wednesday morning.

It wasn't easy for him to return, he said in an interview with Radio-Canada. He lost people he considered to be close friends in the shooting but said life must go on. 'The mosque must reopen,' he said. 'We must say to terrorists that we're here and we won't go away. We don't want them to attain their goal: that we stop praying.' (CBC News, 2017, February 1)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also called the Quebec City mosque shooting a terrorist attack. “Trudeau repeated his contention that Sunday's killings were a ‘terrorist attack’ and called on all Canadians to confront ‘speech that targets certain citizens, that excludes them, that degrades them because of their origins or their religion’” (CBC News, 2017, February 3). The term was also used when experts explained why it is difficult to prove these charges. For example, the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* both re-published a *National Post* article titled “Terrorism charges place extra burden on the Crown.” This is due to the fact that all three publications are owned by media conglomerate Postmedia Inc. I will discuss later on how this contributes to the subjective application of frames. However, the article itself accounts for most instances of ‘terrorism’ being mentioned in relation to the Quebec City mosque shooting. While it is a ‘relevant’ article by Canadian media standards as it addresses questions that the Muslim and other communities had about the charges, it highlights how there is a discrepancy in how the frame is applied. “Terrorism charges carry a lesser sentence than murder and would be served concurrently with a life sentence. ‘I can understand why people want a terrorism charge added,’ Roach said. ‘But in this case it would add nothing in terms of the sentence,” (Feith, 2017, February 1). This quote from an expert does acknowledge the symbolic significance of a terrorism charge. However, it does not address *why* people want the terrorism charge per se.

Zdjelar and Davies (2021) suggest that as long as instances of right-wing violence are not identified and categorized as terrorism, the urgency to respond

to the threat tends to decrease. Therefore, because news coverage has the ability to influence policy change and public concern, incidents such as the Quebec City mosque shooting and Christchurch shootings being mischaracterized often signals that they are isolated, random incidents (Zdjelar and Davies, 2021, p. 294). Zdjelar and Davies (2021) also suggest that:

From a news coverage perspective, it raises questions about the comparative newsworthiness of right-wing violence, which in turn produces coverage that varies considerably from that afforded to Jihadist terrorism. Labelling, or not labelling, incidents of right-wing extremist violence as terrorism has important implications. Failing to acknowledge the attack as terrorism reflects a failure to acknowledge the scope of the threat right-wing extremists poses to national security. (Zdjelar and Davies, 2021, p. 294)

Referring to the actions of Bissonnette and Tarrant and extremism also contribute to this issue. While these are accurate and factual descriptions, there were instances of the extremism itself being downplayed. *A Montreal Gazette* article titled “Suspect in shootings faces 11 charges; Fellow student says alleged attacker had developed radical views,” quoted a former classmate of Bissonnette:

‘He was not overtly racist or Islamophobic, but he had borderline misogynist, Islamophobic viewpoints,’ said Vincent Boissonneault, who is taking International Studies at Université Laval. ‘Unfortunately, that’s become more or less acceptable these days.’ Bissonnette did not show

signs of mental illness or paranoia, Boissonneault said, adding he didn't think he was part of an organized extremist group, either.' (Solyom, 2017, January 31)

This excerpt of the article demonstrates how both the quoted and unquoted portions of the article contribute to the narrative that his actions are less severe. More importantly, the article does not explain why these views may have been developed or their root cause. Instead, Bissonnette is framed as someone with extremist yet harmful or 'borderline' Islamophobic views. Statham (2016) suggests that in media accounts of crime and deviance, there is a tendency to locate crime with the perpetrators of victims—they rarely trace catalysts of crime back to socio-economic roots. Therefore, these differences in *how* the terms 'terrorist' versus 'radical' or 'extremist' are used contribute to which frame is more salient and which incident results in policy change and public concern.

4.4 Terrorists in the eyes of the law

One of the main reasons the Christchurch shooting is used as a point of analysis in this thesis is because the perpetrator was charged with terrorism. Journalists and news organizations tend to rely on official and legal sources of information in sensitive cases like this one. But, since the person was charged with terrorism, it is not factually incorrect or libelous to call the act itself terrorism.

However, the publications tended to handle this attack slightly differently than the Quebec City mosque shooting. CBC News maintained a similar approach to the previous attacks where the term terrorism is quoted or attributed to an official source. The *Montreal Gazette* was interesting to analyze because all references to the Christchurch shootings as a terrorist attack or Tarrant as a terrorist that was not quoted were wire pieces from the *Daily Telegraph* of the *Washington Post*. “The right-wing terrorist behind a massacre at two mosques in Christchurch was acting alone, police in New Zealand said Sunday, as it emerged the killer's manifesto had been sent to the country's prime minister minutes before the tragedy unfolded,” (Drake and Rothwell, 2019). This is the opening paragraph of the *Daily Telegraph* article “Police: Mosque shooter acted alone; White House pushes back on Trump reference in manifesto emailed to Prime Minister.”

Initially, the direct labelling of Tarrant as a terrorist stood out to me because it signaled a potential shift in how these violent incidents are framed when the perpetrator or suspect is white. It later became obvious however that it is a wire/republished article from the *Daily Telegraph*. Publishing it, however, demonstrates that this counter-frame is being accepted and circulated among publications. Or, it may be a byproduct of relying on wire services or affiliates for international stories. However, it is important to emphasize the word *may* because a limitation of this research as mentioned previously is the ability to understand publication-specific judgements and processes.

There is an example however of the *Montreal Gazette* referring to the

Quebec City mosque shooting as a terrorist attack in a 2019 article on the Christchurch shootings. It is a common practice in news media to make international stories relevant to a local audience. There is an inevitable link there with the attack in 2017 in Quebec City. In an article titled "About 200 attend vigil for victims of massacre" on the Christchurch shootings, the reporter writes: "Several at the vigil held posters of depicting the six people killed in another terrorist attack - the 2017 mass shooting by Alexandre Bissonette at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City that left six people dead," (Schwartz, 2019). An unattributed or unquoted terrorism label applied to the attacks by Bissonette and Tarrant is indeed an outlier in this context and not the dominant frame. However, this example could potentially mean there is what Entman (2003) calls frame contestation emerging that might be seen in future reporting. A similar example was also seen in the *Ottawa Citizen* coverage of the Christchurch shootings. An article titled "Aussie senator condemned for punching egg boy; Viral video, anti-Muslim remarks spark call for ouster," calls the incident a "terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand" (O' Grady and Mettler, 2019). The article is also another wire piece from the *Washington Post*. Therefore, there seems to be a pattern where publications are republishing articles that frame the incidents as terrorist attacks without attribution but they are not doing so independently as publications.

Karim (2003) suggests that Western journalists appear to be comfortable with the constructions of the Muslim as a villain since they share in a historical memory that holds Islam as a primary Other. Even though Western mass media

have no explicit religious affiliations, they are reluctant to identify Christians as villains—especially when they have victimized Muslims (Karim, 2003, p. 173).

Therefore, these deep-rooted constructions of who is *capable* of being the villain

Other keep the terrorism frame from being applied to white supremacists.

Applying terrorism charges to these incidents is already a difficult legal task

considering the history of who counterterrorism laws target and the subjective

definition of the term both legally and academically. So, it becomes a journalistic

responsibility to accurately and consistently reflect the legal framing and charges

in these cases. The research thus demonstrates that the process of invoking the

terrorism frame is not necessarily only reproduced in the consistent application

of it to the Muslim suspect but it is also reified in the consistent, subconscious or

conscious exclusion of the white suspect from it as well.

4.5 How did we get here?

Aside from a stylebook that cautions against using the label terrorism while

simultaneously facilitating a subjective application of it, the structure of the

media landscape plays an important role. The Canadian media landscape is

marked by a handful of corporations that control most of the media outlets and

publications across the country (Winter, 1997 as quoted in Jiwani, 2010).

Winseck (2021) found that newspapers are consolidating on a regional basis

while national concentration levels have fallen steadily over the last decade and

now sit at the low end of the scale. However, this does not mean there is a

development of a more diverse and healthy press, but rather responses within the industry to revenue dropping by sixty percent over the last decade (Winseck, 2021, p. viii). “In such a situation, it is not unusual to find journalists and editors who are compelled, through threat of losing their jobs, to toe the corporate line and privilege the ideologies of those in power” (Hackett et., 2000 as quoted in Jiwani 2010, p. 60). Hall (1981) suggests that it is in these media institutions that binary relations of Manichean oppositions that constitute racist discourse get reproduced. He makes a distinction between “overt” and “inferential” racism where the latter meant it is “those apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether ‘factual’ or fictional,’ which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (Hall, 1981, p. 105). Thus, these subtle differences between using ‘allegedly’ or not using it, versus using ‘terrorist’ versus ‘extremist’ are examples of this inferential racism which appear to be naturalized representations of the events. But it becomes important to make these distinctions because what news media produce becomes a representation of the social world: images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world works (Hall, 1981, pp.103-104). And since there are a handful of corporations that own most publications in Canada, it becomes more difficult to challenge the dominant frames and discourse. For example, the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* had a nearly identical pool of articles because they are both owned by the same company. So, these ideologies, frames and perceptions on violent incidents against Muslims become reproduced more and more making it difficult to

analyze individual publications and their media processes. Hall (1981) however warns against seeing the media as “uniformly and conspiratorially harnessed to a single, racist conception of the world” because it would weaken the credibility of media critics (p. 104).

4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have explored one of the ways in which problematic frames are upheld by Canadian mainstream media. Through lexical dichotomies and binaries, the publications reinforced either the terrorism frame or ruled it out by framing the events far from it. We saw that in the example of articles that explain why Bissonnette will not be charged with terrorism and how it is difficult to prove in court. These examples suggest that even when politicians and the public are labelling these events as terrorism, the media reserved that frame largely for the Parliament Hill shooting. More importantly, even when Tarrant was charged with terrorism, articles that were wire stories were the only ones that framed the shootings as terrorism without quotations or attribution. This chapter also looked at how the attempts at creating a neutral, objective language through standardization are not effective in preventing these frames from being reproduced. It suggests that more systemic and structural changes are needed.

Chapter 5: “The lone wolf”: Conditionality of ideology and religion in terrorism

In this chapter, I examine a second way in which the terrorism frame is applied. In examining the sample articles in this study, it becomes evident that the lone wolf classification is applied to all three perpetrators: Zehaf-Bibeau, Bissonnette, and Tarrant. The lone wolf classification is the framing of each perpetrator as carrying out the attack on their own and are not necessarily part of a known terrorist group. However, the research into lone wolf terrorism remains extremely scarce; and terrorism is still commonly viewed as essentially a collective, organized activity (Spaaij, 2010, p. 855). Even legally, most definitions do not account for this individuality in the act (Douglas, 2010).

In this chapter, I rely on Spaaij’s (2010) definition of lone wolf terrorism which is an attack “carried out by persons who (a) operate individually, (b) do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network, and (c) whose mode operandi are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy” (Spaaij, 2010, p. 856). The main ideological sources of recorded incidents of lone wolf terrorism are white supremacy, Islamist, nationalism/separatism, and anti-abortion activism (Spaaij, 2010, p. 860).

The goal of this chapter thus is to look how the respective publications framed each incident within the lone wolf lens. Was the classification attributed or not? Was there more emphasis on a certain ideological source? And what are the effects of emphasizing or de-emphasizing the classification and ideological

source? I answer these following questions by offering a brief synopsis about the lone wolf characterization, conducting a content analysis of the application of the lone wolf classification and examining which attributes of the perpetrator are more salient in the reporting.

5.1 Understanding the lone wolf

As mentioned in the definition of lone wolf terrorism above, one of the tenets is that the perpetrator is acting alone. Hartleb (2020) argues that the classification “single actor” or “lone wolf” in cases of right-wing terrorism merely means that it is one person who planned and carried out the violent attack. The author, however, suggests that this classification does not negate that the perpetrator’s fixation on violence and ideology has caused and that their acts may be the consequence of interacting with kindred spirits. They’re part of a larger group or community of like-minded people, whether real, virtual or both (Kaplan, 2015, as quoted in Hartleb, 2020, p. 5). More so, lone wolves do not operate in a vacuum as in they are directly supported by people who help during the preparation phase (arms dealers) or indirectly by people who provide “inspiration” (mentors, previous attackers, etc.) (Hartleb, 2020, pp. 45-46). Conversely, the actions of lone wolf terrorists may also influence broader movements (Spaaij, 2010, p. 866).

Schuurman et al.'s (2019) study on lone wolves or what they refer to as "lone actors" suggests that the loneliness of right-wing extremists or those motivated by Islamist ideologies is not an inherent quality of these individuals. Instead, it is often reinforced by an "exaggerated sense of self-importance, combined with scorn for efficacy and commitment to the cause of potential coconspirators. Some are simply alone as a result of significant changes in their social environments" (Schuurman et al., 2019, p. 772). The authors thus argue it is important to fundamentally reconsider the lone wolf typology because truly lone attackers are so uncommon. For most individuals, studied social ties were integral to their development of motivations and ability to commit their violent acts. Therefore, if we continue to look at the lone actor terrorism threat as a concept or phenomenon committed by people who are socially isolated and uncommunicative, we risk the ability to effectively detect, prevent and mitigate the danger (Brynielsson et al., 2013, as quoted in Schuurman et al., 2019, p. 774). Looking at this concept of lone wolves existing in a vacuum or truly being alone will be an important element for consideration in the analysis moving forward.

5.2 Encoding the lone wolf: Loneliness

In the previous chapter, we looked at lexical dichotomies and how they either re-enforce the problematic 'war on terror' framing or steer away from it. Here, however, I focus more on the textual connections and the absence or

presence of certain terminology. For this part of my analysis, I selected articles that either entirely focus on trying to discern the motivations and ideologies of each perpetrator and/or articles that also mention ideology (religious and political). I rely on Hall's (1980) theory of encoding and decoding for this part of my analysis—where encoding means the production of the message, and decoding is how the message is received and interpreted. For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing more on the encoding process, given the scope of my research.

Through a content analysis of 90 articles—30 from each respective publication —10 on each incident, it becomes evident that all-three perpetrators are referred to at some point as a lone wolf. However, what reinforces or contests the dominant terror frame is the emphasis or de-emphasis on certain characteristics of the lone wolf typology. One of those characteristics is the liveness aspect. For the liveness aspect, I am dividing my analysis per each incident to allow me to look at how each 'lone wolf' perpetrator was framed. Looking at the articles, I realized that all perpetrators were framed as lone wolves. However, considering Beydoun's (2018) work on lone wolf terrorism, I decided to further break down my analysis into three categories rather than simply noting if they were framed as lone wolves or not. Instead, I look at liveness, identity and ideology. The liveness aspect of the framing means whether they were framed to have links terrorist or extremism groups, identity means how much was their identity made salient through reference to family

background and/or religion. Finally, ideology is looking at references to radical Islamist ideology or far-right extremism.

Examining the coverage on Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant shows that both the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen* frame or quote references to him as a 'lone wolf' or 'lone actor.' CBC News on the other hand does not refer to Tarrant as a 'lone wolf.' The *Citizen* and *Gazette* both have the same wire article from the Telegraph Daily on Tarrant acting alone. The article titled "Mosque shooter acted alone: police; White House pushes back on Trump reference in manifesto emailed to Prime Minister," focuses on the loneness aspect in the first two paragraphs.

The right-wing terrorist behind a massacre at two mosques in Christchurch was acting alone, police in New Zealand said Sunday, as it emerged the killer's manifesto had been sent to the country's prime minister minutes before the tragedy unfolded. Brenton Tarrant sent a rambling, racist manifesto to Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister, in which he denied being linked to any organizations and said he was acting on his own. The document, which praised President Donald Trump and Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik, was emailed to Ardern's office just 30 minutes before the attack began. (Drake and Rothwell, 2019)

In these opening paragraphs, we see there is a lone wolf characterization by police that focuses on the action or attack itself. Tarrant in this case is being referred to as what researchers like Schuurman et al. (2019) refer to as a "lone

actor” as in he committed the act alone. In the second paragraph, however, the characterization of the “lone wolf” or emphasis on loneness comes from Tarrant himself denying having any ties to a group. Therefore, it lends a voice to the perpetrator to dictate, frame, and encode their own characterization of the event and themselves. Thus, it becomes problematic because despite there being no direct link to a white-supremacist group, a subsequent investigation by the Austrian government into ‘Identitarianism’—a growing movement by European activists hoping to reshape identity politics—showed the leader of the movement had previously told Tarrant to watch their English-language video but refused to meet him (Besley & Peters, 2020, p. 113). So, while the article is relevant journalistically speaking in the sense that it provided an update on the police’s conclusions on whether or not there were other suspects, it also gave Tarrant a platform (albeit through his manifesto) to emphasize his “loneness.”

Emphasizing the loneness or lone wolf characterization can be problematic in several ways. Beydoun (2018) suggests the lone-wolf designation for white culprits serves as a way to distance them from terrorism. Therefore, even though Tarrant was legally charged with terrorism, the lack of reference or framing of his actions as terrorism, while also emphasizing the lone wolf characterization can downplay the gravity and effect of the violence he committed. It also rules out the connection—even ideologically—to far-right and white supremacist groups.

Bissonnette was also framed as a lone wolf. Interesting to note, however, is that the lone wolf designation came from the publications themselves. In a

Montreal Gazette article titled “Suspect in shootings faces 11 charges; Fellow student says alleged attacker had developed radical views,” the article mentions that Bissonnette “appeared to have acted alone.” This characterization was not quoted or attributed to law enforcement officials who have come to that conclusion. The other instance of framing Bissonnette as a lone wolf is an article published both by the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* titled “ Terror charges difficult to prove, experts say; Establishing shooter's motivation tougher than proving intent to kill.” This article frames him as a lone wolf with attribution to a law professor. The premise of this article is that because it appears Bissonnette was acting alone, it can disqualify him from most terrorism offences. “A truly lone wolf attack cannot result in most terrorism offences, which require participation or support of a group or commission of an offense for a group,’ he wrote in an email response on Tuesday” (Feith, 2017, February 1). This is another example of the lone wolf designation acting as a way to distance Bissonnette from terrorism. Furthermore, the premise of the article itself acts as a way to distance Bissonnette from terrorism by emphasizing his loneliness. This analytical distinction between lone wolf terrorism and group-based terrorism can be problematic in practice because as previously mentioned, groups influence to some extent people who act alone (Spaaij, 2010). Therefore, when news organizations frame white perpetrators as lone wolves, they ignore the broader issues of growing white supremacist groups and the influence they may have on these attacks. Hartleb (2020) explains the impact further:

If an assault takes place, political decision-makers express solidarity with and empathy for one another, promising to stand shoulder to shoulder in a 'fight against terrorism.' Whoever speaks of terrorism today, has the global event of 11 September 2001 in mind, thinks of the most terrifying events for example in Brussels or Paris, where terrorist networks made brutal strikes. Or of the year of horror in 2016, when attacks using a truck on the most magnificent boulevard in Nice and at a Christmas market in Berlin, abruptly and without warning dispatched innocent people to their death. In the meantime, these events have contributed towards an Islamic background being assumed to be behind every attack, virtually as a reflex reaction. (p. 9)

Thus, this continued distancing of white perpetrators from terrorism by new reporting—even when charged with terrorism—contributes to this default reliance on the 'war on terror' frame. It is helpful here to draw on Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory of communication. Hall (1980) argues that in any form of communication there are messages that have to be encoded and decoded. These messages are constructed within a discourse using codes but could differ at the encoding (production) part of the communication and decoding (consuming) part of the process. However, the codes of encoding and decoding may differ and have degrees of understanding and misunderstanding in the exchange (Hall, 1980, p. 166). On the other hand, some codes could be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture that their meaning does not appear to be constructed, appearing "natural," (Hall, 1980, p.167).

These codes become naturalized as a result of a “degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity – an achieved equivalence – between the encoding and decoding sides of an exchange of meanings” (Hall, 1980, p.167). Therefore, when news media have framed the white perpetrator as a lone wolf—which distances them from terrorism (Beydoun, 2018)— this increases the likelihood that white perpetrators may be decoded within the dominant-hegemonic understanding that they cannot be terrorists.

Zehaf-Bibeau was also referred to within the context of the ‘lone wolf,’ but was more consistently framed as a ‘lone gunman’ instead. The first and only reference to Zehaf-Bibeau as a lone wolf by CBC News was a quoted reference in the article “Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and Martin Couture-Rouleau: Their shared traits” which links him to another Muslim perpetrator who killed two soldiers in Quebec just days before the Parliament Hill attack. The article quotes the codirector of the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society calling Couture-Rouleau and Zehaf-Bibeau both ‘lone wolves.’ This is interesting to note because while there was a lone wolf characterization applied, he was still linked to a person who was labelled and characterized as a terrorist within the article. The *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen* also characterize Zehaf-Bibeau as a lone wolf. However, the emphasis is not on his “loneness” or lack of connectedness to a group. Instead, the article “Authorities face hurdles stopping 'lone wolves'; Until they act on their ideas, potential terrorists can't be arrested,” published both by the *Gazette* and *Citizen* highlights

how Zehaf-Bibeau is both a lone wolf and a terrorist but speaking about the difficulty of arresting terrorists. Here we see again this grouping of both suspects despite the fact that there was no connection between them and a vague connection to international terrorist groups like ISIS. The article quotes Rex Brynen, a McGill University professor specializing in terrorism:

‘Lone wolves appear to be very difficult to stop,’ he said, adding that people who engage in this kind of behaviour beforehand already have many problems. They are often looking for meaning in their lives, or someone to blame for their problems. With Canada's participation in a military action against ISIL, and the group's urging for people to attack soldiers, ‘with their car,’ there is a danger that others will also try to take up the same fight. (Magder, 2014, October 23)

The article thus highlights this connectedness to Daesh (or ISIL) and the difficulty of stopping these attacks. In a subsequent article however, lawyer Pearl Eladis talks about the danger of this grouping or linking these attackers to organized terrorist groups. A *Montreal Gazette* article titled “Beware of curbing civil liberties, rights expert says; Measures already exist for,” Eladis says “It gives a seriousness to these people that I don't think that they deserve. You have a mentally unbalanced petty criminal who goes off to engage in this kind of activity. Why do we view that as a threat to our democracy?” (Scott, 2014). The emphasis on them being lone wolves who also have connections to extremist groups gives them legitimacy as Eladis notes. However, the lone wolf designation while also connecting them to extremist groups suggests that both

religion and identity are important parts of the definition of terrorism which is “evidently in the driver’s seat when the lone wolf designation is assigned as a presumptive exemption or connection to terrorism,” (Beydoun, 2018, p. 214). Kanji’s (2018) study of representations of ideological violence by Muslim and non-Muslim perpetrators also noted similar patterns in how the lone wolf label creates a connection versus an exemption from the terrorism frame. Kanji (2018) found that Muslim perpetrators of violence were more likely to be linked in media reports to larger terror networks such as al-Qaeda, while the threat represented by non-Muslim perpetrators was individualized for example through “ascription of ‘homegrown’ violence to mental instability” (p. 274).

Using Entman’s (2003) Cascading Activation theory, we see the trickledown effect of information flow and framing in the case of Zehaf-Bibeau. The government and law enforcement officials (CBC News, 2014, October 26) designated him as a lone wolf terrorist with some vague connection to an organized terrorist group. According to Entman (2003) ideas and frames that begin with the government or other elites possess the greatest strength. Furthermore, in criminal cases like these, media rely on access to information from the government and law enforcement and with that access also comes the dominant frame of the event. So, when Bissonnette’s and Tarrant’s lone wolf frame acts as an exemption from terrorism, while Zehaf-Bibeau’s acts as a connection, that will be the frame that dominates in the coverage.

5.3 Encoding the lone wolf: Identity & ideology

In order for the lone wolf designation and frame to function in the way that they did, identity and ideology play a vital role (Kanji, 2018; Beydoun, 2018). When perpetrators are white, the lone wolf designation distances them from the larger identity or ideological group that they belong to. On the other hand, for Muslim perpetrators, referencing ideology and identity within the lone wolf designation serves as a connection to larger group they belong to. For this part of my analysis, I looked at references to identity and ideology. Therefore, I noted mentions about family background, white supremacy, far-right or Islamic extremism and radicalization. Here I conducted my analysis by focusing on each perpetrator and looking at the different ways they were encoded or framed by the respective publication.

I begin with looking at the Quebec City mosque shooter Alexandre Bissonnette. Bissonnette was the suspect that all three publications were hesitant to frame as a white supremacist or far-right adherent, even though there were mentions of him being known to immigrant support groups (CBC News, 2017, January 31). CBC News—at least in the sample of articles examined—made no mention of extremism or radicalization in reference to Bissonnette. More so, the only mentions of anything related to his identity were found in two articles. The first titled “Quebec City mosque attack suspect Alexandre Bissonnette charged with 6 counts of 1st-degree murder” acknowledges that he was not labelled a terrorist. “On social media, many took issue with the

categorization of Bissonnette as an introvert and a lone wolf, arguing that the suspect was spared of the term terrorist because he is white. Bestselling author J.K. Rowling was one of those voices,” (CBC News, 2017). The other reference to his identity was not direct, but rather a witness describing the suspect having a “Quebecois accent.” In the article titled “Multiple dead, 2 arrested in shooting at Quebec City mosque,” it reads:

A witness, who asked to remain anonymous, told CBC's French-language service Radio-Canada that two masked individuals entered the mosque. 'It seemed to me that they had a Quebecois accent. They started to fire, and as they shot they yelled, 'Allahu akbar!' The bullets hit people that were praying. People who were praying lost their lives. A bullet passed right over my head,' said the witness. (CBC News, 2017)

This is interesting to note because despite a mention of Quebecois accent which *could* point someone born in Quebec or white, it mentions someone saying “Allahu Akbar” which translates to “God is the greatest.” Quoting this in the article is part of that encoding process where the suspect might be Muslim. Therefore, in the early hours after the attack, people reading the article could potentially decode the meaning that this was a Muslim suspect. Since terrorism is framed as a “Muslim problem,” (Powell, 2011, as quoted in Kanji, 2018, p. 275) mentioning “Allahu Akbar” from a witness statement frames the violence—albeit for a short time—as part of this problem.

The *Montreal Gazette* also seemed to distance or ignore the seriousness of Bissonnette’s ideology and views. An article titled “Suspect in shootings faces

11 charges; Fellow student says alleged attacker had developed radical views,” does address radicalization—while simultaneously downplaying their gravity. An interview with a classmate’s of Bissonnette seems to normalize his views while also acknowledging they became “radical.”

A fellow university student, who also knew Bissonnette from high school in Cap-Rouge, said the accused had developed radical views. ‘He was not overtly racist or Islamophobic, but he had borderline misogynist, Islamophobic viewpoints,’ said. Vincent Boissonneault, who is taking International Studies at Universite Laval. ‘Unfortunately, that’s become more or less acceptable these days.’ (Solyom, 2017, January 31)

This example shows Bissonnette being framed as a lone wolf is an example of whiteness extending the presumption of innocence to the entire collective and him as an individual—even after committing a violent act (Beydoun, 2018, p. 209). By quoting the student who says he was not overtly racist while also saying he has “borderline Islamophobic views” the article conceptualizes his views and ideology as not extreme enough to provoke him to act on them. The article also attributes the student as saying that he believed Bissonnette did not have ties to far-right groups. While trying to understand who the suspect is and their potential motivations in these events, the article locates his ideologies and views within him rather than within the broader context of right-wing extremism in Canada. Beydoun (2018) argues that because Muslim identity alone raises the presumption of radicalization, the racial identity of white or non-Muslim culprits tends to diminish the possibility of them being a terrorist.

Thus, through this framing the news media in this study are diminishing the possibility of the suspect or violent act being investigated as terrorism.

The *Ottawa Citizen* also framed Bissonnette's action as being an exception from white innocence. An article titled "At the end of the day, I didn't know him"; Friend of alleged mosque shooter speaks out over crime that shocked country" distances him from white supremacist ideology. The article reads: 'He didn't like the Muslim religion, but he never said he wanted to exterminate them or that he considered them an inferior race.' In the university chess club Bissonnette belonged to, there were Muslim members he enjoyed playing with. 'There was even a girl with a hijab who

he played with from time to time. He would say that this girl was nice,' the friend said. 'He liked his protectionism, his nationalism,' he said.

Bissonnette was proud of his heritage as a white Quebecer and opposed multiculturalism. He never saw evidence his friend was a white supremacist.' (Hamilton & Bell, 2017)

This excerpt of the article demonstrates how the *Citizen* frames Bissonnette as an ordinary guy who hated Islam but liked Muslims. It follows a similar pattern to the article by the *Gazette* about his views not being extreme by quoting his friend that Bissonnette never wanted to exterminate Muslims and that he never saw him supremacist. Therefore, this excerpt is problematic because it not only distances Bissonnette from the plausibility of having far-right ideology but describes him as someone who befriended Muslims. This errs on the side of humanizing the perpetrator which will be discussed in the subsequent

chapter. But, it also falls back on the downplaying the plausibility of white-supremacy motivating these attacks. The goal is not to presume judgement or enter into the “trial by media” territory by calling Bissonnette a white supremacist or a terrorist. However, ideologically motivated acts are called by many different names by the media and treated differently legally (Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018, p. 182). Sometimes they are called “terrorism,” “hate crimes,” and other times they are acts committed by a “lone wolf” or “mass shooter” (Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018, p. 172). At times, these terms are used interchangeably in relation to the same incident (Colleen et al., 2015, as quoted in Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018, p. 27). Depending on which term is used, it carries with it a significant amount of political and moral weight (Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018, p. 172). Therefore, if Bissonnette’s actions are not framed as terrorism by news media *and* he is referred to as a lone wolf who did not show “evidence of being white supremacist,” it significantly downplays the seriousness of the crime. In turn, this affects political and law enforcement priorities in addressing far-right extremism (Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018, p. 17).

Conversely, Zehaf-Bibeau’s ideology and identity were highly emphasized. Despite the lone wolf designation, there was a tendency to lump Zehaf-Bibeau to Couture-Rouleau as lone wolf terrorist. CBC News, for example, connected the two incidents, perpetrators and even ideology. In the article “Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and Martin Couture-Rouleau: Their shared traits” the journalist writes:

They didn’t know each other and their respective attacks were not directly linked. But Martin Couture-Rouleau and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau shared

common traits — both self-radicalized and adrift in their lives and connected in their sympathy to radical Islamic ideology, seeking to venture overseas and possibly fight for what they considered a higher cause. (CBC News, 2014)

The opening paragraph both acknowledges that Zehaf-Bibeau as a lone wolf while also connecting him to “radical Islamic ideology.” Even though he was not charged with terrorism and the evidence suggesting he was connected to terror networks was meager, he was still referred to as having radical ideology. This illustrates the force of presumptive connection to terrorism when the actor is Muslim (Beydoun, 2018, p. 212; Rao & Shenkman et al., 2018; Kanji, 2018). More importantly, looking for similarities between him and Couture-Rouleau whose connection to terror networks was more evident—reinforces this presumption of connection to terrorism. So, despite him being framed a lone wolf his religion became a shared trait with a known terrorist therefore implying ties to terrorism.

The *Montreal Gazette* also linked Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau in a similarly problematic way. In an article titled “Authorities face hurdles stopping 'lone wolves'; Until they act on their ideals, potential terrorists can't be arrested,” the journalist writes, “With two attacks on Canadian soldiers in the span of three days, police appear to be dealing with a new wave of religious extremism, spurred on by the Islamic State, known as ISIS or ISIL,” (Magder, 2014). The journalist here both emphasizes urgency and danger. Despite the attacks being days apart suggesting there is a “wave of religious extremism” suggests there

are more attacks on the way creating that urgency or fear. More notably, religion is suggested as the forefront and driving force behind these attacks. When evidence around motivation is scant, and the perpetrator is not alive to go through interrogation or trial, suggesting religious motivation inspired by a terrorist group perpetuates that 'war on terror' frame. It does so by creating these vague links to ideology.

Attribution also becomes an important point of discussion in this case. Comparing ideological framing of Bissonnette with Zehaf-Bibeau, the former was often attributed—either directly quoted or attributed to a source. Rao & Shenkman et al. (2018) argue using quotations or attribution to references of “white supremacy” or “far-right” but not “terrorism” suggests that the concept of terrorism in relationship to Islam is widely understood and uncontroverted.

There is a noted shift in how Tarrant's ideology and identity was framed in 2019, compared to how Bissonnette was framed two years prior. While this study is limited in offering *why* that shift in framing took place, it can identify it. The perpetrator in the Christchurch shootings was referred to as a white-supremacist without attribution. CBC News in an article titled “Why the accused New Zealand killer was fascinated with Serbia, Ottoman Empire,” Tarrant is referred to as an “alleged Australian white supremacist gunning down worshippers in New Zealand mosques,” (CBC News, 2019). The *Gazette* takes a more direct approach in emphasizing Tarrant's ideology and identity.

In the article “N.Z. mosque shooter referenced Bissonnette; Online photos

included rifle magazine featuring Quebec killer's name on it," (Riga, 2019) writes:

As was the case in Quebec, the New Zealand attack was reportedly carried out by a heavily armed, anti-immigrant white man bent on killing Muslims. The suspect in Friday's rampage, a 28-year-old white supremacist, appears to have been influenced by Quebec City shooter Alexandre Bissonnette, who was sentenced in February to life in jail without the possibility of parole for 40 years.

In this case, the journalist called him both a white supremacist and an antiimmigrant white man. These signal a potential shift in how these violent incidents will be framed in the future. However, the debate remains whether that is enough to generate the same political, social and legal response to attacks committed by Islamist attackers. Since these attacks are characterized as lone wolves, identity—racial and religious—remain as loci that either bring these incidents closer to the terrorism frame or further away from it (Beydoun, 2018).

5.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I examined one of the contributing factors to continuation of the 'war on terror' frame in three Canadian news media outlets: CBC News, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and *Montreal Gazette* via the framework of the lone wolf designation. Looking at how each perpetrator was framed within the context of the lone wolf it is evident that there are some discrepancies—with some potential for change. All three perpetrators were framed as lone wolves whether

it was by experts, law enforcement, or by the journalist themselves. These designations as Beydoun (2018) establishes either presume or exempt the suspects from being tied to terrorism by emphasizing or de-emphasizing race and religion (or ideology). Bissonnette was evidently distanced from potentially being framed as a terrorist—at least by the news media—by downplaying the seriousness of his white supremacist views. On the contrary, Zehaf-Bibeau's identity and religious beliefs were emphasized and often unattributed, further presuming a connection to terrorism. Tarrant however, signals a slight shift in how white supremacist violence might be framed moving forward. There was more emphasis on his ideology without attribution. But, there was also a greater deal of attribution to him and his manifesto about his views. It also raises the question whether reporting more explicitly about far-right ideology will shape public opinion around white supremacy and terrorism. Therefore, what this chapter establishes is that despite the legal frame and lack of evidence about the motivations of Muslim suspects, there was a clear tendency to resort to the lone wolf designation in a way that reinforces the 'war on terror' frame. The lone wolf designation reinforces the idea that even if a Muslim perpetrator is acting alone, they are still somehow connected to the larger Muslim community. That connection as a result contributes to the notion that all Muslims are terrorists or vice versa. This chapter thus outlines how the 'war on terror' frame continues even though a white suspect has been charged with terrorism—further reserving that label for Muslims.

Chapter 6: Cost of humanizing victims and perpetrators

In this chapter, I examine the concept of humanization within the context of the Quebec City mosque shooting, the Christchurch shootings, and the Parliament Hill shooting. Humanization in this context means framing either the perpetrator or victims of the crimes in a way that elicits sympathy towards them. News media, therefore, may de-legitimize violence by humanizing perpetrators of crimes—including name, information about family life, hobbies, occupation, etc.—by highlighting the humanity and similarities with news consumers (El-masry, 2019, p. 16). Conversely, humanity, through personalization of perpetrators, can also de-legitimize the *severity* or *harm* of their actions. I demonstrate how a humanization frame provokes different feelings or implies certain attitudes towards perpetrators and victims, with their race or religion being a dependent variable. Thus, the degree of humanization afforded to the perpetrators and victims can indicate whether the ‘war on terror’ frame is used or not. Considering Muslims are often linked with terrorism, and white perpetrators are often framed as lone wolves, I seek to compare and contrast how and to what degree the white perpetrators versus the Muslim perpetrator in this study were humanized. Similarly, I examine how and the degree to which the Muslim victims were humanized versus the white victim(s) of these attacks.

In my analysis, I look for references to name, family life, hobbies, occupations, and any other indicators that point to the perpetrators being

anything other than perpetrators. Furthermore, I look for references to criminal history in my analysis. Since the Canadian Press stylebook advises against bringing up criminal history (Canadian Press, 2021), it becomes essential to examine how that guideline was adhered to for the three perpetrators. Therefore, this chapter aims to look at how humanization through reporting contributes to the 'war on terror' frame or creates a counter-frame. I examine this by comparing how the Muslim versus non-Muslim perpetrators were humanized in relation to each other and to what degree. I will then compare the victims in relation to each other. Finally, I compare how the perpetrators were humanized in relation to each other.

6.1 Humanizing the white suspect

For my analysis, I looked at my pool of articles. I chose those that mention the occupation, childhood, mental state, criminal history (or lack thereof), and any other personal information about the perpetrators and victims that attempt to humanize or provoke sympathy towards them. I begin by outlining how Alexandre Bissonnette and Brenton Tarrant—the white perpetrators—were humanized. I then compare this with any attempts at humanizing Michael Zehaf-Bibeau—the Muslim perpetrator.

Looking at CBC News's coverage of the Christchurch shootings, there was an article quoting Tarrant's manifesto, which frames him as an ordinary person.

“New Zealand mosque shootings: What we know about the alleged gunman” quotes Tarrant describing himself as a 28-year-old Australian, born to a “working-class, low-income family,” and having a “regular childhood” (CBC News, 2019, March 15). Quoting him referring to himself as coming from a workingclass, low-income family creates a sense of relatability. Even though the article does detail his attack and white supremacist views, mentioning his seemingly “ordinary childhood” frames him in a way that invokes a sense of innocence or normalcy. When presented with two contradicting realities of this person’s seemingly difficult yet ordinary childhood, it omits the possibility that Tarrant can commit a horrifying crime. It is not unusual for journalists to report on the background of a suspect or perpetrator in their attempt to understand and explain to the public who is behind a violent crime. However, there are discrepancies in which aspect of a suspect’s life is highlighted. For example, the article then mentions Tarrant’s occupation as a personal trainer:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation reports Brenton Tarrant worked as a personal trainer at Big River Gym in the New South Wales city of Grafton between 2009 and 2011, when he left to go travelling overseas in Asia and Europe. Tracey Gray, manager of the gym, told ABC she recalled Tarrant’s father Rodney died from an asbestos-related illness when Tarrant was in high school, and she believed he still had a surviving sister and mother. (CBC News, 2019, March 15)

This excerpt highlights Tarrant’s occupation and even travel adventures. As previously mentioned, the Canadian Press stylebook advises journalists

against bringing up a suspect's criminal history unless it is relevant. "Relevant references to the criminal record of an accused are routinely included in stories at the time of arrest ... The reference to a record should be relevant and in the public interest, and the information must be presented concisely and fairly. Supervisors should vet stories that delve into records" (Canadian Press, 2021, n.p.). Similarly, journalists should exercise the same caution when mentioning personal information that makes the perpetrator more personable or "ordinary." The article excerpt above even goes to the lengths to elicit sympathy towards Tarrant by mentioning that his father passed away from an asbestos-related illness. The *Montreal Gazette* also framed Tarrant and other white supremacist perpetrators like Bissonnette as being a product of "a succession life circumstances and choices" by quoting a former neo-Nazi (Riga, 2019, March 16).

Fiset said there is a fringe of 'young, white men who are disillusioned, who don't believe in the promises of neoliberalism and multiculturalism, who feel rejected and who are gathering and creating cesspools of anger.' Some of them live vicariously through mass murderers such as Bissonnette, Dylann Roof and Elliot Rodger, Fiset said. (Riga, 2019, March 16)

This example by the *Gazette* humanizes Tarrant as a person and even his ideology. While the process of radicalization is highly nuanced and complicated, it is also important to deflect responsibility away from the

perpetrator. For example, calling the likes of Tarrant and Bissonette people who “feel rejected and who are gathering and creating cesspools of anger” emphasizes the emotional aspect of the radicalization process. Corbin (2017) suggests that the dehumanization of the Muslim perpetrator—which will be discussed later in this chapter—the white perpetrator always retains his humanity. Even after committing heinous acts of violence, the white perpetrators are depicted as human beings and not terrorist “others” (Corbin, 2017, p. 467). “The media describes their childhood and shows their graduation photos, not their mugshots. They are shy, quiet young men or charming Southern gentlemen. At school, they sang in the choir or played varsity sports. They have favourite songs and favourite movies” (Corbin, 2017, p. 467). As Corbin suggests, these aspects of describing these often trivial or personal details of white suspects or perpetrators are what allows them to retain their humanity. Similarly, Bissonette was also humanized through the coverage. CBC News’ coverage of the attack mentioned several personal details about him. The article “Quebec City mosque attack suspect Alexandre Bissonette charged with 6 counts of 1st degree murder” begins laying out his education and town. “According to his Facebook page, which has since been taken down, Bissonette is from the Quebec City suburb of Cap-Rouge. His profile also shows he studied anthropology and political science at Laval University and was a cadet as a child” (CBC News, 2017, January 30). The article then references his right-wing ideologies by quoting his parents’ neighbour who describes him a child. “You couldn’t find one more calm than that. He never did anything, he

always kept to himself. We never heard of anything” (CBC News, 2017, January 30). In this article, CBC News frames Bissonnette as a regular university student first and foremost, followed by an emphasis on his childhood. A *Montreal Gazette* article even goes to the lengths to mention that “he dressed up as the Grim Reaper for Halloween, and his musical taste ranged from Katy Perry to Megadeth” (Solyom, 2017, January 31). These details followed right after mentioning that posts on his Facebook page “showed that he ‘liked’ Donald Trump, French Front National leader Marine Le Pen and Mathieu Bock-Cote, a Quebec City columnist known for his pro-nationalist and anti-multicultural views” (Solyom, 2017, January 31). Framing Bissonnette within this child-like, docile image, and someone who likes Katy Perry allows him to benefit from white innocence—which is not only an everyday discourse but also has a material effect that allows white people to avoid being accountable for racism (Rodriguez, 2008, as quoted in Inwood, 2018, p. 5).

White innocence is grounded in notions of “forgetfulness, erasure, denial and transcendent, all-subsuming ‘freedom’ or entitlement” (Griffin, 1998, p. 4, as quoted in Inwood, 2018). As a result, white innocence positions people in a way that the concept of privilege does not interrogate the full range of ways that white people can oppress minorities (Inwood, 2018, p. 5). Other scholars have also noted this pattern in reporting on white perpetrators. Collins (2013) notes that in the rare instances that white offenders are portrayed in news media, there is an emphasis on the circumstances that contributed to their crimes, such as psychological trauma. This occurs because white offenders mirror dominant

values in society, and therefore, their crimes are met with sympathy (Miller et al., 2006 as quoted in Collins, 2013, p. 80). So when news outlets frame white suspects as being calm, quiet, or eliciting sympathy towards them by mentioning painful childhood experiences, it frames them as inherently incapable of committing acts of violence by contextualizing their actions. This is achieved by language that individualizes both the white perpetrator and their crimes which implies that these are not “typical” crimes committed by “normal” people (Miller et al., 2006 as quoted in Collins, 2013, p. 94). On the other hand, Zehaf-Bibeau, the Muslim perpetrator, was not framed in a way that excused his crimes.

6.2 Dehumanizing the Muslim perpetrator

In this section, I follow a similar analysis method of looking for references to personal life, occupation, hobbies, etc., as evidence of humanization. Zehaf-Bibeau was not humanized the same way Bissonnette and Tarrant were. A CBC article reported that Zehaf-Bibeau and Martin Couture-Rouleau both “came from broken homes, both were adrift in their lives, used drugs and were self-radicalized” (CBC News, 2014, October 23). The article then quotes the RCMP Commissioner at the time, Bob Paulson, who says Zehaf-Bibeau had been in Ottawa weeks before the attack, that he was living in a local shelter for the homeless and that he was potentially motivated by the delayed process to get a Libyan passport. Another CBC News article also framed Zehaf-Bibeau as a

criminal. An article titled “Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, Ottawa gunman asked B.C. judge to send him to jail” details his criminal history, which the Canadian Press Stylebook advises against, as previously mentioned. The article quotes much of an audio recording from a 2011 court appearance in B.C. where Zehaf-Bibeau is quoted telling the judge, “I’m a crack addict and at the same time I’m a religious person, so I want to sacrifice freedom and good things for a year maybe, so when I come out, I’ll appreciate the things of life more and be clean” (CBC News, 2014, October 23). The article then mentions his connection to a Burnaby, B.C., mosque but not for his views. “Aasim Rashid with B.C. Muslim Association says a few people at the Masjid Al-Salaam & Education Centre in Burnaby dealt with Zehaf-Bibeau before his arrest in 2011. ‘He was not a very well-mannered person,’ Rashid said. ‘The people who have interacted with him described as kind of rough and maybe a little rude’” (CBC News, 2014, October 23). The *Montreal Gazette* also framed Zehaf-Bibeau as someone who is troubled and has a criminal history. One article’s opening paragraphs are:

The picture that emerged this week of Zehaf-Bibeau, the gunman who fatally wounded Cpl. Nathan Cirillo at the National War Memorial before being killed in a gunfight in Parliament’s Centre Block was that of a troubled man with a history of violence, drug abuse and mental instability. Police said the 32-year-old Muslim convert may have held ‘extremist beliefs’ and was looking to acquire a passport to go to Syria. (Quan, 2014, October 25)

Comparing these excerpts and framing of Zehaf-Bibeau to that of Tarrant

and Bissonnette, it becomes evident that there is no humanization. While the criteria were looking at the presence of personal information, the *type* or *nature* of the information that was present does not humanize Zehaf-Bibeau. Instead, he is criminalized by referencing his criminal history. More importantly, he is dehumanized by making his drug use a salient part of the story. Framing Zehaf-Bibeau as a criminal, drug user, and an extremist, contributes to the history of criminalization and dehumanization of Muslims in news media. While these details could be argued to serve as public interest or offer insight into what led him to commit a horrifying crime, white perpetrators are not framed in this way. The *Ottawa Citizen* was bolder with the language used to describe Zehaf-Bibeau. An “explainer”— a news story breaking down the events in detail — described him as a 32-year-old who:

Was born in Montreal to a businessman of Libyan descent and a Canadian mother, a senior official with the Immigration and Refugee Board. He was a petty criminal and crack addict, and for the past seven years, considered himself a devoted Muslim. His estranged mother, who saw him once during the past five years, said he ‘was lost and did not fit in.’ (Duffy, 2014, October 25)

In the examples above of how Zehaf-Bibeau was framed within the context of humanization versus de-humanization, it is evident that racialization is at play. Tolley (2015) explains racialization in media coverage in two ways: coverage with explicit racial content (skin colour, ethnicity, etc.); and racialized coverage that is more latent and involves looking at how race affects the

coverage of otherwise similar subjects (p.31). Considering the examples above, Zehaf-Bibeau, compared to Bissonnette and Tarrant, was racialized in the latter way. Instead of focusing on his skin-colour or ethnicity Zehaf-Bibeau was racialized by focusing on his ideological beliefs as the driving force behind his action. So even though there was no emphasis on his physical appearance as the racializing factor, his religion and ideological beliefs became the center of the frame. Thus, the framing of the Muslim perpetrator compared to the non-Muslim ones becomes that of racialization versus colour-blind or colour neutral and humanized versus de-humanized. Although racial considerations do motivate stories—when reporting on hate crimes or genocide, for example—the racial considerations should be applied more evenly (Tolley, 2015, p. 31).

6.3 Humanizing the victim

Looking at the sample of articles, both Muslim and non-Muslim victims were framed in a way that was humanizing by mentioning personal details about them. The death of Nathan Cirillo, the soldier killed in the Parliament Hill attack, was deemed to be a national tragedy. An *Ottawa Citizen* article talking about the House of Commons banding together after the attack quotes the Prime Minister at the time, Stephen Harper calling Cirillo a young man “with a beautiful son and a bright future ahead of him” (Kennedy, 2014, October 24). Meanwhile, a *Montreal Gazette* article calls Cirillo and Patrice Vincent, the RCMP officer killed days before Cirillo, heroes. The article’s headline is “Montreal Muslims pay

homage to heroes” (Muisse, 2014, October 29). The article continues this framing through the last paragraph: “In advance of the service, police officers and military personnel gathered Tuesday morning to salute their fallen comrade at the St-Hubert airport” (Muisse, 2014, October 29). This hero versus villain framing is one that has been regularly used in reporting on acts of terrorism committed by Muslims (Karim, 2003, pp. 26-27). Through these references to his beautiful family and his heroism, Cirillo is thus seen both as an individual and a national hero. It is through this framing of the victim(s) to the reader as ‘this could be’ that depictions of crime have their most significant emotional impact (Collins, 2013). This heroism was also used for the Sergeant-at-Arms who shot Zehaf-Bibeau. “The hero of the hour was Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vickers. MPs roared their applause and cheers to thank him for shooting the gunman just steps from the conference rooms where many of them had been meeting on Wednesday” (Kennedy, 2014, October 24). Despite Vickers not being a victim who died in the attack, he was still subject to it, and it serves as another example of this humanization through heroism.

The victims of the Quebec City mosque shooting and the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand were also humanized. However, most of the personal references focused on their education and contributions to society. More importantly, there was a very rare reference to heroism. For example, a *Montreal Gazette* article mentions Quebec City’s victims’ families, but mostly what they studied and where they were born.

Hassan, the youngest of the victims, was a father of three who worked in information technology for the government; Belkacemi was a professor in Université Laval's food science department, well-loved by students and colleagues alike. They were both born in Algeria. Thabti was a pharmacist who moved to Quebec from Tunisia and leaves a son and a daughter behind. Together, they and three other victims - Mamadou Tanou Barry, Ibrahima Barry, Azzedine Soufiane - left behind six widows and 17 children (Solyom, Riga & Curtis, 2017, February 3).

Here we see this emphasis on their education and occupation. While analysis criteria set this is out as how victims of crimes are humanized, it functions differently when the perpetrators are Muslim. Considering Muslims are often vilified and framed as potential criminals, especially in the wake of 9/11 (Ali 2016; Kamali 2017 as quoted in Kaufman, 2019, p. 525), emphasizing their education and societal contributions acts as this form of normalization rather than humanization. Thus, in this attempt to frame Muslims within this frame of humanization as victims, news media are framing them as exceptions to the dominant frame of terrorism and criminality.

6.4 The white perpetrator and Muslim victim

One of the most important things to note from the analysis is the dual humanization of both the white perpetrator(s) and their Muslim victim(s). Despite

there being a great emphasis and attempt to humanize Muslim victims, there is this simultaneous humanization of their perpetrators. Considering the Quebec City mosque shooting, the publications generally framed Bissonnette's actions as a result of something seemingly out of character. His actions were framed as potentially being driven by anti-immigrant, far-right views. However, they were also counteracted by interviews with former classmates who did not think his views may have been extreme enough to commit such a violent crime. More importantly, the interview with the neighbour that framed him as a calm and quiet "kid" further leans into the white innocence frame.

On the other hand, his victims were also humanized by mentioning their families and occupations. This is significant to note because when perpetrators are Muslim, there is a process of Othering that white perpetrators are spared from. The process takes place by individualizing the perpetrator (separating them from the wider Muslim community and appeasing racism accusations) but linking them to "radicals" outside the country (Poole, 2018, p. 77). Meanwhile, the white perpetrator is individualized (and humanized) by divorcing them from the wider population, but they are rarely linked to white supremacist groups. More importantly, what is significant in news framing is even though they might be sparingly linked to far-right ideology, they are still framed as outliers. Thus, by emphasizing a white suspect's difficult upbringing or characterizing them as calm, it downplays the severity of their crimes. Doing so, therefore, takes away from the humanity of victims of crime by downplaying their perpetrator's connection to far-right ideology and by also humanizing them. That is not to

suggest that suspects should be vilified. Still, it is vital to strike a balance between reporting on the information of public interest versus inadvertently downplaying a serious crime through reporting.

6.5 The cost of humanization

There are implications to all frames used by news media. Considering media relies on stereotypes to classify different minority groups into dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad' (Larson, 2006 as quoted in Collins, 2013, p. 79), it becomes imperative to understand how the framing of 'good' can be just as problematic as framing the 'bad.' While mainstream journalism does not always adopt official views on terrorism, "the field of meanings in which they choose to operate inevitably leads them to produce only certain interpretations of political violence" (Karim, 2011, p. 134). Therefore, even when white perpetrators like Bissonnette and Tarrant commit violent crimes—and are charged with terrorism in one case—they are rarely described as having committed political or ideological violence. So when they are reported on within this humanization frame on the basis of race, it can have an impact on public opinion and fear of crime (Collin, 2013, p. 80). Furthermore, if public opinion perceives the risk of victimization as low, this impacts political action and policy changes as a result.

However, Karim (2011) maintains that the media should not be viewed as monolithic vehicles for only one type of discourse.

Depending on the latitude allowed by owners, they [newspapers] do function as sites of contestation across various views. Oppositional, alternative and populist perspectives may appear from time to time in media content, often on the back pages of newspapers or near the end of a news broadcast. Occasionally, alternative news are even printed in high profile parts of a newspaper, such as the editorial, opinion column, and the front page. But often, alternative narrative in the text of a write-up is subverted by the adjacent placing of the dominant discourse in more prominent parts of the article format, such as the headline or an accompanying photograph. (Karim 2003, as quoted in Karim, 2011 p. 135)

This held true for this part of the analysis. At the same time, there were instances where an alternative framing or discourse about these perpetrators being terrorists or not, the dominant ideology and frame still prevailed.

6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I examined how each of the respective publications framed the victims and perpetrators within a humanization frame. The rationale was that mentioning personal details about victims or perpetrators is an important part of the journalism profession. However, I focused on how each was humanized, which details about their personal lives were emphasized and their impact on public opinion. I found that while both white and Muslim victims were humanized, the humanization of the Muslim victim might also bring out the problematic

framing of them being an exception to the rule for being “normal.” On the other hand, the Muslim perpetrator was vilified and framed as a petty criminal with a history of violence and drug use. More importantly, even though the white perpetrators were previously framed as having some ideological motivations for their crimes, they were counteracted with this humanization and innocence frame. This chapter thus suggests one of the ways in which the ‘war on terror’ is upheld—by humanizing the white perpetrator and dehumanizing the Muslim perpetrator. The extent of which this frame is upheld is also evident in the simultaneous humanization of the white suspect and their victims.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has found that the ‘war on terror’ frame has persisted over the years in news media. During the Quebec City mosque shooting and the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand, there was little to no use of the terrorism frame for the white suspects. Meanwhile, that frame was used more during the Parliament Hill attack. Since the 9/11 attack, the Muslimization of terrorism persisted in news media—particularly Western media. However, the analysis shows that while the frame persisted and reappeared in the case studies, it appeared in more subtle and nuanced ways. It appeared in the variable language that is applied when the perpetrator is white versus Muslim. It also appeared through the application of the lone wolf designation and finally, through the humanization of the perpetrator in relation to the victim.

The coverage examined in this thesis shows that while there has been some progress since the reporting following the 9/11 attacks, there is still a shadow of the ‘war on terror’ frame that exists in Canadian media today. What started as a political policy in the United States quickly became a frame that journalists accepted and even framed as public opinion (Lewis & Reese 2009, p. 87).

The rather immediate and widespread acceptance of the War on Terror frame should have been expected, perhaps, when it came sponsored by major political figures in a time of crisis. With the help of an “echoing press,” the Bush administration effectively framed the march toward war

in Iraq as an extension of the War on Terror, allowing the Iraq war to achieve levels of public support that were nearly as high as those for the war in Afghanistan. (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 87)

Therefore, while the news media examined may have moved away from this echoing of the 'war on terror' frame, it continued in the subtle ways mentioned above.

This study looked at coverage by CBC News, the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* for seven days after each attack. It examined how the frame differed when the perpetrator was white versus Muslim. More importantly, it sought to explore whether the legal framing or process was reflected in the framing of each attack and perpetrator. This thesis has been divided into six chapters—three established the historical and theoretical background of the study, and three outlined the analysis I conducted. Chapter One outlined the scope of the research, its limitations and methodology. Chapter Two summarized a literature review about the history of terrorism the problems around defining both legally and colloquially.

7.1 Research findings

The overall question of this thesis was: How have each of the publications under examination framed the three violent incidents, and was the 'war on terror' frame deployed? The secondary research questions were:

- a. Are journalistic standards and practices for reporting on violence or terrorism applied consistently when the perpetrator was Muslim versus non-Muslim? Or were there moments of abandoning these guidelines?
- b. Does legality play a role in whether or not the dominant frame is contested?

The analysis found that overall, the 'war on terror' frame was upheld by all three publications: CBC News, the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette* with the latter two being more salient. The publications used the terms terrorism for all three attacks. However, the *context* in which the terrorism label emerged varies. For the Quebec City mosque shooting and Christchurch mosque shootings, the terrorism label was usually employed in two main contexts: an attributed quote or sentence to a politician, police official, expert or the member of the public; and to explain why they are not being labelled or charged with terrorism (in Bissonnette's case at least). More importantly, even when their actions were framed as being potentially a result of extremist views they were downplayed (Solyom, 2017, January 31). On the other hand, Zehaf-Bibeau was labelled a terrorist through attribution and without. The significance of these discrepancies will be addressed in the discussion section that follows. My analysis also showed that while the lone wolf frame was used for white and Muslim suspects in this study, the emphasis or de-emphasis on ideology and religion played a vital role. Religion and political ideology served as either a justification that the lone wolf was somehow connected to an organized terrorist group or acting completely alone. The analysis showed that the connection to a

terrorist group was played up in the case of the Muslim suspect, Zehaf-Bibeau. Meanwhile, the connection to organized far-right groups was either downplayed or not brought up as a possibility for Tarrant and Bissonnette.

Finally, the analysis showed there was a degree of humanization and dehumanization when it came to the suspects. The white suspects were often framed as outliers of the white population and their motivations were consistently overanalyzed. For example, they were framed as docile, quiet kids growing up or emphasizing that they grew up in a working-class family. On the other hand, Zehaf-Bibeau was dehumanized by bringing up his criminal history and framing him as a petty criminal with extremist ideology.

7.2 Discussion

It has been established throughout years of research and through this study that language in journalistic practice has the power to shape public discourse, set the agenda and make meaning (Habermas, 1989; McCombs et al., 2014). The 'war on terror' frame was and still is the dominant frame in news media when it comes to reporting on violent attacks committed by Muslims. However, there has been a reluctance to use this frame when white suspects commit violent attacks. It is important to note that journalists are not the last line of defense when it comes to editorial judgement or how an event is framed. More importantly, unconscious bias is not the only force driving journalists and newsrooms to decide whether the 'war on terror' frame is employed. Fleras and

Kunz (2001) conceptualize news as a socially constructed discourse that defends dominant ideology. What is particularly concerning is how news media tend to frame minorities as people who have problems or who create problems (criminalizing race and racializing crime) (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 66). It is the latter that became evident in this study.

While language standardization practices and journalistic guidelines in Canadian media work to mitigate the racialization of crime—such as the ‘war on terror’—the lack of concrete definition of terrorism presents challenges. The legal and academic subjectivity of the definition has translated into newsrooms where it becomes difficult to decide what constitutes terrorism. Therefore, looking at the ways in which this subjectivity arises, it became evident that the application of the frame is both subjective and subtle. Thus, journalists and news media institutions need to not only reexamine the application of the terrorism label without attribution, but also reexamine its use when it comes to white perpetrators. While each publication’s framing is driven by various factors—such as business model, publisher interests, and the 24-hour news cycle—it is important for a nation-wide review of how the terrorism label is used and who it is applied to. Considering the rise in violent attacks by far-right groups, it becomes important for Canadian news media to discuss how these attacks are framed so as not to downplay their seriousness.

7.3 Future research

This thesis can be used a starting point for researchers interested in the language used to frame violent attacks in news media. This study focused on whether there has been a shift in how the terrorism frame has been used particularly in its use for white perpetrators. More importantly, it looked at whether a legal terrorism charge shifts the ways in which white perpetrators are framed. While this is not an entirely new area of research, there is little research done in the Canadian context. Therefore, this thesis adds to the growing research on how attacks by far-right white suspects are framed and their impact. It established the subtle ways in which white suspects continue to be excluded from the 'war on terror' frame while Muslim perpetrators continue to be framed within it.

Future research however is needed into the decision-making processes in Canadian newsrooms and how they may be contributing this growing problem. For example, interviews with journalists, editors and producers are needed to establish at which stage of the process these frames get reproduced. Furthermore, it will be important to look at potential solutions to this problem. Should we reexamine using the terrorism label altogether? Or should the label only be used in attribution or when a suspect has been legally charged with terrorism? How much power have news media given government or police in framing an event as terrorism without significantly challenging and corroborating the evidence they are presenting?

This research also raises the question about diversity at the management level in Canadian newsrooms. If most decision makers in newsrooms are white,

how is this impacting the coverage of white suspects and what checks and balances can be implemented? Ultimately, this research adds another layer for thinking about how language functions in news framing and raises questions about using the terrorism label moving forward.

Article #	Headline
1	Government pulled social media ads for 3 days after New Zealand attack
2	I can't believe my eyes': What we know about the New Zealand mosque shootings
3	After New Zealand attack, solidarity and grief at the Quebec City mosque
4	49 people killed in deadly attacks on New Zealand mosques
5	Canada's threat level unchanged, police presence bolstered after New Zealand mosque attacks
6	New Zealand mosque attack resonate with Quebec Muslims
7	Canadian police bolster presence in wake of New Zealand mosque attack
8	Why the accused New Zealand killer was fascinated with Serbia, Ottoman Empire
9	Viral mosque shooting video raises questions about social media firms' responsibilities
10	New Zealand mosque shootings: What we know about the alleged gunman

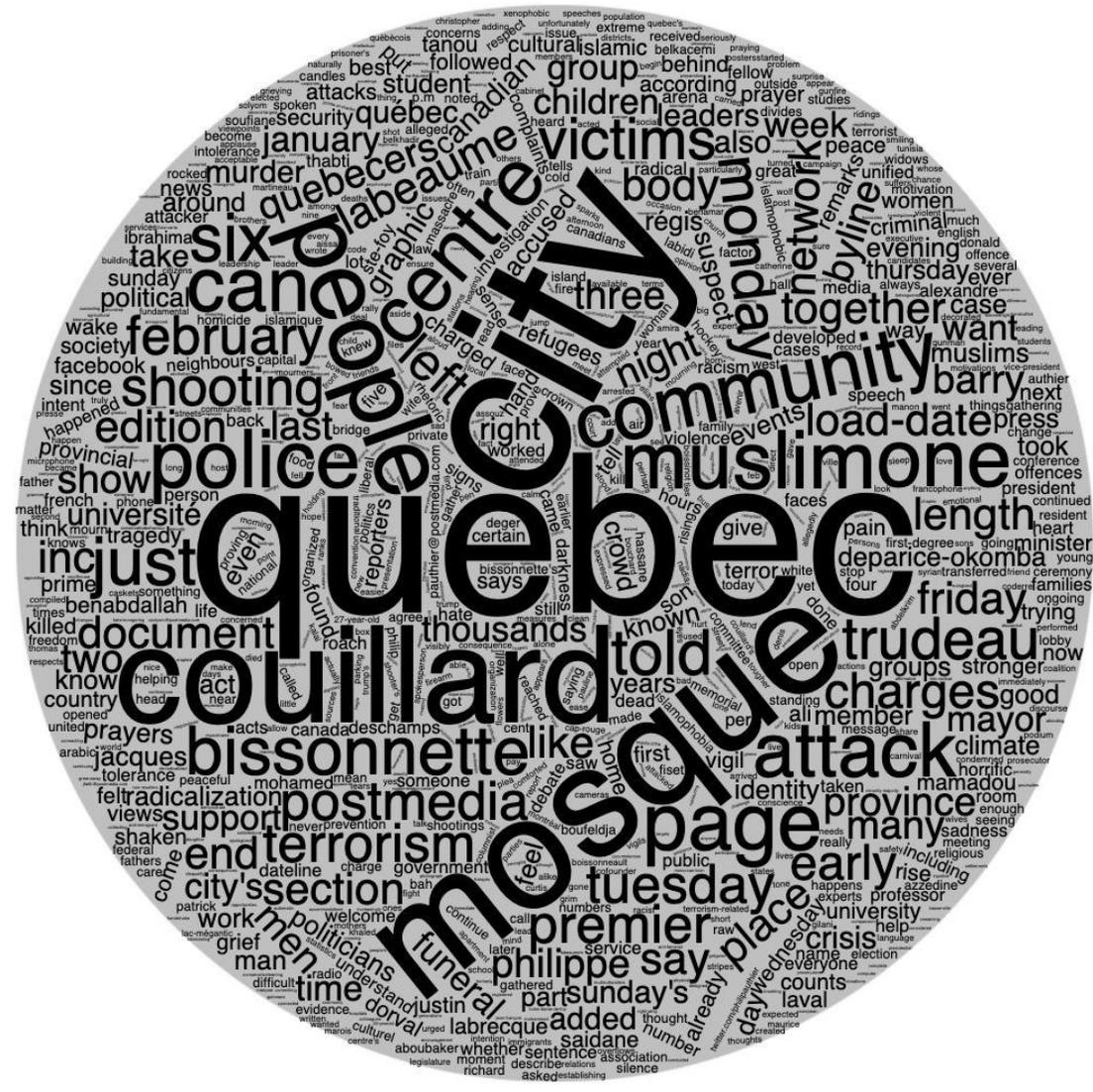
Article #	Headline
1	Ottawa shooting: Michael Zehaf-Bibeau has no criminal record in Calgary says police chief
2	Michael-Zehaf Bibeau, Ottawa gunman asked B.C. judge to send him to jail
3	Ottawa shooting: How Parliament will carry on
4	NDP Leader Tom Mulcair says new security laws must respect rights
5	Ottawa shooting: Michael Zehaf-Bibeau made video, police say
6	Cpl. Nathan Ciriloo, shot dead in Ottawa, dreamed of becoming full-time soldier
7	Ottawa shooting: Where did Michael Zehaf-Bibeau get his gun?
8	Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and Martin Couture-Rouleau: Their shared trait
9	Ottawa shooting: Canadian Forces 'will not be deterred'
10	Ottawa shooting: Canadian Muslims denounce attacks

Article #	Headline
1	We don't feel safe': Mosque shooting sends shock wave through Quebec Muslim community
2	Quebec City mosque shooting victims include businessman, professor, and fathers of young children
3	I never expected such a thing in Quebec': Mourners hold vigil at scene of mosque attack
4	Quebec City mosque attack suspect Alexandre Bissonnette charged with 6 counts of 1st-degree murder
5	Incorrect Fox News tweek on Quebec City mosque earns scorn of PMO
6	Thousands join families of mosque attack victims at Quebec City funeral
7	Time to turn the page': Quebec rallies call for unity after mosque killings
8	Multiple dead, 2 arrested in shooting at Quebec City mosque
9	10 minutes of terror: What happened inside the Quebec City mosque Sunday night
10	Quebec City mosque posts video showing blood stains, bullet holes from deadly shooting

1	Police: Mosque shooter acted alone; White House pushes back on Trump reference in manifesto emailed to Prime Minister
2	First victims of Christchurch shootings laid to rest
3	Hauntingly familiar New Zealand massacre underscores need to solve Quebec intolerance
4	New Zealand vows gun reforms; 'Within 10 days'
5	N.Z. mosque shooter referenced Bissonette; Online photos included rifle magazine featuring Quebec killer's name on it
6	The Christchurch Manifesto; The weaponization of the internet's troll cultures
7	How a racial terrorist unknown to police carried out a shocking massacre in New Zealand
8	Facebook says no one flagged livestream of mosque shooting; video watched 4,00 times before removed
9	About 200 attend vigil for victims of massacre
10	Researcher, engineer, young boy among victims

Article #	Headline
1	Ottawa seeks to give CSIS a boost
2	Stone halls echoes with gunfire and ran with blood; Deadly shootout inside Parliament after gunman executes soldier
3	Three days later: what we know, what we don't know
4	Montreal Muslims pay homage to heroes
5	Canada's foreign policy under fire; No surprise to see violence here, says journalist tied to Snowden papers
6	Shooter left video; RCMP says it has evident Ottawa shooter had political, ideological motives
7	Authorities faces hurdles stopping 'lone wolves'; Until they act on their ideals, potential terrorists can't be arrested
8	A 'faithful friend of Canada'
9	Beware of curbing civil liberties, rights experts say; Measures already exist for 'rational' response to deaths of two soldiers
10	A call for help from shattered families; Parents of extremists urged to step out and help fight radicalization

Appendix F: Montreal Gazette, Quebec City Mosque Shooting Articles



This word cloud consists of all 10 articles selected on the Quebec City mosque shooting by the Montreal Gazette. Here, the word “terrorism” is more visible. However, the context in which it appears is not the ‘war on terror’ frame.

Article #	Headline
1	Peaceful Quebec City rocked by attack
2	Thousands gather to mourn mosque victims; 'We will rise from this darkness stronger and more unified than ever' Trudeau tells gathering
3	Rising above Quebec crisis; Can Couillard help province bridge divides after most attack?
4	Suspect in shootings faces 11 charges; Fellow student says alleged attack had developed radical views
5	Shooting sparks jump in radicalization complaints
6	Dorval Mosque overflows with community support
7	No words to describe the sadness'
8	Terror charges difficult to prove, experts say; Establishing shooter's motivation tougher than proving intent to kill
9	Climate of intolerance a factor in massacre, mosque member says
10	Raw grief on a cold Quebec City night

Article #	Headline
1	City stands in solidarity, but Muslims are fearful
2	Police step up presence at area mosques
3	How a racial terrorist unknown to police carried out a shocking massacre in New Zealand
4	A massacre in real time
5	Researcher, engineer, young boy among victims
6	Aussie senator condemned for punching 'egg boy': viral video: anti-Muslim remarks spark call for ouster
7	The Christchurch Manifesto; The weaponization of the internet's troll culture
8	First victims of Christchurch shootings laid to rest
9	Trudeau, Ardern vow to 'work together'
10	Mosque shooter actor alone: Police, White House pushes back to Trump reference in manifesto email to Prime Minister

Article #	Headline
1	3 days later: What we still don't know; Many questions about Michael Zihaf-Bibeau remain unanswered
2	A call for help from families shattered by radicalization; Parents of extremists urged to come out of shadows and help fight
3	Bill would let CSIS spy on Canadians while abroad; Government plans to co-ordinate action with 'Five Eyes' allies nations
4	Zehaf-Bibeau used old-style rifle, experts say
5	Shooter Zehaf-Bibeau was staying at Ottawa Mission; Years spent wandering Canada as petty criminal with 'radical views'
6	Tories up security bill; government aims to neutralize threats created by offshore radicals
7	Yesterday, reality replaced fiction,' Parliament Hill security officer says; Louis L'tourneau poster details of incident on his Facebook page
8	Attacks on soldiers spart copycat fears; 'Could (Busuttil, 1994) (Busuttil, International Terrorism: Political and Legal Documents . Edited by Yonah Alexander. [Dordrecht: Nijhoff. 1992. xv + 627 pp. ISBN 0-7923-1627-4. £119/US\$205] - Terrorism in Europe: An International Comparative Legal Analysis . By Antonio Vercher. [Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1992. xxiii + 454 pp. ISBN 0-19-825437-7. £45], 1994)someone wake up tomorrow and say 'Today's the day?'
9	House vows to stand firm; Political differences shelves for day as all parties show sense of purpose
10	Don't just call him 'crazy:' MD; Not everyone 'lost' or with a 'messed up life' is mentally ill, expert says

Appendix I: Ottawa Citizen, Quebec City Shooting Articles



This word cloud consists of all 10 articles selected on the Quebec City mosque shooting by the *Ottawa Citizen*. The word “terrorism” is not visible and neither is “white” as an acknowledgement of white-supremacist ideology potentially being a factor in the attack.

Article #	Headline
1	Finest hour' feeling on Hill; Reassurance, stability in wake of shooting
2	Bloodied prayer rugs as terror strikes Quebec; 'Children witnesses this vile cruelty'
3	Terrorism charges place ectra burden on Crown: experts; 'it would add nothing in terms of sentence'
4	Mosque deaths forcce a look inward; Quebec confronts reality of hateful history
5	He's not an evil person, he's my kids'; Ottawa mother reveals heartache over son's transformation from would-be soldier to terror suspect
6	Far right not thought violent, ex-spy chief says; Authorities been monitoring hate groups
7	Thousands gather to mourn mosque victims; 'We will rise from this darkness stronger and more unified than ever before' Trudeau tells gathering
8	At the end of the day, I didn't know him'; Friend of alleged mosque shooter speaks out over crime that shocked country
9	Suspect had passion for extreme-right beliefs, guns; Bissonnette admired Trump, Le Pen, report acquaintances
10	Ottawa mosque seeks hate crime security funds following shooting

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