News Media and the Public Discourse on Terrorism in Aotearoa New Zealand

Author: Qiwei Kang

NEWS MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON TERRORISM IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Qiwei Kang[1]

This article explores the news media's contribution to the evolving public discourse on terrorism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Employing a critical theory framework, it focuses on the construction of responses to terrorism through an analysis of two media texts related to the Christchurch terrorist attack, namely, "The end of our innocence" by *Stuff* and "This Is Us" by *Radio New Zealand*. The analysis demonstrates that, while the dominant media discourse had previously reduced discussions of terrorism to Islamic terrorism, the Christchurch attack created space for an alternative perspective. Moreover, the Muslim community in New Zealand has utilised news media to reject conventional thinking on terrorism. The analysis also suggests that the construction of a new, more meaningful public understanding of terrorism is possible if a wider range of authoritative speakers participate in the evolving public discourse of terrorism and if various social actors are given the opportunity to represent themselves.

Keywords: Critical Terrorism Studies; Discourse Analysis; News Media, Christchurch terrorist attacks

Introduction

On 15 March 2019, *Stuff*, one of New Zealand's largest news media sites, published a feature story titled "The end of our innocence", with a photograph of a mourning woman wearing a hijab as the background. The phrase "our innocence" here refers to the perception of New Zealand being free from acts of terrorism, thereby implying that the Christchurch terrorist attacks was a tragic event that changed the nation's understanding of terrorism. The Christchurch terrorist attack certainly shocked New Zealand society,

_____
1   Qiwei Kang holds a Master's degree in Conflict and Terrorism Studies and a BA Hons in Media and Communication at the University of Auckland. Her Master's thesis examines drone deployment in the U.S. War on Terror, with an application of the actor-network theory. Qiwei is interested in politics and technology, contemporary political violence and the media construction of social reality.

as the country's physical and cultural distance from violent extremism had left many with a false sense of security. Now, three years on from the Christchurch terrorist attack, it is important that New Zealanders and the government reflect on its current counter-terrorism framework, including how the notion of terrorism is collectively perceived.

In response to the Christchurch terror attack, the government appointed a Royal Commission of Inquiry which produced a major report into the event. The Report gave a comprehensive interpretation of the Christchurch terror attack and provided a fulsome summary of the New Zealand counter-terrorism approach. Importantly, the Report made a call to reshape the public's role in countering terrorism, including enhancing "public knowledge of current risks and threats."[1] From this perspective, it is necessary to review how current public knowledge of terrorism is being constructed in New Zealand, a topic to which little attention has been paid thus far.

This article aims to address that existing research gap by focusing on the news media's role in the construction of the public discourse on terrorism in New Zealand, as public knowledge and understanding of terrorism are often built on media representations. Specifically, the article analyses two key media texts related to the Christchurch terrorist attack, using one feature story from *Stuff* and one series from *Radio New Zealand* (RNZ). Employing a broad framework of critical theory and discourse analysis, the aim of the analysis is to explore how the New Zealand media contributes to the construction of New Zealand's public discourse on terrorism and whether new concepts and understandings can be created and sustained. In doing so, it also provides a critical reading of New Zealand's approach to counter-terrorism.

Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Discourse

When examining counter-terrorism approaches, one of the most prominent issues is the difficulty in providing an accepted definition of terrorism. While many agree that at its core terrorism is a form of unlawful violence that targets the general public, carried out by individuals or groups, with the intention of provoking terror and creating a fearful climate for their political ends,[2] such understanding is nevertheless far from a comprehensive or universally accepted definition. With debates on terrorism's scope, membership and targets, it becomes an ambiguous and even paradoxical concept at times, "whose meaning lends itself to endless dispute but no resolution."[3] Some scholars have also pointed out the power asymmetry in defining some groups as terrorists while other are not. Upendra Acharya has argued that "generally, weak, less militarily equipped and marginalized people are identified as terrorists", since "their quest for self-governance or self-determination is generally undermined by powerful actors either in the national or international arena."[4] Therefore, while internationally there may exist a common understanding of which activities would constitute terrorism, a universally accepted definition of terrorism is not agreed upon.[5]

Traditional approaches to counter-terrorism policies usually start with an understanding of terrorism as something "fixed or predefined."[6] Such research is also based on the premise that terrorism is defined by authorised speakers such as politicians and legislators, and that terrorism can be broadly understood as "Islamic terrorism."[7] This can result in the accepted knowledge of terrorism being "reproduced", often "with little deviation from the central assumptions and narratives."[8] While the counter-terrorism approaches that are based on such an interpretation could be effective in combating ideologically-based terrorism such as radical Islamic fundamentalism, it can be less effective in responding to forms of terrorism outside of the frame of Islamic terrorism. Such approaches can also perpetuate Islamophobic, xenophobic and racist narratives. Crucially, the accepted social knowledge of terrorism, or the public's understanding of terrorism, is in large part formed "through speech-acts by socially authorised speakers."[9] At the same time, the lack of an accepted and sufficiently broad definition of terrorism has arguably further led to a cognitive gap in the public's understanding of terrorism and thereby limited public participation in counter-terrorism activities.

Yet, a growing number of studies[10] have acknowledged the importance of increasing the involvement of the public in discussing terrorism, as this could enhance the production of more integrated counter-terrorism approaches. Studies from different disciplines have also highlighted the importance of the rhetorical dimensions of terrorism,[11] especially media texts of terrorism and counter-terrorism, as these texts reflect and uphold the cultural imagery of terrorism in public discourse[12] and the dominant public narrations of terrorism.[13] Given that terrorists and terrorist organisations seek to achieve their political objectives of spreading fear and discord by targeting the general public, the public can be seen as a means to terrorism's end. Nevertheless, although the public can be viewed as the victims and targets of terrorist acts, they also hold a degree of agency in countering terrorism. Depending on the nature and extent of domestic terrorism, it would make sense for each terrorism-affected country to define its own contextualised concept that can then inform the international understanding of terrorism. While the mainstream "problem solving"[14] approaches in studying terrorism have failed to question the existing power structure and have taken the public discourse of terrorism as given, it is worth turning to alternative approaches that "identify, problematize and challenge"[15] the terrorism dominant discourses that are assumed to be fact.

Within alternative approaches to terrorism studies, theories that are influenced by post-structuralism and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (FSCT) have been favoured by many scholars.[16] These theoretical frameworks allow scholars to go beyond the authorised official actors in counter-terrorism approaches, seeing the notion of terrorism as socially constructed and that the counter-terrorism framework is, therefore, made possible through the "social construction of the threat of terrorism."[17] Counter-terrorism policies and national identity, under such a theoretical framework, are not seen as "simply cause-and-effect terms" but rather as "mutually or co-constitutive."[18] This type

of research could therefore contribute to a more profound understanding of identity and security, as well as providing a critical review of current security practices, including counter-terrorism. The importance of alternative approaches like critical terrorism studies (CTS), especially that which employs Discourse Analysis (DA), is that it helps in understanding terrorism discourse as a social practice and demonstrates how the language used in a national counter-terrorism framework is a product of its social context and power structures. Following the work of Richard Jackson on counter-terrorism and Christopher Baker-Beall's research on European counter-terrorism policy, this article is particularly interested in understanding terrorism through the lens of FSCT, with a focus on analysing terrorism discourse.

Along with other discourse analysis-oriented CTS scholars, Richard Jackson has pointed out that critical approaches question the existing accepted knowledge on terrorism and are "characterised by a set of core epistemological, ontological and ethical commitments, including an appreciation of the politically constructed nature of terrorism knowledge."[19] This follows other Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholars such as Teun van Dijk who have argued that CDA is analytical research that is interested in "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context."[20] In other words, given that CDA views language and discourse as a form of social practice, it could then be a useful tool in studying terrorism and counter-terrorism, helping researchers to decode the accepted public understanding and knowledge of terrorism. However, as CDA "treats discourse as an instrument that people can use for ideological purposes,"[21] such an interpretation of discourse's instrumentality could undermine the agency of those actors who are not the authorised speakers, in which case the public would be reduced to a simple receiver of the discourse. Baker-Beall has also added that focusing too much on discourse's instrumentality could "obscure the extent to which actors are also themselves a product of discourse."[22] Therefore, this article follows Baker-Beall's interpretation in which discourse is "constitutive of actors, institutions and social structures rather than causal."[23]

In the context of New Zealand, terrorism and counter-terrorism have been fairly under-researched topics, but with increased attention from academics and the general public after the Christchurch terrorist attack. Despite what many believed, New Zealand was, in fact, never free of terrorism. However, up until the Christchurch terrorist attack, the little discussion on terrorism in New Zealand that did take place most often followed the narrative that terrorism was a post-9-11 threat that posed significant dangers to the rest of the Western world. It was asserted that New Zealand had "avoided the worst to date,"[24] and the public regarded terrorism as "non-existent in the past and unlikely in the future." Further, public discussion on terrorism was often "entwined with commentary on race relations, civil rights and other issues."[25] In sum, it could be argued that the New Zealand public's understanding and accepted knowledge of ter-

rorism was most often simplified and relied largely upon overseas discourses. Among the limited research on New Zealand terrorism pre-Christchurch, some approached it from an historical lens,[26] while others examined the legal framework of counter-terrorism in New Zealand.[27] It was only after the Christchurch terrorist attack that research on New Zealand terrorism really started to grow, with a majority of research focusing on Right-Wing Extremism (RWE) and white supremacy.[28] Crucially, there is to date very little research that examines the discourse of terrorism in a New Zealand context,[29] although there is some important research on the editorial focus of media texts within journalism.[30] Therefore, it is important to expand the current research by focusing on the construction of the public discourse and knowledge of terrorism. Such research could challenge the conventional thinking and received wisdom on terrorism and provide a basis for a more critical assessment of the counter-terrorism approach in a New Zealand context. This article contributes to the existing research gap in studies of New Zealand terrorism in which the discourse of terrorism context is largely overlooked. By applying DA to the analysis of two sample news texts one year apart, both on the Christchurch terrorist attack, this study offers an examination of a part of the public discourse and the accepted knowledge of terrorism in New Zealand. It is hoped that this could in turn help to move towards a more comprehensive counter-terrorism approach that is suitable for the New Zealand context.

Background to this study

This section offers some background on terrorism in New Zealand by focusing on both terrorism and counter-terrorism before the Christchurch terrorist attack. It also examines New Zealand's terrorism and counter-terrorism approach through a critical lens. This brief review provides the background for a critical reading of the public's understanding of terrorism and New Zealand's counter-terrorism framework.

Terrorism Before Christchurch

In 1985, agents of the French external intelligence service, DGSE, bombed a Greenpeace-owned vessel called the *Rainbow Warrior*, which led to the sinking of the vessel and the death of a crew member.[31] The bombing was the French Government's response to the Rainbow Warrior's protest against French nuclear testing at Moruroa atoll, as well as to the emerging anti-nuclear movement in New Zealand at the time. When reacting to the *Rainbow Warrior* incident, the New Zealand prime minister at the time, David Lange, labelled the bombing as an act of "international state-backed terrorism."[32] Lange's claim is supported by the 1937 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism, which defined "criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, or a group of persons or the general public"[33] as terrorism. Under a more cynical lens, Lange's denouncing of the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* as an act of state terrorism could have also been for his government's political gain. When the Labour Party won a general

election in July 1984, it promised to make New Zealand nuclear-free[34]; therefore, taking a strong stance on the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* underpinned Lange's anti-nuclear policy. In response to the *Rainbow Warrior* incident, New Zealand adopted the International Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Act 1987. At the time, some criticised the government for not giving "a clear enough definition of an international terrorist incident."[35] This is because New Zealand did not conceptually separate domestic terrorism from international terrorism, one result of which is an arguable absence of public understanding about the nature and types of terrorism.

In the 1990s, New Zealand witnessed a significant rise in the unemployment rate due to the economic recession between 1991 and 1992.[36] During that period, a rapid growth in skinhead groups was observed in New Zealand, and violent acts by the growing numbers of RWE groups and white supremacist groups were also becoming a visible concern for the security sector. When recalling the 1990s, some New Zealanders pointed out that the local RWE groups at the time had "no national persona" but shared ideological connections with Australia-based skinheads and the U.S.-based groups.[37]

In the twenty-first century, the world was under the shadow of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks and the global war on terror, which in turn sparked a surge in Islamophobia and xenophobia around the globe. In more recent years, the Alternative Right (alt-right) movements have received more attention, as there has been a number of terrorist acts carried out by alt-right individuals and groups.[38] The perpetrators of such terrorist acts are often populations that are socially and economically marginalised[39] who often believe that migrants pose threats to their livelihood.[40] In other words, extremist ideologies appear to define much twenty-first century terrorism, with violent acts committed by those claiming to be Muslims as well as far-right groups; from another perspective, terrorism in the twenty-first century also appears to be closely linked with identity.[41] It can also be observed that some extreme right-wing groups in New Zealand have been growing and transforming, yet they often "lack a unifying narrative or leadership."[42]

Media construction of the terrorism discourse before Christchurch

It can be argued that the terrorism discourse in New Zealand was largely influenced by the discourse of other Western countries in which terrorism was most often reduced to Islamic terrorism. In examining the terrorism discourse through a critical lens, it is also important to question the role the media plays, especially in relation to the public sphere and to public knowledge and understanding.

Jürgen Habermas argues that the public should be seen as a homogeneous entity, in which its cohesion is produced through the exclusion of disruptive social elements[43] that is framed under a binary narrative of normativity. This results in a low level of visibility for groups that have failed to adhere to the dominant norms. Under Habermas's

model of the public sphere, the public is seen as "something to be moulded and tamed", and news media play an active role in providing the public with "what it needs", as well as reshaping those needs.[44] The concept of a public sphere is also crucial to democracy as it "placed a democratic emphasis upon hearing public voice", and in forming active citizenship the public should also have access to participating in the media space.[45] Therefore, "the dynamics of democracy are intimately linked to the practices of communication, and that societal communication increasingly takes place within the mass media."[46] In other words, within a democratic society the media functions as a public sphere where public interest and public representation are constructed and negotiated.[47] Further, limiting the representation of perceived disruptive social elements, such as foreigners, further restrains their participation in democracy.

Reflecting upon the media construction of terrorism discourse in New Zealand before the Christchurch terrorist attacks, and notwithstanding the limited studies available, it is widely agreed that New Zealand broadly followed the public narrative in which terrorism is associated with Islam.[48] A study by Shah Nister Kabir and Michael Bourk in 2012 pointed out that within New Zealand mainstream media, "the coverage indicates that news and editorials relating to Islam and Muslims receive significant interest and reportage", with "8% of total news originating from local events, while 92.0% of stories originated internationally."[49] It can be concluded therefore that "the media representation of New Zealand Muslims is influenced by international events" such as terrorism,[50] and the cultural diversity that constitutes Muslim groups is often ignored by most New Zealanders.[51] In effect, media representation of Muslim groups in New Zealand before the Christchurch attacks was ultimately a reflection and construction of the othering process, in which the Muslim groups were depicted as the "dangerous Other" associated with terrorism. As the "dangerous Other", Muslims and Muslim groups in New Zealand were positioned by the media as a threat to the Self/inside group and the inherently "good" values aligned with the inside group.[52]

Such a discourse of terrorism also obscures New Zealand's history of terrorism, excluding cases such as the *Rainbow Warrior* incident, Ananda Marga plot in 1975, and the bombing incident that occurred on 27 March 1984, inside the Trade's Hall building in Wellington[53]; instead, the public understanding of terrorism is simply reduced to Islamic terrorism. However, this does not mean that the dominant discourse on terrorism remains unchallenged. The discourses that emerged after the Christchurch terrorist attacks have questioned the narratives that see Muslim groups as a threat; instead, the new discourses are recognising other forms of terrorism, such as white supremacist terrorism, and that Muslims are victims of terrorism as well as one of 'us'. When examining the media coverage of the Christchurch terrorist attacks, researchers found that over the week following the attacks, out of the sample of 178 articles, 38% of them focused on the victims; the researchers also found that an empathetic approach was employed by the media when covering the victims, their families, and the New Zealand Muslim

community[54]. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern also plays a critical role in shaping the narrative after the attacks; researchers argue that Ardern "was depicted as symbolising the compassion felt by many New Zealanders."[55] What we witnessed after the Christchurch terrorist attack demonstrates how the media and public figures authorised to speak on behalf of community groups can challenge the dominant discourse, and that the media can choose to construct a different narrative and employ different frames. From the case of the Christchurch terrorist attack, it can be observed that the media, the political actors and the public all hold agency in that they could all reconstruct the dominant discourse. In the following section, this article continues to explore the media's construction of the public discourse on terrorism in New Zealand by analysing two key media texts which came out after the terrorist attacks.

Empirical Case Studies

The author of this article selected two news media texts related to the Christchurch terrorist attacks from two different New Zealand media outlets in order to explore the evolving public discourse on terrorism in New Zealand. In analysing and comparing the two texts, this article then broadly adopts a critical theory framework and follows Baker-Beall's work which sees discourse as mutually constitutive of actors and the social, in which social actors also hold agency.[56] At the same time, the analysis also borrows the concept of framing from communication studies to supplement the analysis. The two texts were published one year apart: the first published in March 2019 and the second in March 2020. Both pieces focused on the Christchurch terrorist attacks, with the first covering the Christchurch terrorist attacks itself and the second focusing on the broader Muslim community one year after the attack. The two media outlets also differed in their natures: one is privately owned whereas the other is a public service broadcaster. The first piece is a feature story entitled "The end of our innocence,"[57] published on the *Stuff* site, which is New Zealand's largest news website, operated by Stuff Limited. Previously known as Fairfax New Zealand, Stuff Ltd is one of the country's most prominent news organisations, reaching almost 3.5 million viewers per month across its print and digital products.[58] The second piece is a series of short digital films entitled "This Is Us,"[59] published by *RNZ* and produced by *RNZ* and *NZ on Air*. As the country's public-service broadcaster, RNZ attracted around 696,600 New Zealanders weekly in 2019, which increased to 760,300 in 2020.[60] In 2021, RNZ was also the third most popular news site in New Zealand[61].

The author of this article is aware of the shortcomings that come with the limitations of analysing only two media texts. However, the two selected media texts are representative in that each demonstrates the emerging news media discourse and the public discourse on terrorism. As New Zealand's largest online news provider, the *Stuff* piece represents the media and the authorised speakers' construction of the discourse on terrorism. In contrast, the *RNZ* piece demonstrates the social groups' effects in actively

constructing the public understanding of Muslim groups and terrorism. The two media texts represent New Zealand's emerging public discourse of terrorism and focusing on these texts gives us an opportunity to better understand this public discourse.

"The end of our innocence"

On 15 March 2019, *Stuff* published the feature story "The end of our innocence" on their news site. This current version of the story was edited with more information added after 15 March 2019. At the front of the story is a photograph of a mourning woman wearing a hijab, standing in front of a police vehicle with a cordon framed behind her; along the woman's side reads "the end of our innocence". The story then briefly described what had happened earlier in the day, where Tarrant was referred to as the "gunman", the attack was described as a "shocking, brutal assault" and a "mass murder", and "the kind New Zealanders had told themselves happened only in other countries". The story then turned its focus to the victims of the attack, with a long ongoing collection of stories introducing the lives that were lost in the attack. Each victim's story was accompanied by a photograph of them. The first half of the story ends with a photograph of a crying woman along with a mourning couple. The second half of the story provides a breakdown of the attack titled "What Happened" and a section titled "reaction", with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's statement, as well as other world leaders' reactions.

While "The end of our innocence" is interested in different dimensions, this article is particularly interested in how the victims of the attack are being represented here. When a major public event occurs, it is the responsibility of the news organisation and journalists to make sense of what happened, as they are often the "first responders."[62] Therefore, news organisations and journalists need to process the event and present it using frameworks that are recognisable by the audience. Journalists most often utilise "framing", in which "definitions of a situation" are "built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events - and our subjective involvement in them."[63] In other words, it is through the deployment of specific language, framing and narratives that produce resonance among a certain population, and how a story can be framed to make sense for its audiences. In "The end of our innocence", the use of the image of a woman wearing a hijab with the words "our" and "innocence" establishes a narrative that implies the victimhood of the Muslim community. Crucially, and in opposition to previous media discourse, the Muslim community is here being positioned as one of "us", who are "innocent". The word "us" here also refers to a collective New Zealander identity, emphasising the inclusion of the Muslim community under such an identity. Connecting a photograph of a woman wearing a hijab and crafted language is an example of what Jackson describes as "carefully constructed discourse - that is designed to achieve a number of key political goals."[64] In this case, the political goals are to condemn terrorism and create a sense of national unity against it. As such, it is effective in establishing a consolidated and simplified public discourse shortly after the attack.

When covering the victims' stories, the "End of our innocence" piece focuses on the victims' personal lives, quoting from their families and friends; most of the media text also sheds light on the victims' identity as immigrants. The language used in covering the victims' stories is often emotional and sentimental. When telling the story of Haji Mohemmed Daoud Nabi, who was 71 when he was shot dead, it reads:

> Nabi was a talented man, a beloved father and grandfather who had come to Christchurch from Afghanistan 40 years before his death. He ran the Afghan Association in Christchurch. He was fatally shot at the Masjid An-Nur (also known as Al Noor Mosque) as he tried to shield another person, according to his son Omar Nabi.

When writing about Mucaad Aden Ibrahim, who was three when killed, it reads:

> He was a clever boy, who could already read sections of the Quran. He loved his dad and his brothers, and enjoyed being in the Masjid. Every Friday night, he would watch his family play football at Hagley Park. He was "energetic, playful and liked to smile and laugh a lot," his brother, Abdi, said.

The language used in both instances tends to evoke emotions from its readers, focusing on the victims' personal stories; the piece also draws on the qualities that are easily recognised and resonated with, such as "talented", "clever", and "energetic". Through crafting the language and with the selective use of images, "The end of our innocence" generates a discourse on the victims, which first confirms their identity as "one of us", in which the term "us" refers to "New Zealanders". Second, through emphasising the victims' humanity, the text indirectly establishes a narrative on terrorism, where terrorism is understood as evil and shameful, in contrast to the victims being "talented", "beloved father", "clever" and "energetic". As such, this demonstrates how the media was able to play a role reconstructing the dominant discourse of terrorism which had previously constructed Muslims as the main perpetrators of terrorism and a threatening other.

However, the piece also seems to struggle with recognising the attack as a terrorist attack at first, referring to it as a "hate-filled mass murder" and to Tarrant as "a gunman" rather than a "terrorist". Such lack of acknowledgement is not an unconscious act but demonstrates the media's previous, longstanding treatment of terrorism; while the phrase "hate-filled mass murder" accurately reflects Tarrant's written vendetta that contains hate rhetoric directed at Muslims, it also diminishes the severity of the killing from a terror act that destabilised communities and the country. In this respect, it can be argued that in addition to breaking down some of the old established narratives about terrorism, the media also plays a role in perpetuating a misuse of the term "terrorism" which continues to shape public opinion. Additionally, the discourse generated from "The end of our innocence" relies on both the victims' and the audiences' identities, beliefs and values, as well as the social context; such discourse functions then as a mutual constitution of the social words and actors within.

"This Is Us"

At the beginning of March 2020, *RNZ* released a series of digital films that showcased "the diversity of Muslim New Zealanders' experiences as they reveal what they love the most."[65] The series contained six short films, each around two minutes long, introducing one Muslim New Zealander and their family each time. The people shown in the films are of different ages with a wide range of occupations, from the first generation to the fourth generation of immigrants. Each person was asked the question: "what do you love the most?" From there, each person told their stories of how they or their family settled in New Zealand and the journey of making this country home. In "This Is Us", it was pointed out that Ardern's calling of the victims "they are us", while well-meaning, is problematic, as it nevertheless implies the "otherness" of the Muslim community – something the media had also long perpetuated. In contrast, "This is us" represented a collective response from the Muslim community, providing "an opportunity for New Zealand Muslims to talk about themselves – "'us' as we see ourselves."[66] "This is us" also "provides a platform for self-representation of Muslims", as well as "an opportunity for everyone in the country to listen to voices that have thus far only been relegated to vox pops after the tragedy of 15th March 2019". It is also the series' goal to "paint an intimate picture of how we can fit into this place, this country and the larger human fraternity".

Similar to "The end of our innocence", "This is us" also focuses on the humanity of the Muslim community, drawing from their universal experiences in constructing a public discourse about the Muslim community. What is interesting about "This is us" is that it is aware of, and has acknowledged, the more authorised discourse produced by Ardern, in which the phrase "they are us" separates the Muslim community from a New Zealand identity. At the same time, the "they are us" discourse implies that the New Zealand Muslim community's identity as "us" is only confirmed after an attack against "them". "They are us" is a significant discourse coming from an authorised speaker, having a direct impact on shaping the public discourse. The impacts of this official discourse can be readily observed. The media soon adopted the term, with the *New Zealand Herald*, among other media outlets, publishing a memorial piece entitled "They are Us"[67] which mourned the victims through presenting their photos and short biographies. *RNZ*'s "This is us", in other words, somewhat challenges the offcial public discourse. That is, in dismissing the binary identity of "them" versus "us", the series challenged the accepted knowledge of Muslims as Other, and Islam as associated with terrorism. And by sharing the participants' personal stories, "this is us" builds a public discourse that functions to restore the Muslim community's humanity.

Further, unlike *Stuff*'s "The end of our innocence", "This is us" allows the participants to tell their stories from their perspectives; therefore, the discourse produced is one in which the social actors have more agency, as it is a direct response to both the Christchurch terrorist attack, which challenged the accepted knowledge of terrorism, and the authorised speakers of terrorism. Through negotiating a public discourse on both the

Muslim community and the notion of terrorism, the "This Is Us" discourse undermined the legitimacy of the official public discourse and the accepted knowledge of terrorism, as well as gaining the Muslim community more agency, too.

In 2021, Hollywood planned to make a film with the name "They Are Us" based on the Christchurch terrorist attack; the film was later put on hold after receiving criticism and a "73,000-person strong (and growing) petition."[68] While the cancellation of the films is no doubt the result of multiple factors, it can be argued that it was in part the public's rejection of the "they are us" narrative and what meaning is attached to such a discourse. Many were appalled by the exploration of a tragedy and the harm it would do to the victims' families; at the same time, following the "they are us" narrative, the film may portray Ardern's role as a "white saviour", which would further simplify people's understanding of terrorism. Therefore, in this sense, discourse is "mutually constitutive of actors and the social world"; at the same time, "discourse can only ever fix meaning on a temporary basis; discourses exist in constant flux and are always in the process of transformation."[69] Yet, it is built on the premises that New Zealand's media system is best to be understood as a liberal one, which means its media landscape is often commercialised, with limited state intervention.[70] At the same time, New Zealand has a robust democratic system, socially celebrates its indigenous and colonial cultures and believes in the social inclusion of all people. Therefore, discourses under such environments have the room and ability to be challenged, negotiated and developed.

However, it is interesting that both "The end of our innocence" and "This is us" pieces have focused mainly on the Muslim community, who were targets of terrorist acts, instead of discussing the terrorist acts themselves. This is not to say that discourses from the Muslim community should be undermined or that we should pay more attention to the perpetrator of the terrorist acts. Rather, it is a reflection of mobilising the accepted knowledge of terrorism in building a public discourse on terrorism in a New Zealand context. And in the case of the Christchurch terrorist attack, even when the Muslim community are the victim of a terrorist act, it still requires them to respond and restore their humanity.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the media's contribution to the public discourse on terrorism in a New Zealand context. Employing a critical theory and discourse analysis framework, it examined two media texts related to the Christchurch terrorist attack: "The end of our innocence" by *Stuff* and "This is us" by *RNZ*. This article does not intend to provide an in-depth analysis of the media landscape concerning the news coverage of the attacks - on that subject, scholars, such as Gavin Ellis and Denis Muller, have conducted substantial research. Rather, by focusing on two representative media texts, this article hopes to enable future discussions on New Zealand's emerging public discourse on terrorism and the construction of a more comprehensive and meaningful public understanding

of terrorism. It is also worth pointing out that when examining *Stuff*'s 'They are us' media text, it is evident that private companies can reflect the narratives approved by authorised speakers. Yet this is not to undermine the news media's agency. *RNZ*, as a public service broadcaster, allowed the participation of the public in constructing their narrative, countering the 'they are us' discourse to a certain degree. It is then vital to notice that while the media does hold agency in shaping public discourse, allowing the public's voice to be relayed through the news media to construct an alternative public discourse is perhaps more important for news media's objectivity.

The conclusions of the article are that, notwithstanding the New Zealand media's role in constructing a distorted terrorist knowledge prior to the Christchurch terrorist attacks and its former reliance on overseas perspectives and narratives about Muslims, it can play a positive role in constructing alternative public narratives about terrorism. However, this requires that authorised speakers, such as political leaders, use their media platform to promote more accurate and balanced narratives. It also requires that marginalised social groups, such as Muslims, are allowed to speak for themselves and construct their own identities. In short, while the media plays an important role in co-constituting public knowledge and national identity, it has the potential to also play a positive role that can assist in allowing the public to play a role in countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Acknowledgements

1   Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, "Report: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019", Chapter Two, Part 10, 21 December 2020, https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz.

2   Pete Lentini, "Understanding and combating terrorism: Definitions, origins and strategies," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43:1 (2008), pp. 133-140; Caleb Carr, "Terrorism": Why the Definition Must be Broad," *World Policy Journal*, 24:1 (2007), pp. 47-50; Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?" *Police Practice & Research* 3:4 (2002), pp. 287-304; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Terrorism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2001); and Marius H. Livingston, Lee Bruce Kress & Marie G Wanek, eds. *International Terrorism in the Contemporary World* (Greenwood Press, 1978).

3   Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahuzur & Sivan Hirsch-hoefler, "The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16:4 (2010), p. 778, DOI: 10.1080/095465590899768.

4   Upendra D. Acharya, "War on Terror or Terror Wars: The Problem in defining Terrorism," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 37:4 (Fall 2009), pp. 653-680.

5   Rumyana Grozdanova, "'Terrorism' - too elusive a term for an international legal definition?" *Netherlands International Law Review* 61:3 (2014), pp. 305-334.

6   Christopher Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism: Discourse, Policies, Identity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 28.

7   Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition* 42:3 (2007), pp.394-426., DOI: 10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00229.x.

8   Richard Jackson, "Knowledge, power and politics in the study of political terrorism" in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, eds. Richard Jackson, Marie Smyth & Jeroen Gunning. (New York: Routledge 2009), p. 74.

9   Jackson, "Knowledge, power and politics," p.75.

10   Connor Huff, Joshua D. Kertzer, "How the Public Defines Terrorism," *American journal of political science*, 62:1 (2018), pp.55-71, DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12329; Ariane Bogain, "Understanding public constructions of counter-terrorism: an analysis of online comments during the state of emergency in France (2015-2017)," *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 13:4 (2020), pp. 591-615, DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2020.1810976; Pippa Norris, Montague Kern & Marion Just, eds. *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Paul K. Davis, ed. *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2012); NATO Advanced Research Workshop on Together against Terrorism, *Building Terrorism Resistant Communities Corporate* (Amsterdam; Washington: IOS Press, 2009); Joseph S Tuman, *Communicating Terror: the Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism* (Los Angeles / London: Sage, 2003); Alex Braithwaite, "The Logic of Public Fear in Terrorism and Counter-terrorism." *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 28:2 (2013), pp. 95–101, DOI: 10.1007/s11896-013-9126-x; Una Radovanović Nenadić & Smilja Teodorović, "Public Understanding, Perceptions, and Information Sources about Bioterrorism: Pilot Study from the Republic of Serbia," *Health Security* 18:1 (2020), pp. 29-35. DOI: 10.1089/hs.2019.0046.

11   Tuman, *Communicating Terror.*
12   Michael C. Frank, *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film* (New York, Routledge, 2017).

13   Stephen Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News: Why Public Service Media Matter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Leysan Khakimova Storie, Stephanie L. Madden & Brooke Fisher Liu, eds. "The death of bin Laden: How Russian and U.S. media frame counterterrorism," *Public Relations Review* 40:3 (2014-09), pp. 429-439; Zachary S. Mitnik, Joshua D. Freilich & Steven M. Chermak, eds. "Post-9/11 Coverage of Terrorism in the New York Times," *Justice Quarterly* 37:1 (2018), pp. 161-185, DOI:10.1080/07418825.2018.1488985

14   Jeroen Gunning, "The case for critical terrorism studies?" *Government & Opposition* 42:3 (2007), pp. 363–393, DOI: 10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00228.x.

15   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 49.

16   See Richard Jackson, Christopher Baker-Beall, Roxanne Lynn Doty.

17   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 29.

18   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 29.

19   Richard Jackson, "The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies," *European Political Science* 6:3 (2007), p. 244

20   Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen & Heidi E. Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 352.

21   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 41.

22   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 54.

23   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism,* p. 54.

24   John Battersby, "Policing terrorism in a void," *New Zealand International Review* 41:4 (2016), pp. 2-5.

25   Battersby, "Policing terrorism in a void," p. 2.

26   John Battersby, "The Ghost of New Zealand's Terrorism Past and Present," *National Security Journal* 1:1 (2019), pp. 35–47. *DOI:10.36878/nsj201901.35*

27   Alex Conte, *Counter-terrorism and Human Rights in New Zealand* (Wellington: New Zealand Law Foundation, 2007).

28   John Battersby & Rhys Ball, "Christchurch in the context of New Zealand terrorism and right-wing extremism," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14:3 (2019), pp. 191-207, DOI: 10.1080/18335330.2019.1662077; Haneen Shafeeq Ghabra, "Don't say his name: The terror attacks in New Zealand and the ethics of White allyship," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 15:1 (2022), pp. 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/17513057.2020.1849773.

29   Hadeel Smadi, Mohammed Obediate & Ahmad S Haider, "Paratextual (re)framing of media coverage of Christchurch Mosque Shootings: A translation-oriented study," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8:1 (2022), DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2022.2029251.

30   Gavin Ellis & Denis Muller, "The proximity filter: the effect of distance on media coverage of the Christchurch mosque attacks," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 15:2 (2020), pp. 332-348, DOI: 10.1080/1177083X.2019.1705358.

31   Michael King, *Death of the Rainbow Warrior* (Auckland: Penguin, 1986).

32   Janet Wilson, "The sinking of the rainbow warrior: Responses to an international act of terrorism," *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1:1 (2017), pp. 133-152.

33   Roger S. Clark, "State Terrorism: Some Lessons from the Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior," *Rutgers Law Journal* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1989), pp.403.

34   Amy L. Catalinac, "Why New Zealand Took Itself out of ANZUZ: Observing "Opposition for Autonomy" in Asymmetric Alliances," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 (2010), pp. 317-338.

35   "Kōrero: Terrorism and counter-terrorism, Whārangi 2. Government responses to terrorism", 1 Sep 2021, Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Available at https://teara.govt.nz/mi/terrorism-and-counter-terrorism/page-2.

36   Jarrod Gilbert & Ben Elley, "Shaved heads and sonnenrads: comparing white supremacist skinheads and the alt-right in New Zealand," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 14:3 (2020), pp. 191-207, DOI: 10.1080/18335330.2019.1662077.

37   Battersby & Ball, "Christchurch," p.198.

38   George Michael, *Confronting Right Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the USA* (New York: Routledge 2003); Max Taylor, Donald Holbrook & P. M Currie, eds. *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism,* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Travis Morris, *Dark Ideas: How Neo-Nazi and Violent Jihadi Ideologues Shaped Modern Terrorism* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017); Kris Millett & Amy Swiffer, "Right-Wing Extremism as Terrorism and the Law's Relation to Violence," *Surveillance & Society* 19:3 (2021), pp. 364-368, DOI: 10.24908/ss.v19i3.15004.

39   Simon Varaine, "Revisiting the Economics and Terrorism Nexus: Collective Depriva-tion, Ideology and Domestic Radicalization in the US (1948–2016)," *Journal of Quantita-tive Criminology* 36:3 (2019), pp. 667-699, DOI: 10.1007/s10940-019-09422-z.

40   Viktoria Gallova, Marek Palasinski, Neil Shortland, Michael Humann & Lorraine Bowman Griev, "Anxiety about digital security and terrorism, and support for counter-ter-ror measures," *Safer Communities* 17:3 (2018), pp. 156-166.

41   Annie Kelly, "The alt-right: reactionary rehabilitation for white masculinity," *Sound-ings* 66 (2017), pp. 68-78; Milan Obaidi, Jonas R. Kunst, Nour Kteily, Lotte Thomsen & James Sidanius, "Living under threat: Mutual threat perception drives anti-Muslim and anti-Western hostility in the age of terrorism," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48:5 (2018), pp. 567-584, DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2362.

42   "Right Wing Extremism," 29 May 2019, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabi-net 2020/21-0430, OIA release on 6 May 2021.

43   Stephen Coleman & Karen Ross, *The Media and the Public* (Malden, MA: Wi-ley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 29-30.

44   Coleman & Ross, *The Media and the Public,* p. 29.

45   Coleman & Ross, *The Media and the Public,* p. 29.

46   Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere Citizenship, Democracy, and the Media* (London: SAGE, 1995), p. 2.

47   Michael Higgins, *Media and Their Publics*, (Maidenhead, McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), pp.18-31.

48   Ruqayya Sulaiman-Hill, "Kiwis on the Straight Path: Muslim Conversion in NZ," *Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal* 2:2 (2007); Erich Kolig & William Shepard, *New Zea-land's Muslims and Multiculturalism* (Leiden; Boston Brill 2010); Shah Nister Kabir & Michael Bourk, "Representing Islam and Muslims in New Zealand Newspapers," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32:3 (2012), pp. 324-338.

49   Nister & Bourk, "Representing Islam," p. 327

50   Nister & Bourk, "Representing Islam," p. 325.

51   Kolig & Shepard, *New Zealand's Muslims and Multiculturalism.*

52   Rune Ottosen, "Enemy Images and the Journalistic Process," *Journal of Peace Re-search,* 32:1 (1995), pp. 97-112.

53   Battersby, "The Ghost of New Zealand's Terrorism Past and Present."

54   Gavin Ellis & Denis Muller, "The proximity filter: the effect of distance on media coverage of the Christchurch mosque attacks," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 15:2 (2020), pp. 332-348., DOI: 10.1080/1177083X.2019.1705358.

55   Ellis & Muller, "The proximity filter," p.338,

56   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism.*

57   "The end of our innocence", 15 March 2019, *Stuff*, https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/03/end-of-our-innocence/

58   "Stuff maintains its dominance of New Zealand news market", 16 August 2022, *Stuff*. Available at: https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/300671825/stuff-maintains-its-dominance-of-new-zealand-news-market

59   "This is Us", 1 March 2020, *RNZ*, https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/this-is-us.

60   "Annual Report 2019-2020 – RNZ," 15 December 2020, *RNZ*. Available at: https://www.rnz.co.nz/assets/cms_uploads/000/000/365/RNZ_Annual_Report_2020_FA_WEB_1.pdf

61   "RNZ connects with more New Zealanders with strong online growth", RNZ, Avail-able at https://www.rnz.co.nz/media/162

62   Verica Rupar, "Journalists as first responders," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of So-cial Sciences Online* 15:2 (2020), pp. 349-359, DOI: 10.1080/1177083X.2020.1741405.

63   Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Bos-ton: Northeastern University Press 1986).

64   Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-ter-rorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

65   *Stuff,* "This is Us".
66   *Stuff,* "This is Us".
67   "They are Us," *New Zealand Herald*, Available at https://insights.nzherald.co.nz/christ-church-memorial/
68   "Even By Hollywood Standards, 'They Are Us' Is A Hard Sell", MTV Australia, Available at https://www.mtv.com.au/news/w6ukr9/they-are-us-movie-christchurch-at-tacks-muslims-mosque-jacinda-ardern-rose-byrne.
69   Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight Against Terrorism*, p. 42.
70   Gavin Ellis, "Who owns the Media?" in *New Zealand Government & Politics*, ed. Raymond Miller (South Melbourne & Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 399-412.