Reassessing the Bunbury Bombing:
Juxtaposition of Political and Media Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines an Australian newspaper's coverage of the bombing of an export port terminal in Bunbury, Western Australia on 19 July, 1976. We wanted to see how *The West Australian* newspaper framed the story, its precursor events, and the events that followed. We were particularly interested in whether the bombing was reported as an act of *terrorism* because the then Premier of Western Australia, Sir Charles Court, immediately decried it as "a gross act of terrorism." We find the newspaper resisted the lure to apply this label, and couched the story in terms of *serious criminality*. However, it did so before the 1978 Hilton Hotel bombing; an event the news media heralded as the "arrival" of terrorism in Australia. Also, this occurred before what could be argued the sensationalist and politicised reporting of terror-related events became normalised.

Keywords: Bunbury bombing, news media framing, environmental protest, terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Despite terrorism being "as old as history," academic interest in it as a field of study only gained serious momentum in the 1970s (Duyvesteyn, 2004: 440). It is now an expansive and contested multi-disciplinary scholarship. As a term, terrorism remains inherently difficult to define and its meaning is constructed in different academic, legal, political and colloquial contexts (Easson & Schmid, 2011: 99–157; Schmid, 2011; Tiefenbrun, 2002). While it is an expansive and contested scholarship, at the core of the contemporary concept of terrorism is that it is ideologically or politically-motivated criminality and violence (Schmid, 2011).

Internationally, there is a large body of research about how the news media frames terror-related events that has expanded over time, driven by factors including technological shifts (such as widespread television broadcasting) and specific acts of terror (such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks) (Paletz & Schmid, 1992; Pippa, Montague, & Marion, 2003; Weimann & Winn, 1994). Moreover, there is a substantial body of research about how bombings and bomb plots have been

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reported by the news media since the events in the United States of America on September 11, 2001 (Kern, Just, & Norris, 2003; Leurs, 2007; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008; Ryan, 2004; Schaefer, 2003; Willcox, 2001). Researchers have focused on how bombing and terror plots within Australia have been reported by the news media since 9/11 (Dreher, 2007; Ewart, Pearson, & Lessing, 2013). However, scant attention has been paid to the news media framing of politically-motivated bombings that occurred in Australia before 9/11. Our examination of one of these bombings shows not only a juxtaposition of political narratives and news frames, but a sharp contrast to what has become sensational and politicised reporting that seems to be the "new normal" (Dreher, 2007).

This paper explores the news media framing of a now largely forgotten 1976 kidnapping and bombing of port infrastructure in the Western Australian (WA) town of Bunbury, and the policy and policing contexts in which it occurred. The *Bunbury bombing*, as it became known, was ideologically and politically motivated. It was at the time, and remains, "unprecedented in Australia" (O'Donnell, 2015: 75). The Bunbury bombing was a serious and genuine attempt by two men to shut-down the fledgling, yet increasingly contentious, woodchip export industry in Western Australia (Chapman, 2008: 121–126).

We identify that while the Bunbury bombing was immediately decried as a "gross act of terrorism" by the Premier of the day (Court, cited in *The West Australian*, 1976a), it was consistently reported as an act of criminality or sabotage by *The West Australian*. It occurred before the bombing outside the Hilton Hotel in Sydney in February 1978 that was heralded by the Australian news media as the "'arrival' of terrorism in Australia" (Hocking, 2004: 101) and decades before a terrorist act was defined in the Criminal Code (Lynch, McGarrity, & Williams, 2015: 15).

The question of how the Bunbury bombing was framed by the news media and the context in which this occurred is an important one because researchers have shown that in contemporary politico-policy environments, there is now a close relationship between how news media cover events that are framed as acts of terrorism and policy responses in relation to those events (Ewart et al., 2013).

In the early hours of 19 July 1976, motivated by environmental and anti-capitalist concerns and intent on crippling port infrastructure used in the export of wood chips, Mr Michael David Haabjoern and Mr John Robert Chester drove to Bunbury in a stolen car fitted with false number plates (Western Australia Police, 2006: 17). After cutting through fencing, they entered the site of the WA Woodchip and Pulp Company's export port terminal (Western Australia Police, 2006: 17). Not stationed on site full time, Mr Trevor Morritt, the sole night watchman, was making his rounds of the site when he encountered the men, initially mistaking them for contractors who would have been there legitimately (T Morritt, personal communication, 24 February, 2015). Morritt was bound and held at gunpoint by Chester in an on-site office for approximately 25 minutes, while Haabjoern planted three home-made bombs fitted with home-made timing devices that were set to explode concurrently at 5:30am (Bonyhady, 1993; Guhl, 1976; Western Australia Police, 2006: 17). While held at gunpoint, Morritt feared for his life and worried for the safety of his family (T Morritt, personal communication, 24 February 2015). The bombs themselves had been made from part of a cache of 363 kilograms of gelignite and associated detonating equipment the men had earlier stolen from an explosives magazine in the nearby city of Perth (Rinaldi, 1977; *The West Australian*, 1976b).

After ascertaining from Morritt that the regular train that had delivered wood chips had already passed through the site, Haabjoern and Chester, when existing the site after the bombs were planted, placed signs warning of the existence of explosive devices (*R v Michael David Haabjoern and John Robert Chester*, 1976: 16). The three men exited the site in two cars: Chester drove Morritt's car (with him still bound in it), and Haabjoern drove the car the men had arrived in (T Morritt, personal communication, February 24, 2015). In relation to Chester driving his car, Morritt (personal communication, February 24, 2015) explained that this was because he had raised concern about its possible destruction as it was uninsured and belonged to his wife.

Of the three bombs planted, only one exploded. This was set at the base of the stacker tower (Rinaldi, 1977; *The West Australian*, 1976a). As a result of fused wires, the remaining two bombs set at the base of the main loading gantry (the main target that would have crippled the infrastructure) failed to detonate and were later defused by the Western Australia Police (Skehan, n.d.; Western Australia Police, 2006: 17–18). The magnitude of the single bomb that did explode sent

metal flying into a nearby housing estate and broke windows 500 metres away (*The West Australian*, 1976a). The blast was heard at least 15 to 20 kilometres away (T Morritt, personal communication, 24 February 2015). While damage was estimated at $300,000, because the main loading gantry was not affected, the explosion had little overall impact on wood chipping operations and the export of wood chips continued (Western Australia Police, 2006: 17–18).

The Bunbury bombing remains unprecedented in Australia (Bonyhady, 1993; Chapman, 2008; O'Donnell, 2015: 75). It occurred in the context of the wood chipping of native forests and as the negative impacts on the environment (while predicted) were beginning to be observed (Chapman, 2011). The clearing of old growth forest to export wood chips was a divisive political and social issue (Chapman, 2011: 85–87). Motivated by anti-capitalist and environmental concerns, Haabjoern and Chester sought, by bombing the export port terminal, to delay the export of wood chips for up to two years, which they viewed as long enough to generate a groundswell of opposition to wood chipping and to force a resultant change in the law to prevent it (*R v Michael David Haabjoern and John Robert Chester*, 1976: 22). Both men acted in isolation from the broader (and already well established) environmental movement that quickly, strongly and consistently denounced the bombing as both illegal and violent (Bonyhady, 1993: 40–41; Chapman, 2008; Guhl, 1976; *The West Australian*, 1976a). Haabjoern and Chester were arrested by the WA Police soon after the bombing (Western Australia Police, 2006: 17–18) and in November 1976 both pleaded guilty in the Western Australia Supreme Court to four offences:

(1) breaking, entering and stealing;

(2) causing an explosion likely to cause serious injury to property;

(3) placing an explosive substance in a place likely to cause serious injury to property; and

(4) unlawfully detaining a person against his will (Rinaldi, 1977; Supreme Court Criminal Indictment Register, 1977).

The offences were serious, carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment with hard labour (Bonyhady, 1993: 41). On 22 December 1976, Haabjoern and Chester were both sentenced to serve concurrent prison sentences of three years, seven years, five years and twelve months for the respective charges with a minimum

term of ten months to be served before becoming eligible for parole (Supreme Court Criminal Indictment Register, 1977).

Following a Crown appeal, the minimum non-parole period was increased to three and a half years (Rinaldi, 1977; Supreme Court Criminal Indictment Register, 1977). In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the then Premier of WA, Sir Charles Court decried it as "a gross act of terrorism" (Court, cited in The West Australian, 1976a). In a sharp distinction, *The West Australian* consistently characterised the Bunbury bombing as an act of criminality (albeit very serious criminality) and Haabjoern and Chester as criminals, bombers and saboteurs.

METHODOLOGY

The concept of framing has been the subject of much scholarship in the fields of media studies and social movement studies (Benford & Snow, 2000; de Vreese, 2005). Entman (1993: 52) describes framing, at its core, as involving two interrelated components; selection and salience. As Benford and Snow (2000: 611) explain, framing acts to "render events or occurrences meaningful." Frames then "function to organise experience and guide action" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 611). Entman (1993: 52) provides one of the most cited definitions of framing:

> 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.

As as sub-set of the framing scholarship, news media framing has been conceptualised both broadly and narrowly (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; de Vreese, 2005; Miller & Riechert, 2001). It too continues to develop theoretically (Miller & Riechert, 2001). Lawrence (2010) points out a key question in news framing analysis is the extent to which the preferred narratives of political actors gain traction. In setting out a typology of news frames de Vreese (2005: 60) explains that they can be *issue-specific* (relevant to a particular topic), as well as *generic* (with a broader application including across time and cultures). de Vreese (2005: 60) calls for researchers to specify the nature of the frames being studied, and to consider "the conditions under which frames emerge." In this analysis, we focus on the issue-specific news framing of the Bunbury bombing by *The West Australian* newspaper, political narratives and the policy and policing contexts in which the frames emerged. We selected *The West Australian* for analysis because

31

it is a key daily newspaper in the state of WA and the newspaper reports were able to be accessed through the newspaper's archives.

Using an inductive qualitative approach, we first applied framing analysis to sixteen news articles supplied by *The West Australian's* archives to one of the authors about the Bunbury bombing, its precursor event and the events that followed it. As it enables analysis of different phases of a news story, we applied Miller and Riechert's (2001) framing cycle. To situate the analysis in its historical context as part of a broader study, one of the authors also conducted three semi-structured, conversational style interviews with people with direct knowledge of either the bombing or the policing and policy context in which it occurred. This interview technique is suitable for exploring and understanding alternative perspectives on events (Burgess-Limerick, 1998).

NEWS FRAMING DATA

All sixteen news articles were published by *The West Australian* newspaper between 14 April 1976 and 14 March 1978. We began our analysis by identifying key news frames in each headline and lead paragraph and mapped them to Miller and Riechert's (2001) schema. Each story was read to determine the most commonly occurring news frames and a list of the key news frames was developed. All sixteen articles cover events that led up to the bombing, the search for the bombers, the arrest and trial of the suspects, their subsequent convictions and the escape from custody by one of the convicted bombers.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The West Australian newspaper used very traditional news frames in reporting the events associated with the Bunbury bombing. The story broke on 14 April 1976 with details about the theft of the gelignite later used in the bombing. A little over three months later, the news about the bombing of the wood chip terminal at Bunbury led *The West Australian's* news coverage. From then until 28 July 1976 the newspaper covered various aspects of the search for the bombers and their eventual capture by police. Coverage then turned to the court case, the jailing of the two convicted bombers and the Crown appeal against the length of their sentences (perceived to be inadequate) through late 1976 and into the first quarter of 1978. Chester's escape from custody then became the focus of the newspaper's coverage.

Table 1—Newspaper articles, date of publication, headlines, key news frame headline, key news frame lead paragraph.

Date	Page	Headline	Key news frame headline	Key news frame lead paragraph	Phase of Miller and Riechert's framing cycle
14 April 1976	1	Thieves get big gelignite haul	Crime - theft	Crime - theft	Emergence
20 July 1976	1 carry over to page 3	Sabotage bomb fails to cripple chip base (p1 headline) Woodchip bomb blast (p3 headline)	Crime - failure	Crime – damage and failure	Emergence
21 July 1976	3	Theft theory on Bomb	Crime - theft	Crime investigation	Definition - different views on event
22 July 1976	8	Guard: Bombers didn't hurt me	Human interest	Human interest	Definition – guard's views of the event
23 July 1976	4	Leitch: Bombs no surprise	Expected crime	Trend to violence; international political situation replicated in WA	Definition/ Conflict
24 July 1976	8	Car clue in Bunbury blast	Crime - investigation	Crime investigation	Definition
29 July 1976	1	Blast probe continues	Crime - investigation	Crime investigation	Definition

Date	Page	Headline	Key news frame headline	Key news frame lead paragraph	Phase of Miller and Riechert's framing cycle
30 July 1976	3	No bail on bomb counts	Crime – court story	Court proceedings	Definition – magistrate's view of event
24 November 1976	4	Two woodchip bombers guilty, seek mercy	Crime – court story	Court proceedings	Resonance - resonates with expectations and values of the public
23 December 1976	1 cont. page 8	Two bombers gaoled, Govt calls for report (P1 headline) 2 bombers gaoled (p8 headline)	Crime – Court story	Court sentence	Resonance - resonates with processes of court
15 February 1977	3 cont. on page 5	Woodchip sentences 'inadequate' (p 3 headline) Outrageous, says crown (p 5 headline)	Court response to court sentences	Court response to court sentences	Resonance - crown response resonates with expectations and values of the public
19 March 1977	3	Two woodchip bombers will serve 3 and a half years	Crime – court new sentence		Equilibrium or Resolution – policy response phase i.e. increased sentences

34

Date	Page	Headline	Key news frame headline	Key news frame lead paragraph	Phase of Miller and Riechert's framing cycle
14 March 1978	1 with pictures page 5	Hunt for bomber in forest (p 1 headline)	Police search for bomber	Escape of convicted bomber	Emergence – a new event in the story
		Cars searched (p 5 headline over photos)			
15 March 1978	3	Forest fugitive still evades capture	Police search for bomber	Bomber evades capture	Emergence
16 March 1978	10	Search for Chester goes on	Police search for bomber	Police search for escapee	Emergence

Most the newspaper stories were framed as news reports about a crime, with follow-up stories about court appearances being framed in the manner of a typical court report. Haabjoern and Chester were routinely referred to by the newspaper as "bombers" or "saboteurs." For example, on one occasion *The West Australian* reported as follows: "The armed bombers who blew up part of the woodchips berth at Bunbury's inner harbour on Monday told a security guard: 'We don't want to hurt any little blokes'" (22 July, 1976: 8).

After sentencing and the appeal, the newspaper continued to refer to the men as the "Bunbury bombers." "The two Bunbury woodchip bombers who looked forward to probable release on parole next October now face imprisonment till 1980" (sic) (19 March, 1977: 3). Quite some time after the bombing and subsequent court trials, the newspaper again avoided the possible terrorism description, framing the story as a police search for a *bomber*.

There were three attempts by public figures to influence the trajectory of the news coverage and subsequent framing of the story, with no success. These were all contained in a single story published by *The Western Australian* on 20 July, 1976. In that report, the then WA Premier, Sir Charles Court, attempted to reframe

the story by referring to the actions of Haabjoern and Chester as terrorism. The newspaper reported:

> The Premier, Sir Charles Court, said yesterday he was appalled that anyone would resort to such an act of violence. Someone could have been killed or seriously injured. 'We will not tolerate this kind of intimidation,' he said. 'It is a gross act of terrorism and will be treated as such. I do not see this as a protest. Those responsible will be treated like anyone else who carried out an act of violence' (20 July, 1976: 3).

Sir Charles Court's use of the word *terrorism* failed to gain purchase in *The West Australian* newspaper. A similar attempt to reframe the story was made by the manager of the company that owned the woodchip loading facility, who described the actions of those responsible for the bombing as "extremists" and their actions a form of "madness." *The West Australian* attributed the following comments by the aforementioned source:

> The manager of the Forest Products of Association of WA, Mr GW, Kelly, said that 'pseudo conservationists' at the head of the anti-woodchip campaign could not escape responsibility for the outrage. 'This exhibition of madness occurred after extremists among these people had inflamed emotions with a campaign of bitterness and hatred, divorced almost entirely from the truth,' he said. 'Their distortions have been rejected by all responsible authorities in Australia. Yet they have been spread with such venom as to poison minds and provide a savage inspiration to ideological extremists' (20 July, 1976: 3).

One other source quoted by *The West Australian* attempted to frame the actions of Haabjoern and Chester in a similar way. This was the then Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Western Australia, Mr HD Evans. His electorate was described as covering a significant part of the wood chipping area. The newspaper cited him as "deploring the bombing" and he went on to say "the ALP was appalled by such violence. The incident was un-Australian and must have been the work of unbalanced minds" (20 July, 1976: 3).

Ewart (2012: 92) in an article that explored the news frames used by four Australian news media organisations suggests that "for news frames to shift there have to be extenuating circumstances." Despite the attempts of these sources to frame the story within the context of terrorism or madness, *The West Australian* did not pursue these particular frames. This persisted through the four phases of the news framing cycle. Further, the fact that the bombing was clearly a

politically-motivated crime didn't gain wider appeal with *The West Australian* newspaper. The newspaper framed the Bunbury bombers as *criminals* and the bombing as a *crime*.

de Vreese (2005) identified the importance of analysing news frames in the context in which they emerge. By the time of the Bunbury bombing, Australia had already experienced at least 196 acts of terroristic violence (Commonwealth of Australia, 1979a: 474). In his examination of home-grown terrorism in Australia during the 1970s, Brawley (2016: 295) identified such acts were directed at "mostly government, military, judicial, diplomatic and commercial targets" predominantly by "radial left-wing actors."

Despite Australia's experiences of terrorism, it was the bombing outside the Hilton Hotel in Sydney in February 1978 (that killed three and injured many others) as Commonwealth heads of regional governments were convening to meet, that was heralded by the Australian news media as the "'arrival' of terrorism in Australia" (Hocking, 2004: 101). The Hilton Hotel bombing is still considered to be one of Australia's most serious unsolved crimes (Head, 2009: 49).

The policy and policing responses to the Hilton Hotel bombing have been well documented (Commonwealth of Australia, 1978, 1979a; Head, 2008, 2009; Hocking, 1993, 2004). It was a turning point for Australia's emerging counter-terrorism policy, federal policing arrangements and military call-out arrangements (Commonwealth of Australia, 1978, 1979b; O' Donnell & Bronitt, 2014). It was also a turning point for the Australian news media that intensively covered the bombing, the unprecedented military call-out that followed and its long and complex policing and legal aftermath (Head, 2009, p. 50; Hocking, 2004, p. 101). As Hocking (2004: 101) explained, "the Australian security context was reversed overnight" and the ways the Australian news media reported acts of politically-motivated violence shifted with it. Hocking (2004: 101) asserted that, before this the Australian news media had shown a distinct "lack of interest" in the terroristic plots and events that had taken place in Australia.

The further acceleration of counterterrorism policy development that occurred post-9/11 has also been documented by researchers (Bronitt, 2008; Lynch et al., 2015; Williams, 2011). Among other substantial responses Australia enacted "its first national anti-terrorism laws" (Lynch et al., 2015: 15). In context, terrorism itself is a powerful and pejorative label that continues to elude both academic consensus and international legal definitions (Easson & Schmid, 2011;

Saul, 2012). In 2002 a terrorist act was defined in Australia's the *Criminal Code* for the first time (Lynch et al., 2015, p. 15). It is defined at s100.1 in the following terms:

> *terrorist act* means an action or threat of action where:
>
> (a) the action falls within subsection (2) and does not fall within subsection (3); and
>
> (b) the action is done or the threat is made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause; and
>
> (c) the action is done or the threat is made with the intention of:
>
> > (i) coercing, or influencing by intimidation, the government of the Commonwealth or a State, Territory or foreign country, or of part of a State, Territory or foreign country; or
> >
> > (ii) intimidating the public or a section of the public.

Importantly, subsection 3 of s100.1 of the *Criminal Code* excludes: advocacy, protest, dissent and industrial action not intended to cause serious physical harm or endanger the lives of others.

Whether Sir Charles considered he was being technically correct in characterising the Bunbury bombing as a gross act of terrorism or thought he was being politically astute in pushing a pro-development agenda ahead of what was to be a hard-fought election is beside the point. Sir Charles levelled the label *terrorism* at an act of violent protest before terrorism was viewed by Australia political, policing and policy elites any differently than so-called ordinary criminality (O'Donnell, 2015: 116; Williams, 2011: 1,146).

It is interesting to speculate if the Bunbury bombers would today be charged with engaging in a terrorist act and to consider how the news media may report the story. What is clear is that since their enactment, Australia's contemporary suite of anti-terror laws "have been rigorously enforced" (Lynch et al., 2015: 92). Of the forty-six people charged with terrorism-related offences in Australia since 2002, twenty-six have been convicted (Lynch et al., 2015: 92). However, to date, no one has been charged with the core offence of engaging in a terrorist act, and in this regard the law remains untested (Lynch et al., 2015: 93).

On the one hand, the Bunbury bombing was ideologically driven and was a genuine attempt to directly influence the government of the day. The nightwatchman, Morritt was bound, gagged, held at gunpoint, kidnapped and feared for his life and the safety of his family. The single bomb that did explode caused serious property damage. While precautions were taken by the Bunbury bombers to limit possible injury to people, the unexploded bombs risked serious injury to first responders.

Conversely, the Bunbury bombing could arguably be considered a form of protest and dissent (albeit violent) that was never intended to endanger lives. At the time, the highly contentious practice of directly linking violent as well as non-violent environmentally-motivated protest to terrorism had also yet to emerge (Arnold, 1983, 2007). While the term *eco-terrorism* is now part of the US political and policy lexicon, it has not gained acceptance in contemporary Australia (Jarboe, 2002; O'Donnell, 2015: 104–107). It does, nevertheless, offer a potentially different frame for considering such events not available at the time.

What is far more certain is that since 9/11, news media coverage of terrorism, terrorism plots, and suspected terrorism has been sensationalist and highly politicised (Dreher, 2007; Ewart, 2009; McNamara, 2009). Sensationalist reporting has in many instances become the standard way in which bombings and terror plots are approached and reported. In effect this has established expectations amongst news media organisations and journalists about the way these stories will unfold. That means it can be very difficult for journalists to shift their approaches to reporting when an event or series of events do not follow expectations.

The daily news cycle has expressively increased pressure for many news organisations to be the first to break a news story and that in turn means that mistakes can be and have been made. The arrest in July 2007 of Australian-based Indian doctor Mohamed Haneef on suspicion of providing resources to a terrorist organisation highlights the urgency involved for the news media of reporting bombings and bomb plots (Ewart, 2009: 16). Ewart (2009) outlined some of the mistakes that were made by some mainstream news media and the associated failure of those organisations to correct those errors, in the process providing salutary lessons for journalists. Key amongst them were: do not jump to conclusions about the guilt or innocence of those arrested; cross check information you obtain from all sources; correct errors as soon as they are drawn to your attention; and avoid the political spin involved in such cases (Ewart, 2009).

Our case study findings have implications for those charged with managing public communication about similar events and those reporting on such events. Governments recognise that public confidence in their ability to respond to terroristic violence is paramount (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015: 2). Whereas Sir Charles immediately decried the Bunbury bombing as a gross act of terrorism, the contemporary orthodoxy is restraint (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015: 3). This is because hoaxes, false alarms, and serious criminality unrelated to terrorism could all be in play (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015: 3). As the Bunbury bombing illustrates, finding the tipping point between serious criminality and terrorism is complex. In contemporary Australia, the law remains untested.

A series of tensions combine during suspected terror events. For policing and security agencies tensions arise from the need to inform the public in a timely about an event while exercising restraint in rushing to label an act as terrorism (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). For the news media tensions arise from the race to be the first news media organisation to get the story and to publish it and the increasing pressure to "obtain a scoop."

The fractured relationships between Australian news media and security agencies add to the tensions (O'Donnell & McLean, 2015). Stories involving planned or actual acts of terrorism will continue to garner news media attention, particularly in the current political climate. The Haneef case illustrates the problematic and frustrating experiences some journalists reported having when dealing with government and policing agencies' spokespeople (Ewart, 2009). If not addressed, these are likely to continue to influence news media coverage of terrorism-related stories.

CONCLUSION

The Bunbury bombing was a watershed event for Western Australia and therefore an important news story for *The West Australian*. The newspaper showed considerable restraint in framing the story. In particular, the newspaper continued to treat it as a crime, rather than an act of terrorism. Our findings highlight the independence of one news media organisation in crafting news frames, and identify that the contexts in which events occur can moderate the take up by journalists of the preferred narratives of pressure groups (in this case the political elite).

By not taking-up and continuing to refrain from positioning the bombing as an act of terrorism, or to question the mental health of the perpetrators, the

40

newspaper avoided what might be deemed hysteria that characterises recent news media coverage of similar bombings (Dreher, 2007; Ewart, 2009). What this case study reinforces is that the context in which news frames emerge are crucial to their analysis.

Future research could focus on comparing how the news media framed terroristic violence in Australia before the policy and media turning points of the Hilton Hotel bombing and 9/11. Official catalogues of serious politically-motivated violence now available to researchers provide a useful starting point (Commonwealth of Australia, 1979a: 473–476; SAC-PAV Review Team, 1993 Annexe 6).

There is evidence that the way news media frame coverage of events can have "a considerable influence on the way in which audiences, including policy makers, understand and respond to issues and events" (Ewart, 2012: 97). In contemporary Australia, our study's findings have implications for those charged with managing public communication about similar events and those reporting on such events. Public figures who are tempted to frame a story that has a complex connection to terrorism for political gain may not always succeed. For journalists reporting such events, avoiding the attempts by public figures to frame or reframe the story and change its trajectory is vital.

Understanding the policy and policing context for such an event is also vital. In contemporary Australia, there have been instances where political narratives about terrorism have been uncritically accepted and replicated by journalists (Dreher, 2007; Ewart, 2012). Policy frameworks for countering terrorism and responding to politically-motivated violence that had yet to develop at the time of the Bunbury bombing now provide journalists with a starting point with which to assess political narratives.

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