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# News and the Public Sphere: The Boston Marathon Bombing in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ioana Alexandra Coman entitled "News and the Public Sphere: The Boston Marathon Bombing in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

Peter Gross, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Elizabeth Hendrickson, Suzie Allard, Michael Palenchar, Harry Dahms

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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**News and the Public Sphere: The Boston Marathon Bombing in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro***

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ioana Alexandra Coman  
August 2014

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents (the original Doctors in the family ☺), Dr. Cristina Coman and Dr. Mihai Coman, and to my brother, Tibi. Your never ending patience, encouragement, support and when needed, tough love made my journey, accomplishments and the successful completion of this project possible.

Thank you! Va iubesc!

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## **Abstract**

The current dissertation explores the online mediatization of the Boston Marathon bombing crisis by an American newspaper (*The New York Times*) and a French one (*Le Figaro*) and their publics' reactions to it. The research was conducted along two main analysis axes: (1) the main frames and themes through which the journalists and the publics gave meaning to the event, and (2) the characteristics of the online public spheres therefore created. The comparative perspective on the journalistic frames showed a strong tendency of homogenization, as the same main frames appeared in both analyzed newspapers. However, the online comments analysis revealed that in both cases, while the publics debated the event within those journalistic frames, they also negotiated or assigned new meanings, therefore creating new themes. The comparative perspective on the online public spheres showed that the major normative conditions of a public sphere were achieved. Nevertheless, certain differences were found that could be explained as pertaining to different cultures: the French debates were characterized by more moments of subjective personal involvement and flaming. From a journalistic practice standpoint the findings indicated that both the American and French publics critically scrutinized every piece of news information, addressed precise requests, and expected journalists to reply and fulfill their informational needs.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and General Information

#### The Project

This dissertation explores the online coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing by *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*, and the resulting reactions by their respective publics in the public spheres created by the two newspapers.<sup>1</sup> This crisis began on April 15, when two bombs exploded near the Boston Marathon finish line, on Boylston Street during the race, killing three people and injuring over 100 others (Levs & Plott, 2013). On April 18, The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), asked the public for help and released photographs and surveillance video of two possible suspects, later identified as Chechen brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who were U.S. residents. The same day, the suspects allegedly killed a police officer on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) campus, carjacked an SUV and exchanged gunfire with police in Watertown, Massachusetts, injuring another police officer. The older brother, Tamerlan, died during this fight, while an injured Dzhokhar managed to escape (abcnews.go.com timeline).

The next day thousands of law enforcement officers started a massive manhunt, searching a 20-block area of Watertown. During this time, officials issued a lockdown order, asking residents of Watertown and surrounding areas, including Boston, to stay indoors. The public transportation system, as well as the main businesses and public institutions were also closed. That evening, shortly after the “shelter-in-place” was

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<sup>1</sup> The researcher is proficient in French, and tried as much as possible to keep the original meanings when translating the quotes from the French news stories and comments into English.

canceled, a Watertown resident called police after discovering Tsarnaev hiding in a boat he was dry storing in his back yard. After police arrived at the scene, and after another gunfight, police arrested the suspect and transported him to a nearby hospital (abcnews.go.com timeline). On April 22 Tsarnaev, while still in the hospital, is charged with using and conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction (Associated Press Timeline cited in Huffingtonpost.com). On April 26 Tsarnaev was moved in a federal prison (Tracy, 2013).

Network coverage of this event was generous. According to a Newsy.com report the Boston Marathon bombing was “the single story the networks spent the most time on 2013” (Toombs, 2014). But by virtue of the Marathon’s international status, the coverage extended well beyond American media. The Boston Athletic Association (BAA) cites its event as the world’s oldest annual marathon, ranking as one of the world’s best-known racing events in which both amateur and professional runners from all over the world participate. The race held normally on April 15 attracts approximately 500,000 spectators each year. In light of this international scope, the Boston Marathon bombing can illustrate exemplary media dynamics on multiple levels. This research examines (1) how media and publics interpret a crisis, both nationally and internationally, as visible on *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro*’s new media platforms, and (2) the characteristics of public spheres created on the media websites comment section, through and by a crisis.

Given the many elements that are part of this dissertation, the presentation is organized as follows: subsequently to this chapter, the theoretical lenses informing the study are presented; and the following chapters will contain a detailed description of the

method and analysis process, the findings and analysis considerations, and finally a conclusion, research limitations and future directions.

### **Statement of Purpose and Rationale**

This dissertation explores the online mediatization of the Boston Marathon bombing crisis case by two newspapers and the publics' reaction to it. Specifically, the purpose of this research was to investigate the interpretations and attributions given to this crisis (i.e. its causes, solutions, consequences, culprits) by *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro*, and in turn by their online publics. These web platforms allow for almost instantaneous comments to be registered by the readers at the end of these online news stories. A second goal of the current study was to identify the characteristics of the public spheres in which the publics engaged with the subject and its coverage, and the responses to this coverage.

The way the publics are informed about a crisis, as well as the way that public opinion is manufactured are profoundly influenced by new and social media<sup>2</sup>. These have emerged as important communication tools when a social system faces a crisis: new and especially social media are employed both formally by actors involved in the crisis (i.e. government officials, corporations, media) and informally by those affected by the crisis (i.e. victims and their families, and the public at large). Social media have become major

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<sup>2</sup> Social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) are defined through the quality of promoting, sharing and interactivity, while new media (i.e. websites) are seen as only distributing content (Coombs, 2012). However, the new media, especially mass media websites became more and more interactive. They are designed for the journalists to post their news stories and for the publics to leave their comments below the news stories. Moreover, all the stories on the website now have buttons incorporated so people can share/like them on social media. More and more websites (again at least the media ones) resemble the characteristics of social media and their layout/content connects with social media.

conduits of information for the public during crisis situations (see White, 2012; or Palen, 2008). Starbird and Palen (2011) state that social media are now a vital communication highway in the process of connecting and organizing “digital” volunteers during emergency situations. Even for those who are in the midst of a crisis or “on the ground,” microblogging sites such as Twitter have been a way for these individuals to share with the world what they are experiencing and seeing, and providing a “situational update” on events (Vieweg, Starbird and Palen, 2010). Journalists are also translating or embedding information from social media into news stories; research shows how journalists use social media, for example to gather information for their stories (see Bates, 2009; Legatt, 2010). The relationship between officials, journalists, publics, in the new and social media context, can be conceptualized as follows:

- A. Through new and social media officials send messages/information to the crisis stakeholders, and gather information in their crisis response process/efforts.
- B. Through/from new and social media – journalists gain access to information sent by both officials and publics and use it for their news stories.
- C. Through social media, publics both send information about the event (as witnesses, or what they heard/found out), as well as their opinions, feelings, and experiences; and receive information about the crisis from officials and media.

From the multiple forms of user-generated content, such as blogs, crowdsourcing, or forums, “comments in the news is the most widespread in online news sites, and

usually the most popular in quantitative terms,” with more than 75% of U.S. online media offering this feature since 2008 (Ruiz, Domingo, Mico, Diza-Noci, Meso, and Masip, 2011, p. 464). Even more importantly, the emergence of new communication technology and the growing popularity of existing new and social media offer researchers a direct way of observing and analyzing the three aforementioned actors’ reactions to a given crisis. This study only focuses on journalists and their public. Before the emergence of new communication technology and the increasing popularity of new and social media, whenever scholars were studying the interactions between media and the public (or for that matter organization and the public) they could only survey and interview the officials and journalists, or analyze the messages coming from them (through content analyses, discourse analyses, axiological analyses etc.), and then survey or interview the publics. The other option was to create experiments in which members of the publics would be put in virtual situations resembling the crisis, and observe the effects of different messages. While these methods of inquiry brought valuable insights, they often lacked complete external validity or veracity; the participants’ answers (especially the publics’ ones) only reflected their hypothetical reactions, feelings, interpretations, or intended behavior. New and social media make all these interactions of messages, feelings, and intended actions traceable, storable and ready to be analyzed almost instantaneously. In a crisis, organizations, including web based media communicate relevant information to their publics, who can in turn reply. These posted messages and comments reflect true testimonies of what the publics think, who they blame, what their intended actions may be and so on. As such, new and social media became in a sense a real world lab defined by open access, and an inexpensive source for researchers.



The current dissertation also offers an international perspective by comparing the way the media and the publics framed the Boston crisis in the United States, and France, specifically in the online versions of *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* respectively. Similarly to the U.S., France has dealt with terrorist attacks, including “homegrown” terrorists (i.e. the terrorist attack in Toulouse led by Merah) and the collective memory keeps the image of the terrorist attacks alive. Furthermore, like Valentini and Romenti (2011) argue, different national media give different meanings and representations to events that happen at home, and to those that occur abroad. Impressive events (both negative and positive) happening in the United States have an echo in the international media. This is the case especially with major, impactful, dramatic crises such as the Aurora and Connecticut shootings, and more recently the Boston Marathon bombing. All these crises animate and ignite reactions from both media and the publics around the world. Moreover, it is possible, as some scholars argue (i.e. Gross, 2008; Lijphart, 1999; Ronald, 2000; Somers, 1995) that the process of national public spheres construction is marked by the history, culture, and the specific of the political life from each country. As Gross (2008) explains:

institutional cultures combine with professional cultures, political culture, and the general societal culture to establish how systems are organized, how they function, who and what affects them, and the effects they may have on their constituencies. A country’s political system and its politics are directly shaped by this admixture of cultures and, in turn, the media as an institution and platform for mass communication is the child of these cultures almost no matter how the system is organized and how many institutional changes are made (p. 148-149).

In this context, it is interesting to explore the similarities and differences in how the media and the publics in these two countries perceived the Boston bombing. The Boston Marathon bombing constitutes a great research case, as it was a crisis with a large number of victims, major impact, highly mediatized and with an international echo. By comparing how media and publics reacted to this crisis, in both France and the U.S., the current study brings more in-depth insight about the cultural elements' connections for the framing and public sphere theories. Therefore, the current dissertation aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How did *The New York Times* and its publics frame the Boston Marathon bombing?

RQ2: How did the *Le Figaro* and its publics frame the bombing?

RQ3: What were the characteristics of this specific American public sphere discourse, as revealed by the publics' comments?

RQ4: What were the characteristics of this specific French public sphere discourse as revealed by the publics' comments?

By comparing the media framing with the public one and the public spheres characteristics, both nationally and internationally, in the new media context the dissertation aims:

1. To reveal and discuss from a theoretical standpoint, the challenges brought to and the possible changes necessary to the traditional conceptualizations of framing and public sphere theories as connected to crisis communication, in this new/social media context.

2. To reveal and discuss from a practical standpoint, the challenges brought by these new realities to the journalism practice. Journalists are still trying to figure out how “news as a conversation” should look like, the benefits, the downsides and the solutions. As Briggs (2010, p. 278) notes, “many journalists (maybe most journalists) preferred news as a lecture. Only begrudgingly have they come around to the idea that a future in journalism means managing online communities and participating in various social networks.”

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical lenses

#### Media and crisis

##### Media and disruptive events

Robert Park (1966) once noted:

if it is the unexpected that happens, it is not the wholly unexpected that gets into the news. The events that have made the news in the past, as in the present, are actually the expected things. They are characteristically simple and commonplace matters, like birth and death, weddings and funerals, the conditions of the crops and of business, wars, politics and the weather. These are the expected things, but they are at the same time the unpredictable things (p.136).

Journalists' daily work consists not in reproducing events, but in searching for *news*, that is, for 'noteworthy' events that can be brought to the public's attention, because they have been credited with some significance and have been deemed relevant in a particular cultural context. Also, because they work on deadline, journalists have to promptly identify 'the events', that is, those observable, relevant, undeniable realities on whose basis they can build their articles.

Although crucial for understanding the processes of social construction of a particular version of the surrounding reality, the relationship between the media and the concept of the event is insufficiently studied. A closer analysis reveals that in media studies the concept of event is not very well defined despite its apparent simplicity. Several distinct features characterize the concept of event (Berkowitz, 1997; Charaudeau, 1997; Quere, 1997; Schudson, 1995):

- a. *Individuality in space and time*: the event is located and relatively well defined temporally; it is part of a chronology it influences (and sometimes creates); it may be identified with a particular area of occurrence; thus, it is distinct from processes, situations, issues, all expression of historical regularity, therefore, of profoundly repetitive schemata;
- b. *Observability*: the event can be followed by various spectators; however, events are rarely witnessed on the scene: usually mediated by various accounts produced by witnesses, but most of the times they are mediatized, i.e. millions of people becomes witnesses of an event only due to the messages transmitted by mass media;
- c. *Social importance*: the event exerts a variety of influences over the surrounding or global environment and may have long-term consequences. Its importance is socially defined; this leads to the issue of institutions or persons that set the degree of importance of the various occurrences (therefore, transforming them into events) and of the systems of social representations by means of which and in whose name such versions of reality are given, and
- d. *The disruptive character*: the event breaks the normal course of daily life. The disruption of the normal course of life generates an effort to (re)define reality. In such situations, we face a lack of information and frames for understanding what happens. Thus, the media makes use of an entire arsenal of images and symbols in an attempt to name and

classify the facts, to interpret them according to the public's dominant cultural codes and to provide a reassuring version of that happenings.

A terrorist attack fulfills all these characteristics: it is an event that interrupts everyday life, it has long term influences on society, it requires explanations and attribution of meanings; and evidently it is well localized in space and time, and observable directly or indirectly through its mediatized representations. Even if “there is no single, commonly accepted definition of terrorism” (Freedman, Thussu, 2012, p. 7), it can be understood as “the systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilian, for political goals” (Norris et al., 2003, p. 6) or as “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of a political change” (Hoffman, as cited in Seib & Janbeck, 2011, p.4).

Political scientists demonstrated that terrorism is first a form of communication: it aims not only at the elimination of a target (even if it frequently succeeds in achieving this objective), but especially to communicate a double message: on the one hand the terrorists want to show they fight for a cause (political, religious, ecological, etc.) that legitimizes their gesture, and on the other hand they want to create fear among larger social groups (Altheide, 2009; Nacos, 2007). Media studies scholars underline the symbiotic connection between terrorism and media coverage: “It is unsurprising that both news and entertainment media share a fascination with terrorism. News media, both print and broadcast, frame their stories in terms of conflict. This allows them to offer events that carry the potential of sensationalism, dramatization, shock and fear” (Tumber, 2007, p. 31).

According to Nossek (2007, pp. 274-278) the studies dedicated to the relation between terrorism and media can be grouped into three main categories: (a) the classical approach, (b) the critical approach, and (c) the functional-professional approach. The first perspective focuses on the idea that the media are guilty for the spread of terrorism, giving it global exposure, legitimizing its reasons and providing information on the terrorist tactics that can be copied by other terrorist groups. The second school of thought asserts the themes of hegemonic analysis, arguing that the media are controlled by the ruling classes, and that by manufacturing a culture of fear, they offer arguments to the governments for strengthening their control on institutions and people. The functional-professional approach underlines the role of professional routines and values in selecting news on terrorism and in framing the terrorist act.

### **Crisis**

Scholars offer various definitions and typologies of the crisis concept, such as (1) “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company or industry as well as its publics, products, services or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.1); (2) any problem or disruption that could impact the organization’s business and financial strength (An & Gower, 2009); or (3) a perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies for stakeholders (Coombs, 2012). An example of a comprehensive typology of crises is the one offered by Coombs (2012) who divides crises in three clusters: (1) victim (crises are identified based on the impact in victims-- i.e. natural disasters, or work place violence crises); (2) accident (crises that occurred by accident -- i.e. product errors, technical errors); and (3) preventable crises (crises that could have been prevented -- i.e. organizational misdeeds).

For the purpose of this dissertation, crisis is defined by melding three theorists' views as (1) an unexpected event or the perception of an unexpected event, that threatens important expectancies for stakeholders (Coombs, 2012), (2) an event that disrupts social order and creates high levels of uncertainty (Dowling, 2002), and (3) one that triggers negative stakeholder reactions (An & Gower 2009). Moreover, typologically, the Boston Marathon bombing can be considered a man-made crisis, with a high number of victims, and high impact for the immediate stakeholders (victims, their families, government), as well as the general public/society in general.

Examining the Madrid and London bombings, Canel & Sanders (2012) note:

A terrorist attack fulfills the characteristics of a crisis. Crisis by definition, can mean predicament, emergency, calamity, disaster or catastrophe (...) Although the fundamental facts of a crisis are rarely in dispute (an explosion, for instance), question of cause, responsibility, blame, relative harm and remedial actions almost always are disputed following a crisis. All these features are applicable to the Madrid and London bombing. As we shall see that, although the essential facts (the explosions) were quickly evident, there was at a same time uncertainty about the nature of the problem, which actors were involved, to whom blame should be attributed, and what remedy and actions should be implemented (p. 450).

The focus of this study, the Boston Marathon bombing, fulfills all these characteristics: beyond the obvious nature of the attack and its devastating effects, a notable number of elements intrinsic to the event were not initially known (e.g. who, why, with what repercussions). The media and then the online commenters explored



these unknowns, trying to fill the void caused by the absence of precise information, through numerous symbolical constructions, with origins in similar past events that helped interpret the new drama in a familiar frame.

### **Media's multiple roles in a crisis**

Sellnow & Seeger (2013, p. 138) note, “from their inception, media have played a central role in crisis communication as active information-seeking receivers attempt to understand the events at hand.” In these situations journalists start from *a set of definitions of ‘eventfulness’*, which are merely the product of media culture, of its constitutive values and its derived routine procedures. Thus, reality is pre-defined: relying on already built mental patterns journalists select especially those occurrences and phenomena that correspond to their cultural and professional frames. Irrespective of the type of event they work with (routine or unexpected), journalists employ elements of their cultural heritage or create specific general frameworks of classification and interpretation. This fact brings into the current analysis the constructivist perspective, which focuses on the negotiations (concerning procedures, institutional constructs, types of discourse, genres employed, etc.) by means of which journalists attribute specific significance to the information they gather through a socially organized and culturally determined process.

According to Dan Berkowitz (1997, pp. 362-375), the journalists' first reaction when they find out about a crisis is surprise and then, an enthusiastic: “What a story!” Afterwards, as the crisis unfolds, journalists select those data that supply the public with a “securing” version, that is, a version that meets the public's expectations (by employing metaphors, cultural clichés acknowledged by the public, sensational details, dramatic but

stereotyped elements). Doris Graber's frequently quoted study (1997, pp. 139-142) points out that during the initial stage of the crisis, when "a flood of uncoordinated messages is transmitted," the media turn into "an information collection center," which works "to coordinate public activities and to calm the audience" by rapidly disseminating the news. During the subsequent stages of the crisis, the mass media "try to correct past errors and put the situation into its proper perspective" and to prepare the public to face the consequences of the crisis. Another study focusing on the journalists' behavior in situations of crisis (Mogensen et al., 2002, p. 104) identifies seven media functions in crises situations:

1. They serve as a guiding and consoling source instead of just as an information source in a crisis situation involving national interest;
2. They demonstrate visible patriotism in a crisis situation involving national interest;
3. They rely more on government sources than other sources in a crisis situation involving national interest;
4. They advocate American values (democracy, freedom/liberty, justice, human rights) in a crisis situation involving national interest;
5. They emphasize human interest in a crisis situation involving tragedy more than other political and economic factors,;
6. They frame the coverage based on moral/religious issues rather than political, economic, criminal, environmental, or human interest issues;
7. Their coverage focus shifts during the different stages of crisis.

From another perspective, Schudson (2011) asserts:

There are three occasions when U.S. journalists instinctively and willingly abandon the effort to report from a neutral stance. In moments of tragedy journalists assume a pastoral role. On television, correspondents adopt quiet, even reverent tones, an air of solemnity (...). Second, in moment of public danger journalists replace professional objectivity with neighborly reassurance, whether danger comes from terrorist or hurricanes. They seek to offer practical guidance and to communicate fellow feelings. (...) Third, journalists also reject neutrality during threats to national security. When they are convinced that national security is at risk, they willingly withhold or temper their reports” (p. 49).

These studies showcase the modality in which media cover a crisis situation, which is determined by the application of, or failure to apply, the professional procedures and symbolical categories through which journalists frame that event. Adopting the arguments of the professional-functional approach (Nossek, 2007), this researcher can posit that media coverage of a crisis, and implicitly the way it is framed, should be similar to any other coverage in which journalists behave in a “professional” manner; for example, respecting the standard writing norms and procedures. Numerous studies have stressed that the professionalization of journalism was achieved in the post Second World War Europe especially by applying the American model of journalism (Benson & Hallin, 2014, Esser & Umbright, 2014; Hanitzsch, 2009; Hallin & Manicini, 2004).

Yet, other research studies underline the idea that despite this homogenization in the coverage of events, significant differences emerge and that these could in turn be explained through either the political and professional traditions defining those specific “media systems” or through in-depth cultural patterns shaping the journalistic frames.

The first approach led to Hallin & Mancini's (2004) path-breaking study, which reinforces the thesis that the correlation between the political systems and the history of the press leads to three main media systems: the liberal, the democratic corporatist, and the polarized pluralist. Even though Jakubowicz (2010) notes that within media studies scholarship multiple classification systems were proposed, the majority of the recent investigations comparing the way different national media covered the same event use the model proposed by Hallin and Mancini (Archetti, 2008; Benson et al., 2012; Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010; Esser & Umbright, 2014; Hotchkiss, 2010). This dissertation is also situated in the framework advanced by Hallin & Mancini (2004) as it focuses on the media coverage of the same event in a newspaper that embodies the liberal model (*The New York Times*) and another one that exemplifies the polarized pluralist model (*Le Figaro*). According to Hallin & Mancini (2004, pp. 299), in the liberal model the media is seen as a 'watchdog,' and a "common professional culture of journalism is relatively strongly developed." The polarized pluralist model "is characterized by a high level of politicization, with the state and political parties intervening strongly in many areas of social life, and with much of the population holding strong loyalties to widely varying political ideologies" (p. 298). Here journalists and political actors are close, the state intervening "actively in the media sector" and the newspapers emphasizing "sophisticated commentary directed at a readership of political activists" (p. 298). Finally, if in the liberal model the development of mass press and professionalization are high, and the political parallelism and state intervention are low, in the polarized pluralist model the first two are low and last two are high (p. 299). While from a political approach *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* may belong to two different models as Hallin & Mancini

have pointed out, this dissertation's author is concerned not only with the news coverage but with the utilization of the public spheres that the two news sites represent.

Media scholars who compared the French media with the American ones used the same classification and typology approach (Benson, 2013, Benson & Hallin, 2014, Gade & Ferman, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2011).

Another stream of comparative media studies refutes the tendency towards homogenization, in media systems, asserting the supremacy of cultural traditions specific to each nation:

A peoples' or nation's fundamental culture is established over a long period of time in the crucible of historical experiences and circumstances, geography, religion, outside influences, and so on. It is in this realm that the explanation for Romania's media system, its problems, and effects may find clarity and meaning. (Gross, 2008, p. 150).

From this perspective, journalistic procedures, values and in the end, discourse are shaped by the cultural values deeply rooted in each nation history:

- (1) Longitudinal studies of cross-national media framing suggest that national cultural repertoires may be consistent and stable across domains as diverse as sexual harassment, immigration, and abortion (Hotchkiss, 2010, p. 370);
- (2) Therefore, as seen in their coverage of the other, both American and African, media reflect a degree of self-centeredness. Although it is difficult to say with any certainty, one interpretation is that these differences may be due to national cultural values" (Schaeffer, 2003, p. 109);

(3) We find evidence of cultural filtering in the context of foreign news coverage” (Nossek, 2007, p. 44).

The same idea is conveyed by the research comparing the U.S. and French journalistic cultures:

- (1) Against expectations of powerful forces for homogenization, we find that French–American press differences in writing style, narrative schema, level of criticism and viewpoints represented do not diminish significantly between the 1960s and 1990s. Moreover, despite being more attuned to ideology, the French press is also more focused on the ‘political game’ than the American press, which contradicts the usual assumption that a game schema is due to a disengagement rather than engagement with politics (Benson & Hallin, 2014, pp. 41-42),
- (2) On the other hand, some broad cross-national differences continue to hold online: in particular, a French tendency to emphasize deliberation and to make more room for non-journalist authorial voices (Benson et al., 2012, p. 33).

In the context of these approaches, it is important to examine the way the Boston Marathon bombing was framed in the American and the French media systems, more so because “framing is often best understood through comparisons, whether temporal or spatial, where the same events are depicted through different journalistic lenses” (Rusciano, 2003, p. 159).

### **Crisis communication in the online and social media context**

“Social media play in today’s societies a fundamental role for the negotiation and dynamics of crises,” Utz et al. (2013, p. 40) argue. According to Shan et al. (2013):

With the increasing use of Web 2.0 technologies, media use in times of crisis has evolved from one-way communication to multi-way interactions between a range of stakeholders and publics. Not only do media transmit crisis messages, they also interpret the story for the reader (p. 2).

To this, this dissertation’s author would add that not only do media transmit and interpret crisis messages, but also they offer on their new and social media pages a space for the publics to submit their interpretations and to debate the crisis issues, culprits, and possible solutions.

This notion is imported by Liu et al.’s (2011) social-mediated crisis communication model in which “publics use social media during crises for the following three motivations: issue relevance, information seeking/sharing, and emotional venting/support” (p. 345). Within crisis communication literature related to social media, scholars took interest in three aspects: (1) the differences between traditional and social media in imposing differences in framing and attribution of responsibility processes; (2) the way journalists use social media in the process of news gathering; and (3) the way the publics use social media in order to receive information and to express their own feelings and opinions, or to disseminate information. This dissertation is not an argument for or against the idea that social media changed the basic processes of communication, instead the author posits that social media offer a better way to observe how these

communication processes take place (i.e. it constitutes an open window to the making of people's opinions, feelings, meanings).

Traditionally during a crisis, information is disseminated by officials, in a unidirectional manner through their websites, or through traditional media, such as television or radio. All this changed with the emergence of information and communication technologies, such as new and social media. During crisis situations the public increasingly turns to social media, and often they switch from only passive consumers of the information to possible creators of information (Perng et al., 2012; Sutton et al. 2008). Palen (2008) found that, especially during disasters, the use of social media became an emergent and significant form of public participation and backchannel communication. For example, during the crisis at Virginia Tech and during the Southern California wildfires, social media (Facebook, Wikipedia, etc.) were used by survivors, friends, family and others looking for information (Palen, 2008). Microblogging sites like Twitter are increasingly being used in emergency situations as means of communication broadcast by people who are "on the ground" (Vieweg et al., 2010), or as means of communication and organization of "digital" volunteers (Starbird & Palen, 2011). Now more than ever, social media became an emergent and significant way of communication in crisis situations for all those involved (White, 2012). Social media are adopted more and more not only by people at risk in a crisis, but also by traditional media – e.g. CNN is relying on the public (I-Reporters, monitoring social media etc) (Palen et al. 2009). Journalists are translating or embedding information from social media into news stories, as well, with research showing (both for U.S. media and the French one) how journalists



use social media to gather information for their stories (see Bates, 2009; Legatt, 2010, Lits, 2012; Millets, 2013; Severo, 2012).

## **The public sphere**

### **The Habermasian public sphere: conceptualization**

One of the most cited and debated conceptualizations of the public sphere, a long-standing notion and the subject of research and debates, especially in Europe, is the one belonging to the German sociologist, Jurgen Habermas. In his book, *The Structural transformation of the public sphere*, Habermas (1991) describes the historical evolution and transformation of the public sphere beginning with ancient understandings, continuing with the representative public sphere in the Middle Ages, and the modern conceptualization beginning with the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He distinguishes between the private sphere and the public sphere, based on historical and semantic analyses of public vs. private and public vs. secret; and he argues that the public sphere, as a concept was both an empirical description and an ideal. In the modern sense, Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1991, p.27).

In principle, this arena of debate was inclusive, and all the participants in social discourse were equal. Moreover, the public sphere was visualized as a specific domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. The formation of public opinion referred to “the functions of criticism and control of organized state authority” (Habermas, 1991, p. 399). Citizens act together as a public when they deal with matters of general interest. As such, the public sphere is defined as the public expression of private individuals who

join in the debate of issues bearing on state authority (Calhoun, 1992). It is in this context that the distinction between public and state becomes essential. The public sphere was supposed to mediate between the realms of the private and the state, and the guarantee of the basic rights of the citizens in the liberal state depended on the demarcation between the two. In order for this mediation to be effective, discourse in the public sphere must be critical and rational, and transcend individuals' own interests. For Habermas, rationality does not exist *a priori*, it is the product of social interaction as a collective construction and, therefore, it only exists in human interactions as an emerging product of communicative action (Kim & Kim, 2008). Moreover, Habermas (1992) argues that for this equilibrium / bridge to exist and be maintained, society must institutionalize the practices of social debate. Freedom of the press and assembly become the necessary constitutional and structural guarantees, denoting the importance of communication institutions to fulfilling the functions of the public sphere. The mass media are central to Habermas's account of the public sphere (Benson, 2009) and, therefore, their main role was to provoke reasoning and dialogue. The public sphere emerged through table societies, salons and coffee houses where informal conversations and dialogic deliberations took place and the press was what connected each of these places (Habermas, 1989).

The framing processes highly connects with the idea of a public sphere and Habermas (2006) asserts:

The dynamics of mass communication are driven by the power of the media to select, and shape the presentation of, messages and by the strategic use of political

and social power to influence the agendas as well as the triggering framing of public issues (p.415).

Continuing along the same line of thought Habermas (2006) argues:

The public sphere is rooted in networks for wild flows of messages – news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, and shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content. These published opinions originate from various types of actors (...). They are selected and shaped by mass-media professionals and received by broad and overlapping audiences, camps, subcultures, and so on (pp.415-416).

The media, through the way that the journalists frame events, as well as informal communication, influence the publics' attitudes towards those events.

A key concept in Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere, as connected to mass media, was the idea of modernity as well as its consequences. Continuing on the path of the public sphere evolution, Habermas argues that this ideal bourgeois public sphere has undergone negative transformations after the 1800s. The state started taking over additional functions of the private sphere and the private interests started assuming a more public character, leading to self-interest overcoming the common good.

The communication industry as a whole also changed for the worse, by giving up its political and news information functions for the entertainment one. Consequently, the public sphere was turned into an arena of consumption (of products and culture).

Habermas (1989) argued that modernity brought along a radical alteration of the public space's functionality. Therefore, the economic interest (part of the private life) became the main engine for the production of mass media messages. Access to a public

increasingly vast (also transformed into consumers) led to message distortion and adaptation of its content to these new publics' expectations and cognitive levels. The negative consequence was thus the disappearance of the rational dimension specific to the public space's debates. Therefore, for Habermas generalizing mass culture and the means of production, distribution and consumption determined by the market logic (the industrialization of cultural creation, search for profit and imposition of satisfaction as a criterion supreme of the receivers) led to the destruction of the original public sphere. Emptied of its specific „medium” (i.e. the public use of reason) this new public sphere, modeled and controlled by mass media is being “feudalized.” According to Habermas (1992, p. 171-175), the new public sphere is now “in appearance only” and “the public use of reason has been shattered.” The ‘new’ media was to blame. If public debate was supposed to achieve a consensus on what is in the best interest of all, this new media expanded the public sphere to include those less educated and less oriented to a concern for the public interest. Conflicts based on self-interests emerged and the public sphere became an “arena of competing interests” as opposed to a search for common good. Because of these private interests taken into the public realm, the original relationship between private and public realms vanished, and so did the real public sphere. When media changed from being a merchant of news to being a dealer (Habermas, 1992, p.175). In other words, the public sphere then was transformed from a forum for rational-critical debate into a “platform for advertising.”

### **Critiques and alternatives to Habermas' public sphere conceptualization**

Since Habermas first proposed the idea of public sphere, the concept has been the subject of numerous analyses and criticisms. As Schudson (2011, p.60) points out, the particulars of Habermas' central argument "have been challenged again and again, and few scholars today accept Habermas' view as he originally proposed it." Calhoun (1992, p. 35) also notes that, the "very dichotomous understandings of public/private and system/lifeworld are thus among the reasons why Habermas reaches an impasse." On the other hand, Adut (2012) remarks the fact that the critiques brought to the Habermasian model are not questioning the theoretical paradigm, but try to solve the contradictions between his model of ideal public sphere and the large variety of concreated forms in which the public sphere functions:

Nevertheless, Habermas and his critics all operate within the same paradigm, which is characterized by these idealist and normative elements: (1) the condition of civiness or civility, (2) the conflation of the public sphere with citizenship, and (3) the ideal of widespread, egalitarian participation (p. 239).

The critiques regarding the ideal model of public sphere could be categorized as follows:

- a. Participants: the critique of the "unique" elitist public sphere and the issue of different types of participation: social class (plebeian public sphere); gender (feminist public sphere); ethnic (multi-cultural public sphere) or education (entertainment public sphere).

- b. Rationality (“seriousness”): was criticized for identifying rationality with logical argumentation; ignoring other forms of rationality (narrative, symbolic, play, ritual); excluding the affective elements of debate; excluding entertainment.
- c. Communication: was criticized for the excessive accent on face-to-face exchanges; simplistic identification of mass communication with mass entertainment, and the ambiguity of media (channel, place, substitute, alternative). Media scholars Kunelius and Sparks (2011, p. 11-18) argue that the Habermasian model of public sphere contains a series of contestable oppositions (i.e. public/private; debate/action; reason/rationality) and involves two unclear areas, centered on the oppositions real public space/ideal public space and unique public space/multiple public spaces.

Lits (2009) argues that the very nature of media discourse leads to a symbolic narrative public space/public sphere rather than an argumentative one. He (2009, p.85) describes three postulates / assumptions/ presuppositions vis-à-vis of/ when it comes to the media supply of narratives:

1. Mass media are great narratives producers – through /in both their fictional sections and their informational ones (i.e. coverage of events investigations, hard news stories, tabloid tales).
2. The totality of media content is not necessarily all narrative, as for example editorials usually privilege argumentative type content, even if they also have some narrative structures. However, the dominant narrative of the media system will install the user in a posture of consumption-type narrative.

3. If this narrativization effect is obvious in the producer side of the message, then it also occurs in the manner in which the receivers consume these sequences and many others.

Additionally, he argues that it is exactly the narrative dimension of journalism that the publics use to make sense of the world chaos (p.87).

As Rasmussen (2013, p. 97) notes, the contemporary public sphere tends towards a more dispersed structure than its 19th- and 20th-century versions critically analyzed by Jürgen Habermas. Also, opposing the idealistic view of a unitary public sphere, in the context of communication technology revolution, new media emergence, publics' fragmentation and multiculturalism, Gitlin (1998) argues instead for the existence of multiple public "*sphericules*." Likewise, McNair (2000) describes a class-fragmented British public sphere, with each *sub-sphere* emphasizing different types of information and varying sharply in styles of presentation. Along the same lines, Keane (1998) proposes a model of a multi-level, fragmented public sphere. He reasons that the ideal public sphere never appears in pure form; instead contemporary public spheres have a fractured quality not being overcome by some broader trend towards an integrated public sphere (Keane, 1998, p. 109). He proposes, therefore, the existence of micro, meso and macro public spheres. In the *micro-public spheres*, existing at a subnational level, dozens, hundreds, or thousands of disputants interact mainly at the sub-state level. In other words:

The coffeehouse, town-level meeting and literary circle, in which early modern public spheres developed, today find their counterparts in a wide variety of local spaces in which citizens enter to dispute about who does and who ought to get what, when and how (Keane, 1998, p. 110).

Keane describes these micro-public spheres in connection with social movements. These types of public spheres:

Are the sites in which citizens question the pseudo-imperatives of reality and counter them with alternative experiences of time, space and interpersonal relations. On occasion these public spheres coalesce into publicly visible media events, such as demonstrations in favor of gay male and lesbian rights or sit-ins against road-building or power plant projects. But, paradoxically, these micro-public spheres draw their strength from the fact that they are mostly latent.

Although they appear to be ‘private’, acting at a distance from official public life, party politics and the glare of media publicity, they in fact display all the characteristics of small group public efforts, whose challenging of the existing distribution of power can be effective exactly because they operate unhindered in the unnewsworthy nooks and crannies of civil society” (p.111).

In the *meso-public spheres*, at a national level, millions of people interact at the level of territorial nation-state framework. According to Keane (1998) these meso-public spheres:

Are those spaces of controversy about power that encompass millions of people watching, listening, or reading across vast distances. They are mainly coextensive with the territorial state, but they may also extend beyond its boundaries to encompass neighboring audiences (as in the case of German-language programming and publishing in Austria); they reach may also be limited to regions within states, as in the case of the non-Castilian-speaking regions of Spain like Catalonia and the Basque country (p.112).



More importantly, Keane (p. 112-113) argues that these meso-public spheres:  
Are mediated by large circulation newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the Catalan daily, *Avui*. They are also mediated by electronic media such as BBC radio and television, Swedish Radio, RAI and (in the United States) National Public Radio and the four national networks (CBS, NBC, ABC and Fox).

The *macro-public spheres* (regional/global; i.e. European Union) encompass hundred of millions, billions of people enmeshed in disputes at the supra-national and global levels of power. According to Keane (1998, p. 113-114): “Macro-publics of hundreds of millions of citizens are the (unintended) consequence of the international concentration of mass media firms previously owned and operated at the territorial nation-state level.”

In an attempt to solve the tension between a public space centered on rational deliberation and one in which argumentation is marked by affective elements, Miege (2011) proposes the distinction between a *societal public sphere* and a *political public sphere*. Although profoundly and permanently interconnected, these two public spheres are individualized by their own autonomy, and by their own specific ways of treating information. A societal public sphere is spontaneously formed, under the pressure of events that affect some groups; the information is selected according to the values and interests of those groups; debates are launched, often passionate; here the diverse interests, values, symbolic representations and forms of discourse meet but also confront each other; in some cases these debates (and their subject) cross over the borders of a unitary group or multiple groups and they coagulate in a theme of general interest, further

taken and redefined by mass media. In that moment, the societal public sphere becomes the political public sphere, and the positions are expressed in the form of argumentative deliberations.

### **The public sphere and the new media**

In Habermas's model the mass media have an ambiguous and contradictory position as they are described having several simultaneous functions, and today more questions can be added to the debate:

- a. Medium of/for debate – in this stance does the mass media offer only the support for ideas that made the object of public debate to be fixed and transmitted in its traditional places or is it itself a media(ted) public sphere?
- b. Place of the public debate – the mass media substitute for the traditional places (coffee houses, theatres, markets, and so on) and become the “space” un-localized, ubiquitous, and accessible for all the debates on general-interest themes.
- c. Alternative for the “canonic” public sphere – the mass media create, emphasize, and impose multiple public spaces, corresponding to the multiple communication devices, and multiple cultural and social identities. Now the debate can also move on deciding if the social media brought along more visible mini-spheres, or as Keane (2011) called them (referring to social movements) micro-public spheres. Could it be argued that the comments space at the end of the news article on every media website, or on their Facebook pages recreate in a way the literary or coffee houses debates and discussion?

In the first two stances, the mass media amplify the number of those who can access the debates in the public space. In this case, it is through the technological dimension that the mass media become the optimal instrument for global broadcasting, becoming therefore factors of integration into the public sphere and democratization of the political life. In the last context, the mass media create public spaces. In this case, it is the communicational dimension that makes the mass media a system of constructing meanings and negotiating different representations about the world.

In a world dominated by new and social media, the public space enters a new stage of structural transformations. Perhaps the most important change consists in the public space now being opened to a vast number of people, who in multiple online public spheres(icles) participated to discussions referring to all events, or issues considered important:

Citizens and audiences today are actively engaging in bottom–up communication through an increasing number of social media that are creating alternative communicative spheres, and thus challenging the traditional top– down model of political communication. In response, both traditional media institutions and the political elite have begun tapping into this bottom–up culture by increasingly adopting participatory approaches (Graham, 2011, p. 262).

In these conditions, the ideal model of deliberation based on mastering and applying the logical argumentation techniques is contradicted by the extraordinary variety of approaches and debate modalities:

Within actually existing civil societies, public spheres tend increasingly to be evanescent. The point about rational argumentation is more difficult to answer,

although it is again clear that there is no reason in principle why the concept of the public sphere must necessarily be wedded to the ideal of communication orientated towards reaching consensus based upon the force of the best argument (Keane, 1998, p. 119).

The literature addressing specifically the idea of public sphere as connected to the publics' comments as they appear on the media outlets' online or social media pages, is scarce. In a way, at a theoretical level, Breese (2011) argues for the existence of multiple publics, therefore multiple public spheres, the existent public spheres varying depending on their scale and content. Breese proposes that public spheres range from face-to-face interaction between individuals (acting together or conversing in real time) to symbolic, or mediated public spheres, usually facilitated by the mass media.

However, to date, few studies advanced from simply philosophically or theoretically debates of the concept of the public sphere in the context of new and social news media, to actually analyzing the issue empirically. These studies that explore the concept of public sphere in online/social media by looking at the online news outlets' comments sections, could further be categorized as pertaining to two research directions: (1) simply "testing" or applying Habermas' conceptualization and theory of public sphere (i.e. argumentative discourse characteristics) to the online/social media news' comments; many of these studies have a comparative character, following the correlation between different media and cultural systems and the construction of a "public sphere 2.0.; and (2) proposing alternative views/forms of the public sphere conceptualization in the context of the analysis on these online/social media news' comments.

A representative example of the first research stream is offered by Ruiz et al.'s (2011, p. 463; 464) analysis of over 15,000 comments from the online versions of five national newspapers of record from different political and journalistic contexts from the perspective of Habermas' theory of the public sphere. Assessing the quality of comments from the normative perspective of Habermas' discursive ethics, Ruiz et al. propose two models of audience participation: 1) *communities of debate*, where the discussions are argumentative, respectful and mark diverse points of view; and 2) *homogenous communities* marked by a more emotional debate rather than argumentative. The authors conclude:

While the results of the study suggest a rather bleak overall picture of comments in online news as a space for the reproduction of hegemonic points of view and the expression of the citizen frustrations with the ruling class, they also provide evidence that some users do engage (more in some online newspapers than others) in thoughtful discussions enjoying the exercise of trying to provide the most convincing argument. Public Sphere 2.0 is not perfect either (Ruiz et al., 2011, p. 484).

In the same sense, Graham's (2011) investigation compares online public debates and identified nine conditions: rational-critical debate, coherence, continuity, reciprocity, reflexivity, empathy, discursive equality and discursive freedom (Graham, 2011, p. 250). His study also stresses the importance of emotions and their concretization in deliberations in the form of expressivity. His approach echoes Papacharissi's (2011) research focused on the correlation between civility vs. uncivility and politeness vs. impoliteness in the debates from online political groups. In these "co-existing public

spheres of diverse counter-publics” (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 38), the debate is developed between the poles of affectivity – “flaming, and often offensive, nonsensical, albeit passionate online response” (p. 27) – and the ones of rational equilibrium, where civility and politeness lead the game of arguments.

The second direction is exemplified through a series of studies devoted to online public sphere and authored by Dahlberg (2001; 2007). He considers that the Internet changes the public sphere’s way of functioning, especially regarding the deliberation mechanisms. In this “radical democratic public sphere” the deliberation quality can be evaluated starting from six categories (2007, p. 48):

1. *Exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims.* The discussion includes the exchange and critique of normative arguments that are established through reason and rationality.
2. *Reflexivity.* Participants display a willingness to critically review the positions presented, the cultural and society norms discussed, and their own personal values.
3. *Ideal role taking.* Commenters respectfully consider the viewpoints of others and show that they are committed to engaging in constructive dialogue.
4. *Sincerity.* Individuals make a sincere attempt to engage in discourse by providing all the relevant information necessary to contribute to the discussion.
5. *Discursive inclusion and equality.* Each participant has an equal opportunity to participate, contribute, and criticize the statements of others in the discourse.

6. *Autonomy from state and economic power.* Rather than having economic or political censors dictating the conversation, the discourse is driven by the interests and motivations of autonomous individuals.

Also, representative for the second type of research stream is Loke's (2013) research about *Republican Herald's* online comments in regard to a local murder trial, in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Loke (2013, p.179) argues that those "online news readers' comments have emerged as new public spaces, allowing the public to participate publicly, but yet often with shielded identities." Her research focuses on the way issues of race were debated in the online public sphere, more specifically in what she called the "new public spaces." Loke (2013, p. 180) argues that the research's findings show that the section offered by the newspaper's online version for readers to voice their opinions provided "an unprecedented view into the unconstrained emotions and uncensored comments of the people in Shenandoah and beyond." Moreover, Loke (2013, p.180) concludes that the research demonstrated that online news readers' comments sections "have evolved into new public spaces and thus in exceptional cases such as this, can arguably provide a gauge of society's pulse."

## **Framing Theory**

### **General overview**

Framing is one of the media theories that stemmed from the presupposition that reality is socially constructed. Initially the concept of "frame" was introduced by Bateson (1972) in the context of his research on language interactions and his observations of monkeys playing (how they framed hostile moves as play). In sociology, Goffman (1974)

in his book *Frame Analysis* offered an in-depth and comprehensive view on framing, providing different levels and types of framing existent in everyday interaction.

Essentially, the two scholars proposed that people make sense of a complicated world primarily through frames and framing.

The theory was further developed by scholars such as McCoombs & Shaw (1972), Gamson & Modigliani (1989) and Entman (1993). It soon became very popular among researchers from different fields (especially in political communication); a massive number of studies about frames and framing processes were and are generated up to date and a variety of definitions and conceptualizations are available.

An in-depth review of the studies on framing, and a theoretical synthesis (Chong & Druckman, 2007; D'Angelo, 2002; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Entman et al., 2009; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Reese, 2010; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012), showed that the plethora of definitions could be divided into general and functional categories. The definitions from the first category, are the ones that are offered by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Gitlin (2003) who argue that news making is a socially constructed process, and the frames are the patterns embedded in news messages. Functional definitions deal with what frames generally do, what their function is, at the societal or individual level. Among the most cited are the ones offered by: (1) Entman (1993; 2004) who argues that frames define problems, diagnose causes (by identifying the forces creating the problems), evaluate (by expressing moral opinions / making moral judgments), and prescribe solutions / support remedies; (2) Nisbet (2010, p. 47) who states that “frames simplify complex issues by lending greater importance or weight to certain considerations and arguments over others”; (3) Reese (2001, p. 11) whose



working definition is: “Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” ; (4) Salem (2002) who notes that media frames play a vital role in stimulating opposition to or support for an event or issue; provide moral judgment, causal interpretation and remedy/solution for media-focused problems. Also drawing from the functional definitions, some scholars identified and proposed different types of frames. Again, among the most cited and used is the typology offered by De Vreese (2005) - *generic frames* (can be identified across different issues and contexts) or *issue specific frames* (pertinent to a specific event, such as the Gulf War). Continuing along the same line of thinking, it can be considered that the generic frames can include the five categories proposed by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) and Iyengar (1991):

- *attribution of responsibility frame* – attributing responsibility for the cause or solution of an event, problem, or issue.
- *conflict frame* – reflecting the conflict between individuals, groups, and organizations;
- *economic consequences frame* – reporting an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have financially on an individual, groups, organizations, or countries;
- *human interest frame* – bringing a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem;
- *morality frame* – placing the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions.

The research studies of reference pertaining to the specific literature are concentrated either on “frame building”, or on “frame setting” (De Vreese & Lechler, 2013, p. 293). The first process refers to the way in which different frames are born, thus in the case of news frames, the factors influencing their creation. Synthesizing various research, Scheufele (1999) proposes a typology of these factors, then used by numerous other scholars: (a) external influences: social norms and values, pressures of various interest groups and organizations; (b) internal influences: organizational pressures, journalistic routines, journalist’s ideology. As Chang et al. (2010, p.179) point out, “it is particularly noteworthy that cultural and societal considerations influence a country’s news media in terms of how information is processed.” Indeed, among the external influences shaping media news framing, the symbolic representation deeply rooted in the journalists’ cultural baggage plays an important role:

Culturally embedded frames are appealing for journalists because they are ready for use. On the basis of their narrative ingredients is possible to assign roles to the principal actors of an issue (e.g., good-bad, advocate-opponent), specify what the problem is and who is responsible and so forth, all of which contributes to the dramatization and emotional appeal of the news” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 87).

This explains the fact that numerous studies identify the long-lasting cultural stereotypes and even archetypes as media frames, especially in media coverage of crisis and controversial issues such as immigration (Benson, 2013), terrorism (Altheide, 2007, Ghanem, 2010; Silverstone, 2011), economic crises (De Vreese, 2010), medical risks (Chang et al., 2010). This dissertation is inspired by this theoretical perspective, because it aimed to showcase, by comparing news frames from two quality newspapers from U.S.

and France, if and in which way cultural values and representations contribute to the construction of frames through which journalists attempt to convey meaning to the Boston Marathon bombing, and to attribute guilty, responsibility, and merits with the help of some symbolic cultural constructs.

The second approach, “frame setting,” studies the relations between the frames created and distributed by the media and the cultural representations of these messages’ receivers. Rooted in the media effects paradigm numerous studies investigated these processes often with the goal “to explore the extent to which and under what circumstances audiences reflect and mirror frames made available to them in, for example, the news” (De Vreese & Lechler, 2013, p. 293). The same authors (2013, p.296) argue that the framing effects on publics can be placed at a cognitive level (“how frames in the news affect public opinion toward a specific issue or event”), behavioral (“how can enable mobilization or protest”) and emotional (the effects of news framing on distinct emotions toward a political issue”).

As an attempt of an all-encompassing definition, Entman et al. (2009) propose the following:

A frame repeatedly invokes the same objects and traits, using identical or synonymous words and symbols in a series of similar communications that are concentrated in time. These frames function to promote an interpretation of a problematic situation or actor and (implicit or explicit) support of a desirable response, often along with a moral judgment that provides an emotional charge (p. 177).

Frames became essential in the study of media and publics since both use these schemas to interpret and evaluate events and issues. Two contexts of the framing process, essential for the current study are presented below.

### **Framing in the crisis situation; emotions-as-frames**

Generally, a crisis is “an event for which people seek causes and make attributions” (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, p.97). Because the public’s opinions, perceptions and impressions about the crisis and the organization in crisis are influenced by media frames, it is essential to consider how media frames a crisis event, its cause, and who is responsible for the crisis (Coombs, 2006). Framing theory offers context to the investigations of media contents, issues and frames during various type of crises, as well as to the relationship between media and public opinion (e.g. An & Gower, 2009; Coombs, 2012; Liu, 2010; Verhoeven, 2009). In a crisis situation a continuous frame negotiation process is set in motion: the affected organization tries to impose its frame, the media construct frames that would promote an interpretation and make sense for a senseless event, and the public uses and negotiates these proposed frames or other frames coming from other sources, when trying to understand a specific event (Cho & Gower, 2006):

The public perceives not the objective fact of a crisis event, but the fact constructed by the media or news releases from the party in the crisis. Framing or describing of a crisis may well influence the public’s evaluation of organizational responsibility for the crisis event (p.420).

Valentini & Romenti’s (2011) argument that in crisis communication research the notion of framing has gained momentum can be extended to the terrorist attacks media

coverage research. In the same spirit, numerous media studies dedicated to crises caused by terrorist attacks use framing theory in order to explain the way in which journalists select and interpret the information, and the way in which through these processes they offer symbolic representations of the event:

The heart of our explanation lies in the idea of news frames, representing persistent patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusions that furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of the event. Decisions and common practices in newsgathering – determining what and how stories are covered – contribute toward these frames. Out of the myriad ways of describing events in the world, journalists relies upon familiar news frames and upon the interpretation of events offered by credible sources to convey dominant meanings, make sense of facts, focus the headlines and structure the story line. (...) Conventional news frames of terrorism are important because they furnish consistent, predictable, simple and powerful narratives that embedded in the social construction of reality (Norris et al., 2003, pp. 4-5).

Nossek (2007) analyzes the way in which three quality newspapers from the U.S., UK, and Israel have covered different cases of political violence, focusing on the role of “national considerations” (external frame) and “professional standards” (internal frame) in the framing of these events. His conclusions stress the role of political and cultural factors in the mediated construction of a crisis:

The definition of an event as political violence cause the reporter and editorial board to adopt a stance and define the political violence as ‘their’ or ‘ours’.

Because an event is defined as their or ours, it is then covered as either an open

story or a closed one. I suggest that the reason for this distinction is that the national position takes precedence over professional norms whenever an event is defined as ‘our’ political violence and that the professional frame of reference takes precedence whenever political violence is defined as ‘theirs’ or is not framed as a specific type of political violence (e.g. war, terrorist attack, violent protest etc.), (Nossek, 2007, p. 60).

Emphasizing the different framing of the same event depending on the way the crisis was defined as “ours” or “theirs” offers a possibly useful perspective for this dissertation, because it can be assumed that any terrorist attack happening in the U.S. would be defined as “ours” by the American media and as “theirs” by the French media, a prediction that could lead to the emergence of specific frames and themes for each nation. At the same time, this model can be correlated with the distinction suggested by Norris et al. (2003, p. 12) who describe “one-sided” cases in which “the conventional news frame is likely to be strong and all pervasive that politicians, journalists and the public within the community will probably be unaware of this process and media coverage will be relatively uncontroversial”. When the crisis is perceived as a “two-sided case,” the media will be dominated by “greater awareness, contest and dispute about the framing process.” These studies suggest that when journalists present a crisis as “ours”, it would be framed according to the “one-sided-story” model, and it will be integrated into a journalism of consensus, that uses the three ways proposed by Schudson (2011): a pastoral mode, a practical guidance mode and a supportive mode.

In his study devoted to the impact of 9/11 attacks on the media, Altheide (2009) argues that

News does not merely set agendas; rather, consistent with symbolic interaction theory, news that rely on certain symbols and promotes particular relationship between words, deeds, and also guides the perspectives, frameworks, language and discourse that we use in relation to certain problems, as well as related issues (p. 46).

Moreover, he proposes the correlation of the frame concept with the “evidentiary narrative” concept, arguing that because our worldview is shaped by the culture in which we live, “what people regard as evidence is contingent on symbolic processes and meanings that shape, guide, deflect, and construct boundaries” (Altheide, 2009, p. 73). Starting from these symbolically shaped experiences, people construe different “evidentiary narratives”, which in turn, influence the process of framing reality: “I suggest that the evidentiary narrative links frames and even broader domain assumptions about a topical field to a communication process in a specific situation” (Altheide, 2009, p. 74). His analysis of media coverage of 9/11 attack and of the Iraq war shows how “mass media played a critical role in the contemporary evidentiary narratives about terrorism” and suggested that “audience members interpret, discuss and reframe messages, representations, and images of reality” (Altheide, 2009, p. 97). His theoretical model, rooted in a constructivist paradigm, offers possible challenging perspectives to this dissertation, because the current analysis covers not only the media frames from the two newspapers, but also the way in which the publics from the two countries, through their online comments, interpreted the frames proposed by the journalists, or created new frames and themes. In this context it would be instructive to follow the way the publics

accepted or negotiated and reconstructed the meanings of those “evidentiary narratives” proposed by mass media through their stories.

Another perspective is suggested by Nabi (2003) and her proposed emotions-as-frames concept. The “emotion-as-frame perspective” is based on the “repeated pairing of certain emotions with particular ideas or events eventually shapes the way in which one interprets and responds to those events that in turn affect one’s worldview” (Nabi, 2003, p.227). In a crisis situation six negative emotions are dominant – anger; fright; anxiety; guilt; shame and sadness. These emotions are driven by different relational themes, and vary depending on how the crisis is appraised by the public (Lazarus, 1991). Therefore, it can be suggested that different emotions can promote different degrees of message processing (Nabi, 2003). In practice this greater affective reaction triggers agitation. According to Nabi (2002; 2003) these emotions can serve as frames for issues. For example, emotions make certain information more accessible and guide subsequent decision-making.

Even though other empirical studies tried to identify the role of emotions in frame construction, “all existing studies point out the lack of a systematic account of the role of emotions in framing research” (De Vreese & Lecheler, 2013, p. 299). However, this perspective is also interesting in the context of the dissertation, because it can be expected that when dealing with such a powerful drama, as a terrorist attack, journalists and especially commenters would organize and interpret their information through these emotions as frames.



### **Framing theory in the new/social media context**

The changes in communication technology and the emergence and increasing popularity of new and social media brought an end to the mass media communication era and a beginning for a media communication one (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). It could then be argued that these new and ongoing developments challenge the assumptions of the majority the traditional mass communication theories and heighten their possible shortcomings (Baran & Davis, 2009). For example, the agenda setting model as well as the studies based on its concepts could be disputed since they were based on the assumption that audiences regularly and passively use a finite number of media for news, which may no longer be true in the context of new and social media (Baran & Davis, 2009). In the new digital landscape, “these new forms of interactive media also shift the focus away from a transmission model of traditional news framing effects to a more interactive, social constructivist, and ‘bottom up’ model of framing” (Nisbet, 2010, p. 75).

The same argument could be made about framing theory, especially in the context of media framing effects. The essential idea behind the framing theory – the fact that journalists, publics and other actors interpret and give different or similar meanings to the same events through frames – does not change depending on the appearance of new communication channels, or the publics’ preferred channels. Moreover, this dissertation showcases how new media make the investigation of framing processes/game easier. The officials rapidly react to a crisis by posting on Facebook, trying in this manner to impose frames advantaging the organization that they represent. Journalists use the official posts as sources and they also post their stories and leads on the media website and Facebook

page. Publics can and do offer feedback, their thoughts and feelings through their comments to those specific stories and posts. Due to open access, researchers can now trace these “artifacts,” save them and research them. Therefore, in the real life laboratory of social and new media, one can easier analyze the media frames as well as the publics’ frames (the real reactions and thoughts). The dialogue between these frames could serve as an argument for the vitality of the public sphere in a crisis situation.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology and data analysis

This dissertation examines the Boston marathon bombing crisis case, namely the interplay between the interpretations and attributions offered by the media and the publics. As previously argued, the recent emergence of new technologies and the popularity of new media offer researchers access to online news articles and user comments, and thus documented interaction between media and their publics by looking at online news articles and the comments made by readers in response to them. The broad adoption of new media platforms allows journalists throughout the world to post news stories to media websites, and the accompanying the subsequent readers' comment section lends the publics a forum to contribute thoughts, feelings, suggestions, or criticisms. It can be argued that this "live" interaction during a heavily mediatized crisis situation offers the exemplary dynamic negotiation of meanings and frames between media and the publics, as well as the creation of public spheres specific to the phenomenon.

This research aims to offer an international comparative perspective by examining (1) how the crisis was framed by the media and the publics in the U.S. and France, and (2) the online public spheres consequently created in the U.S. and France, respectively. In addition, a comparative perspective can bring additional depth to the scholarship pertaining to the cultural elements, connections and influences for framing and public sphere frameworks. This research compares website coverage of the U.S. newspaper, *The New York Times*, and the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*. Both are considered national newspapers (Albert, 1998; Cayrol, 1991; Jeanneney, 1998; Kuhn, 2011 - for *Le Figaro*;

Blanchard, 1998; Emery & Emery, 1996; Schwartz, 2012; Shepard, 1996 – for *The New York Times*), with a strong online audience, which ensures the presence of enough comments for the analysis. In addition, both are considered to be newspapers of record by numerous comparative media studies scholars (Benson, 2013, Benson & Hallin, 2014, Berkowitz, 2007, Hallin & Mancini, 2004, Hotchkiss, 2010, Quandt, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, this choice follows the rationale offered by Ruiz et al. (2011) that the quality press portray “themselves as the main area for public opinion formation, and comments in news of their websites could be understood as a central space for the digital public sphere” (p.468). In this case, distinctions between news outlets and their publics allow the exploration of how such emergent differences impact the representations and meaning of the same event (whereby the strong connection between culture and frames has already been asserted).

This cross-cultural examination requires a comparative investigation as it is carried out “with the intention of using the same research tools to compare systematically the manifestations of phenomena in more than one temporal or spatial sociocultural setting” (Hantrais, 2009, p. 2). In the context of this dissertation, the comparative perspective has the goal of permitting the explanation of both similarities and differences between media frames and themes, and public frames and themes of the same event from the perspective of the characteristics of the two media systems and the two political culture models. Thus, this researcher tries to attain the major objective of such a research – as Laswell (1968, p.7) one of the founders of media research, concludes, “meaningful

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<sup>3</sup> It also has to be noted that while in France newspapers like *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro* have been historically national publications, in the U.S. there is no history of national newspapers, *The New York Times* being considered the publication of record because of its quality and impact.

comparisons ultimately involve assessing the significance” of the object of study. Over the last decades, cross-national media investigations increased in number and significance:

It is in these recent years that comparative research on media and communications has moved from mere description to explanation, from conceptual oversimplification to theoretical sophistication, from juxtaposition of countries to a theory-driven selection of cultures, and from anecdotal evidence to methodological rigor” (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012, p. 521).

A newspaper from the U.S. and France were chosen on purpose, because according to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the U.S. and French media belong to two different media systems, the liberal model and the political polarized one. This dissertation’s author considered that the system difference might better show specificities of a media outlet by contrasting it to another media outlet. France was chosen as a first example; future research would extend other countries, from other specific systems. Hallin & Mancini (2004) showed that research trying to explain media phenomena only by reference to its own system, risks not observing a series of characteristics, which only a comparison would be able to highlight, and consequently they argued that it is “the value of comparative research to address theoretical questions about the relation between media systems and their social and political context ” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 302; also see on the theoretical and methodological implications of the media comparative studies, Downing, 2012; Esser & Hannitzsch, 2012; Gross, 2011; Hanitzsch, 2009; Livingstone, 2003).

The way frames are extracted from media content differs depending on the scholars' paradigmatic views, research questions or intentions, and frames can be identified utilizing qualitative methods (i.e. Downs, 2002; Reese & Buckalev, 1995), quantitative approaches (i.e. Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), or both (i.e. Simon & Xenos, 2000). Scholars adopting a positivist paradigm employ methods that empirically confirm the existence of some already-known theories and relations, in this case frames. However, such an approach limits the field of social representations of a crisis situation, and as such a more in-depth qualitative approach might better reveal the complex dynamics within the social construction of reality. In this sense, as Brennen (2012, p. 22) notes, "the myriad meanings that people make" is best understood through qualitative methods, a fact that becomes essential especially when studying a crisis. In this sense, data can be explored through different means, such as a qualitative content analysis (as labeled by Kracauer cited in Brennen, 2013, p. 194), qualitative media analysis/qualitative document analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013), qualitative data analysis (Dey, 1993) or qualitative textual analysis (Brennen, 2012). The qualitative content analysis can be (1) conventional (where coding categories are derived directly from the text data), (2) directed (where an existent theory would guide the initial coding), or (3) summative (where keywords or content would be counted and compared) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Various scholars described the qualitative content analysis process (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Brennen, 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Dey, 1993; Priest, 2010; Schreier, 2012). Perhaps, the main characteristic of a content analysis is that the object of study (be it images, interview transcripts, field notes, political speeches,

journalistic accounts) is considered as text. This text includes a manifest meaning and a latent meaning. Generally, the quantitative content analysis addresses the manifest meaning whereas the qualitative content analysis is best suited to examine the latent meaning.

According to the aforementioned scholars qualitative content analysis encompasses five main steps. The first step in any research project is the immersion in text, through the full reading of the corpus, in order for the researcher to become familiarized with the texts under examination. The second step is the “break down” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 366) of the text by identifying basic textual units (labeled by other authors as “concepts” i.e. Punch, 2005). The units serve as entities with which the researcher will work and, therefore, must be both heuristics, (i.e. they have to have a specific meaning) and manageable (i.e. they have to be conveniently maneuvered). The third step is coding – identifying categories that organize units based on their similarities and differences. This step implies non-linear navigation within the data: “Brainstorming about the data in order to identify meaning, then conceptualizing that meaning by assigning concepts to stand for it being expressed” (Corbin, Strauss, 2008, p. 187). This coding journey should contain the following stages: (1) identifying the first categories that seem to answer the research questions; (2) identifying other categories through reading another text segment; (3) comparing the two groups of categories to identify similarities and differences among the units that compose them – process resulting in the possibility of moving units from a category into another, or grouping units into a new category; (4) the same process is retaken for each segment of text; and (5) creating category labels and analytical descriptions for each category and identifying quotes from

the analyzed text, that eloquently exemplify these categories. As articulated by Punch (2005):

Open coding, like all coding, is labeling, putting labels on pieces of data.

Sometime these labels will be descriptive, low-inference labels, and sometimes they will be in vivo labels, but mostly they will be labels, which involve a first level of inference (p. 207).

During each stage the researcher must also be include what the aforementioned scholars label memoing - writing down notes with observations, difficulties, possible directions of interpretation and theorization. By doing this, the researcher might attain one of the main goals of the qualitative content analysis: “to use consistent categories in a systematic way, but at the same time allow them to emerge from data” (Priest, 2010, p. 170).

The fourth step of this process involves coding the emergent categories to establish main frames. Through this process of coding of categories, main frames are established. The final step ensures qualitative research quality (Silverman, 2005, p. 209). In qualitative research, the researcher can utilize techniques such as constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 73; Dey, 1993, p. 96-98; Punch, 2005, p. 204; Silverman, 2005, p. 213-214), negative case analysis (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 369), or comprehensive data treatment (Silverman, 2005, p. 214). The research process stops when the text analysis does not bring any more new categories, and saturation is reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 197; Scheier, 2012, p. 77).

For the purpose of this dissertation, online news articles and related user comments were examined using a qualitative media/document analysis, as described by



Altheide & Schneider (2013). Although the authors label the method differently, its schema is similar to the qualitative content analysis described by the aforementioned scholars. This method of data collection and analysis best fits the paradigmatic assumptions behind the current study, and it best aligns with the study's research questions. Altheide & Schneider (2013) constructed and described their analysis model as related to their applied research on media coverage of different crises – an object of study identical with this dissertation.

In addition, this study's focus on the interplay of interpretations, the negotiation of meaning and frames between media and their publics, as well as the importance of cultural contexts for explaining these interactions and meanings, corresponds to a social constructivism perspective, similar to Altheide & Schneider's acknowledgment that the theoretical and methodological positions of sociologists like Berger & Luckman (1966) inspired and informed their proposed method (2013, p. 13).

This dissertation considers both the media and commenters frames, and thus also considers audience-generated text. Altheide & Schneider (2013) argue that it is important to consider how a “document helps define the situation and clarify meaning for the audience member” (p. 17), and they divide documents as pertaining to three classes: primary (the objects of study), secondary (records about primary documents), and auxiliary (supplementing materials). While news articles are considered primary documents and online or social media commentaries as auxiliary documents by the two authors, this dissertation examines both as the object of the study, and therefore considers both as primary documents.

Adapting from the model proposed by Altheide & Schenider (2013, pp. 39-73) ten steps were applied.

**The first step** was to decide the problem to be investigated and to establish research questions. This step was achieved before and during this dissertation's proposal, and the research questions were defined and redefined.

**The second step** was to become familiar with relevant information of the context. The researcher familiarized herself with Boston Marathon bombing case, *The New York Time* and the *Le Figaro* main characteristics.

**The third step** involved becoming familiar with the documents and selecting the units of analysis. The researcher selected online newspapers articles and comments as units of analysis.

**In the fourth step** the researcher listed several guiding-items to serve as the basis for drafting a protocol.

The researcher then, **as a fifth step**, read articles and comments in order to further revise the protocol, and in **a sixth** step she further refined the protocol (for the final version see Appendix A).

The collection of the data was done as part of the **seventh step**. The sampling strategy was conceptualized: given that the current study focuses on a very specific case, the Boston Marathon bombing crisis, this research applied a purposive sampling for all *The New York Time* and the *Le Figaro* online news stories that focused on the bombing. The sampling process involved several decisions. Since the focus of the research included public sphere elements visible in comments, the news stories with less than five comments were not used in the analysis. The same procedure applied to the news articles

that were posted later than April 22. The timeframe was set to correspond to the beginning of the crisis (the bombing), April 15, its immediate resolution (the apprehension and charging of the second bomber), April 19, and April 22, when the suspect in custody admitted his guilt, therefore, offering closure to the publics. Moreover, this dissertation's author decided to focus only on the news articles from the respective newspapers' websites (not their blogs) and filed under general news category (U.S. news or International news in the *Le Figaro* case). Editorials on the Boston Marathon bombing, as well as news stories filed under other labels such as "sports" or "flash actu" ("reality in brief" in *Le Figaro*) were not considered for analysis.

The data were collected using the aforementioned preset codes: (1) news stories about Boston Marathon bombing, (2) news stories published in the 'news' section, (3) news stories published online between April 15 and April 22, and (4) news stories with more than five comments. Therefore after applying all these criteria a total of 25 news articles with 1858 comments for *Le Figaro*, and 9 news articles with 7377 comments for *The New York Times* were collected and chosen for analysis<sup>4</sup>. The difference in both the number of articles and of comments is assignable to the fact that the *Le Figaro* opens all its news stories to comments, while *The New York Times* only opens some news stories to comments, as explained by *The New York Times* Public Editor, Margaret Sullivan (2012):

We open approximately 17 articles per day for comments. In addition, every blog post is open for comments by default. The process, in general, looks something like this: A member of the community staff consults with the news desk, which runs the home page, about the articles that are likely to be published that day, then

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<sup>4</sup> The main focus remained on the meaning of the content, and not on how the breakdown may be counted.

decides which should be open to comments. That list is revised throughout the day as the news evolves and new articles are published. In addition, the Opinion department chooses a number of articles to open in discussion with the community team. Generally, we consider four factors when deciding which articles should be available for comment: news value of the story; the likelihood of reader interest in the story; whether we can moderate the likely number of comments in a timely fashion; and whether we have recently hosted comments about the issue in question.

**The eighth step** involved collecting, organizing and analyzing the data. The original data was kept in a folder, and another one was created containing word processing format for the text coding. Each story and comments were given a first reading, notes were made regarding emergent concepts, and themes and some changes were made to the initial protocol. Data analysis was performed during several weeks (in mid-April and May); articles and comments were re-read and re-examined, which helped the researcher to identify themes that were not obvious at first glance, or to refine the ones initially identified, and to decide on the emergent frames<sup>5</sup>. This operation was made separately for each of the four data sets: *The New York Times* news stories, *The New York Times* comments, *Le Figaro* news stories and *Le Figaro* comments.

**In the ninth step** the data analysis was finalized: the themes and frames identified for each corpus were compared and by looking at the similarities a list of common themes and frames was created; concurrently, another list with themes unique/specific to

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<sup>5</sup> Following Altheide & Schneider, 2013 (p.53) themes were conceptualized as “recurring typical theses that run through a lot of the reports,” in the current dissertation that run through both news stories and comments; and frames as “the focus, parameter or boundary for discussing a particular event.”

each corpus was created; the “key differences” were highlighted in notes in order to be further explained. Then, for each theme and frame from each corpus the researcher looked for eloquent exemplifications (quotes) that were later systematized.

And finally in **the tenth step**, the findings were then written up, and within the discussion section they were further interpreted and debated in the context of a constant comparison between the corpuses when it came to the frames, and the public spheres characteristics.

Additionally, because the larger context of the current investigation is the public sphere, this type of qualitative analysis did not stop at only identifying themes and frames, but aimed to showcase the characteristics of those specific public spheres. In other words, the analysis was done in the context of the differences and / or similarities of how this online public sphere is defined, used, contributed to, reacted to in these two different countries. In this context, the researcher was not interested in what is discussed in the comments, but in *how* the debate unfolded – in other words in the mechanisms of deliberation specific to each analyzed public sphere. Over the last decades, following the initiative of Habermas’ (1991) classical study, which was based on a comparative analysis of the development of public spheres in main European societies, numerous studies were devoted to comparing the public spheres between different countries. These studies focused more on European countries, because of the European Union’s aspiration to create a unified public sphere (Bee & Bozzini, 2010; Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Kunelius & Sparks, 2001). Nevertheless, the studies comparing online public spheres in different countries are much less numerous (Downey et al., 2012; Ferre et al, 2002; Graham, 2011; Ruiz et al. 2011). Different scholars studying the quality of deliberation in

online public spheres use similar several categories (even if sometimes differently labeled), in order to identify the mechanisms of the public debate: (1) rational-critical debate, coherence, continuity, reciprocity, reflexivity, empathy, discursive equality and discursive freedom (Graham, 2011); (2) exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, discursive inclusion and equality, autonomy from state and economic power (Dahlberg, 2001); (3) freedom of expression, rationality, equality of participants, common efforts to reach a consensus (Cohen, 2011).

Synthesizing these general characteristics, this dissertation's author identified as common denominator three main characteristics: cooperative search for truth, rational and argumentative debate and reflexivity. They were conceptualized as follows:

1. Rational critical debate: the ability of commenters to state the reason for their positions, support them with arguments;
2. Cooperative search for truth: the ability of commenters to try together to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus (even if there is no promise that consensual reasons will be forthcoming" - Cohen, 2011, p. 37).  
This cooperative search for truth is materialized in cooperation forms such as reciprocal respect, sincerity, equality and inclusion.
3. Reflexivity: the ability of commenters to show a strong commitment to critically reviewing the positions presented and their own personal values; the ability of commenters to show that they can reflect upon the conditions in which the debate is taking place, or upon the society in general.

These characteristics were used purely as guides to the study, intended to help the researcher better identify the communication and deliberation mechanisms specific to online public spheres, and eventually to identify deliberative techniques specific to each of the national online public spheres. Moreover, the outcome of the study suggested other elements to serve as guides in future similar studies (i.e. media performance or commenters performance). The findings emerging from the analysis and the dissertation's author considerations presented below will be followed by a conclusion chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and analysis

This chapter is organized accordingly: the main findings and analysis considerations are offered for the (1) *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* journalistic themes and frames; (2) *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* commenters' themes and frames; and (3) for the characteristic of *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* public spheres as they emerged from the comments.

#### **Findings and analysis: *New York Times* & *Le Figaro* journalistic themes and frames**

Five main frames were found both in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*: terrorism, the horror, the heroes, the hunt, and justice.

##### **Frame 1: Terrorism**

*Terrorist attack: domestic vs. foreign*

*The New York Time* stories emphasized the terrorism perspective from the beginning of the newspaper's coverage of the Boston bombing, by citing DesLauriers, the FBI-Boston special agent in charge of the investigation, who described the attack as potential terrorism:

Richard DesLauriers, the special agent in charge of the bureau's Boston office, described the inquiry at a news conference as 'a criminal investigation that is a potential terrorist investigation' (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Two paragraphs down, both President Obama and an unnamed White House official were cited offering their somehow contradictory interpretations on the terrorist attack hypothesis:



Mr. Obama did not refer to the attacks as an act of terrorism, and he cautioned people from “jumping to conclusions” based on incomplete information. But a White House official, speaking on the condition of anonymity afterward, said, ‘Any event with multiple explosive devices — as this appears to be — is clearly an act of terror, and will be approached as an act of terror’ (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

If in the first story, due to different interpretations of the different sources cited, the terrorism concept was nebulously defined between certainty and possibility, by the second day of the coverage, the terrorist attack angle was clearly presented:

New details about the explosives emerged as President Obama announced that the F.B.I. was investigating the attack as ‘an act of terrorism’ (*The New York Times*, April, 16, 2013).

Once the “terrorism” was adopted as a news angle, the journalistic discourse organized the information by deepening the initial theme, thus moving forward to the discussion of domestic terrorism versus foreign terrorism. Because no known terrorist organization or group claimed responsibility for the attack, two big questions remained unanswered (who did it and why?), leaving room for speculations, interpretations and rumors until the investigators found new information. Therefore, *The New York Times* stories presented the two versions of the terrorism hypothesis: a domestic or foreign terrorist attack, both options presented as equally possible. Details on both were given by citing official sources:

‘However’, the official added, ‘we don’t yet know who carried out this attack, and a thorough investigation will have to determine whether it was planned and carried out by a terrorist group, foreign or domestic’ (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

As the investigation evolved, *The New York Times*, on April 16, allocated several paragraphs citing terrorism experts, and investigators who were inclined more towards

the domestic terrorism hypothesis, arguing that clues like the scale of the attack, the nature of explosives and fact that no one claimed responsibility for the attack suggest that there was one perpetrator or a small group who was responsible. As the events unfolded and new information surfaced the emphasis moved on the domestic attack emphasis, culminating with the discovery of the two suspects, the killing of one and the capture of the other. The stories developed the line of a possible foreign connection when the country of origin of the suspects turned out to be Chechnya, and other theories related to the meanings of this emerged. Thus, from April 19 through April 23 the stories clearly defined the act as domestic terrorism, and were focused more on the possible explanations for the suspects' radicalization.

By attributing guilt and introducing some determinations (domestic terrorism, individual or small group, non-sophisticated weapons), *The New York Times* journalists, therefore, materialize and legitimize the terrorism frame. Furthermore, in analyzed *The New York Times* articles there was little focus on the idea of a united, strong Boston, or of Americans as united against terrorism theme.

In the *Le Figaro's* case, while the terrorism angle was also present throughout the news stories, it is noteworthy that in the first story the terrorism attack hypothesis was better emphasized than in The New York Time one, by presenting both sides equally (or but not citing more the officials who were sure that it was a terrorist act):

Obama did not explicitly talk about a terrorist attack, regarding the explosions, emphasizing the grey areas are still unanswered. But a White House official declared that the event involving a series of explosives 'is clearly a terrorist act, and will be treated as such' (*Le Figaro*, April 15, 2013).

While the first story's headlines refer only at "blasts" (in *The New York Times* story) and "deadly explosions" (in *Le Figaro* article), the terrorism 'angle' was clearer in *The New York Times* article, as they also cited the FBI labeling the attack as most likely terrorist. Interestingly, the same FBI declaration namely, "The head of the FBI office on site announced that his organization took the lead in the investigation into the attacks, a criminal investigation that could potentially become a terrorist investigation," appeared in *Le Figaro* in a much later article, dating April 16, 6:56, 2013, that was already talking about the U.S. relapsing in the horror of terrorism.

In the news stories subsequent to the first one, the incident is clearly labeled as a terrorist attack in headlines, subtitles and story body:

Barack Obama denounced an 'act of terrorism' (Headline in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

The President Barack Obama qualified Tuesday's attacks as 'terrorism acts' (this is subtitle, and the same phrased is repeated in the news story in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

United States relapse in the horror of terrorism (Headline in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013), and

a large scale terrorist act (in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

After the first news story, the terrorism emphasis as well as its two options (domestic vs. foreign) were equally presented in *Le Figaro*, and in very similar way to *The New York Times*. While *The New York Times* had no reference of /emphasis on U.S. relapsing in terrorism, *Le Figaro* strongly highlighted this idea, and was the source of a successive series of comments critical in regards to the U.S. policies.

*Boston strong: don't let terrorists win*

The idea of Boston remaining strong, united, and Bostonians not letting fear rule, thus not letting the terrorists win was the other emerging theme in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*. In *The New York Times* it emerged only in a few of the analyzed articles (April 18) when the photos of the suspects were first released, and the service for the victims was held; and when the second suspect was caught (April 19). Moreover, references to this idea always appeared only when the journalists were citing the speeches of President Obama and Boston's Mayor:

His [President Obama] theme was the marathon, both as road race and metaphor, and he began his remarks with the same phrase that he used to end them: 'Scripture tells us to run with endurance the race that is set before us' (*The New York Times*, April 18, 2013);

Boston's long-serving mayor, Thomas M. Menino, who recently announced that he would not seek a sixth term, rose from the wheelchair he has been using since he broke his leg last week and stood at the lectern to proclaim, 'We are one Boston.' He said he had never loved the people of his city more (*The New York Times*, April 18, 2013); and

'Americans refuse to be terrorized,' Mr. Obama said. 'Ultimately, that's what we'll remember from this week' (*The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

Only one instance conveying the solidarity idea was found to be separate from the two officials speeches, included in the journalistic discourse:

In Boston, as Tuesday wore on, many runners, clad in blue and gold jackets, made pilgrimages to the police blockade on Boylston Street, pausing to take pictures with their cellphones. Others came wearing jackets from previous marathons — a symbol of accomplishment that in Boston turned into a sign of solidarity (*The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

In the *Le Figaro*'s case, further differences appeared in regards to the Boston Strong theme's development. In the first article, *Le Figaro* presented declarations of sympathy and support towards the U.S. from France's President:

In Paris, François Hollande has expressed he is 'deeply shocked' after these explosions. In a statement, the head of state 'presents his condolences to the families of the victims and expresses full solidarity of France to the American authorities and the people' (*Le Figaro*, April 15, 2013).

Additionally, while in *The New York Times* the theme appeared mainly only when President Obama or Boston Mayor's speeches were cited, in *Le Figaro* the theme was more stressed through quotes from three different sources, citizens, a *The New York Times* editorial, and only in the end President Obama:

'It's scary, but it will not stop me from doing what I do every day. We do not live in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv,' noted Evan Diamond, the director of a school in Boston, who confided that he would evoke the drama with his students on Tuesday (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

In its editorial, The New York Times wanted to believe that the Boston Marathon will be held next year 'regardless of the necessary security.' 'No act of terrorism is strong enough to break a tradition that belongs to American history,' wrote the great newspaper newsroom. Way of saying that America was not to be discouraged by the return of attacks (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013); and

The Head of State stressed that at this moment, 'there are neither Republicans nor Democrats.' 'We are all Americans and united,' he has insisted, expressing sympathy for the victims and for Boston, 'tough and resilient city of evil' (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

The same pattern was noticed when it came to the image of "unity" conveyed by the newspapers. While in *The New York Times* only one paragraph towards the end of a news story depicted the image of a "united Boston," *Le Figaro* offered ample description of how Americans are coming together to get through the crisis:

The impetus of solidarity (subtitle in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013); and

Despite the horror, a powerful show of solidarity took hold of the city. Some residents have opened their doors to visitors whose flights were blocked; others offer to take them to the airport. An extensive network of blood donation was organized (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

## **Frame 2: The Horror**

The “Horror” frame is present throughout all the analyzed news stories. In both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* this frame is developed through several themes expressing this idea in different contexts emerging, as events were unfolding and defined by a powerful emotional content.

### *The apocalyptic after-the-bombing-scene*

An extensive emphasis was put in almost all the analyzed *The New York Times* articles on the (a) strength of the explosions and (b) on describing in-depth and in a metaphorical language the scenes following the two explosions. Initially, the horror of the scene was overly described, in very visual terms, accentuating the dismembered victims, the war-like atmosphere, the huge power of the bombs (although artisanal, made out of slow cookers rigged with nails), and the extreme impact of the explosions. The bombs, although as revealed later, were “rudimentary devices made from ordinary pressure cookers” (The New York Times, April 16), were still described as “powerful” (The New York Times, April 15), with a “tremendous force of the explosion,” (The New York Times, April 17) potent enough to “toss debris on top of the buildings” (*The New York Times*, April 16).

Moreover, the articles emphasize the idea that the “Boston bombs were loaded to maim” (Headline in *The New York Times*, April 16); were filled with “nails, ball bearing

and black powder” (*The New York Times*, April 16), and that would explain the ‘war-like’ injuries:

The widespread leg trauma was a result of bombs that seemed to deliver their most vicious blows within two feet of the ground (*The New York Times*, April 15).

A cataclysmic and chaotic atmosphere was described as taking over Boston streets, where the event was held and the bombs detonated. Journalists used in abundance words or expressions like: (1) “pandemonium” or “panic” to describe people’s initial reaction; (2) “ambulances started coming by the dozen” “victims arrived two in an ambulance” or “so many patients arrived at once” to describe the chaos caused by the high number of victims, and (3) “shattered bone” “shredded tissue” “legs or feet so mangled” to describe the gruesome injuries.

Adding to the already gruesome image was the comparison of the scene with a war zone: journalists stressed that this it’s not something that it expected to happen in the U.S. (the idea that the “unthinkable” just happened – is something that you see in other places in the world but you think it would never happen in US):

‘This is like a bomb explosion we hear about in Baghdad or Israel or other tragic points in the world,’ Dr. Conn said (*The New York Times*, April 15); or

Some of the attendant medical professionals, said Julie Dunbar, a chaplain at Beth Israel, were faced with ‘more trauma than most ever see in a lifetime, more sadness, more loss’ (*The New York Times*, April 16).

Doctors describing the war-like injuries and methods (i.e. tourniquets) to deal with some of those injuries were also cited:

Dr. Stavas said she had applied a tourniquet to the man’s leg with someone’s belt (*The New York Times*, April 15),

Tourniquets, once discouraged because they were thought to cause damage to injuries, have returned to favor and have been used to treat wounds inflicted by explosive devices in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Dr. Panter said. (*The New York Times*, April 16).

‘With blast injuries to the lower extremities that we’re getting in the Middle East, you bleed out,’ he said. Tourniquets ‘can help save lives. I don’t know if they helped in this situation, but it sure couldn’t hurt’ (*The New York Times*, April 16).

Similarly to *The New York Times* news stories, the in-depth and metaphorical descriptions of the macabre post-explosion images are widely present in the analyzed French news stories. The gruesome picture of severed legs and arms was, as in *The New York Times*, over-emphasized:

‘Someone’s leg flew over my head,’ says John Ross, a witness who gave his belt to act as a tourniquet (*Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2103); and

Witnesses evoke dismembered victims (Subtitle in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

The same “warlike” gruesome comparison is present in the French news stories, and the same Dr. Conn was cited saying that he has never seen something like this carnage typical for war zones, in his entire career.

Several discrepancies between *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* coverage emerged. If in *The New York Times* the power of the bombs and the size of the explosions was over-emphasized, in the *Le Figaro* the bombs are described a few times as “deadly” or “the deadliest” (as compared to other incidents), but the explosion and detonation is in a way underemphasized, described across the stories as: “a small scale detonation” (subtitle in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 23:19, 2013). Even if calling the attack a nightmare for the U.S. Homeland Security Administration, the bomb is still described as small scale:



The Homeland Security's nightmare has become reality: a low intensity attack against a soft target (easy target), an innocent crowd in a public space (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 23:19, 2013).

In *The New York Times* the image of chaos reigning everywhere was present only in the first news story, and it was not overemphasized, but on contrary, in the article applauding the doctors the opposite was underlined – the order that these doctors brought to the scene. On the other hand, the *Le Figaro* widely overstressed the image of chaos all throughout, with subtle nuances depending on the events: “It's total chaos” (*Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2103); “an atmosphere of chaos and people in tears” (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013); and “Chaos in the suburbs of Boston” (*Le Figaro*, April 19, 11:27, 2013).

Moreover, throughout the articles, the French journalists emphasize the horror of the current act by again connecting it to past terrorist attacks in US, both foreign and domestic, by highlighting the idea that again the U.S. is the target of terrorist attacks. Headlines read “United States relapse in the horror of terrorism” (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013) or “The precedent terrorist attacks in the United States” (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 18:04, 2013). The after-math is described as: “Twelve years after September 11, America relives the horror and agony of a large-scale terrorist act, whose authors are unknown” (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013); the bombs are referred to as the two bombs that “resurrected / brought out the specter/worry of the terrorist threat/danger in United States” (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 18:04, 2013), and the explosions are constantly labeled as “deadly” or as the “deadliest” since 9/11.

*Boston and Marathon's purity tainted*

Both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* journalists moved from the “horror” emphasis to highlighting the effects on Boston in general, and they overstressed the antithesis between how Boston looked like before the bombing, during the moments of celebration, and after the bombing, full of death, and the dismembered sentence – worse than death for the runners.

In *The New York Times* stories, whenever describing the explosions and the aftermath's apocalyptic images, the gruesome reverberations of the bombs labeled in the articles, as specifically designed to dismember are presented in contrast with the initial joy and purity of Boston, and the marathon. In this sense, journalists emphasized the antithesis between: (1) the perfect, sunny day filled with cheers versus the aftermath scene of carnage filled with screams; and (2) contestants running in the race versus running for their lives; and the triumphant runners in the race versus defeated, dismembered runners after the explosion:

Two powerful bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on Monday afternoon, killing three people, including an 8-year-old child, and injuring more than 100, as one of this city's most cherished rites of spring was transformed from a scene of cheers and sweaty triumph to one of screams and carnage” (*The New York Times*, April 15),

Some runners were approaching the end of the 26.2-mile race when the two blasts, in rapid succession, sent them running away from the finish line (*The New York Times*, April 15).

The *Le Figaro* presented very similar antithetical images, with the addition of the historical meaning of the day the marathon was taking place, thus emphasizing the idea of a tainted purity, as exemplified in these two instances:

day of historical celebration (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013) and,

In the aftermath of this tragedy, the beautiful historic city of New England is bathed in spring sunshine, but the faces show angst (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

*Boston paralyzed and 'fear' / 'jitters' spreading across U.S.*

In *The New York Times*, a few paragraphs in the stories dating April 15 and April 16 referred to the jitters spreading across U.S., and the precautions taken in other cities. However, again the emphasis fell on describing a Boston paralyzed by the closed crime scenes, and finally by the lockdown during the suspects' hunt. Immediately after the explosions, Boston became a dead city as:

The explosions brought life in Boston to a halt. Police officials effectively closed a large part of the Back Bay neighborhood, which surrounds the blast site; some transit stops were closed; planes were briefly grounded at Boston Logan International Airport and the Boston Symphony Orchestra canceled its Monday night concert. A Boston Celtics game scheduled for Tuesday was also canceled (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

The journalists emphasized the “heightened law enforcement presence,” and “Boston’s police commissioner, Ed Davis” who “urged people” to stay inside. The following days’ coverage continued to present the ghost-like city, and the “fearful” citizens:

Boston was deserted (*The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013),

the city’s subway system was uncharacteristically quiet (...) Stores on Newbury Street, Boston’s busy retail thoroughfare, were closed, and tables on the patio at Stephanie’s, a restaurant there, were still covered in dishes left there on Monday (*The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013), and

Dave Greenup, 58 (...) reflected the anxiety caused by the bombings. ‘For the past couple days, I have been in a daze,’ he said. ‘All of a sudden, we get this evacuation thing. Every time we turn around now, there’s something. I was really hoping they caught somebody. You want closure’ (*The New York Times*, April 17, 2013).

On Friday, Boston was described as completely and officially shutdown. Boston was “paralyzed” by a “frenzied hunt” (words used in the headline, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013). This time the event’s evolution makes the cause for the ‘paralysis’ different: the city is dead not in order to protect people from the effect of other possible bombs hidden in buildings or streets, but to permit law enforcement forces to hunt the suspects. Only in the April 20 news story, somewhere at the end of the article, appeared the image of a Boston coming back to life:

The investigators began scrutinizing the events in the months and years before the fatal attack, as Boston began to feel like itself for the first time in nearly a week” (*The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

Regarding the jitters, panic and fear spreading in other cities, the journalists initially emphasized the protective measures installed immediately after the Boston bombing, continuing by Wednesday to highlight the jitters, and signs of possible other attacks were described in other cities:

The reverberations were felt far outside the city, with officials in New York and Washington stepping up security at important locations. Near the White House, the Secret Service cordoned off Pennsylvania Avenue out of what one official described as ‘an abundance of caution’ (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013), and

As the investigation went into a third day, there were signs of jitters around the nation, which was on high alert. New York City officials said there had been an increase in reports of suspicious packages. In Oklahoma City, the scene of a devastating bombing in 1995, City Hall was briefly evacuated Wednesday morning as the authorities examined a stolen rental truck that was parked outside (There was no bomb, officials there said.) (*The New York Times*, April 17, 2013).

As in *The New York Times*, the image of a paralyzed Boston and other cities, fearful and jittery is present throughout the *Le Figaro* articles. Again, both these images are definitely more emphasized by the French journalists. Boston is described to be not

only paralyzed, but also as almost partially defeated, as journalists constantly refer to it as “besieged” or “under sieged.” Like *The New York Times*, *Le Figaro* also addresses the high alert instituted in the other big American cities. The French journalists however, augment the image of a fearful and under attack U.S. by (1) emphasizing certain words – “America in under-siege state” (headline in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013); or “psychosis looked set to win the United States” (*Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013); and (2) including all the other fear-inducing events, like the ricin letter, the Texas plant explosion, and suspect packages alert in New York, in the stories about the bombing.

As expected, the bombing was briefly connected to France by weighing the event’s the implications for France; the image of a France on alert, is also described, in the one of the first articles subtitled, “Enhanced patrols in France,” followed by a quote from the French Interior Minister for reinforcement of security forces and for the French people to stay alert.

### **Frame 3: Heroes**

The first two frames defined the nature of the event, and the major actors in the terrorist act, i.e. perpetrators and victims. From the vastness of the chaotic happenings, the panic and agitation, to detailed portraits of victims, journalists emphasized another major actor: heroes. Before the accent was placed on the law enforcement forces and their efforts to catch the suspects the journalistic narratives focused on those who save lives and brought relief to those in pain. Within the same frame, the analysis revealed that *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* had different approaches.

*Doctors as heroes (specific only to The New York Times)*

Doctors are clearly portrayed as heroes. Journalists focus on: (1) the doctors that happened to be there as spectators and immediately rushed to help, and (2) the Boston doctors who went back to duty to their respective hospitals, immediately after hearing about the bombing. Additionally, doctors from the events' medical tent, and those from the hospitals where the high number of victims were taken, are depicted almost as superhumans, in an article that seems to be a tribute to them, headlined: "Doctors saved lives, if not legs, in Boston" (*The New York Times*, April 16, 2013). The doctors in the event's medical tent were only prepared "for ordinary marathon troubles" (*The New York Times*, April 16, 2013), and the ones from the hospitals would maybe see one case of such trauma but they were put in an extraordinary situation of having to make "profound, life-changing decisions for runners and spectators of all ages" (*The New York Times*, April 16, 2013). Nevertheless, these doctors not only were able to create order in a very chaotic situation, but they were able to make sure the death toll remained low:

Given the force of the blasts, doctors at area hospitals said that the death toll could have been much higher but that the triage teams at the blast site had done a good job of sending the victims to the hospitals capable of handling them (*The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

*Citizens as heroes: the American hero portrait (specific only to Le Figaro)*

If in *The New York Times*, citizens and first responders were somehow in the shadow of the doctors, depicted as almost superheroes, in the *Le Figaro* the doctors and first responders were in the shadow of the citizen superheroes. *Le Figaro* for instance, dedicated an article to Carlos Arredondo – the man who became the portrait of the American hero. In this article (April 16, 15:50, 2013), Arredondo becomes an almost stereotypical symbol of the American hero, as he is depicted as a "Costa Rican

immigrant” with a “cowboy hat screwed on the head,” who “rushed on the road to clear the fences and debris around the victims,” and who after saving lives, was seen and photographed “with a bloodied American flag.” It has to be mentioned that it was not the French journalists who proposed this image but the American media, as *Le Figaro*’s article acknowledges:

The American media are unanimous on the courage and dedication of Arredondo and see him as a ‘true American hero.’ This is one way to alleviate the distress caused by these attacks (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013).

#### **Frame 4: The Hunt**

The Hunt frame was by far the widest used frame in the analyzed news stories both American and French newspapers. Again within this frame, different themes were very events’ timeline dependent.

##### *The hunt for the culprits*

*The New York Times* coverage in the first three days (April 15 – April 17) emphasized the unknown, and the possible leads; journalists stressed the fact that the spectrum of possible suspects is very wide, varying from terrorist organizations to unknown individuals. A Saudi citizen injured in the attack, was briefly mentioned by *The New York Times* journalists, who also added that no official statements were made about his possible role:

It was unclear Monday evening who might be responsible for the blast. Although investigators said that they were speaking to a Saudi citizen who was injured in the blast, several law enforcement officials took pains to note that no one was in custody (*The New York Times* April 15, 2013).

Following the initial three post-bombing days, the analyzed articles presented the authorities' efforts to search for the suspects and acknowledged the difficulty to find answers in the huge mass of data, images from the hundreds of camera videos, anonymous tips received by email or phone, and the examination of online databases. In this context, when on April 17 photos of a possible suspect, with his identity still unknown, are released by the authorities, the tone of the news stories became optimistic, calling the new information "the first major break" (*The New York Times*, April 17, 2013). Moreover, the image of a relentless and strenuous search is constantly present in the articles, and takes the form of public's aid being sought to help the investigators solve the puzzle, "Contact the F.B.I. with information at 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324) or bostonmarathontips.fbi.gov" (*The New York Times*, April 18, 2013). Consequently, journalists highlight a unique phenomenon: the public takes the 'hunt' in its own hands on social media, trying to identify the suspects. However, it did not occupy more than a paragraph towards the end of that news story. While the search for the identities of the two suspects was successful, on April 18 and April 19 the hunt for the two brothers was still ongoing, and was depicted by *The New York Times* as a movie-like hunt through detailed descriptions of every unusual turn of events, and expressions like "frenzied hunt," "frenzied chase," "furious firefight," and "furious gunfight."

In the *Le Figaro*, as in *The New York Times*, the hunt for culprits theme was included in the first stories, initially focusing on the faceless, nameless suspects, unknown terrorists, various theories, law enforcement combing through hundred of photographs and videos, and then on the photographed suspects, still nameless, until the end when it concretized in the movie-like manhunt for the two now known brothers.



A few differences are worth of mention however. The lack of results appears to be more emphasized, almost as a critique in the *Le Figaro*, by juxtaposing Obama's promise with the lack of results:

'We will find who did this' [subtitle with Obama's quote, followed by] 'No arrest has been made yet, no claim has been received' (*Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013),

'We still do not know who did it and why, and people should be careful to draw conclusions before we have all the facts, said President Barack Obama during a televised speech. But let there be no mistake: we will go through with this deal ... All responsible individuals, all responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice' (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Moreover, in the context of the yet unfulfilled hunt for the suspects, the excruciating need of knowing who perpetrated the bombing and especially why, is conveyed in the *Le Figaro* by citing the victims expressing, one the one hand angry demands for faster answers and apprehension of the suspects, and on the other hand, frustrations that they cannot go home, because of the ongoing investigation:

Chris, who has no family in Boston, would go home. He has no desire to sleep here tonight, despite the warm welcome volunteers. But interrogations related to the investigation expected to last another two days, it was learned. 'It's frustrating, but I have no choice. The most important for me is to know who did it and why (...) After the adrenaline will fall and I fear that this time, the emotion invades me' (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

The publics' involvement in this hunt is also better emphasized by the *Le Figaro* than *The New York Times*. Aside from describing how the authorities "urged witnesses to share their memories" (*Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013), the French journalists dedicated a whole story on the publics' investigation. *Le Figaro* journalists specifically label the

last part of the movie-like manhunt that culminated in the capture of the second culprit after his discovery by a citizen, as “a thriller scenario.”

Lastly, in *Le Figaro*, the French journalists confessed to their public that they did not have access to the photographs of the two culprits, but that their sources described those photos:

*Le Figaro* has not seen these pictures. But they were described to us as showing two young men who could be from the Middle East or North Africa (*Le Figaro*, April 18, 5:53, 2013).

*The hunt for answers: looking at the past*

Tightly connected to the hunt for the culprits, and to the issue of lack of information, was the continuous and assiduous hunt to discover why the bombing happened in Boston, whether it was a terrorist domestic or foreign attack, and which were the attackers’ motives and objectives. In an attempt to make sense of the events, and possibly answer the who and why questions, both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* emphasized possible connections with the symbolism of the day the attack took place, as well as comparisons with previous terrorist attacks (i.e. Oklahoma and Atlanta):

Some law enforcement officials noted that the blasts came at the start of a week that has sometimes been seen as significant for radical American antigovernment groups: it was the April 15 deadline for filing taxes, and Patriots’ Day in Massachusetts, the start of a week that has seen violence in the past. April 19 is the anniversary of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (*The New York Times* April 15, 2013).

A track, just as thin as the others, that seems to attract the attention of investigators, probably because of their gut feeling (instinct) and their recent history is the one of the ‘domestic enemy’ (...) American right-wing extremist factions, already responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing, April 19, 1995. April 15 was not a day like any other: it marks in Massachusetts, the commemoration of the first shots against the British occupation in 1775. Called ‘Patriot's Day’ in New England, it is fittingly celebrated every year by those who

call themselves ‘true patriots’ of a certain America (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 23:19, 2013).

*The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon*

As in any terrorist act, the weapon is a meaningful element of the news stories. Both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* journalists developed the information related to the origin of explosions, and underlined the artisanal character of the bombs.

In The New York Time’s case, on the one hand, the emphasis on this aspect, correlated with the underlining of the fact that the attack was the work of individuals and not of an organization, makes this theme into one whose function is to eliminate fear and assure the public that the danger has been removed; on the other hand, the emphasis on the idea that specifics on how to build such weapons are readily available in magazines and online (i.e. “Instructions for assembling such devices can be found in many places on the Web, including in terrorism ‘cookbooks’ popular among domestic extremists, and the Qaeda magazine is also easily available on the Internet” – *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013), seems to establish the opposite feeling.

In *Le Figaro* the theme materialized in a similar way, the French journalists often citing American media:

The two bombs, made in the traditional way with a ball bearing placed inside, are not sufficiently sophisticated to be the work of an international terrorist organization, says the Boston Globe. CIA and the national counterterrorism center therefore sent their investigators to look for a single jihadist living in the United States (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013).

Moreover, as new details emerged regarding the weapon, the *Le Figaro* journalists showed enthusiasm regarding the resolution of the chase:

Boston: the unexpected discovery of the FBI” (headline in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013),

The investigators found a backpack that contained one of two improvised explosive devices, and a pan deformed pressure cooker having sheltered among the debris of the attack. These clues could accelerate the resolution of the investigation (lead in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013).

*The hunt for answers: the Chechnya/Russia connection*

As the identities of the culprits became known, a new connection to the reasons for the attack was emphasized by both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro*: the brothers' past, their immigration status and the possible connections of the act with Russia or Chechnya:

Federal investigators are hurrying to review a visit that one of the suspected bombers made to Chechnya and Dagestan, predominantly Muslim republics in the north Caucasus region of Russia. Both have active militant separatist movements (*The New York Times*, April 20, 2013),

Information is beginning to emerge about the past of the two brothers from the small Caucasian republic of Chechnya. What is striking in the information that emerges is that they have spent much of their lives, children in America, where they arrived in 2002, fleeing the horrors of war between Chechen separatists and Russian army (*Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013).

Therefore, this theme encompassed different plans of development: the simple enunciation that the two brothers are of Chechen origin, the presentation of the fact that Tamerlan Tsarnaev recently visited Dagestan and Chechnya, and finally the assumption that he had contact with the separatist Islamic movements from there.

**Frame 5: Justice**

*The guilty ones will be punished*

This theme appears throughout the bombing coverage, by emphasizing the official declarations. Both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* journalists reveal the fact that

President Obama (reluctant at first in defining the act as terrorist) was very trenchant in showing that the entire nation's energy will be focused on catching and judging the culprits:

President Obama, speaking at the White House, vowed to bring those responsible for the blasts to justice. 'We will get to the bottom of this,' the president said. 'We will find who did this, and we will find out why they did this. Any responsible individuals, any responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice' (*The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

We still do not know who did it and why, and people should be careful to draw conclusions before we have all the facts, said President Barack Obama during a televised speech. But let there be no mistake: we will go through with this deal ... All responsible individuals, all responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice (*Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

#### *Justice – legalities*

The Justice frame focused mainly on legalities, especially in the last articles. Initially the idea that the guilty ones (whomever they may be) will be punished was present, but again only through the direct citation of President Obama's speech. The legalities and the idea of making sure the right laws are applied when punishing the suspect was overly emphasized in the last articles, with accents put on the Miranda rights issue, the punishing of an American citizen for terrorism issue, to making sure the hospitalized suspect understands his rights, and is in his right mind to talk and confess:

A federal law enforcement official said he would not be read his Miranda rights, because the authorities would be invoking the public safety exception in order to question him extensively about other potential explosive devices or accomplices and to try to gain intelligence (*The New York Times*, April, 19, 2013),

Judge Bowler then read Mr. Tsarnaev his rights. Also present were two United States attorneys and three federal public defenders, who will be representing him. Judge Bowler asked if he understood his right to remain silent, to which he nodded affirmatively, according to the transcript." (*The New York Times*, April 22, 2013).

Moreover, the issue of applying the law in order to punish the suspects generates a controversial theme and is amply developed by *The New York Times* journalists - the status of the terrorist in custody:

An issue arose about the administration's decision to question him for a period without giving him a Miranda warning, under an exception for questions about immediate threats to public safety (*The New York Times*, April 20, 2013),

Tensions also escalated Sunday over how to handle the case of the surviving suspect. Some Republican lawmakers want President Obama to declare Dzhokhar Tsarnaev an 'enemy combatant,' putting him into military detention and questioning him at length without a lawyer. But the administration has said terrorism suspects arrested inside the United States should be handled exclusively in the criminal justice system, and gave no sign it intends to do otherwise in Mr. Tsarnaev's case. Moreover, there is no evidence suggesting that he is part of Al Qaeda; the United States is engaged in an armed conflict with Al Qaeda, not all Muslim extremists (*The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

The articles emphasize the opposition between the two statuses of the suspect, enemy combatant and American citizen, and between the application or suspension of his Miranda rights. It could also be noticed that the punishment per se was not really emphasized. It only appeared in a few phrases like, "That charge, the official said, carries a maximum penalty of death. Though Massachusetts has outlawed the death penalty, federal law allows it" (*The New York Times*, April 20, 2013), "He is aware of the nature of the proceedings.' If convicted, he faces the death penalty or life behind bars" (*The New York Times*, April 22, 2013), and in a headline: Boston Suspect Is Charged and Could Face the Death Penalty" (*The New York Times* April 22, 2013).

**Considerations: findings in the light of the proposed theoretical lenses**

This dissertation's author would expect that, in the light of arguments made by Berkowitz (2007), Nossek (2007) or Schudson's (2011), *The New York Times* would frame the information in accordance with the "our news" perspective and that the *Le Figaro* would frame it from a "their news" perspective. Nevertheless, both newspapers framed the Boston drama as an "our news" story, frequently offering what Schudson (2011, p.49) called "a prose of solidarity rather than a prose of information."

In both cases, the findings showcased the numerous media scholars' references to the organization of frames in "master narratives" (Reese, 2011). As Van Gorp (2010) argues "on the basis of their narrative ingredient" journalists "assign roles to the principal actors of an issue (e.g., good-bad, advocate-opponent), specify what the problem is and who is responsible and so forth, all of which contributes to the dramatization and emotional appeal of the news" (p. 87). In the analyzed stories, journalists accentuated first the victims' portraits, then the heroes ones – both were the source of narratives in which the drama of the first was resolved through the courageous action of the second. The same epical schema was applied to the other couple of actors, the suspects and the authorities – the positive and heroic action of authorities led to the elimination of the threat and reestablishment of the equilibrium. This modality of organizing and signifying the information echoes Entman and Rojeki's (1993) arguments that journalists exercise a "framing judgment." In this case it seems that their framing judgment was based on the typified narrative of the terrorist attack (Altheide, 2009; Norris et al., 2003; Tumber, 2007), which privileged the frames related to a story that involved "cast" (victims,

perpetrators, heroes), the scenes (the horror), the chase (the hunt) and the “happy ending” catching the culprit and bringing awaiting punishment (the justice frame).

Regarding the *Le Figaro*, it is worthy of mention, the existence of an angle that traversed all its frames and themes: the 9/11 and other past terrorist attacks reminiscence. Everything was constantly compared first with 9/11, and further on with other terrorist attacks in the U.S.: the horror was presented as the worst one in a while after 9/11 and as coming back to haunt U.S.; and a whole article was dedicated to not only describing the Boston bombings, but also explaining and describing all the past terrorist attacks, both foreign and domestic. This pattern also echoes the remarks made by media scholars who argue that “the way that journalists observe and report each of these occurrences is shaped by how similar events has been covered in the past” (Norris, Kern, Just, 3003, p. 5). It should also be noted, that all in all, the news stories were focused on the U.S., and France was mentioned very briefly, in only two instances: President Hollande’s offer of support and Minister Valls’ remarks vis-à-vis French security.

### **Findings and analysis: themes and frames in *The New York Times* & *Le Figaro* comments**

For both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* publics, the same five frames were revealed by the analysis: terrorism, the horror, heroes, the hunt, and justice. Online commenters assumed, debated and discussed the happening in the light of or through the frames offered by journalists. However, they did not remain trapped by these frames, amplifying them through numerous pro and con arguments, supplemental information



(taken from different media), conceptual clarifications (from books, articles, online materials), and developed new themes within the pre-existent frames.

### **Frame 1: Terrorism**

#### *Terrorist attacks: domestic vs. foreign / Definitions of terrorism*

Similarly to the journalists, the majority of *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* commenters decided right from the start (April 15) that the incident was an act of terrorism, and the issue moved on to whether it was domestic or foreign:

Obviously this was terrorism. But we should remember that terrorism is committed by all ethnicities, not just Islamic fanatics. I have a feeling that this was a domestic attack, and could have well been carried out by Americans (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Of course it's terrorist attacks. Personally, Islamist terrorists have no reason to attack and aim Boston marathon ...They targeted a symbolic city. I think it is American with twisted motivations and violent ideas (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

The commenters are engaging in debates, thus within this theme (as in many others) a pro and con side emerged. In this sense, there were few *The New York Times* commenters that did not hurry to catalogue the tragedy as a terrorist act, hoping for an alternative explanation, while the *Le Figaro* commenters compared the event with France's past attacks; however, in both examples they were quickly countered by other commenters:

We don't yet have enough information to know that it was indeed sabotage. Yes, could be a terrorist act. Or it could be something else like a natural gas explosion. Either way, a tragedy (comment in *The New York Times* April 15, 2013);

I suppose that it ‘could’ have been two pockets of leaking natural gas about 50-100 yards apart that could have been pooling without anyone’s knowledge or recognition...And I suppose those two pools of volatile natural gas ‘could’ have been ignited by a couple of people 50-100 yards lighting up a cigarette at the same time, or perhaps getting on their old faulty sparking cellphone causing the explosions...But I would think the odds would be against that (comment in *The New York Times* April 15, 2013);

Why are people still debating if this was a planned attack? They found undetonated bombs, and the ones that did explode left shrapnel and other bomb debris, embedded in peoples bodies, and torn off limbs. This was not some natural gas explosion. It was a deliberate terrorist attack. At this point the big question is whether it was domestic, foreign, or some combination (comment in *The New York Times* April 15, 2013);

Tell me the number of attacks led by the extreme right in recent decades (there are some, it is true), compare them with the number perpetrated by Islamists and the extreme left, and reconsider the lines of evidence that you have (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013).

While *The New York Times* news stories contained no information and no reference to terrorism in general, a wave of commenters engaged in a philosophical debate over the meanings and definitions of terrorism:

How about the terror that the bombing inspires at the time of the bombing and after the bombing. And the fear and terror it inspires in the minds of all who were maimed by it (and their families) and in the minds of all who witnessed it. And the certain knowledge that is engendered in the minds of all of us that no where is safe and that nothing is sacred and that it can happen to anyone at anytime and anywhere (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

It was almost as if they decided that although they all agreed that it was a terrorist act, they still could not move on to the debate of whether it was domestic or foreign (like the journalists did), until they have also agreed on what in principle makes such an act, terrorism. As Coombs and Holladay (2004, p. 97) argue during a crisis situations “people seek causes and make attributions.” Moreover, the Boston Marathon bombing was also a

terrorist attack, and similarly to the cases analyzed by Canel & Sanders (2012) it was characterized by a lot of “uncertainty about the nature of the problem, which actors were involved, to whom blame should be attributed, and what remedy and actions should be implemented” (p.450). And as among other scholars, Sellnow & Seeger (2013, p.138) notes media occupy the central role in crisis communication as “active information-seeking receivers attempt to understand the events at hand.” From this point of view, The New York Time news stories contained the information and the frames deemed by journalists as necessary to offer possible explanations, until more information would come in. Clearly, the journalists did not consider necessary to include political definitions or core explanations of terrorism, therefore not satisfying the need of the publics to make sense of an event at a deeper level, forcing them to seek answers from each other.

*Boston strong: don't let terrorists win*

In *The New York Times* this theme emerged in the news stories, but only when President Obama and Boston Mayor's speeches was quoted, and in a very dry journalistic discourse. Once again the commenters made the theme offered in the news stories their own. A wave of comments followed the same 'rationale' as Obama offered in his mediatized speech, not letting the terrorist win, by not letting fear prevail, by being strong, while other commenters posted one or few phrases with a mobilizing content:

I lived in Boston most of my life. I am certain of this: Bostonians will not allow the psychopathic coward(s) that bombed us to change anything...the marathon, the Boston Red Sox game, and most of all - celebrating that resolve and bravery of the minutemen, which still lives in every Bostonian today. President Obama was spot-on when he stated the Boston is 'tough and resilient town' (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

It is far more likely that the BM will be the biggest ever next year. Word to the wise: Never bet against this country or its resilient, nay, defiant, people (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

In the *Le Figaro*, commenters further developed the idea and image of a strong and united Boston and Americans that was conveyed in the news stories through the three cited sources (citizen, *The New York Times* editorial and President Obama's speech) and further developed these through their own previous perceptions of Americans dealing with crises, and in a sense, with their fascination with American resilience, as illustrated in the following example:

One can only be relieved and pleased to learn that a city is able to unite and mobilize and to counter the barbarism of criminals who do not deserve to live in a civilized country! That is why America is a great country! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013).

Strongly connected to the idea of staying strong, was the idea of staying united and offering support. While *The New York Times* news stories conveyed very weakly the idea of support or unity, the commenters overemphasized this element. A plethora of commenters showed support, unity, and offered help conveying a message of general mobilization and optimism:

Love you Boston, and miss you. Hang tough my scrappy little city. If you need anything just call - we'll be there (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Does anyone know of a charity that could help runners who lost legs? I can think of nothing more vital for their healing than the access to the types of prosthetics they could run on (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

While the idea of France's support was conveyed in the *Le Figaro* stories by including a short quote from President Hollande, that message was better and consistently conveyed in the comments of *Le Figaro*'s publics:

We all have in our heart a part of America. When she is injured and bereaved, we are wounded and grieving too (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Moreover, in the *Le Figaro*'s case two more patterns were revealed by the analysis. First, a wave of commenters were clearly touched by the idea emphasized in the *Le Figaro* news stories of an America hit again by sorrow and fear:

My full support to our American friends, who live again the horror of terrorism (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

Wholeheartedly with the American people. Although it is difficult to live the daily life when the fear of an attack lurks in the corner, do not cede to terrorism. Courage and thoughts to all (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013).

Second, some comments criticized Americans, but still sympathized with them, and again in this fluid discussion, whenever some commenters posted messages that would not support U.S., many more others would critique their anti-Americanism, arguing that they should be more appreciative and supportive as France owes its freedom to the U.S. troops who gave their lives to free France and Europe in the Second World War:

The Americans did absolutely not deserve this monstrosity. I express my full support to the people who certainly have many faults, but have a lot of generosity in the defense of freedoms (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

Shame on the first 3 commentators; it is not about the U.S., but about athletes. The United States is a great country to whom we owe a lot (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

Solidarity with America, our oldest friend. Shame, shame, shame on those who despise a country that has so much to bring us. We gave them independence; they repaid us with freedom from the Nazis (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

young man just shut up ! You ... did not give your blood to liberate Europe and if you are free today to express such infamy you owe it to America and her thousands of dead fallen on Normandy beaches ... Reread the History of France is urgent! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

A wave of *The New York Times* commenters had longer, more reflective thoughts.

In order to convey the idea that terrorists and fear will never win, these commenters went back to (1) the symbolism of the Boston marathon and (2) the history and symbolism of Boston as the cradle of the American Revolution, always triumphing against evil and fear:

If this was a terrorist attempt to shake Americans resilience, they couldn't have chosen a worst event to do so. A marathon is full of thousands of people with amazing spiritual, physical, and emotional strength, I doubt that two explosions will undo them. In any case the opposite will happen. Next year they will be back to run their Boston marathon stronger than before. Boston, America loves you and is behind you. For those runners, never cease testing your potential (comment in NYT, April 15, 2013);

15 April, 1775 - it was on this day that began the American Revolution. A day of hope and eventual triumph. A day to celebrate the patriots which gave their lives to start a new nation. hence, the day's name; Patriot day. 238 years later, on this day, a day of celebration commemorated with the Boston marathon. Again, patriots gave their lives. This time it was taken from them by a party or parties yet to be named. and with this day, some new patriots who gave their lives, or were maimed, in the course of completing a marathon. I would have never thought that a marathon race would end in horror. Running, is an individual sport, that brings peace to ones mind as one logs many miles for exercise or to prepare for a race. Yet, today, someone decided that killing innocent runners, and bystanders, was going to send a message. Well, the message sent was resolve. Resolve that we Americans will still attend sporting and public events. Resolve that we will not live our lives in fear. Resolve that the Boston marathon will continue. Resolve that this nation will become more united. And, resolve, that those responsible are punished to the fullest extent of the law. To the people of Boston, I extend my

condolences to the deceased and my prayers to the injured. You are not alone in your grief. Next year, open up the Boston Marathon to everyone who wants to participate. Tens of thousands will come to remember this day in the memory of those taken from us (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Other American commenters, took the idea of showing terrorists how strong Boston and Americans are, and how their acts have been useless, to the next level, by already talking about participation in future events. The majority of commenters also admitted that they normally do not run, or go to such events, but just to spite terrorists and show their unity with the runners, victims and so on, they will participate in the future marathons:

The only thing we can do is to show that we are not afraid and that their intimidation does not work. I never go to NYC parades and marathon (because I'm simply lazy), but I will start going there just to show my support for my fellow citizens. The enemies (whoever it turns they are) will not win by trying to scare me away (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

A series of *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments resembled letters of love, support and unity. Only in *The New York Times* commenters, however, also directly addressed the terrorists (whoever they may be) by conveying the message that they did not win:

Dear Boston,  
Our hearts ache for you and we cry tears of sorrow along with you. But you are strong. You will get through this. We in New York, the nation, and the world, will pray and with each others' support, help you, just as you helped us in New York, the country and the rest of the world during our own tragic events. I've visited Boston twice. Beautiful place. Even more beautiful people. There is no doubt you will move forward and find peace in the days and years to come. Bless you (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013);

Dear American friends we are wholeheartedly with you! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

Hey terrorists, you don't get it. You think killing and maiming innocent lives in the birthplace of American democracy will strike fear in us? The land of Paul Revere, and John and Quincy Adams, and the heroes of Lexington and Concord, is a land of Americans not easily shaken by the heinous acts of cowards in hiding. Today we Americans - and today we're all Bostonians – will grieve our dead and tend our wounded. But your day will come soon, of that be sure, when justice will fall on you with a mighty weight. Count your days of freedom in this great land, for they are few. But we Americans can look forward to unnumbered days of freedom, now made more precious by the sacrifice of three more innocent heroes. Get it? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

### *Terrorism prevention & security failures*

A theme revealed by the analysis of *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* comments, but not emphasized in the news stories, focused on the issue of security measures failing, and future terrorism preventions. Many American (angered) and French (more ironic) commenters wondered how the attack was even possible with all the counter-terrorism measures that are widely in place after 9/11, and quickly assign the blame to either inefficiency despite the money spent, or to not focusing also on domestic terrorism prevention:

I'm confused. Billions are spent annually to decrease the chances of an event as horrific as this from ever happening.... Yet, it's incredible that planted bombs can be detonated at the most famous and public marathon to ever exist. At the finish line much less!! Were the bomb sniffing dogs only called on after the fact or where they used at the proper time? (beforehand). ... Is this how complacent the authorities have become? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

At the finish line? Seriously? This could not be prevented with all the cameras and security protecting the race? I mean this is not just any point along the route... this was the finish line for godssake! Why do we bother with the charade of security if somebody can plant four bombs in the middle of a major city during a high risk event? I have no confidence in security, TSA, or police anymore (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

There's still a strange thing in this story! It is now more than 10 years that the U.S. is on alert permanent in terms of internal security, but how such bombs could they



be placed in a crowded place in the middle of an important sporting event? It seems completely implausible! Do not tell me that the premises have not been verified, there is no police on site and people have not even been excavated, especially around the line of arrival? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

One thing amazes me, how is it that Americans with their battery infallible cops, FBI, Pentagon, marshal, U.S. Army Special Victims Unit, NCIS, dirty Harry, and what do I know, did not prevent the attack? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

In both cases, it can be posited that these comments constituted reactions to broken expectancies in the context of a post-9/11 American society where people (Americans and *foreigners*) acclimated, through experience or through what they learned from the media, to having cameras everywhere, NSA surveillance, heightened security (especially in the airports), and big sums of money spent to combat terrorist risk.

The prevention measures side of this theme, was only visible in comments on *The New York Times* articles. The commenters took an information from the news stories, that the bombs may have been put in trashcans (information that was somehow neutrally presented - the media did not emphasize, further interpreted it), and reinterpreted it, gave it new meaning through extended critiques of the security failure to learn from other terrorism events such as the ones in London or Paris where the trash cans have been or eliminated, either redesigned to prevent bomb-dumping:

One bomb was in a garbage can. If you've ever been France you've seen that the public garbage cans have been replaced by metal rings holding clear green plastic bags. This action was in response to terrorist threats, and it sickens me to think that such a simple, precautionary change might have prevented some of this horror (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

The debate moved to other prevention measures. A number of commenters went to the somehow logical consequence and argued that citizens should take prevention in their hands (because authorities are failing) and receive training, become more vigilant, as it is the case with the citizens of foreign countries that experience this type of attacks more often:

We must begin to be more proactive in training the public to be more aware of their surroundings. Formal courses run by trained instructors should be implemented to pass on to the public what to look for, and how to respond, when a possible threat is observed. Israel is constantly under threat and perhaps we could learn a few lessons from them. These terrorists are sick cowards who take out their anger on innocents (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

The pattern of the commenters adding new meanings, finding new interpretations, offering new solutions to issues they deem relevant but are not answered by the media is visible again. Furthermore, it can be posited that their specific content and interpretations added to the frame came from their previous experiences (i.e. travels abroad) and knowledge obtained from different media or sources, or friends.

The prevention frame gained a new direction in comments with the dissemination of new information regarding the weapons used by the culprits and their identity. The weapons theme evolves in two different directions: (1) some commenters end up debating gun control issues and legislation, with pro and con arguments for each side, and (2) others argued about the issue of the two brothers' "arsenal." This debate is more ample between *The New York Times* commenters, only a few echoes are seen in *Le Figaro* comments, in between the lines of the stereotypes related to U.S. as a country of "western movies:"

I think that yesterday's bombing may be a domestic terrorist attack carried out by some very misguided individual or persons connected to a far right militia group

(modern day Timothy McVey & crew) egged on by all the violence inspired vitriolic anti-government rhetoric coming out the RW propaganda machine who see gun control and as direct threat to their existence (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013);

I wonder where they got all those guns, thinking back to the gun control reform bill in Congress..?! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

The tragic events in Boston this past week provide a unique opportunity for triangulating the arguments in favor of stricter gun control laws, especially the notion of universal background checks (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

Arsenal...2 handguns and a rifle? If that is an arsenal how would you describe a typical hunters firearms? The typical hunter will have a small calibre rifle for small game, medium caliber for deer, and large for elk or bear. They would also have several different gauge shotguns for small birds like quail, and larger birds like geese. And, they probably will have a shotgun for shooting clay pigeons. Some hunters use handguns as well for deer, wild boar... (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

Who sows the wind (laxity and permissiveness U.S. for firearms) reap the whirlwind (serial killers mass shooting bombing)! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

The terrorists' identity – ethnically Chechens but American citizens, – incited debates regarding the issues of immigration, mobilizing the American commenters, but not the French ones:

I hope they can fix the broken immigration laws. The current system is counter productive and not in favor of American growth. The current law focus too much on ethnic diversity and too little on growth, innovation and business (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013);

Land of the free, home of the brave. It might just be time, as others have expressed, to be more vigilant about visitors, visa for students or otherwise, and citizenship; not to mention other areas of immigration, legal or otherwise that we seem to be so "FREE" about (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

*Culture of surveillance*

This was another theme that emerged only in the comments, especially among *The New York Times* commenters. Both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* articles contained sprinkled details about authorities combing through thousands of images and videos about the event, coming from spectators' phones or cameras, and street cameras. These bits of information ignited among *Le Figaro* commenters a discussion on the utility of surveillance camera for faster apprehending the Boston bombing culprits, and generally for yielding better results in cases with unidentified suspects, or suspects on the run:

Walking with a backpack is banal but with two backpacks ... it is noticeable. If it is a lone wolf one of the bombs had to be carried inside another bag in hand and the individual, caution should wear gloves. Let's see if surveillance cameras are used to something (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 2013).

The cameras are useless? Unfortunately for you they have solved many crimes, in France or abroad and until proven otherwise, their usefulness is not questioned. The London terrorists were caught by surveillance cameras (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 2013).

Very few commenters touched on the connection between surveillance cameras and freedom issues, or privacy issues:

Interesting in terms of those who complain about video surveillance. Well used this technique does not threaten our freedoms but facilitates the search for those who do not respect others (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 20).

However, the American commenters took this discussion three steps further, turning it exclusively into a debate on the possible consequences that the terrorist act combined with the multitude of surveillance cameras already in place would have on the future of the American society.

Some commenters expressed the disappointment rooted in the expectation that the act will lead, like after 9/11, to American citizens losing more of their rights/freedoms, while others more optimistically argued for not letting fear win and not letting the loss of more freedoms happen:

This is terrible, but I have this feeling we are about to lose more of our freedoms (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Everything is getting turned into a terrorist event nowadays; I'm getting sick of living in a police state (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

I am horrified by this attack and my heart goes out to all Bostonians. But; We have nothing to fear but fear itself. Now more than ever. We cannot let this event cause us to sacrifice our freedoms. (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Even more intriguing was the constant and instant connection made by commenters between the details given in the news about CCTVs and other cameras that are used in the hunt for culprits, the shutdown and mobilization of forces and the gloomy prediction or image of an American version of the Orwellian surveillance society:

As horrific and inhumane as this bombing was, news emerging from FBI and police operations show more and more how we have become a surveillance culture, cameras on roofs, smartphones, videos, in every hallway and on every corner, facial recognition software, computer evaluating every gesture. These horrible moments in time cause us to accept this growing trend as benign and even necessary, but it will be a power not easily given up by authorities when surveillance serves a less beneficent purpose, when it becomes as in Orwell's vision a means to control and suppress citizens. It is not difficult to imagine all these surveillance operations turning against our democratic ideals and even against the Constitution, dismantling the very concept of privacy and personal space. To solve this mystery in Boston, we are gradually surrendering something to the powers in charge which in 50 years may be read as the historical moment when America became a dictatorship, surveillance cameras in every room in every house on every corner. We may find the culprits this way, but that will only prove that we need more powerful surveillance operations, more scrutiny of every citizen, so we can actually see the bombers at home in their basement plotting

their evil intentions. Next step will be to get into the minds of every citizen to detect a mental crime before it happens, a thought crime, emotional terrorism, suppressed by the thought police (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013).

The 'war on terror' is the US implementation of '1984'; a perpetual series of wars whose enemies, and allies, are continuously to instill fear in the populace. And the enemy is 'terror; which means anyone can be an enemy. It is pure genius, a perpetual, undefined enemy; even Orwell could not come up with such a concept (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013).

Nevertheless many other commenters argued that these views are not real, or that they would not mind losing some privacy for the greater good:

Police state? Are you kidding? Or are you simply paranoid? Thank goodness for the security cameras which, with the excellent work by the FBI tech agents, enabled the law enforcement people to identify these savages and led to a rapid apprehension. I am not the least concerned about having "every facet" of my life recorded. But I am happy that this particular facet of the life of the Tsarnaev brothers was indeed captured on film. You betcha! Security cameras are used everywhere and not only by the state. Ever been to a bank? a condo complex? These cameras have nothing to do with 'America of 2012 under Barack Obama', get real! I'm glad security cameras were useful in this case, aren't you? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013).

Much thanks to police cameras... many people don't care for them, think they invade people's privacy. I'm glad they exist. How often I have objected to the now ubiquitous use of surveillance cameras in our country. Well, no more. It was images from such cameras that led to the FBI and police so quickly finding the suspects who committed this heinous crime. Let's hear it for technology and the hardworking individuals who use it to keep us safe (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

The French public took the information from the media and debated then briefly, continuing in a sense the same angle as the one proposed by journalists. The American public's approach completely transformed the same information into an in-depth deliberation on the social and political implications of using new technologies. The

debate was carried through symbolical references (Orwell, Minority report movie), or political references (9/11 post policies). The interest for this subject could be explained by the numerous references from popular culture (movies, series, novels) and political debates (especially the post 9/11).

*U.S. had it coming / guilty for creating terrorists*

While it could be argued that in the case of the previous themes, a few of the conveyed ideas were inspired by the news stories including details, or small pieces of information here and there about cameras, the police checking photographs and videos, the ‘U.S. had it coming/is guilty for creating terrorists’ theme was clearly not related to anything even remotely present in the either *The New York Times* or *Le Figaro* news stories. An overwhelming majority of French and American commenters conveyed the belief that such attacks were, are and will be imminent as long as America’s foreign policies, actions and domestic inactions continue to create domestic and foreign terrorists:

This could be a domestic terrorist act. But if it is foreign, as long as US keeps meddling with Middle Eastern and Northern African countries in the name of ‘peace’ and ‘democracy’ but end up killing and messing up lives of millions, this country is doomed to have these kinds of attacks. It's not Obama, it's not democrats nor republicans. It's the shadow government that doesn't want peace. Do you know who's been feeding terrorist groups for decades in middle east. US! You think Obama ended the war. Do you know who's sending arms to Syrian rebels? US! Obama just chose a different strategy where he can make other countries like Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to do it for him. It's all American weapons being used at the end (comment in *The New York Times*, 2013);

Our foreign policy creates terrorists. And, at this point, we don't know if the terrorist is domestic or foreign; nevertheless, we should not be surprised if people from the Middle Eastern And North African countries want/try to harm us. Drones and other forms of death does a terrorist make! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Over one million Iraqis have died in the American war. This is a figure that undoubtedly placed the United States among the villains of the story. According to the Fund for the Children of the UN, 500,000 Iraqi children died in 1990 due to sanctions imposed by the UN (under pressure from the United States) that prevented medicines and other basic necessities of entering the country. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State at the time, said in speaking of the death of 500,000 Iraqi children that 'it was the price to pay' (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013).

Both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* commenters engaged in long critiques and debates over the American drones killing innocents, and thus creating terrorists, or in a way the U.S. deserving the Boston bombing:

It's amazing to see all the comments and news headlines of how the perpetrators of this crime are below human and should be hunted down and brought to justice - fully agreed, but we see no outcry, at this level, when our drones in Afghanistan & Pakistan kill innocent civilians, including women and children. They are listed as collateral damage, might make a blip on the news, and we go on with our day. I don't think either action is justified, but we need to have a little more self-reflection in this country, beginning with our President (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

In Boston, the innocents were the targets. In Pakistan, the innocents are not targeted but may be occasionally caught in the crossfire. There is no moral equivalence here. None (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013); I find it hard to understand terrorism whatsoever: for 8 years drones "made in USA" have killed more than 3,000 people including many under the collateral damage (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

Collateral damage is dramatic and condemn, but the target of U.S. drones are just terrorists, and the U.S. is at war against each other since 2001, when the latter said they go to war against the world power, it should be put things in their place! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Even after the two suspects' identity was revealed, and before it was clear if the attack was domestic or foreign, some American commenters still argued that U.S. 'had it coming':



To be clear: what these young men did was despicable and heinous. And to be clear: this is what is called "Blowback". It's what happens when we torture, kill numerous civilians with drones to save our own, and The Gods know what else our government does quietly overseas in the name of the economy and America (*The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

We have home-grown radicals and terrorists who are allowed to operate websites and foment hate and racism. They call themselves white supremacists, neo-Nazis, Aryans, and our prison system is full of them, in fact is a training ground for them. So a violent country like ours, in which about 30 people a day are murdered, should not be wondering how this could happen (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

A few comments were contradicting these views, for instance:

This is not a place for complaints about our foreign policy. This story is about three premeditated cold blooded murders. Get real (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Additionally, a wave of comments addressed the next step in this rationalization of the reasons for the attack, directly demanding change from the U.S. administration:

We cannot go on like this -- insulting and aggravating other countries, nations and whole ethnic groups by imposing our might on the rest of the world, taking sides in regional conflicts, killing innocent people with drones, etc. This is how we will continue paying the price. As a Boston resident involved in local issues, I can attest that Boston (and I'm sure other major US cities too) does not have the resources to spend millions of dollars in anti-terrorism prevention. We cannot live like this! It's up to Washington to fix this issue (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

It would seem that this administration is focusing on the wrong issues facing our country. The drone program has induced more hate for our country, which in the end will radicalize those that would normally not go to the extremes of killing Americans. That said, one would think that President Obama would stop the drone killing and be more involved in back door diplomacy (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

This pattern shows a meaning-making process. After people get over the initial shock of the bombing and the break in everyday expectations and routines, and get past the stage of expressing emotions (anger and sadness especially), they try to find reasons, explanations, assign blame, and find solutions. When the media content does not correspond to their beliefs, or logic, their assigned meanings will just deviate from the ones proposed by journalists. In this particular instance, it could also be argued that these new meanings, assumptions and judgments do not appear out of thin air, instead they arise in the context of a globalized mediated world where American publics are more and more exposed and aware of what is happening outside their countries.

Within the same theme, several discrepancies were found when comparing the two sets of publics. While *The New York Times* commenters blamed U.S. policies in general for the attack, the French commenters directly blamed both President Bush (for his actions) and President Obama (for his inaction):

This corresponds to the Iraqi routine! (Kudos to the Bush administration filthy & Co.) (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

This is not Obama and the Democrats who said that "War on Terror" was a nonsense that cost a lot of money? This is not Obama and the Democrats that reduce budgets armies. This is not Obama and the Democrats who wanted to close GitMo? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Also in the *Le Figaro* case, from the very first day, French comments conveyed the idea that Americans had it coming because of their fascination with guns and lack of gun control, and because of the violence characterizing American society:

Who sows the wind (laxity and permissiveness U.S. for firearms) reap the whirlwind (serial killers mass shooting bombing)! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

All these thoughts might echo the general French public opinion on this theme. Nevertheless, the way these beliefs are conveyed, without too many arguments, taking more the form of some universal truths, may suggest that they are born from stereotypical cultural representations about the U.S. in general, the U.S. society, and the U.S. political life.

Additionally, not only that the information presented in the French news stories did not somehow inspire the theme (as it was the case with previous themes emerging in comments), but commenters took the information and the angle from the news stories, and used it to make and argue for meanings, opposite from the ones intended by journalists. The extent to which the French commenters revealed interpretations seems to be deeply rooted in their beliefs. For example, a wave of comments criticized one of the *Le Figaro*'s news stories that contained a quick look into the past attacks taking place in the U.S.. Commenters re-phrased the specific information given by journalists in order to correspond to their assigned meanings, and to tighten their point of view (an opposite angle than the journalistic one):

It is clear that it is shorter to enumerate the attacks that took place in the United States than to count those who were committed by the United States" (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 18:04, 2013);

You could write an article with a similar title: 'The previous attacks in the United States' for their actions in Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Indonesia etc. (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 18:04, 2013).

A counter-public emerged as well, against the 'U.S. had it coming/deserved it' views. These commenters again made the argument that the U.S. saved France, therefore, Americans are decent and beautiful people and the attack was unwarranted:

Due to the ‘behavior’ of the USA during World War 2, you can now write freely what you think. Is it possible for you to recognize this? If I follow your reasoning, the innocent victims of Boston deserved this horror? Because of the ‘behavior’ of the USA, elsewhere? And it is you who dare to speak of decency? Yuck!  
(comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6: 49, 2013).

## **Frame 2: The Horror**

### *The apocalyptic image after the bombing*

This theme too is developed by commenters in close association with the journalistic discourse. Both the American and the French commenters are visibly impressed by the victims’ sufferance (their awareness coming from the images of the city in the aftermath of the bombing, visualized either through television, online photos and videos or the written press descriptions):

Along with my fellow Americans, I reacted with horror at the prospect of so many innocents losing life and limb in the terrorist attack that took place yesterday afternoon at the Boston marathon. I awoke this morning feeling ill, hung over from exposure to the horrifying images broadcast on the networks following the bombing (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Total horror! Repugnant those who do such acts. (...) Dead people and several little children with both legs cut off ... We must pray for those bereaved and injured (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

The image and significance of the severed legs as related to the symbolism of the runners, dominated the comments, thus reinforcing the influence of the frames and contents (i.e. specific language, expressions, images) that both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* journalists (for that matter media covering the event in general) had on their readers (publics).

*Boston and Marathon's purity tainted*

Some *The New York Times* commenters conveyed their shock and denoted the antithesis between the purity of Boston/the event and the horror of the act, as proposed by the journalists, through short messages, such as:

This is as pointless and mean as shooting Winnie the Pooh (comment in NYT, April 15, 2013).

In both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments, these antithetical images of what Boston and the Marathon symbolized, and the terror of the attack mirrored the ones proposed by the journalists:

Youth, athleticism, joy, freedom; the thrill of running and competing, a multiethnic spectacle participated in by all ages, by men and women, going by, past the great buildings of old Boston, the Trinity Church and the Old South Church and the magnificent front of McKim, Mead and White's BPL; down Boylston Street, hearts beating, blood pumping, legs moving; eyes, hearts, brains in the tens of thousands, taking it all in, the wonderment of urbanity and the ancient tradition of the marathon, transported to modernity, in the Athens of America. And then death and dismemberment in a garbage can. Smoke and darkness, blood and limbs, broken glass and fallen people and screams of horror. In tears, with heavy hearts, we mourn this senseless act of violence (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Abject! Such acts demonstrate the stupidity and baseness of soul authors. Whether using such measures to express its opinions do not already noted at the beginning of intelligence. But really hit on such a peaceful and healthy manifestation notes of everything except nobility of soul. But we must recognize that these people sign their actions, without needing to identify themselves. Shame on them! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Commenters were impressed by the image of severed legs, especially because the victims were runners. It can be argued that these commenters were affected by the frame proposed by the journalists, as well as by the specific language they used:

The tragedy of having one's human legs viciously stolen while watching one of the world's greatest celebrations of the power of human legs and the human heart is beyond articulation. The human heart will find a way through this sheer madness (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

Moreover, *The New York Times* commenters would appeal to their memories when emphasizing their emotion at how the virtue and innocence of Boston and the Marathon could be ruined by such a horrible act:

I used to live in Boston, and the runners who flocked to town every spring for the Marathon were the nicest, most positive and uplifting people you have ever met. It was such an energetic and inspiring day to be in that city. That someone could do this to them, or any group of people for that matter, is simply beyond my comprehension of humanity (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

In both the apocalyptic aftermath image and tainted Boston purity themes brought up by commenters it is clear that they (1) placed every image, and piece of information under the microscope and discovered new interpretations, and (2) appealed to their memories, or experiences, to give new meanings to these images and information. Commenters who said they watched videos (YouTube or from other media), observed that the bombs exploded under a row of country flags and added that detail to the symbolism of the marathon and the atrocity of the act, i.e. the global nature of the sporting event. Other commenters added their personal memories, their experience with the beauty of Boston and its marathon, adding extra-meaning to the antithetical images already conveyed by the news stories. Frames, and especially news frames, have a tremendous symbolic power, as scholars have noted. Media narratives on the after bombing horror offered the public what Altheide (2009) called “evidentiary narratives:”

What people regard as evidence is contingent on symbolic processes and meanings that shape, guide, deflect, and construct boundaries. These are

associated, acquired, and accompanied with various memberships (and identities) and components, some explicit (e.g., occupation and education), but most implicit (e.g., region, class, religion, ethnicity, religion, family structure, and functioning). This provide an evidentiary narrative through people define, create, share, recognize, and reject information as relevant for a purpose at hand, including a topic that might be considered (Altheide, 2009, p. 73).

Media amplifies the symbolic power of a frame, as the one of the horror of a terrorist attack (which already has a ‘past’ and a cultural history), with actual images in which the victims and heroes are the main actors, thus constructing “evidentiary narratives.” Commenters take these elements, debate them, interpret them, and confirm them; they give nuance to them through images from their own cultural baggage. The analyzed case reveals the slow and gradual process of coagulation of a media frame in the public opinion of both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*, or using De Vreese & Lechler’s (2013, p. 293) terminology, a “frame setting” process.

*Boston paralyzed - The new normal? - What’s next*

*The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* publics personalized the gruesome descriptions of a paralyzed Boston and of the jitters felt in other big cities found in the news stories. In *The New York Times*, some comments convey the publics’ fear that there is no safe place anymore, that what happened in Boston might soon happen at other events they are about to attend, and their observations of the aftereffects being felt in their respective cities:

The terrorist attack seems to have caused one weird side effect here in NYC. On my commute this morning (I walk a mile or so), there were far less people on the streets (maybe 30% less), and everything was quieter than normal. I did not hear a single car horn in a half hour, and that's astounding in Manhattan's rush hour. I

can only conclude that this weighs heavy on peoples' minds, whereas the constant larger, deadlier bombings around the world do not have this affect on Americans at all (e.g.: same day as the Boston attack, 37 died in Iraq from bombs, and probably the same number all last week, for which we didn't mourn) (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

This scares me in a way that I can't even express. What if -- and here's my explosive imagination running amok -- what if this was merely a "test" to see how much damage this bomb could do -- and they're really (whomever is responsible for this?) after a bigger medley of horror at the London Marathon, this weekend? Oh. My. G-d. When will this END? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

I wouldn't be surprised if, some year, Mardi Gras is hit in New Orleans or a Maid of the Mist boat at Niagara Falls some June. The number of potential targets is endless. We're eventually all going to feel like deer always edgy looking and listening for danger (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

No place is safe in this country. I have strolled on the sidewalk where the Boston Marathons bombs went off today and have seen a movie in the Aurora theater site of the shooting last summer. My son is a Kindergartner and my heart sinks thinking of Sandyhook and all of the children who never came home. While we debate tax increases on the wealthy and Michele Obama's bangs, people died today (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

In the *Le Figaro*, mirroring the news articles conveying the idea of U.S. under terror, commenters are wondering about American reactions, whether this attack would generate the same post 9/11 reactions of fear and panic, and if a new wave of terrorism is to be expected:

This attack is particularly disgusting and hateful (...) Now it is clear that it will make this country even more unbearable and paranoid than ever (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013);

Can we really end up with terrorists? ..... This is the question to be asked and for all the rest of our lives. Let's arm ourselves with vigilance my brothers. It is terrible ... (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).



The emphasis on and constant descriptions of Boston as a city that is shutdown in the news stories, conveying jitters and a hopeless image, seemed to seriously impact some commenters who were concerned that fear has defeated what initially was presented as a strong and undefeated Boston. Several *The New York Times* commenters referred to the tension between the appeal to fight against fear and to show it by returning to the everyday life, and the reality of life, in these days, in Boston. They observed how the measures taken to prevent more loss of lives, or to catch the two suspects, led to the paralysis of the city, in a way emotionally fortifying the feeling that panic, fear, and terror dominate:

I guess that whole "messed with the wrong city" thing didn't work out as planned - instead of Bostonians being able to go on with their lives, they are being forced to stay in doors through a prolong police state - all to catch one person. Crazy, pretty much the opposite of the hopeful sentiments expressed in that op-ed (comment, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Of course. What on earth do you expect? How else could they catch them without disrupting life for a few days? Life will go on in the long run, but how would they be caught without the "cost or disruption of daily life in a major city" ? (comment, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Amazing! A curfew to nab A guy ! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013);

Not amazing, however, there were very good reasons to believe that he had enormous amount of explosives with him saw the exchange he had had the previous night and ended with the death the brother (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013).

At a first glance, such comments might look as if Altheide's (2009) thesis about the media creating a culture of fear through their discourse is averred. But the analysis shows that (1) the comments take the form of a constant debate, where both sides are

represented, where to each fearful comment many others reply by dismissing the idea of fear winning, and where a situation was created in which the shutdown of the city only meant that the police is more efficient, and not that Boston is defeated; and (2) even more important that the comments showing that ‘we are not afraid’ and ‘Boston remains strong’ attitude supersede the ones showcasing panic and fear.

The widely emphasized the *Le Figaro* news images of a paralyzed Boston, an America under siege and on terror alert resonates with French commenters who convey the belief that similarly to the 9/11 aftermath Americans will return to being fearful and even paranoid. However, when a image of France on a terror alert was emphasized in the news stories – e.g. the “Enhanced patrols in France” subtitle, the Internal Minister’s demand to the security forces to strengthen their presence, and to the publics to stay vigilant – the French commenters directly and vehemently disagree with this journalistic angle and with the Minister’s demand:

Why Manuel Valls concludes by asking us to ‘exercise patience and civility’. (...) If President Obama stated that ‘services do not yet know ‘ who committed these acts and why. What is the origin of this French panic about an American event with so little information? Were there any threats of war or guerrilla incurred, or a preemptive strike (...) that are hidden from us? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013).

### **Frame 3: The Heroes**

The Hero frame showcased *The New York Times* public’s attempt to redefine the news content and negotiate meanings in the frame. The news stories mainly portrayed the doctors as heroes. Commenters applauded, not only the doctors, but also the first responders, the medical staff, and the citizens for their heroic actions. It was in this way that the first responders, doctors and medical staff, and citizens, as heroes emerged as

themes in the comments, separate from the one offered in the news stories. In *Le Figaro* case, in both news stories and its public's comments, the Carlos Arredondo – the American hero portrait is constantly emphasized, emerging into a strong theme, further reinterpreted and refocused by publics. Both American and the French commenters add the theme of the authorities as ambiguous heroes, separate from the news stories.

*Doctors & medical staff as heroes (specific only to The New York Times)*

It has to be noted, that similarly to the news articles, the idea of gratitude towards the doctors and their image as saviors and heroes appeared in a wave of comments:

God bless you all - the doctors who saved people and those who are so injured their lives will never be the same (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

However, *The New York Times* commenters directly criticized the journalistic decision to have an article solely dedicated to doctors as heroes, and gave credit to the other persons who they regarded as heroes:

DOCTORS were the ones who saved lives? HOSPITALS are where the lives were saved? Doctors can't save lives in the hospital unless the patients survive long enough to get there. The existence of nurses and "other medical professionals" is mentioned exactly once in this article. A more pertinent focus for the story would have been the extensive ad hoc teamwork, from untrained bystanders who kept victims from bleeding to death on the spot, by the nurses -- who outnumber MD's in the medical tents and often have more extensive critical care experience than others working there -- and by the volunteers of every discipline who mustered to get victims to the hospitals. Surely MD's are not the only quotable clinicians available to journalists (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

Nurses, and the other medical staff are also seen as heroes – it seemed as if commenters were more attentive than journalists to the variety of situations and actors involved in solving the terrorist attack:

There are and were so many heroes in Boston at the time of the explosion and they reacted instinctively to reach out and help, rescue, console and with the case of the doctors, save many lives. I am grateful too for the support personnel at the course who provided triage and this assisted also with those most in need being rushed to the hospital ER and OR. Bystanders like Carlos Arredondo who, though he had lost his own son in the war, found it his first nature to rescue one of the fallen and quickly bandage the wounds of that injured man, thereby saving his life. This will stick with me long after this tragedy passes into history. However, the true spirit of the strong in Boston will always remain (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

Some arguments among *The New York Times* commenters about who deserves more applauses start within the April 16 article focused on doctors:

I would also thank the nurses, OR techs, Anesthesia techs, CRNA(s), etc. Etc. It is a team effort (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013)

And the reply:

someone has to make the grueling decisions, this is what this article was about. While health care is a team, let's also not steal the thunder from the physicians who train their twenties and thirties away working 80+ hours a week and make these decisions daily with limited information and tremendous consequences. Instead of the constant doctor bashing and trivialization of physician roles, let doctors bask a little bit for once, heaven knows they deserve it here (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

*First responders as heroes (specific only to The New York Times)*

One of the major preoccupations of the commenters is to thank (by simply mentioning or by congratulations) all the individuals who contributed to saving lives. Generally, these are integrated in the category “first responders” the emphasis falling on the rapidity and the spirit of sacrifice of those who immediately intervened efficiently and without fear:

The actions of the first responders, both uniformed police, medical staff as well as volunteers, jumping to respond even before and after the second bomb exploded, were quite moving” (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

*Citizens / publics as heroes (specific only to The New York Times)*

The news stories presented but did not emphasize the public helping with the initial hunt for the suspects, and the random citizen finding the younger brother after the police's failed search. Unusual attention by the commenters was oriented towards members of the publics, those anonymous individuals who overcame their fear provoked by the explosions (or by the threat of other possible attacks) and jumped to the rescue of others:

I congratulate the wonderful people of Boston as they rushed to the aid of those in distress (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

Another side of this theme was present throughout the comments made to the news stories of and after the second suspect's apprehension, in the idea that citizens/publics were actually the ones who helped identify/catch the suspects:

A spectator who took a single photo (plus videos) immediately after the first bomb went off actually obtained the best photo of the suspect in the white hat, which clearly showed his face. He gave it to the FBI and called them back the next day to tell them to look at it again. (...) Everyone in Boston rallied to catch these perps. The last apprehended suspect was identified by a man who lived in the house who noticed a trail of blood in his driveway on the way to a boat he kept in his back yard! Citizens were key to making the arrests (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

*The American hero (specific only to Le Figaro)*

In the *Le Figaro* case, while some commenters applauded everyone involved in saving lives, the majority reacted to the news article emphasizing the American hero, Carlos Arredondo, conveying either admiration or critique vis-à-vis the stereotypical manner in which he was depicted:

Carlos, a very brave and human remains despite the hardships that the man hit. Bravo, sir you are the honor of America, and a model' (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013);

This is very good news! Legend is written live. A cowboy walks into the crowd blown by the blast and helps the flayed (...) the new man of the west is from the south, and America opens its arms to the man who saved her. Here is a change in the geopolitical feelings! Yes, Carlos can! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013).

As with the other themes, the discussion among *Le Figaro* commenters turned into a comparison of the U.S. with France as they debated the differences between the American heroes and the French ones:

In France, we would make a hero of a man who, after helping rescue workers, firefighters and doctors (if he has the skills), after an attack, would go back in tears holding him against a tricolor flag stained with blood? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013);

Reply:

In France, we dare not wear a French flag ... right? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013);

The Yankees always need a hero! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013);

Your reflection is typically French. I did not even read the comments I already knew that I would find a comment on your style. Yes the American mentality is different from the French mentality, and that's what makes them succeed where we fail. I must say they do not spend their time envying and denigrate those who succeed, that they know how to give a chance to people that ; they trust the people who work with them, that they put the ways that it works , and especially that they believe in the Individual. In short, it is not only an ocean that separates us, but especially a world. We find this mentality in French who are expatriates, volunteers usually people who are not afraid to move to succeed (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013).

Additionally, as the American commenters debated the meaning of terrorism, the French discussed the philosophical meaning of American heroes:

By attacking America, they exalt their entire history, dotted with resistance against the invaders. These two brothers are certainly heroes for Chechens, as opposed to American heroes. This is similar to ancient Greek tragedies, such as the Trojan War with its war heroes on both sides (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 15:55, 2013)

And the reply:

You confuse the real heroes of the Trojan war with these two terrorists? You think that Chechnya is Troy? I hope that the Chechen shot was not Aeneas this could have disastrous effect for the future of the world (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 15:55, 2013),

In modern times, a hero is a person (man or woman) who, by his courage, save one or more lives. Here, the two brothers are not heroes but murderers, terrorists, religious. Nothing to do with heroes (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 15:55, 2013).

Through the constant comparison with France and the philosophical debate on the meanings of heroes, commenters redefine and reinterpret the heroes' images.

From the discussion of the heroic actions of those who helped the attack victims, French commenters transition to another discussion of the ambiguity of the two brothers' position: for the ones who sustain the anti-Americanism they can be heroes, but for the victims and the attacked society they can remain terrorists. The American soldiers who fight against terrorists are heroes, but in the many of the places where they fight they can appear as terrorists to those populations. This whole game of images is colored by the analogy with Homer's saga. The zigzagged line of the debate, specific to the relation between the French commenters discourse and the French media frames is again noticeable. It is possible that this pattern is due to a characteristic specific to French

journalism, a “tendency to emphasize deliberation and to make more room for nonjournalist authorial voices” (Benson et al., 2012, p. 33). In this case the appeal to a more liberal treatment of themes, towards divagations and subjective expression can emerge not only from the specific French (or Mediterranean) public sphere (Ruiz et al. 2011) but also from the characteristics of a political polarized media system (Hallin, Manicini, 2004; Benson, Hallin, 2014).

*Authorities – the ambiguous heroes (specific to both New York Times & Le Figaro)*

Information appeared in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* news stories about the U.S. authorities’ search for the suspects, their manhunt, and about some officials blaming government agencies for ‘intelligence failure.’ The American and French commenters again gave their own interpretation. The American authorities were the object of critiques and dissatisfaction, because they did not prevent the tragedy, they were not identifying or catching the suspects fast enough, but in a contradictory manner, they were also applauded for their quick and efficient actions:

The FBI are not Superheroes with eidetic memories - that's a let down! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013);

A ludicrous amount of fire power, a great show and a waste of money. The French caught their fellow in a few days and did not have to shut down or immobilize an entire city. More brains and less brawn is needed here I think. Of course it was a terrible thing and whoever did it should be punished but not in this way (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

To all the officers involved, you are heroes. May Officer Collier rest in eternal peace, and Officer Donohue, we pray for your speedy recovery. To FBI and local law enforcement, you deserve towering praise for solving what initially seemed impossible so quickly. I only hope that I could rise and deliver in such ways if



ever the situation calls for it. YOU ALL MAKE ME SO PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Another security services fiasco (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013);

Congratulations to the Americans for this brilliant Police investigation (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013).

In this sense, the majority of these comments showed again the pattern of the publics taking the information from the media, and assigning to it more or different meaning than the journalists did.

#### **Frame 4: The Hunt**

In the Hunt frame both similarities and differences occur in the French and American comments. Moreover, within this frame, although the same themes emerged in both the news stories and comments, the emphasis is different.

##### *The hunt for culprits*

In the 'hunt for culprits' the media theme of the chase resembling a movie script emerged in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments. Both sets of commenters reacted negatively to the massive mobilization of forces to catch one teenager and to the long gunfire scene that occurred at the boat where the suspect, already wounded, was hiding. Both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* commenters criticized the mediatization of the events as resembling more a spectacle than a real happening. However, the majority of the American comments were in-between quasi whimsical, and focused on the strangeness of the events leading to possible future movies:

Ben Affleck, one can imagine, must be intensely interested in this bizarre story. It takes place in and around his hometown of Cambridge. And it is the stuff of high drama that is material for movies (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

Few comments were more reflective touching on the American spectacle culture and the belief that the whole show of forces was to make up for the authorities' previous failings and to make themselves look good in the credulous American public's eyes:

Too much of a show. Part of it is Americans' love of a good hysteria, another is an opportunity for all sorts of political poseurs, and careerists to strut their stuff and look good. But all of this armada missed the basic legwork any decent local cop would've done. Movie at 11 (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

A deeper critique of the American society dominated the French comments judging this 'movie-like hunt':

These Americans, so they cannot do a thing without a Hollywood like grand show. What ridiculous excess! (comments in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 23:52, 2013).

The ambiguity of this comment (i.e. is it referring to the authorities' strategy or the way mass media presented their actions?) reflects the ambiguity of the U.S. image in France: on the one hand, commenters praised the FBI's efficiency and the law enforcement forces' ability to neutralize the suspects, on the other hand, the U.S. image as a show-oriented nation appears again. Commenters underline numerous movie-like elements: the computerized search and combing through thousands of photos from the CCTVs resemble or recall the identical scenes from U.S. TV series such as CSI or NCIS, or from spy or adventure movies; the chase, the gunfire exchange, the bizarre or controversial death of one brother and the capturing of the second one have the narrative line and the suspense of a terrorist action movie (or a popular TV series such as '24');

and the street celebration, with applause, chanting and fireworks resemble the numerous festive parades presented by mass media. These cases echo the analyses of various media scholars who argued that “narratives are powerful organizing devices, and most frame will have ideal narratives that organize a large amount of disparate idea and information” (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p.148).

In the same ‘hunt for culprits’ theme the belief that the police should release more photos, videos, information to the public, and put the social media/online space to work for a better result, emerged more in The New York Time comments than in the *Le Figaro* ones. Clearly, the American public was more invested, commenters felt that they are capable to do more, that taking the matter into their own hands would actually solve the problem faster and better. In a sense their comments illustrated a shattered trust in authorities:

I think the FBI should have released the film, online, to get more eyes of the prize; modern technology is online, and democracy is online; the old top-down stuff does not work anymore; the multicultural, multitalented mob is more effective, with the aid of technology, than a gaggle of Ivy League men. We are wasting time letting the Old Boys try to solve the crime, while the monster (s) get away! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013)

The few comments in *Le Figaro* suggested only passively that the social media might be of use in this hunt:

I think the authors (...) will soon boast about their actions, if they are proud of them, and surely they are....the social networks may be useful (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

This pattern and the differences between *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments in this instance could be explained by two arguments. First, the proximity factor (geographical and psychological) constitutes an explanation for why the American

public wanted to become more than spectators. Secondly, another explanation could be related to the crowdsourcing phenomenon, a trend that developed in the U.S. and is wide spread in the U.S. more so than in other countries. Crowdsourcing refers to the idea of involving the crowds (publics) in order to solve a problem. These practices date as far back as 1998 when the American multinational pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly created a crowdsourcing platform, and were further popularized by Howe and Robinson in their article published in the *Wired* magazine, in 2006 (Schenk & Guittard, 2011).

Crowdsourcing is now a common practice and it is used for tasks like generating geographic content, text translations, graphical design, problem solving and innovation projects (Schenk & Guittard, 2011); in local government/public projects decision making (Brabham, 2008); in disaster relief (Starbird, 2011) and even in helping police with unsolved crimes<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, as Burke (2013) argued in her analysis of the online crowd taking on police work during the Boston Marathon Bombing, besides this crowdsourcing culture, Americans are flooded with popular detective TV series like *CSI*, *Numbers* or *The Profiler* that give people the false sense of “understanding why killers and terrorists do what they do,” and additionally that they can predict such actions, and quickly solve any crime. Consequently, it may be that this pattern that heavily emerged in *The New York Times* comments can be explained by this new reality in which the American public is more and more used to be involved and to have a voice that matters, and in which Americans, fascinated and flooded by police/detective series, come to the belief that they can solve any mystery (in trend with the Do-It-Yourself phenomenon).

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in 2011 Philadelphia Police Department launched a new website where they were sharing videos or photos to faster apprehend suspects (Wink, 2011).

Several issues regarding the reinterpretation of the content of the journalistic theme by the commenters need to be discussed in regards to both New York Times and *Le Figaro* cases. Following the sequence of events, and the order in which new information was disseminated, *The New York Times* journalists stressed the unknown when it came to the suspects, then the strenuous process the authorities are dealing with by having to comb through endless photos and videos, and through even more information after they enlisted public help. Towards the third day of the coverage, the journalists emphasized the public taking the ‘hunt’ into their own hands on social media. The ‘hunt for culprits’ culminated with the almost unreal manhunt and finally the apprehension of the second brother. On the other hand, the commenters emphasized the public engagement from the very beginning. They also took the manhunt descriptions and mocked the movie-like feeling. As for the ‘happy-ending’ scenes after the second brother was apprehended, it startled an entire new debate among the commenters about the celebration’s place this event.

In *Le Figaro*, the publics started echoing the journalistic angle (i.e. the movie hunt) and then took other bits of information and assigned their own meaning to them (i.e. the information that police is combing through photos and videos, led to infinite debates on the utility of surveillance cameras). Again even in the case of images taken directly from the media, commenters still bring their own interpretations, as it was in the movie hunt case when the journalists were criticized by some commenters for their exaggerations.

*The hunt for answers: looking at the past*

This theme similarly materialized in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments. Both sets of commenters overly debated the foreign and domestic attack hypothesis by initially comparing the Boston Bombing with the Atlanta Olympics attack and the Oklahoma one, as it was proposed by the news articles:

We may never know but I would think that 4/15 being tax day could set someone off. The choice of a presidential library or any government building says domestic terrorism to me. With all the polarization in our nation's politics we can't be all that surprised if we don't see events like the Oklahoma City and Olympic Park bombings repeated (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

It is too early to blame anyone. But do not forget that the United States have already been hit by an 'endogenous' terrorism (Oklahoma City, Atlanta Olympics, ...) (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

And both publics then moved on to other possible international suspects such as North Korea, in comments more or less serious:

Clearly an act of terrorism. I'd be willing to guess North Korea is behind this since today is a special day commemorating Kim's grandfather and they've been threatening us for weeks now....(comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

It seems that this year, North Korea has chosen to celebrate the anniversary of its founder in Boston. The missile that did not shoot in Asia exploded anyway ... No need to look further (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

The only difference emerged in *Le Figaro* in two instances where:

1. Commenters compared the Boston Bombing with France's Toulouse attacks in their arguments for the home-grown/domestic terrorism theory: "the bombings in France Toulouse also came from inside" (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013) and

2. Commenters made references to 9/11 in order to criticize the investigation that in their minds, brought no answers:

Hopefully this time (as opposed to September 11) the victims' families will be entitled to a real investigation (not a survey sewn with white thread in rickety budget and they had to beg for 440 days) taking into account all the elements and leaving aside any track it was politically incorrect, but may be I am too optimistic (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013); or

They always look: debris from the plane supposedly having hit the Pentagon, weapons mass destruction in Iraq, they always look the authors of 11/09, but they are looking for bad side is to look internally to find .. already glad they do not accuse Iran or Syria in order to bomb, destroy and kill millions of innocent people as in all their research (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 23:19, 2013).

These minor differences could be explained by the publics' dissimilar cultural frames determined by the past experiences and the level of political knowledge.

*The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon*

This theme also appeared in a similar manner, in the two sets of comments. Both the American and the French commenters connected the information that the bombs were homemade, with nails and metals, with the Paris subway bombings:

This is the same technique that was used in Paris to blow up subways and trains railways. now our government have to be very vigilant with this problem. It went for years in France. And I hope not (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Some may recall that France has also experienced indiscriminate attacks with homemade bombs filled with small metal parts to make the greatest possible civilian casualties, but it was the work of OAS extreme right (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013).

Both publics also engaged in countless and often ironic debates on pressure cookers. The interest for in this subject may come from the contrast between the horror of the explosion and the unsophisticated nature of the device:

The authorities are turning this into a farce: a home made explosion device is not a weapon of mass destruction. A simple military hand grenade would have done much more damage (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013); Owners of pressure cookers will be required to leave them in the next police station under sentence of 25 years in prison (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013);

The debate on free sale of pressure cookers is restarted (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013).

In the context of both the ‘the hunt for answers: looking at the past’ and ‘the hunt for answers: looking at the weapon’ themes, there are several issues regarding the public interplay with the media content that need to be mentioned. *The New York Times* news stories when trying to make sense of why it happened and who was responsible (whether it domestic or foreign), contained two possible connections with the symbols of past terrorist attacks, and the details of the bomb itself. The public took the two suggestions and engaged in massive debates, assigning meaning to any detail no matter how small (the symbolism, the targeted areas along with their history, the elements of the bomb design) when trying to figure out the best explanation for the event. A few commenters even deviated from the two proposed theories and brought into the discussion other possible meanings, symbols and past connection, that could point to different suspects such as an anti-abortion individuals, far right militia group, Al Qaeda, or even North Korea. As journalists reported the gun fire during the manhunt, and after the apprehension of the second brother quoted officials labeling the pressure-cookers as



weapons of mass destruction, the commenters reinterpreted the information, and heavily debated: (1) the issue of gun control, where did the brothers get their weapons, and how should gun control legislation change; and (2) a critique of the officials for their choice of words in describing the guns as an arsenal and the pressure-cookers as weapons of mass destruction, considered by the commenters to be exaggerations. In the *Le Figaro* case, some commenters debate the possible explanations through the lenses offered by the news stories (the connection with the past attacks, symbolism of the day chosen, the weapon), while others brought in new possible interpretations by looking at France's past attacks (i.e. when decoding the meanings of the weapon of choice). Similarly to the New York Time case, the information presented by the *Le Figaro* news articles regarding the pressure cookers, lead to numerous ironic comments.

*The hunt for answers: the Chechnya / Russia connection*

Journalists heavily covered all sides of the Chechnya / Russia connection in their stories (i.e. when they immigrated, when they could have been radicalized, Chechnya's terrorism tendencies). Both the French and American commenters tried to understand the Chechen connection, the radicalization of Tamerlan after his visit to his home country. The commenters debated the new line of possible explanations and again offered their own interpretations and assigned meaning to details that the media did not connect with the new information, like going back to look at symbolism of bombs exploding behind the Russian flag. Some of the commenters did not believe this connection to be a real explanation, and others moved on from interpretations to wondering what the American government will do to Chechnya.

The American commenters wondered how the U.S. will react politically, while the French ones either blamed President Putin or criticized the ones not agreeing with his anti-Chechen terrorism policies:

It seems that the two suspects are now supposedly Chechen (let me clarify that it seems he is actually from Dagestan, so it is unclear if he is actually of Chechen ethnic origin or not, just an fyi). I was just wondering if anyone other than me noticed (or perhaps I am wrong?), that the backpack bomb seems to have been exploded in front of international flags, particularly what strongly resembled a Russian flag. It will be interesting to see how this now changes the perspective stance of the US government on Chechnya. The US has often critiqued Russia for its dealings in the region, particularly for its harsh stance on Chechnya (though it has softened over recent years). It will be interesting to see the reaction of the American government, as well as the reaction of the Russian government (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

The Boston bombing was committed by two Chechen terrorists: Tamerlan Tsarnaev , 26, shot dead by police and his brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev , 19 years on the run. (...) Chechen paid by Putin (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 15:55, 2013);

Dzohar Tsarnaev native of Chechnya is the second terrorist on the run. Chechnya is the most important basis of the Jihadist, and this is the greatest terrorist threat to the West as they are easily assimilated into the European population. Those critical of Putin should bite their tongue (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 15:55, 2013).

For the U.S. commenters the possible causes of the transformation of an American citizen, educated and socialized by and in the American society into an enemy of America was an essential issue (and it was the main question launched by President Obama). Consequently, these commenters dissected each possibility that could have influenced the older brother (from the propaganda led by the Islamic guerilla groups from Russia, to the frustrations related to the unfulfillment in sports in the U.S.):

Chechens? Two Chechens are at war in Cambridge and Newton with the MIT and MBTA police? They hoped to make what point by bombing the Boston

Marathon? Having trouble processing this... I hope they apprehend this guy soon...and alive; that's the only way we will ever understand what these freaks were looking to achieve with this bizarre rampage... (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

He was a young man who, apparently, felt as though he belonged nowhere. In Dagestan, where bombings and violence are a normal part of everyday life apparently, he learned that is one way to express your anger. When he returned to the US and was denied citizenship, that was the last straw. Angry at the US and blaming the government for his problems, he plotted the attack and got his younger brother involved (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

For the French public, these were “their” topics, in what was clearly seen as “their” crisis (using Nossek’s, 2007 terms) and consequently they attributed the guilt to the leader that conducted the war against Chechnya and promoted a radical policy against Chechen guerillas and terrorists.

### **Frame 5: Justice**

Both similarities and differences are discernable in the French and American commenters’ address of the Justice frame. *The New York Times* commenters deviated from the news stories content.

*Responsible ones will be brought to justice / Demand for punishment*

Initially, both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* briefly presented official declarations especially the ones coming from President Obama, assuring the public that the responsible culprits will be identified, found and punished accordingly. Both *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* commenters convey strong beliefs that the responsible ones will be brought to justice:

Those responsible will be brought to justice, I have no doubt (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

As for the perpetrators of this attack ... directly to Guantanamo when they will be caught, with special diet! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013).

If in the news stories, the actual punishment was never explicitly defined, and the possibility of the death penalty was mentioned in passing in one of the last news stories, waves of comments in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* focused on the punishment:

Fry this piece of human garbage, he forfeited his rights when he blew up innocent people, including a beautiful 8-year old. This case is a perfect example of why the death penalty, which has been used throughout history, is valid (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013);

He will spend the remainder of his life in concrete cube at the United States Super Max Prison at Florence, Colorado. He will never see another inmate. Just himself, the guards and the concrete wall. He is 19 now. Imagine more than 60 years with a daily life like I just described. Who could deserve it more? He might have it much easier and get executed (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013);

Nothing can excuse such acts.. (...) I know it does not happen, but I want revenge more than justice (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

What cowardice to deposit bombs in the city to kill innocent people! Hope that those responsible will be caught - judged and end the rest of their lives/existence in prison (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

Again, the American' commenters sent direct messages to the suspects, letting them know that they will not evade punishment:

To the coward(s) who did this: We will find you. We will bring you to justice. No matter how long it takes, it will happen. Guaranteed! It doesn't matter who you are; it doesn't matter why you did it (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

*The mob justice issue / Not accusing the wrong person*

This theme was also very similarly dealt with in the two newspapers' online comments. In both cases it emerged with no visible connection to any of the news stories content. Even if initially, *The New York Times* commenters demanded the public to be involved in the hunt, when it came to the justice issue, both the American and the French commenters expressed the concern of a mob type punishment, as well as of punishing an innocent:

Justice is not the same as finding the solution to a problem in protein folding. I, for one, am glad that they don't give the job to the public. Sounds like a variation on mob justice (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

Do it yourself justice... the risk of accusing innocent people? Noble cause, but double-edged, caution... (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 23:17, 2013).

Related to the mob justice, the worry that a scapegoat may be punished was also brought forward by both sets of commenters. The only difference was in the examples given from the past to help make the point:

So, based on surveillance even the police say can't identify anyone as the bombers, when they come up with some poor sap—such as Richard Jewell—we should throw presumption of innocence out the window and deny the guy due process of the law and equal protection? In other words, lynch him. There was no evidence against Jewell except for his being close to the bomb and 'fitting' the FBI's "profile" (the man, ultimately convicted of the crime, did, too). Yet, the FBI fried him, ruined his life, he lost his job, etc for something he didn't do. Good thing we gave him due process of law and didn't lynch him (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

I hope that the U.S. authorities failing to find those responsible for this tragedy, and to save face, do not sacrifice a scapegoat to blame as the killer of Kennedy (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013).

*Legalities: Miranda rights / Constitutional issues / Patriot Act*

On the legalities theme, the Americans debated the Miranda rights, and the question of constitutional rights for citizens who prove to be terrorists, while the French debated the Patriot Act and the issue of civil rights versus national safety in the context of the Saudi suspect (presented in the first news stories):

No matter how heinous the crimes this young man is accused of, he should have his Miranda rights and all other rights which are guaranteed by our Constitution. If he is denied these rights, we are selling out not just him, but ourselves.” (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013) versus:

Terrorists have no rights!! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

The infamous Patriot Act: the exception to Human Rights. Like what everything is relative (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 5:53, 2013) versus:

I am less bothered by the ‘patriot act than by terrorist acts. (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 5:53, 2013).

*The New York Times* commenters debated whether to judge Dzhokhar Tsarnaev as an American citizen, or as a foreigner:

The kid is an (naturalized) American. He is entitled by trial by a jury of his peers. IT seems to me this is one of the few absolute rights all Americans have. IT couldn't be spelled out more clearly in the Constitution (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

Under what theory is Tsarnaev an enemy combatant but Timothy McVeigh or James Holmes or Jared Loughner and on and on are not? Because he is a naturalized citizen instead of having been born in the United States? Because he is Muslim, not Christian? "But this is different" seems to be motivated by the guy's ethnic and religious heritage, as well as, I assume, the need to make political hay from an incident that was effectively handled and resolved by traditional law enforcement means (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

Commenters from each country had, not surprisingly, different social and cultural references. The French public was not informed or sensitive to the legal subtleties related to the interrogation procedures of a suspect in the U.S.; whereas the Patriot Act, which was the subject of mediatization and pro and against debates, offered an easy symbolic referent to interpret the issues related to the accusation of a possible suspect or judging the suspect.

*Mixed feelings for younger brother (specific only to The New York Times)*

This theme appeared only in *The New York Times*. Ample debates were started over the journalists' labeling of the apprehended suspect as a teenager, between commenters considering the younger brother a kid, not completely guilty, and expressing their feel sadness and sorrow, and the ones arguing that he should not be considered a teenager because he killed people, and as such he should be harshly punished:

No one will agree with me. But I find this sad for this kid because I think the dead older brother is the one who put this kid up to all this. And now it is this kid who has to stand trial, not the brother (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Kid? He's a legal adult responsible for all of his actions. I hope that he never sees the light of day for the rest of his life (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Remember that the younger suspect is still a teenager. While what he did was violent and dangerous, his mind may have been in a semi-fantasy mode that's typical of teens (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013);

He's still a mass murderer, teenager or not (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

### **Considerations on the interplay of frames - media to publics**

The findings show that the public reads, rereads, and deeply scrutinizes all the words, information and interpretations from the news articles, then re-develops them or comes up with new ones.

Scholars consider that the frames through which journalists organize information and give meaning to it influence the public's framing of that event or issue. Nevertheless, empirical research on this matter is difficult, because of the publics' heterogeneity and the volatile character of the public opinion construction. Online news and forums offer a unique chance to observe the interplay between media frames and public frames, and to additionally observe this "frame setting" process. In the analyzed case, the process of opinion making can be clearly observed. The readers adopt the themes and frames from, they then subject them to the filter formed by additional information from other sources (the comments showcased that they are active seekers of information, consulting other media) and of their own knowledge (again the comments showcased that they make references to the U.S. history and legislation, literary works, political debates, etc.).

With few exceptions (Graham, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2011), few comparative studies referring to both media coverage and public sphere debates of the same event or issue exist. This dissertation compared media frames and public frames generated by *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* coverage of the same event. Some comparative studies stress that in covering a crisis "Western media utilized the same framing mechanisms and told virtually the same story" (Bantimoroudis & Ban, 2001, p. 183). Others state that significant differences appear due to (1) "enduring deeply embedded practices and beliefs established at the formation of the journalistic field" (Benson et al., 2012, p.23), (2)



“cultural filtering” (Nossek, 2007, p.44), or (3) “national cultural values” (Schaeffer, 2003, p.109). All comparative studies on the online public spheres showcase the importance of political and cultural traditions in explaining the functioning modality of a national public sphere or of particular “public sphericules” (Dahlberg, 2001; Downey et al., 2012; Papacharissi, 2011).

This dissertation shows that the interplay of media and public frames does not have a deterministic character. Some frames are taken from media, but even in this case, their specific content and themes are negotiated, and developed in new directions. Some themes even if situated under the same general frames taken from the media, are the product of commenters debates on these online spaces offered by the media. It has to be underlined that the fact that commenters directly accepted The New York Time or *Le Figaro* frames, redefining the themes and content, shows the fluidity of the framing process (see Table 1<sup>7</sup>). In this sense, the observed phenomenon looked more like Entman’s proposed cascade model (2004).

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<sup>7</sup> Legend: Green highlight – different theme in one newspaper as compared to the other; Yellow highlight – different themes in comments as compared to the news articles; Bold – themes specific only to one set of comments.

Table 1: Media & publics' frames and themes in *The New York Times* & *Le Figaro*

|                               | NYT stories   | LF stories  | NYT comments  |  | LF comments  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Frame 1:<br><b>Terrorism</b>  | Terrorist attack: domestic vs. foreign<br><br>Boston strong: don't let terrorists win   | Terrorism attack: domestic vs. foreign<br><br>Boston strong: don't let terrorists win   | Terrorist attacks: domestic vs. foreign / Definitions of terrorism<br><br>Boston strong: don't let terrorists win<br><br><b>Terrorism prevention &amp; security failures</b><br><br><b>Culture of surveillance</b><br><br>U.S. had it coming / guilty for creating terrorists |  | Terrorist attacks: domestic vs. foreign<br><br>Boston strong: don't let terrorists<br><br><b>Terrorism prevention &amp; security failures</b><br><br>U.S. had it coming / guilty for creating terrorists |
| Frame 2:<br><b>The Horror</b> | The apocalyptic after-the-bombing-scene<br><br>Boston and Marathon's purity tainted<br><br>Boston paralyzed and 'fear'/ jitters spreading across U.S.                                 | The apocalyptic after-the-bombing scene<br><br>Boston and Marathon's purity tainted<br><br>Boston paralyzed and 'fear'/ jitters spreading across U.S.                                 | The apocalyptic after-the-bombing-scene<br><br>Boston and Marathon's purity tainted<br><br>Boston paralyzed – The new normal – What's next  |  | The apocalyptic after-the-bombing-scene<br><br>Boston and the event's purity tainted<br><br>Boston paralyzed – The new normal – What's next  |
| Frame 3:<br><b>The Heroes</b> | Doctors as heroes   | <b>Citizens as heroes: the American hero portrait</b>   | <b>First responders as heroes</b><br><br><b>Doctors &amp; medical staff as heroes</b><br><br><b>Citizens / publics as heroes</b><br><br><b>Authorities –the ambiguous heroes</b>  |  | <b>The American Hero</b><br><br><b>Authorities – the ambiguous heroes</b>  |
| Frame 4:<br><b>The Hunt</b>   | The hunt for culprits<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the past<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon<br><br>The hunt for answers: the Chechnya/Russia connection | The hunt for culprits<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the past<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon<br><br>The hunt for answers: the Chechnya/Russia connection | The hunt for culprits<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the past<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon<br><br>The hunt for answers: the Chechnya/Russia connection   |  | The hunt for culprits<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the past<br><br>The hunt for answers: looking at the weapon<br><br>The hunt for answers: the Chechnya/Russia connection                    |
| Frame 5:<br><b>Justice</b>    | Guilty ones will be punished<br><br>Justice – legalities  | Guilty ones will be punished<br><br>Justice – legalities  | Responsible ones will be brought to justice/Demand for punishment<br><br><b>Mixed feelings for younger brother</b>  | Legalities: Miranda rights/Constitutional issues<br><br><b>The mob justice issue /Not punishing the wrong person</b> | Responsible ones will be brought to justice/Demand for punishment<br><br>Legalities: Miranda rights/Constitutional issues<br><br><b>The mob justice issue / punishing the wrong person</b>               |

***The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* online public spheres: rules and procedures of  
deliberation**

As Habermas (1991) emphasizes, the mass media are a condition for the well functioning of the public sphere. Additionally, the Internet offers the publics the possibility to immediately react to the journalistic messages, and to do so on different platforms: media forums, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, or personal online sites. This dissertation has already shown the interplay between media themes and commenters' themes in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*. Answering the question regarding what the publics comment on, the research showed that the debates follow the main media frames, but also develop specific paths by amplifying and nuancing certain themes, or inaugurating new ones. The current section answers the question of how the debate takes place— by looking at rules governing the online debates and the procedures that are applied in these exchanges. Taking similar research as a guide (see the Method section), the researcher chose to look at three main characteristics of deliberation as an initial step, ultimately allowing the findings to aver these characteristics, deny them, or add to them:

1. Rational critical debate: commenters stated the reason for their positions, supporting them with arguments; if their positions or the ones of fellow commenters were not defended with acceptable reasons, they were rejected.
2. Cooperative search for truth: commenters tried together to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus (even if there was no promise that consensual reasons will be forthcoming - Cohen, 2011, p. 37). This cooperative search for truth was materialized in cooperation forms such as reciprocal respect, sincerity, equality and inclusion.

3. Reflexivity: commenters showed a strong commitment to critically review the positions presented and their own personal values; commenters showed that they can reflect upon the conditions in which the debate is taking place, analyzing the quality of information sources (media performance) and the quality of deliberation (commenters performance).

### **Rational-critical debate**

In regards to the rational-critical debate feature, both similarities and differences can be noted when looking at the different characteristics of the public spheres emerging in debates in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*. In *The New York Times*, the vast majority of comments are individualized through the logical line of the arguments, and through continuity in discussing certain information or ideas. Commenters follow the major themes from the news stories and further develop them through coherent analyses.

1. *The argumentative deliberation* element is visible in the following examples:

I believe that as a first step for Djokhar Tsarnaev, his US citizenship should be revoked immediately, because he violated his oath of allegiance (comment in NYT, April 21, 2013),

And reaction:

But what do you do with the likes of Timothy McVeigh? Don't native- born Americans also swear oaths of allegiance? (comment in NYT, April 21, 2013),

Counter-reaction:

No, native born Americans are not required to swear an oath of allegiance. That's only for immigrants who become naturalized American citizens after taking the citizenship exams (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

Or in *Le Figaro*:

Russia should be an objective ally not only for the U.S. but also the EU. It will become necessary for the Europeans to maintain a real politics with that power as the strategic and geopolitical interests are similar (comment in *Le Figaro*, April, 18, 2013)

Counter – reaction:

This is preposterous ! Russia has used the same terrorist methods in Chechnya and supports all terrorist regimes, Iran, Syria ... The appointment of Putin is unwelcome (comment in *Le Figaro*, April, 18, 2013),

Pro-reaction:

I'll just say that fights evil with evil. I 100% support Putin about Syria and Chechnya (comment in *Le Figaro*, April, 18, 2013).

## 2. Avoidance of logical debate

*The New York Times* commenters do not avoid logical arguments when defending their positions. They almost never directly attack each other. In some instances commenters replace arguments with sarcastic reactions, and on rare occasions with direct references to the quality of their debate partners' thoughts:

Killers are killers - whether terrorists or murderers. They all have the same genetic defect that makes them revert to their animal ancestry and killer instincts. Psychological analyses and political discussions miss the point. The killer terrorist will seek out a reason for his/her behavior - religion, ideology, self fulfillment, fantasy. It is a genetic disease that has to be dealt with by society (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013),

Reply:

Genetic disease, really? Any scientific citations in evidence? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013).

Or:

I'm first interested in saving his life and make him sing! We will worry about his punishment later (comment in *The New York Times*, April 23, 2013),

And the reply:

Interesting... Some would like him punished immediately. We trust his "day in court" will take place very soon--and not dragged on (comment in *The New York Times*, April 23, 2013),

And counter-reply:

'Some would like him punished immediately.' Yeah, why don't we adopt the communist Chinese or the Iranian legal system? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 23, 2013).

In *Le Figaro* comments the debate exits the argument – counter-argument model and it sparks, gaining personal notes. Usually one of the participants has a sarcastic reply, another one considers it as an attack to his/her person and reacts through verbal violence, initiating a chain of such reactions:

A: Simple reminder. Yesterday, many attacks have resulted in deaths. For example, there were 3 deaths in Boston and 50 dead in Baghdad. I do not have the data on victims in Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013),

B: Do you have other arguments, except this fake one?

A: You are hypersensitized to what is happening in this region, it seems.

B: No - I would say it is rather you who is hypersensitive, because it is you who has spoken first if I'm not mistaken - huh? Anyway, finding excuses is your strength, as we understood...

B: Justify it – justify it, dear hillbilly ...

### 3. Using quotes, books

In order to better make sense of the events, or to bring extra arguments for possible explanations some of *The New York Times* commenters appeal to or refer to quotes from philosophers, political leaders and to books or articles:

The question that we should really be asking is what Fareed Zakaria asked in *Newsweek* several years ago – ‘Why do they hate us?’ It used to be that the US was a beacon of freedom and opportunity for people around the world. Now you have people who take advantage of being able to come here but yet has a deep down hatred for this country. They are walking time bombs, waiting to go off at any minutes. And the bad news is that I believe there are several more individuals waiting to take these brothers place as murderers (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

Purchase a copy of John Updike’s 2006 novel, “Terrorist.” You’ll probably think you’re reading about young Bostonian, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

So we put people in the hospital to resuscitate them, then move them to prison to execute them. I’d like to know what Foucault would say (comment in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2013).

Others simply quote lyrics from songs or poems in order to emphasize the tragedy of the event:

I can't get Paul Simon's lyrics out of my head. "These are the days of miracle and wonder and don't cry baby, don't cry, don't cry" (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

From a great Bostonian.  
 Epitaph On The World  
 Here lies the body of this world,  
 Whose soul alas to hell is hurled.  
 This golden youth long since was past,  
 Its silver manhood went as fast,  
 An iron age drew on at last;  
 'Tis vain its character to tell,  
 The several fates which it befell,

What year it died, when 'twill arise,  
We only know that here it lies.”

Henry D. Thoreau (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Commenters have also made up their own lyrics, resembling famous ones, as visible in this dialogue:

In a world of fear, in a world of hate.  
In a world that fights and doesn't know who to blame.  
We stand in pain we stand so weak  
We look in the world and it looks so bleak  
We share all our grief and the grief withstands  
And together with anger we stand hand in hand  
We fight with courage and prosecute with justice  
Together we stand as one and go through this  
We are scarred, we are injured  
Our peers stand with us as we figure  
We will show no weakness, we will endure the pain  
We will take every attack and bare the rain  
We get back up because that's who we are

We are Americans were born with scars (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

Reply:

Is this also by Henry David Thoreau? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

Answer:

No I actually just wrote this (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Similarly to *The New York Times* commenters, the *Le Figaro* ones use quotes from philosophers, novelists, political leaders or celebrities to either make sense of the events, or bring extra information that would help, while some of the replies are again in a very joking French style:

I almost cried ... ‘War is war of men; Peace is the war of ideas.’ Victor Hugo  
(comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

And the reply:



It has not been Mussolini or Stalin, otherwise he would have seen that men can make war of ideas with weapons (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

Or:

‘Cigars, whiskey and certainly no sport.’ This is the secret of good health. dixit W. Churchill (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

You are asking: Why such hatred? I recommend the excellent book by Jean Ziegler ‘hatred of the West’ and you will see that things are not so simple, simplistic like: we're the good guys, the others are bad (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

### **Cooperative search for truth**

#### *1. Demands addressed to media for more information / correcting information*

Commenters show that they are conscious of the fact that (1) they are “there” to make sense of the event and discover the truth together; (2) they are a part of a public sphere, acknowledging how it works, what their own role is in the exchanges of information and arguments. This is proven by the situations in which they directly address and try to engage *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* respectively, and demand more information. This shows that they feel that the truth is unobtainable with the information provided by the articles and that their deliberation on an issue will be biased by partial or false information. Consequently, one of the subjects broached by the American commenters is the demand for more information on how the suspects acquired their guns:

To the Editors, I am interested in finding out how the two brothers bought their cache of firearms and ammunition. I am sure that bit of news will be forthcoming but, in the interim, I find it chilling and ironic that in the week our lawmakers couldn't pass gun legislation, one police officer is dead and another seriously

wounded by firearms used by the two brothers. I know any legislation would have been too late to help in Boston but I wonder how many would-be terrorists are now purchasing weapons for future mayhem? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

Another subject was the demand for a better explanation/timeline of the events as they were happening:

New York Times can you create a timeline I am confused by this article and I think it would be helpful for lots of pple to have a more concrete timeline of events. Thank you for providing the news that I want to know (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

French commenters would correct the information that the *Le Figaro* journalists provided in their articles, from their knowledge of the issue, or based on the information found on the 'original' American media sources, thus serving as fact-checkers for the newspaper:

Yet '*Le Figaro*' forgot to mention that Carlos Arronedo had told the U.S. media (it is in the U.S. press today): I do not want this name/label of Hero because, I'm not one, I only gave a hand to the rescuers and that's all' (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 15:50, 2013);

According to the American press, it was not exactly a sac-à-dos (back bag), but a kind of fourre-tout sportifs (duffel bags) that was found (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013);

There is something wrong in this article: Witnesses of the service station recognized the two individuals, among other things in their backpacks. However, they have logically been destroyed in the attack right? Or the article is poorly written or poorly translated or is jammed slack. Who can answer? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 8:31, 2013)

The French commenters also criticized *Le Figaro* for not publishing the photos of the suspects, when they were available already in the American media, and demanded that the newspaper does so:

*Le Figaro* did not see the photos you say? They are there. Not difficult.  
<http://www.infowars.com/boston-bombing-culprits-found> (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 5:53, 2013);

Their picture is in the American press that day (New York Post). Why do not you post, Is there a problem? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 5:53, 2013).

## 2. *Attacking other commenters (civility, politeness vs. uncivility, unpoliteness)*

Another pattern revealed by the analysis was the expression of the commenters' thoughts on other commenters' performance in the debates, testimony to their consciousness of the public sphere in which they participate, and their identifying with and belief in quality debates and quality of space in which they can get together to the bottom of the issue discussed. Commenters were appreciative of these elements:

I'm impressed with the wisdom, balance and common sense of the above comments, most of them, in comparison to those of our leaders, our pitiful congress, civic officials and the media "braying," (someone's beautiful verb) about punishment, revenge, guns and patriotism (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

However, the comments showing discontent with the general quality of the commentary criticizing their fellow commenters for speculating and jumping to conclusions, dominated the discussion:

Wow - so disappointed with the quality of the comments of NYT readers - didn't realize the level of ignorance and ability to jump to conclusions without any basis. Sorry I even came here to check (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

And replies:

Sort by reader recommended; it's restorative (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

I always pick "Reader Picks." For years, it has helped me feel that I'm not alone. (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Another wave criticized the lack of a topic in the debate, or a topic being overly present even though they thought it had no connection to the actual issue:

Why are so many commenters here desperate for this to be 'domestic'? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

I wonder, why do you weigh in here? You clearly haven't done any fact based analysis, nor do you know the actual threats that are out there (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

In response to [name]'s reply: There are in fact a couple of aspects of this attack that suggest domestic terrorism (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

So two guys explode bombs and the commentary here on *The New York Times* is about guns? I guess the narrative now trumps reality (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

In *Le Figaro*, commenters were also discontent with the general quality of the commentary, and they criticized their fellow commenters for speculating and jumping to conclusions:

Many pitiful/lamentable comments, let's wait to see what will be the result of the investigation. Rather let's think at all those families in mourning and injured (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

The French public also criticized other commenters for being opinionated without having an in-depth knowledge of the facts and for their tendency to speculate:

And now, as usual, we see the emergence of a whole bunch of emulators Clouzeau and theories more or less preposterous :- ) (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013)

I am frightened by the comments of people, who do not speak a word of English, who have never set foot in the United States, who know even less about their history and society and who sell you ‘primitive reactions’ based only on their feelings. It's as if I was talking about nuclear physics, which I know shit about. I lived in the USA, I studied there (Harvard, for fascists like Obama), my children live there so we have a somewhat sharper perception that those who swing a trick to care. YES, THERE IS AN EXTREME RIGHT, and this is not the first time it shows (see Oklahoma City) and the date of Patriot 's Day is key. Unless you are completely uneducated, we made the connection. And this is what I get from SF or NY. They are in shock, but nobody emits startling theories as some here (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

Absolutely true. But we are in a country of the assisted, the country of stupid anti-U.S. theories, without knowing of course. (I lived there too) (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Whereas in *The New York Times* comments the only possible example of a swearing was someone calling another commenter “a puffy door mat,” the French public sphere abounds with direct swearing and demeaning language:

[name], you are of a staggering stupidity (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

Shuuuut up ignorant do not take your delusions for reality! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013).

Quarrels are also often more like an array of cussing rather than arguments:

A: You are ignoble (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013);

B: Ignoble? I do not allow you to insult me! Ignoble because I tell truths that do not help you? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013)

A: To be ignoble as you, I will answer: ‘Because I do not care?’ (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

Sometimes, after such acerbic and demeaning exchanges, love declarations are made:

But no, but no, let's see - you're not bad, you know I love you ... (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 20:07, 2013).

### 3. *Foreigners (specific only to The New York Times)*

In *The New York Times* comments section, signatures by way of a nickname or a name and a point of origin (country/city), as registered by participants is visible. This information helped identify another very interesting pattern: foreign commenters entered the exchanges and debates among on *The New York Times* site, sending messages of solidarity, condolences or/and unity:

Romania: Solidarity and encouragement from Romania. Sincere sympathy to those affected by this inhuman act (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Sao Paulo, Brasil: The American people don't deserve it. That's unjust, coward and sad (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

New Zealand: Kia Kaha Boston! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Commenters also acted almost as ambassadors for their countries, speaking in the name of their countries:

Brazil: Unnecessary tragedy ... The Brazilian people send the full force of the world for American friends. This year I've visited NY, LA and Texas ... A beautiful country with beautiful a people! A real inspiration to the free world! Keep the faith! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Melbourne, Australia: We Aussies all feel for you over here and we are praying for good outcomes for the wounded. I visited your wonderful city in 2001 and met many wonderful people. I cannot imagine what could bring anyone to target

vulnerable families like this. Strength (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

American commenters would appreciatively reply to all these messages, in direct conversations or as separate all-encompassing messages:

Israel: We feel your anger/We cry your tears/We understand your sorrow wishing Full recovery for the injured/Of course We gonna be there for your vengeance if needed {terror on a marathon it's not under the belt it's MADNESS. We holding your hands with our mind and spirit And above all we wanna strength you on weak times like this For the victims all we can say is rest in peace. God bless you America (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Replies:

Philadelphia: Many questions might be asked on how Israeli cities deal with terrorist attacks (comment in NYT, April 15, 2013);

Townsville: Surely it's a question of justice, not vengeance, or at least it should be? Otherwise you're worse than them, because you know better. Thank you for your good thoughts, but please, keep vengeance out of it. Peace (comment in NYT, April 15, 2013);

Ridgefield, CT: To all those folks from outside our country who wrote in to express their sorrow, sympathy, and support-----from Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands, Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Russia, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea-----I want you to know that most Americans probably feel as I do, touched and very grateful for your kind words (comment in NYT, April 15, 2013).

The analysis revealed that another wave of foreign commenters would actually debate the issue, and express opinions on the event. Their messages could have been integrated in the frames and themes that were found for the American comments, as visible in the following examples:

U.S. had it coming/deserved it:

Egypt: i am sorry for sounding so insensitive, but US likes bombing...a lot. It is so easy and no repercussions. Nobody is going to vote the pres out for bombing other nations. That someone could do this to them, or any group of people for that matter, is not simply beyond your comprehension of humanity? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Heroes:

Moscow, Russia: These doctors are heroes. Thank you! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

These examples show that *The New York Times* American commenters prove empathic and respectful of all the participants at the discussion. The deliberation's debates and exchanges are based on reciprocity and discourse equality, and the replies prove a common interest and effort to identify the essential issues of debate, to get to the truth together (even if not always finding consensus).

## **Reflexivity**

An essential condition to deliberation in any public sphere is the reflection upon the rules that define the debate. Online commenters prove developed critical thinking skills, analyzing the way the principal actors of this public space, i.e. media (journalists) and commenters, answer to the exigencies of a rational, informed, non-biased and fair debate.

### *1. Media performance*

In this sense commenters reflect on the premises of debates as related to the information conveyed by mass media in general or by *The New York Times*, and the *Le Figaro* articles in the end of which they comment.



*A. Appreciating media performance*

A few commenters reflected on the quality of journalism offered by *The New York Times* and appreciated it:

I just want to thank *The New York Times* for consistently maintaining high standards for covering this case. This is the only source I trust right now for accurate information (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

Amen to that. NY1 claimed this guy would be actually arrested hours ago (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

Ditto. I have followed this on CNN and gave up on them late today after they essentially broadcast rumors today including a statement that an arrest had been made. Last night's anchor and a reporter lambasted the police for not having made more progress only 24 hours after the crime. The two were actually cautioned by their terrorism expert (retired deputy director of the FBI) and a reporter specializing in that area on air. Quite unusual, I believe (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

Dear Ms. Barry and other Writers: This is an excellent story (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

Unlike in *The New York Times* case, only one *Le Figaro* commenter applauded journalists, but for their bravery cameraman:

we should praise the professionalism of the cameraman who heard and saw after the first explosion as early approaches to film closely. My instinct would have told me to run away (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

*B. Criticizing media performance*

Rare comments applauded the media's performance and the plethora of critiques was overwhelming. Both American and French commenters criticized media in general and both *New York Times* and *Le Figaro* for the (1) journalists' work; (2) over-mediatization; and (3) in the American case for over commercialization.

*B1. Journalists' work/performance*

Yet another point of critical reflection was the journalists' actual performance, generally and directly referring to *The New York Times* journalists. TV anchors or journalists were criticized for their posture in front of the camera, as visible in the following example:

The reportage last night and this morning regressed significantly. (...) Train your broadcast personalities in voice modulation, clear presentation of information and use of officials to relay critical facts, procedures or requirements. We must do better. Above all this is not infotainment. Use professional language, methods to convey essential information and help all of us to handle the problem (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

Journalists in general were criticized for their choice of words and commenters condemned the choice of words that exaggerated the stories and their use of metaphors or epithets for being politically correct:

Journalists should try to keep some perspective when choosing the words they use. Both explosions were comparatively small. Judging from the various film shots, they appeared to have been somewhat less powerful than a standard US military hand grenade. While a terrible tragedy, we should be thankful. If they had been "high explosives", the toll would have been, at least, 10 times worse (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

My heart goes out to Boston, but I am slightly infuriated by the reporting. Would the journalist had been so detailed with the religious beliefs of the suspects had they been Christian, or perhaps Jewish? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

Others judged the journalists' choice of words for being too politically correct:

The reporting has been fantastic. For an hour at least, the media did not want to call the bomb a bomb. Well that was very informative (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

The main stream media seems to be going out of its way not to mention the word 'Islam'. They mention 'radicalized', 'devout', etc, but never mention the word Islam. This P.C. avoidance of the issue at the hear of the matter is shameful (comment in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013).

The same critique of political correctness as a form of censorship is reflected upon by the French commenters:

Basically, read the reactions, I would say that people are tired of political correctness dripping constantly on our TVs and Media divers. Il must stop and that all views can be represented and not just those the 'honest' left "humanist" as she calls herself canting these terms at will (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 11:24, 2013).

*The New York Times* journalists did not escape these judgments and critiques either. Their choice of words was criticized:

Why do you use the term 'frenzied' in the headline? to anyone watching all day, or part of the day, what was most evident was the deliberation with which the heavily armed searchers moved. There was lots of speeding of vehicles from place to place...is that it? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

Commenters also criticized *The New York Times* journalists' words and phrases for overrepresenting different actors in the tragedy:

'The discovery of Mr. Tsarnaev came just over 26 hours....' Excellent job everyone. 'The case unfolded quickly — and lethally — after that.' C'mon NY Times, that's a little gratuitous. Still, good job to all involved getting these 'suspected', and I say that only as a proper caveat, repugnant villains (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

A plethora of comments judged and reflected on the over-use of terms such as dismembered limbs and other synonyms and epithets when describing the bombing aftermath:

Once again, the Times gives us a lurid title. 'save lives, if not legs.' Please stop referring to 'lost legs' in your titles. It is horrible and unnecessary. At the very

least, you could change it to ‘limbs.’ But ‘if not’ is really a horrid phrase to use (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

I could not have said it better myself. Even as a crime reporter who covers breaking news and reads all types of police reports on a daily basis, I have been unable to stomach much of the stories. It sure is nice to know that I am not the only journalist who feels this way (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Maybe describing what really happened, as opposed to sanitizing the event, is another way to look at it (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Similarly to *The New York Times* commenters, the French ones scrutinized all the choices of words, phrases, and choices of epithets or metaphors made by the *Le Figaro* journalists:

Why do you say they relapse into terrorism, is what a shooting that generates tens of victims is not akin to terrorism can be!? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

‘isolated jihadists?’ does not exist. They are like wolves, always pack (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

We do not say ‘jihadist’ but ‘Islamic terrorist.’ Here we are in France, not in Arabia (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

In case you have not noticed, the Figaro article is written in French (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

in headline: the Deus with an S??!! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 11:24, 2013).

The French commenters also ‘dissected’ the choice of words in or the choice of headlines and their relations to books or articles:

‘State of Siege in Toulouse’ is the title of a book coming out this month about Merah, the murderer. Wink? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013);

You should know ‘all keep proportions’ ... ‘State of Siege’ was the last book of poetry of the great Mr. Darwish, Palestinian poet ...Palestine is under siege, Iraq and Afghanistan 's under siege since foreign armies and foreign militias have sowed the chaos , even if the U.S. left, they are related to the total destruction of the Iraq. The U.S. is no under siege : no one occupies. There was an attack, much less serious than those in Iraq and Pakistan (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013).

Another pattern visible only in the comments made by the French, was criticizing the *Le Figaro* journalists for their choice of words when translating them from English:

For Figaro in the photo caption, stringer = freelance (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

Chinese Student Shenyang, not Shanghai! If you are not even able to copy information from other sources, it gets serious! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 20:19, 2013).

The French commenters also criticized American journalists for their choice of words:

I find it very hard to follow the Western press about the term ‘terrorism’ (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013);

The use of the word by the media is strategic. They will not talk about a U.S. terrorist kill 20 people with a rifle! Yeah, understand, we must ensure that the word ‘terrorist’ is associated with the word ‘Muslim’, and in no case ‘U.S.’! Raising racism, allowing future war, is the current ultimate goal in the West! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

As the following example illustrates, commenters in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* did not stop at criticizing only the words, but also the information

presented in the articles, and the position that certain information occupied in the story, or headlines, in contrast with their expectations:

The Times' homepage headline to this story, and the headline on the story page itself, are somewhat misleading, as details about the components of the bombs were already well circulated yesterday-----old news this morning. What's more, that seductive "pressure-cooker device" of the homepage headline was not discussed until the fourth paragraph-----talk about burying the lead. In fact, the only real development of this story-----what should have warranted a headline to itself, though not necessarily a banner one-----should have been the fact that authorities have deemed the Saudi national, the 'person of interest', as innocent and not responsible for the bombings (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

A title that says one thing, followed by an article that belies what was said in the title thing ... It's time to go to bed! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 20:19, 2013).

Unique to *The New York Times* commenters, was their criticizing of media in general for invading privacy with their reporting and thirst for sensational data; their arguments show a good knowledge of journalism and its legal and ethical issues:

I'm disgusted with the press coverage of this disaster, which is intruding into the private lives of victims and their families. Let the authorities do their job. They will tell us what they find and the press can interview them and report. Suffocating the Boston area with reporters and vans is entirely inappropriate. Of course, the press has the unlimited First Amendment right to say and do almost anything it wishes. But the people who died and are injured were and are not public figures -- or they weren't until the press descended on them like locusts. Enough! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

The same critique of invading the privacy took the form of direct demands addressed to *The New York Times* to take out a photo of a victim that was posted in different news stories:

URGENT: Please pull the photo of the young man being attended to in the wheelchair currently occupying slot #8 out of your slideshow on the front page of the website. He has a devastating injury as plainly apparent even in this redacted version to the trained eye and could very likely die from his injury. Out of respect

to him and his family, this photo should not be publicly available (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

And the replies:

You're asking that of the same business who will send reporters to funerals and will stick microphones in people's faces and ask them how they feel. Wonder if any of those clowns ever get punched (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

No - that man is a survivor. The picture communicates a thousand words - to my heart in particular (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

American commenters also complained about the news stories not offering enough details on some of the victims, and initiated a debate on privacy and how much information is enough or too little:

NY Times could have taken some more efforts to find out more about Lingzu Lu. She's barely acknowledged compared to the other two victims. Imagine how her family must feel (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013);

Actually, it's been reported multiple times that her family did not want her identity made public (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013).

Commenters criticized journalists and media in general for not getting facts right, misinformation and for conflicting information:

It seems everytime there is an important, breaking, news story the media gets major facts wrong in their headlong rush. Was it 2 devices, 4, 5 devices. Were some 'disarmed?' Were they in back packs or garbage cans? Jeez! (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Both American and French commenters criticized the media for speculating, before getting all the facts:

The unsubstantiated speculation on the live TV coverage is sickening (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013);

It makes me smile that itv and bfm quickly rush once more toward the extreme right theory/track, while we know nothing yet. Poor them, are limited to/at wish/wishing that that will be the case, otherwise they will again be covered with ridicule. They'd better treat other subjects rather than making 'information-meuble' (in French), when we have nothing to say we avoid swinging / throwing stupid assumptions. Here, I'll launch that this is the IRA or better yet ... the ETA (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

Some commentators, 'journalists' and other lackeys on duty immediately go on the trail of the "extreme right" although they do not know anything about anything. It may be a disequilibrium /an unbalance, a revenge etc ... Do they know the word ethics/deontology? (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

This discontent with media speculations led to reflections by *The New York Times* commenters on media's role or the trendy 24/7 cycle as a cause /leading to speculations among:

The cable channels are speculating, speculating, speculating. Why not actually provide some actual news, a timeline, something? I love Chris Matthews on MSNBC but he was going on and on about the significance of a bombing at JFK Library and how iconic Kennedy was, etc. Then when he heard that there was no bomb there, he immediately speculated whether the attack could be domestic. Could we just TAKE A BREATH before doing all of this speculating? The bombs just went off 4 hours ago. Can we just figure out what is going on before speculating on live television who can be doing it? Can we leave that job to the FBI, CIA and the President? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Unfortunately, that's the nature of 24 hour news - speculation is the only thing they can do at the moment. Until some hard news comes in, the 24 hour news media are going to mark time by speculating, because with a huge story like this, no one wants to risk losing viewers by covering anything else (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

*The New York Times* commenters also critiqued the way media presented and portrayed the initial person being questioned by the authorities (the Saudi man) and later the suspects, without verified information:



It is irresponsible for the media to report such a thing without further facts, particularly since as we now know he was a victim and witness like so many others...his life will probably be adversely effected by being held under suspicion for no reason other than his ethnic background (if you've ever been discriminated against for your race/background you will certainly understand). How many men who looked like Timothy McVeigh or Eric Rudolph were tackled to the ground and had their homes searched? We have to do better than this...it is harmful to go around ignorantly assuming that every man of Middle Eastern descent is out to get us/our government when sadly we do just fine making our own terrorists at home. :-( (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

If these guys are innocent, then a lawsuit is waiting. The media has been posting pictures of these suspects without mentioning that they MAY be innocent. If something happens to the remaining suspect, the media is to blame. The community will not spare them at all (comment in *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013).

Connected to the same idea of speculation, some commenters go even further in their reflection by critiquing the role of media in the American public opinion formation:

I find it pathetic that the FBI releases images of 2 possibility "middle eastern" guys walking with backpacks and ball caps during a large event and think, "they must be the suspects". Then, all the news programs broadcast it OVER and OVER again telling Americans what to think and not how to think. I just watched on CNN where they were talking about how they seemed to show no fear by not trying to hide their faces and walking like they were confident. The guy was saying that their mannerism was similar to that of a soldier... What was never brought up the entire time they were talking about this was the possibility that the reason they showed no fear was because they didn't do it and were just at the marathon like every other person and had NO reason to have anything to fear (comment in *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013).

*The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* journalists were also directly criticized for speculating. Some commenters simply described their discontent:

Let *The New York Times* not publish irresponsible, inflammatory hearsay. The tragedy is terrible enough without making assumptions. The bombers will undoubtedly want to take credit for this, as it was most certainly planned for attention (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

Would ... would ...?? That all conditional ... Wait until you have verified and verifiable sources! (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 11:24, 2013);

Warning *Le Figaro*! You'll end up on the side of conspirators!" (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013).

In other instances commenters dissected the news articles paragraphs, and extended debates started on the issue of *The New York Times* journalists' possible speculations:

'It was unclear Monday evening who might be responsible for the blast. Although investigators said that they were speaking to a Saudi citizen who was injured in the blast...' What does his nationality have anything to do with the investigation if there is no evidence supporting the correlation between Saudi Arabia and this act of violence? NY Times quick to point fingers?.... (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

And the replies:

No, actually most news outlets were saying he was a Saudi citizen (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Yeah okay 19 of the hijackers in 9/11 were Saudi, but the Times should not report the nationality, even with the caveat that no one is in custody (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

It was factual information reporting. Accurate. Why suppress it? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

I recall the press was quick to report a "Middle Eastern" fellow picked up for questioning in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing and the near instantaneous conclusions that followed for a few days. Patience and prudence in reporting are warranted (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

The commenters' subtlety is visible when they discuss the influence that speculation or speculative information occupied in headlines or website/articles could have on the public opinion formation:

I am disappointed in the Times for putting the Chechnya origin on its Home Page headline. Perhaps later it may turn out to be relevant, but at the moment I see no established relevance to the fact that their families originated in Chechnya and that the children were born abroad. If it had turned out the guys were from Canada, would we, at this point, be questioning whether their actions had something to do with American opposition to the XL pipeline or festering wounds about 54-40? Would the headline have stated they were of Canadian origin? What if they were from Ireland? Imagine how that headline would play out in Boston at this point (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

What world do you live in that you think that their Chechen origins have no relevance in this news story? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013).

### *B2. Overmediatization vs. undermediatization*

Both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* commenters criticized media for either just over-mediating the incident, or also doing so to the detriment of other tragedies with more impact that happened outside U.S. Some commenters simply express their disgust in this phenomenon:

The news media frenzy is somewhere between sad and disgusting" (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Other critiques were related to the idea that the media are over-mediating and over-emphasizing the bombings and forgetting about, or under-emphasizing other more impactful tragedies albeit occurring outside the U.S.:

This is a great tragedy and a bitterly sad comment on fanaticism and hatred. But I wish the media and the public would be more even-handed about these things. There is a stream of stories like this from Africa and Syria and Iraq and Afghanistan, and the suffering there is often as great or greater than this. Bodies are broken, loved ones die, and lives are destroyed. I sympathize deeply with

victims of extremism where-ever they are and I hope that in the inevitable excessive coverage of this event (theme music and custom logo, CNN?), they are not forgotten. May we also remember that what the perpetrators crave more than anything else is a furious, extreme response (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

French media in general were criticized for according too much attention to the U.S. incident, and for not offering enough coverage of other incidents:

What we've drunk with the Americans, I'm in France (...) We live in what country? Yesterday I turned on the TV I thought I was watching CNN (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 17, 6:49, 2013);

These acts are clearly reprehensible and highly condemnable. On the contrary, as these events call for comparison, I find it much more difficult to accept that no one in the French press - and not only - is concerned about the 3105 victims of U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan since 2004, only 2 % of them are from actual targets by the U.S. government, the rest being composed of civilians, children, and others not directly targeted individuals (source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2013/mar/25/drone-attacks-pakistan-visualised>) (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013);

In Syria, the horror is every day and it does not make the headlines (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 6:56, 2013).

Moreover, related to the idea of over-mediatization, were the critiques regarding the *Le Figaro* exaggerations on the bombings, again when comparing to other tragedies:

Title is good but greatly exaggerated as usual when it comes to U.S. (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013);

Strongly agree, because the attacks of 50 dead in Iraq or other, there is no zoom, details, pictures carry forwards as complete (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013);

I am sad for America and for humanity ... but headlining it siege ... when we read in small line in the bfm tv (...) 50 and more dead in Iraq, Afghanistan. Well then it's just an article of 2 lines and no photos or videos ... all attacks are heinous and

cowardly and must therefore all be reported to the same height (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 18, 8:16, 2013).

In both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*, commenters directly asked the papers to make sure to cover other tragedies that just happened:

I hope *The New York Times* does not lose sight of the Texas fertilizer factory story. 35 people--the death toll that the mayor of West has now stated--in a town of about 3000 is truly tragic almost beyond comprehension (comment in *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013);

Note that other democratic countries are affected this month. Here is a case that has gone unnoticed in France: One or two suitcase bombs were found TGV in Taiwan this Friday, April 12, we still do not know much (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 18:04, 2013).

Related to the idea of over-mediatization, *The New York Times* and the *Le Figaro* commenters observed the fact that they have become over-sensitized and numb to such tragedies:

I'll speak for myself only, have become and been so numb to the terror elsewhere that goes on on a daily basis. The loss of limbs, lives and little boys are all too common in places like Damascus, Iraq, etc. yet my life goes on as normal, I turn off the radio or TV right in the middle of a bombing report from the middle east without even standing still. Only until now have I stood still since Monday 2:50 pm. (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013);

Sad. But it is a daily scene in many other countries worldwide. And nobody is moved, especially not in the U.S.. A brief 'news' that is (unfortunately) not really important because of its banality (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 15, 22:07, 2013).

A few patterns unique to *The New York Times* commenters need to be emphasized. First, it is important to note that a wave of commenters criticized the over-mediatization of the bombings for therefore creating or spreading more fear and panic than it should be the case:

every hour 4 people die in this country from car accidents, and every hour 3 people die from gun accidents/violence. So the amount of fear the media has drummed up over the past eight hours for this statistical non-event is unconscionable. 3 women die in the US in childbirth every single day. Where's the reporting on real issues that affect millions? Oh, right: CNN can't sell a 30 second ad before the 'video' of those events. That's the difference. Oh, and that millions will happily turn away from the causes which may actually make life better for all Americans- and blithely give up their civil liberties while they do it. It \*is\* fear. Unless you give equal time to all events of similar magnitude- which is of course impossible- this is exactly about making you afraid - and then selling you something that you think will help you feel better (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

This is a horrible tragedy, but listening to Fox News you would think it is Another 9/11-unfortunately in this world we live in today the United States has been fortunate to avoid this kind of thing until now. We do not know the facts yet, so we should not suppose until we know (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

Defenders of the need to over-mediatize or to thoroughly cover the bombings, were also present:

It's 4:59 PM EDT. By 6:00 PM every news outlet, on every network, will be beating this event home, examining every detail, real and imagined, pummeling the viewing public with video, analysis, terrorism 'specialists', 'expert' panels... and ads for erectile dysfunction and depression. Fear is the tool, a Disney vacation the balm. Sadly (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

And the reply:

And why should this tragic event not be thoroughly analyzed? Not sure I understand your point. People have died. Many have been injured. The reports are not "fear." This is called breaking news (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

*The New York Times* was also blamed directly for creating fear through the choice of and over-emphasis on the interviewed sources:

I also wonder why the Times quoted an out of state politician's opinion about the possible suspect; they got the same information from people on the ground in NY. It seems like we love to ratchet up the anxiousness and give the rumor mongers

the air when they are politicians - like that gives them an added right. That does not build a society of caring and civility (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Another wave of commenters criticized general media for over mediatizing violence, thus leading to further violence in society and also for offering too many details about explosive devices and 'giving terrorists ideas or informing culprits:

I wonder, too, what has happened to nonviolence as a movement, and whether the insufficiently challenged and escalating political rhetoric of our times, as well as 24-hour news coverage of mass shootings doesn't set the table for a sick act like this (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013);

Why did NBC News show a picture of a pressure cooker and the materials used within the bomb? Why give the next terrorist ideas? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

When it came to the idea of the media offering too much information, thus informing the suspects and contributing to their escape, a pro and con debate started on the role of media, and publics in the hunt and capture of the suspects:

It seems to me that in their pursuit to be the first, news media is releasing so many fine details so fast that it may delay or even prevent the capture of real culprits." (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

it seems totally inappropriate to me to have every major news media all duplicating their stories, and showing video clips over and over while there is no new, real or valuable information to disseminate.. (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

On the contrary, the information released may jog someone's memory. For instance, the purchase of a single pressure cooker wouldn't draw much attention but selling several pressure cookers to one person would be unusual enough to develop a good lead. A guy walking around with one backpack is common enough but you would probably notice someone carrying two or three full backpacks. And everyone with a digital image knows to turn over their images to the investigators. Releasing such information gets several thousand people

working on the problem like a living computer churning away at the data and honing in on the answer (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013).

*B3. Commercials (specific only to The New York Times)*

The analysis revealed another point of reflection and critique among the commenters, unique to *The New York Times*: the expression of the discontent vis-à-vis both general media and *The New York Times*, for including commercials in their videos about the bombing. A discussion about the usefulness of versus the misplace of commercials in the context of such event, and in more general terms about the causes for commercials in media:

Yet, in addition, ---What is THIS??!! -- a shock of abysmal taste and insensitivity: News coverage of this UNSPEAKABLY horrendous occurrence is expanded, -- yet: the expanded "news coverage" is, with disturbing frequency, INTERRUPTED BY A STRING OF 3-4 COMMERCIALS, just as if it were one more ordinary evening! Is this truly "news," -- or opportunistic "infotainment?" Where is the authentic decency and respect for victims, or true concern for our national security and morale? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013);

Can the networks please spare us the indignity of having to sit through promotional spots for places like Radio Shack when we're trying to access video on the internet? Yes, we know that making a buck is important but does that trump the need for information regarding this tragic situation? (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013),

And reply:

Who pays the salary of the reporters? They are the ones now gathering facts, even at the risk of their lives yesterday. Courageous reporters as well as bystanders who filmed what happened. I am more than willing to put up with a few commercials to support these folks. Heck, I am even willing to watch a few more commercials if the money went to first responders, the police and hospitals helping in this tragedy. No, they won't spare you that. Their mission is to generate money and they don't care about your sensitivities (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).



*The New York Times* was also directly heavily criticized for having commercials in its videos:

Just a quick suggestion for the NY Times. Don't make us watch an advertisement before we can see this video. To be useful we might want to view it more than once. Attaching it to an advertisement is an impediment and also in very poor taste (comment in *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013).

### *C. Commenters performance*

In this case the emphasis of the comments falls upon the debate's premises, or in other words the mechanisms of the commenters' deliberation process.

#### *C1. Awareness of and reflection on the online public sphere rules, mechanisms*

Commenters are aware of the 'game's rules' when it comes to the online public sphere to which they contribute, in which they 'play'. Moreover, they are not only aware of the need for a rational and critical debate in order to maintain this public sphere, but also they defend its standards:

And I'll answer your sarcastic, angry questions too, why not. I weigh in here because it's a public forum, not a counterterrorist professional debate. I have analyzed the facts, from what I have read, to what I've learned through life, and I remember everything in life that's interested me. My analytical skills also got me perfect scores on the analytical sections of the GRE and LSAT, so I'm not some toothless yokel. If I have no right to comment on this, neither do you (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

Being aware of how the debate should be carried out, and defending its standards also takes the form of reflections and debates on how *The New York Times* moderators/editors assign labels to certain comments that through their content don't correspond to the expectations of some commenters as visible in the replies to the comment that was designated/labeled as Editor's Pick:

Keeping It Real Los Angeles. With all the strife and war that our nation has formented around the world via the destabilization of other govts, if not by outright invasion, what is suprising is how well insulated the USA has been until now from this sort of violent retaliation. I am angry just like everyone else about these attacks, but I am a little older and a little wiser than I was twelve years ago during 9-11, and so I understand more where they are coming from - having witnessed our govt in action over the last few years, I think we all do (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013),

New York Times- I am shocked that you the above comment as a an Editor's Pick. Do you support blaming our government for this heinous attack that has cost numerous individuals limbs and those who have been killed (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013);

I'd like to defend *The New York Times* here, don't mean to step on any toes. From what I have seen, they choose the 'editor's picks' not to reflect the editors' opinions, nor even the best writing. They attempt with each batch of comments to select those that most clearly state the most different opinions. So I got a 'pick' on this one because I happened to be first to insist it was domestic terrorism, with some other corollary points. I made later statements I prefer, but some didn't even get published and none got a 'pick'. Keeping It Real's comment here got a 'pick' just from most concisely stating the view that America's warlike foreign policy is the cause of these attacks, sort of directly opposite to my first comment. Just my opinion based on observations, and peace be with you (comment in *The New York Times*, April 16b, 2013).

The same was noticed in the process involving *The New York Times* readers' labels of recommendations, as highlighted by moderators as the below examples show:

I am continually amazed at the comments that get the most recommendations from NYT readers (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013);

In fact *The New York Times* even highlights one posting as a 'readers Choice' in which the writer equates the justification for the bombing as a reaction to the US 'terror' around the world (comment in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2013).

It is clearly stated on *The New York Times* website that only some articles, chosen by the editors are open to comments - in response some commenters went as far as to question and debate the need or usefulness for a comment section for certain articles:

I'm conflicted about the usefulness of a "comments" section on such an article, even though it is 2013 and we feel like we need to have an open-access online conversation about everything. A wall of love only seems like it would be entirely more appropriate. <3 to all those affected (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013),

And the reply:

It's not "useful" it's just the social web where during a traumatic event we can get online and collectively discuss, process, speculate, grieve. We need each other, even strangers, during a time like this (comment in *The New York Times*, April 15, 2013).

### *C2. Awareness of the conditions of a good debate*

Another pattern that emerged in the analysis, was the critiques directed at the people commenting or asking things without first reading the articles to which they comment:

Read the article before commenting. It clearly indicates the bombs were set off by timers (comment in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013);

Does anyone read anymore? There are so many comments like this! It is in the article: "We have a lot more video than what we released," the official said. "The sole purpose of what we released was to show the public what they looked like." And why should the FBI compromise an ongoing terrorist investigation in its infancy? Crazy (comment in *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013).

Similarly to *The New York Times* case, *Le Figaro* commenters are aware of the 'public sphere game' rules. They address directly the *Le Figaro* moderators and demand, more or less, censorship:

Apparently, the moderators let more stupid comments than rational/wise ones..?  
(comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

The moderators should not let through the expressions of dangerous and extremist commentators. During the French Revolution this kind of madmen/fanatics would have sent to the guillotine many innocents (comment in *Le Figaro*, April 16, 10:29, 2013);

My statement was not published because I was comparing Merha with those two terrorists and now journalists are doing the same thing. With this history of political correctness, we are battered in flour! [we get burned – my explanation]  
(comment in *Le Figaro*, April 19, 11:24, 2013).

All in all, both similarities and differences are noted in the characteristics of the public spheres (see Table 2<sup>8</sup>). Differences emerge in the length of the comments: *The New York Times* ones are often no shorter than three paragraphs, while the *Le Figaro* ones are almost never longer than two paragraphs. But these limits, related to the online commentary rules, do not alter the argumentation.

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<sup>8</sup> Legend: Yellow highlight – differences in debate style; Green highlight – elements specific only to one set of comments.

Table 2: Online public spheres' characteristics in *The New York Times* & *Le Figaro*

|     | Rational critical debate  | Cooperative search for truth  | Reflexivity  |
|-----|---|---|--|
| NYT | <p>Argumentative deliberation: well reasoned positions, logical lines of arguments.</p> <p>Less direct attacks, or avoidance of logical debate.</p> <p>Use quotes, books, articles to bring more information/arguments.</p> | <p>Conscious of <i>The New York Times</i> space, and their role.</p> <p>Demands addressed to media for more information/correcting information.</p> <p>Attacking other commenters (but remaining civil &amp; polite).</p> <p>Foreigners: are embraced and integrated in the debate.</p> | <p>Reflective – upon rules of debate, quality of the public space, society.</p> <p>Media's performance. Criticizing:</p> <p>* Journalists' work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- choice of words (horror metaphors)</li> <li>- politically too correct/incorrect</li> <li>- misinformation/conflicting information</li> <li>- speculations</li> <li>- invading privacy</li> </ul> <p>* Overmediatization vs. undermediatization<br/>+ creating fear/spreading violence</p> <p>* Commercials</p> <p>Commenters' performance:</p> <p>* Awareness of &amp; reflection on online public sphere rules, labels, mechanisms</p> <p>* Awareness of conditions of good debate</p> |
| LF  | <p>Argumentative deliberation.</p> <p>More direct attacks, avoidance of logical debate.</p> <p>Use quotes, books, articles to bring more information/arguments.</p>   | <p>Conscious of the LF space, and their role.</p> <p>Demands addressed to media for more information/correcting information (esp. comparing with American media sources).</p> <p>Directly attacking other commenters, swearing (civility but unpoliteness).</p>                         | <p>Reflective – upon rules of debate, quality of the public space, society.</p> <p>Media's performance. Criticizing:</p> <p>* Journalists' work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- choice of words (+ bad translations)</li> <li>- politically too correct/incorrect</li> <li>- misinformation/conflicting information</li> <li>- speculations</li> </ul> <p>* Overmediatization vs. undermediatization</p> <p>Commenters' performance:</p> <p>* Awareness of &amp; reflection on online public sphere rules, labels, mechanisms</p> <p>* Awareness of conditions of good debate</p>   |

Within the rational-critical debate dimension, both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* commenters try to bring arguments in their deliberation. In both cases the public looks to be educated and well informed. Both sets of commenters bring up philosophers (Foucault), political thinkers, other articles (from Newsweek or Les Echos), lyrics (Paul Simon, Sardou) in order to make sense of the event, better their arguments, or help their fellow debaters to better understand the issue at hand, the philosophical, in-depth reasons for that happening. However, while in *The New York Times* the commenters rarely replace arguments with sarcastic reactions, or direct insults to their debate partners, in *Le Figaro* it was almost the norm for debates to deviate from the argumentative style into personal, fiery dialogues.

Regarding the cooperative search for truth, at the dialog level, *The New York Times* commenters usually acknowledge each other as valid interlocutors, rarely exhibiting a lack of respect, impoliteness or incivility, while in *Le Figaro* insults and derogatory references between each other are present. Yet, while lack of politeness can be observed, incivility was never present. In this sense, two different models of public sphere deliberation pattern emerge. In *The New York Times*, referring to the relation between commenters, as Ruiz et al. (2011) noted in their research, the situation most frequently present is the one of mutual respect and team working to find the truth or clarify the issue at hand (but not necessarily implying consensus). Often the commenters congratulate each other, appreciating the contribution (idea, information or perspective) offered by their partners in debate. These patterns echo the model proposed by Papacharissi (2011) in which the ideal deliberation is based on civility and politeness. In the French case, again similarly to what Ruiz et al. (2011) found in their research, the

comments show less reciprocal respect, and also in Papacharissi's (2011) terms a model of civility, but with impoliteness in debates emerging through spontaneous reactions, sarcasm, flaming. In contrast to Ruiz et al. (2011) who consider that French, Italian and Spanish commenters "do not seem to listen to each other" forming what they authors called a "homogenous community" characterized by "a dialogue of deaf" (Ruiz et al, p.480), this dissertation finds a strong level of interaction, attention to the others' arguments and willingness for dialogue.

Another characteristic of these publics, emerging from the analysis, goes beyond Ruiz et al.'s (2011) suggestions. The commenters had an expressed awareness that they are all there to cooperatively find the truth (or at least shed light upon the meanings). This was clear in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments in regards to fellow commenters in general, and the media. Commenters critiqued the general quality of comments (true more in *The New York Times* than in *Le Figaro* where the critiques took form of direct addresses and replies) for impeding or slowing down the other commenters in their togetherness attempt.

Finally, the media critiques showed that both sets of commenters are clearly well-read, active, conscious of why they are on these forums, and concerned about being able to have all the information, presented correctly in order to be able to correctly decode all the meanings behind the tragedy, get to the bottom of the issues under debate and be able to understand who perpetrated the act, why, and what would be solutions for future prevention. Therefore, in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* the publics constantly and directly demand from the respective journalists what they consider to be key clues, or to correct misinformation or flawed information. The only differences in demands and

critiques are related to the characteristics of each newspaper. American commenters asked *The New York Times* to give them a timeline that better highlight the events unfolding, being used to such integrated interactive features in *The New York Times* stories. On the other hand, the French commenters who were also accessing the American media, demanded *Le Figaro* to correct certain details or mistranslations, or present more information, or photos, given that they were available already in the U.S. media.

All things considered, clearly *The New York Times* and also *Le Figaro* online forums, despite some moments of “flaming” and colorful language (specific maybe to the French culture), show that the commenters are aware that they are tied together by the effort to commonly search for answers to the themes of common interest. They seem to know that they cannot find a unanimously accepted truth (and that it was never the goal) and thus their debates show their willingness to engage in dialogue with others, to take into consideration different opinions, even when not agreeing. In fact, it seems that even when they get angry (flaming), it is due to one of the commenters believing that the opinion or language of another one blocks dialogue, presents harsh or excessive attitudes that hinder the cooperative search for truth.

A pattern, unique to *The New York Times* public sphere, that connected to the cooperative search for truth, and that needs to be further researched, is the overwhelming presence of foreign commenters, integrated in the American debate. On one hand, the fact that the American commenters accepted the foreigners into the American debating community, and that they welcomed and respected the foreign points of views, opinions, arguments (even if sometimes not agreeing with them, or offering counter-arguments) shows the plurality of *The New York Times* online public sphere, and further portrays *The*



*New York Times* public sphere as what Ruiz et al. (2011, p. 480) called “communities of debate”. On the other hand, this massive presence of the foreign commenters in the public sphere created by a national media, *The New York Times*, may show the blurry lines between what Keane (1998) differentiated as meso versus macro public spheres.

According to Keane, the meso-public spheres form at a national level, where millions of people interact at the level of territorial nation-state framework, are mediated by large circulation newspapers such as *The New York Times*. They are mainly coextensive with the territorial state, but they may also extend beyond its boundaries to encompass neighboring audiences (as in the case of German-language programming and publishing in Austria), while the macro public spheres form at a global level encompassing hundred of millions, billions people, and are considered to be the (unintended) consequence of the international concentration of mass media firms previously owned and operated at the territorial nation-state level. In the Boston bombing case the foreigners commenting on *The New York Times* articles go well beyond the neighboring audiences, but it would be an exaggeration to consider that billions of people were present in this sphere.

Furthermore, *The New York Times* is still nationally owned and operated. Perhaps this phenomenon might be considered as the consequence of a globalized media, the easy access from anywhere in the world to any national media’s website (or for that matter even local media), and people’s acute interest in what is happening outside their immediate world, especially if it is about the U.S. or if it hits home (in the sense of the commenters from countries that deal with such events more often).

Reflexivity, the essential condition of deliberation for any public sphere, was clearly present in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments. The French and

American commenters proved to be critical thinkers, analyzing the media and commenters' content, the space's rules and guidelines, and offered their reflection on both the media and the commenters' performance.

Regarding media performance, in both sets of comments media in general and directly the two respective publications were heavily criticized, for over-mediatization. Journalists were criticized for almost everything: choice of words, exaggerations, political correctness or incorrectness, misinformation, speculations, bad translations (the *Le Figaro* commenters) and the TV anchors' actual behavior (*The New York Times* commenters).

Some sets of the critiques were unique to *The New York Times* sphere: (1) the critique of general media and also *The New York Times* for invading the privacy of the victims (going as far as demanding certain photos taken down from their website), versus the critique of *The New York Times* for not offering enough information about the victims; (2) the critique of over-mediatization, blaming it for spreading fear among Americans; (3) the critique of commercials injected in the online videos. In the case of direct demand the photos published by *The New York Times* and an article (that was not opened to comments), in which the drama of the one of the victims' father was emphasized are the causes of debate. This issue is virtually non-existent in *Le Figaro*, and implicitly neither is the discussion of intrusion into private life. It should also be noted that generally the issue of media intrusion of privacy might not be so important in France and in the French commenters' minds, as the French media are more regulated than the American ones, and the tabloid tradition is almost non-existent in France (Albert, 1998).

The critique of the media and *The New York Times* for running commercials in the videos, the reflections on the causes of commercials' presence in the online videos, and the issues of running ads in news videos on a national tragedy, appeared just among *The New York Times* commenters.

The commenters' performance critique, in both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* comments included the critique of moderators and their censorship or 'awards' assigning mechanisms, and the quality of some of the fellow commenters.

All in all, two mediated public spheres emerged with similar and different characteristics. While elements of rational debate, the cooperative search for truth and reflexivity were found in both, only *The New York Times* mediated public sphere resembled almost "textbook" style of the Habermasian and ideal (in other authors descriptions) public sphere. These differences could originate from two different cultural models regarding the role of the individual in society. In France the personal (or the individual) is often strongly construed as illegitimate and opposed to the 'public', which is associated with the general interest. In contrast, American definition of individualism largely shaped by the liberal doctrine, conceives the individual as a kind of 'public being' who, by definition contributes to the giving birth to the public interest. This requires that he/she submits his/her position to the evaluation of others, according to the rules of liberal democratic space (Thevenot & Lamont, 2000, p. 312).

While cultural differences surely mattered, a difference in moderation was noticed, that might better explain the differences between the two spheres. *The New York Times* pre-moderates all comments, while *Le Figaro* both pre-moderates comments belonging to the Connect members (free) and post-moderates comments belonging to the

Select and Digital members (paid subscriptions, arguing that these members are known more to the moderators).

The argumentative-deliberative quality of the majority of comments appearing on New York Times website, can further be explained by *The New York Times* Public Editor, Margaret Sullivan's (2012) advice on how a commenter can be sure his/her comment will be posted:

If a comment is respectful, on-topic and avoids YELLING, then it will most likely be approved. One more thing to ensure approval: When you make an argument, defend it. Simple declarative statements like "Obama/Romney is so dumb!" will be rejected. "Obama/Romney is so dumb because of X, Y and Z" will be approved.

Probably almost no "noise" or off-topic discussions will ever be found on *The New York Times* mediated public sphere, because as Margaret Sullivan (2012) explained:

We also often close comment threads when we feel the discussion has run its course and there is nothing substantial to gain from having more comments on the article. The community team asks itself the general question: Would our readers be better served by seeing another 1,000 comments on one article on a hot-button issue, or by finding 1,000 comments across four or five different articles on a variety of topics?

Regarding the lack of swearing, impoliteness or incivility in *The New York Times* mediated public sphere, it can be explained by these moderation rules. *The New York Times* clearly states that comments containing "personal attacks, obscenity, vulgarity, profanity (including expletives and letters followed by dashes), commercial promotion,

impersonations, incoherence and SHOUTING” will not be tolerated, thus will not appear in the comments thread. Moreover as *The New York Times* Public Editor, Margaret Sullivan (2012) argued:

the most common reason for rejection is for being ‘inflammatory’. We don’t allow name-calling, even for public officials in most cases. Rudeness to fellow commenters is also frowned upon, and usually rejected. We also reject comments for being off-topic, incoherent, unsubstantial and spam, and for using obscenities.

*Le Figaro* on the other hand, seems more permissive its “Rules of Conduct” state:

The etiquette and politeness are welcome. Lefigaro.fr is a medium where you can discuss, debate, defend different points of view, provide information ... Everyone has the right to speak, respect of others. And more broadly, respect other users of Figaro.fr., avoid tantrums unsightly, do not demean, do not ridicule. Mockeries on the physical and vulgarity are not appropriate

[http://www.lefigaro.fr/charte\\_moderation/charte\\_moderation.html](http://www.lefigaro.fr/charte_moderation/charte_moderation.html)).

However, in a description of what it is permitted and what will not be published or will be deleted, “profanity/curses, insults without vulgar words, that are within the limits of law,” “statements detrimental to others,” and “contributions that may ridicule, or devalue a personality, as long as they are not vulgar” fall under “authorized” comments, even if, according to Papacharissi (2011) they will fall under “unpolitness” category. Clearly incivility does not appear in *Le Figaro*’s public sphere because the following will never be permitted:

The incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence: racist, xenophobic, sexist, homophobic or revisionist nature; contrary to public order and morality

contributions, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing, vulgar, obscene, libelous, privacy of others, hate; contributions defamatory or disparaging the contributions detrimental in any way to minors. It's the same for any direct or indirect contribution denigrating *Le Figaro*, its journalists and executives

([http://www.lefigaro.fr/charte\\_moderation/charte\\_moderation\\_details.html](http://www.lefigaro.fr/charte_moderation/charte_moderation_details.html)).

Finally, it can be argued that in the online public spheres created by the two newspapers' websites, the essential characteristics of a public sphere deliberation as underlined by Habermas (1989) and detailed by numerous other scholars are present. The deliberation found here is free of external constraints, reasoned, with the partners of discussion appreciating each other as formally and substantively equal, and seeking to reach a certain consensus (Cohen, 2011, p. 36-37) if they can. In Dahlberg's (2001) terms, this sphere is characterized by exchanges and critiques of reasoned moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, discursive inclusion and equality and autonomy from state and economic power; or in Graham's (2011, p. 250) terms, the rational-critical debate, coherence, continuity, reciprocity, reflexivity, empathy, discursive equality and discursive freedom were all present in the analyzed case.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusions, limitations and future research directions

The research was organized along three major axes: (1) a comparative perspective on journalistic frames in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*; (2) a comparative perspective on journalistic frames and online commenters frames (both in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*); and (3) a comparative perspective of the two online public spheres.

In the first instance, the findings showcased a strong tendency of homogenization, in general, the same big frames appearing in both newspapers. Although the two media belong, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) argued to two opposed media systems, the findings did not reveal any significant differences in regards to their journalistic discourse. The differences that were revealed can better be explained by cultural patterns, echoing the culturalist' approach.

Regarding the second axe, the research shows that the public debates follow the path put forward by the journalists' frames and themes, but in the same time, they launch new themes of discussion and they reinterpret or even contradict / reject some of the journalists' themes. This pattern shows the active character of the media reception process, and suggests the need for more in-depth future research on media effects. Also, the current findings did not show what was suggested by the culture of fear thesis (Altheide, 2009) but show that the public rejects the idea of fear and panic, mobilizes itself to comfort and support the ones affected by the tragedy. Moreover, the findings also echoed the proposed model of emotions as frames (Nabi, 2003). The commentators

exchanges show that in a first phase of the crisis, emotions as frames appeared in the form of anger and sadness, but that later on, the tendencies of rationality and of not letting emotions impede the path to the answers posed, dominated the exchanges in this online public spheres.

Finally, the findings show that in these public spheres inter-mediated by these two quality newspapers, the major normative conditions of a public sphere were achieved: rational critical debate, cooperative search for truth, continuity and sincerity of the discourse, reflexivity (Dahlberg, 2001; Graham, 2011). Nevertheless, differences were also found, and they can be explained as pertaining to the different political cultures of these two nations (Lamont & Thevenot, 2000): the French debates being characterized by more moments of subjective personal involvement, flaming and frequent impoliteness (Papacharissi, 2011).

From a journalism practice standpoint the findings reveal that the American and French publics critically scrutinize every piece of information, and directly criticize journalists' work when they deem it inappropriate or not corresponding with professional journalistic standards. These publics also make direct demands. The question then becomes, if these publics react by reflecting and passively criticizing or if at the point when their demands are not answered, they will act as consumers and actively boycott the news organization (i.e. cancel their subscription). In this regard, future research should find out whether this pattern of critiques is present regardless of the topic of the news stories, or if it is more apparent in crises situations, when the need for publics to get the correct information is higher. Furthermore, surveys or interviews with the respective commenters should be conducted in order to better understand their critiques and find out



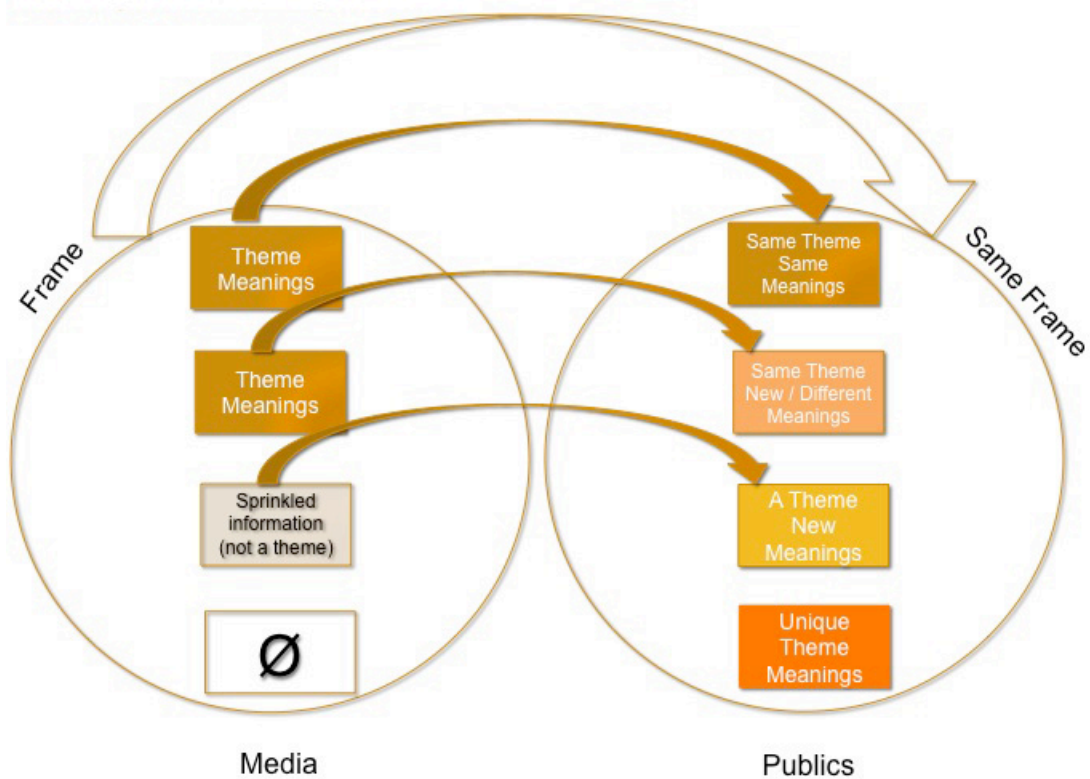
their possible intended behaviors. On the other hand, journalists have a certain image of the general needs of their publics. According to the commenters' reactions, they do not follow these specific needs, thus the gap between them. The current research shows that the commenters from both newspapers addressed precise requests to which it appears that they never received an answer or clarification from the newsroom. In this regard, further research should focus on how moderators interact with the newsroom, or specific journalists, and if they convey these commenters' messages. It may be that they are two different groups that never talk to each other, and thus journalists would never get the detailed feedback on their articles, unless they choose to go and comb through all the thousands of comments. Also from a practical standpoint, this investigated phenomenon may demonstrate the need for journalism educators to bring these issues in front of their classroom. The future journalists should be trained to interact directly with their publics.

There were several limitations of this dissertation. First, the current study did not broach subject of the relation between frames and themes proposed by officials (Government, President Obama, authorities, etc.) and the ones constructed by journalists. This should also be addressed in further research.

Second, in selecting the sample of analysis only articles that had five or more comments were chosen in order to satisfy the main goal of (1) looking at the interplay between media and public frames, and (2) the characteristics of the public spheres. While this decision presented no problem when looking at *Le Figaro*, it did so for *The New York Times*, which only opens certain articles for commentaries. A very brief post-analysis shows that the journalistic discourse in the articles that *The New York Times* newsroom decided not to open for comments was unexpectedly and fundamentally different from

the one in the news stories opened for comments. The news stories open for comments, had an almost dry discourse, filled with quotes pertaining to different angles, and rarely the journalistic tone deviated from anything less than neutral and balanced. Completely in opposition, the articles not opened for comments showed more sensationalism and subjective elements, and a much less neutral tone. This phenomenon of having two opposite facets of journalistic discourse while reporting the same events in the same media outlet clearly needs to further be researched. Future studies should find out if the same happens not only in crises situations, and if this is the norm for *The New York Times*.

Beyond these limits, the current dissertation posits three main conclusions. First, the found vitality of the online public spheres make all the gloomy predictions on the disappearance or refeudalization of the public spheres seem rushed. Second, the capacity to create and the dynamics of the publics show that they are clearly not the prisoners of media frames and themes, which they debate, negotiate and to which give new meanings (see Figure 1). Last, the journalistic coverage of a crisis situation is less determined or shaped by the media system characteristics and professional norms and more so by the repertoire of meaning and past connections available to readers and according to each culture.



**Figure 1: The four situations within the framing interplay characterizing both *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro***

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**Appendix**

**Appendix A: Protocol for coding news stories and comments**

Publication/Newspaper:

News story headline:

Date:

**News story elements**

Sources used in news story:

Themes:

Frames:

Emotions emitted:

Other:

Research notes:

**Comments elements**

Themes:

Frames:

Emotions emitted:

Other:

Research notes:

**Public sphere/Debate elements**

Rational-critical debate:

Cooperative search for truth:

Reflexivity:

Other:

Research notes:



### **Vita**

Ioana Coman was born and raised in Bucharest, Romania. She earned two Bachelor Degrees, in Public Relations from Bucharest University, and Political Sciences/International Relations from SNSPA, Bucharest. In 2011 she earned her master's degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. From January to May 2011, she was an intern for the Scripps Network, Press Department, DIY Network. She then pursued a doctorate in the College of Communication and Information at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is now an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at University of Wisconsin - Green Bay.