

# SCIENTIFIC REPORT

European Science Foundation  
Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)  
Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)

ESF SCH-SCSS EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

## **THREATS, RIGHTS AND REDRESS : RE-IMAGINING TERRORISM AND SECURITY IN EUROPE**

Nottingham, United Kingdom, 15-18 September 2006

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The way democracies respond to acts of terrorism and balance the demands of security against the implementation of due process and the defence of civil liberties is arguably the litmus test of their claim to superiority over other forms of government. As the central mechanisms for distributing information, articulating experience, presenting frameworks of interpretation, and orchestrating debate, the media of public communication play a central role in cultivating public understandings and reactions. How they discharge this task has important consequences for the future constitution of democratic citizenship and the balances struck between the inclusion or segregation of groups and communities suspected of supporting terrorism, and between open debate on causes and responses on the one hand and stigmatisation and intolerance of challenge and dissent on the other. Where European societies strike these balances will play a key role in determining the future of the project to construct a more cosmopolitan form of citizenship.

The workshop brought together established and emerging scholars from EU member states and two non-EU countries, with differing histories and recent experiences of terrorism, to develop an intellectual agenda for research initiatives that address the changing relations between terrorism, security and public media.

The seminar was predicated on the assumption that recent and current debate on the nature and causes of terrorism and appropriate responses is dominated by the contest between three competing frameworks of definition and explanation, based respectively on notions of threat, rights and redress.

Perspectives organised around *threat* emphasise the unprecedented nature and scale of the dangers posed by contemporary forms of terrorism (typified by the 9/11 attacks

in New York and Washington and the July 7 bombings in London) and the necessity of implementing enhanced security measures to counter them. This framework is supported by the widespread assumption that 'old' nationally based forms of terrorism pursued by secessionist organisations like the IRA and ETA has been replaced by the new transnational terrorism of Islamic jihadist movements whose adherents may come either from 'outside', as migrants or visitors, as with the 9/11 attacks, or be native born citizens of the countries they operate in, as with the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings in London.

Perspectives organised around definitions of *rights* argue that constructing the problem as mainly or solely a matter of security simplifies the political and cultural roots of terrorism and supports the introduction of counter measures that are disproportionate and violate key principles of civil rights and the rule of law, thereby undermining the moral case for democracy.

Perspectives rooted in notion of *redress* are employed by terrorist groups themselves to present their actions as justified responses to perceived assaults, both physical and cultural, on the populations, beliefs, and expressive forms that are central to their sense of themselves.

The second starting point for the seminar was the observation that the contest between these competing frameworks of interpretation is now being fought out across a media landscape undergoing rapid change as a consequence of two developments. (1) the increasing commercialisation and accelerating globalisation of programming within the television system-the dominant established medium. (2) the rapid expansion of new communicative systems and forms based on digitalisation and convergence - the Internet, interactive games, and virtual environments-

In selecting participants and compiling the seminar programme particular attention was paid to ensuring that presented papers raised key issues of method and conceptualisation that cut across disciplinary boundaries within and between the social sciences and humanities, and addressed questions that had been neglected or underrepresented in research to date.

Drawing on these contributions and the discussion they prompted the workshop aimed to advance thinking and research on terrorism and the media in three main ways :

**Contextualisation** – subjecting assertions of the distinctiveness of the present situation to critical scrutiny by exploring continuities in both forms of terrorism and media representations.

**Evaluation**- critically reviewing the available literature on terrorism, security and the media and identifying conceptual and methodological limitations.

**Innovation**– identifying key gaps in the available research on public media and proposing areas for future work. In the course of discussion seven areas were identified as priorities. (1) the role of visual imagery in anchoring popular understandings. (2) the role of generic forms, particularly in the field of popular fiction, in mediating competing frameworks of interpretation. (3) questions of intertextuality (4) the organisation of networks (5) the uses of interactivity (6) the

growth of vernacular media production and its relation to professional journalistic practice (7) the stratification of public participation and knowledge.

These themes are explored more fully in Section 2 of this report.

## **2. SCIENTIFIC CONTENT OF THE EVENT**

### **APPROACHES**

#### **1. CONSTRUCTIONS**

There was general agreement throughout the discussion that approaching public representations of terrorism and security as the outcomes of a continuing contest between the three competing interpretive frameworks outlined in the seminar brief offered a highly productive departure point for analysing both media performance and public understandings. There was however considerable support for adding a fourth framework based around constructions of conspiracy. This, it was argued, was necessary in order to address the widespread popular distrust of official accounts and the frequent resort to conspiracy scenarios in popular fictions dealing with terrorism and security.

#### **2 CONTINUITIES**

It was argued strongly in the meeting that identifying current shifts required a sustained analysis of the historical contexts out of which they have arisen and the continuities in the iconographies, narrative forms, and underlying assumptions that circulate within popular culture. It was argued that in the European context there was a particular need to take account of (a) constructions of subversion developed during the Cold War (the image of the ‘sleeper’ and the enemy within for example), (b) images and accounts of insurgents and insurgencies developed during wars of decolonisation and (c) the history of relations to the Arab world and to the Israel/Palestine conflict. It was noted that while there are strong studies on particular aspects of these issues there is, as yet, no systematic attempt to look across these specialised areas and identify central threads in the construction of the terrorist as ‘other’.

#### **3. COMPARISONS**

This project was seen as a necessary component of a more comprehensive comparative cross European study that would situate national experiences of terrorism (both sub-national and supranational) and responses to them in the post World War II period, key stratifying dimensions. Discussion suggested the following as particularly worthy of further investigation:

- (1) Differential direct experiences of terrorism. It was argued that whereas in most countries terrorist attacks constitute an exceptional ‘event’, in some (such as Northern Ireland and Israel) their greater frequency weaves them into the texture of everyday life.

- (2) Differential relations to processes of decolonisation
- (3) Differential relations to the politics of the Cold War.
- (4) Differential state formations and security systems
- (5) Differential media systems

#### **4. CROSS DISCIPLINARITY**

Because media systems are simultaneously institutional formations and cultural arenas, any attempt to develop a comprehensive account of their operations must necessarily develop cross disciplinary and multi-method approaches. There was unanimous agreement that this project required innovative research that combined approaches and methods drawn from across the social sciences with the full range techniques and analytical resources offered by the humanities. It was widely felt among participants that the centrality and indispensability of the contribution that the humanities could make to the study of contemporary terrorism had not been sufficiently recognised in the work undertaken to date. At the same time, it was noted that research on popular representations of terrorism and security had not so far engaged with the full range of relevant areas and issues.

Identifying key areas for future research and specifying key questions was a major focus of group debate. Six areas emerged from these discussions.

### **KEY AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Two major clusters of issues were identified. The first related to the general organisation of media representations of terrorism and security. The second focused on the emerging questions presented by the rapid growth of digital media in general and the internet in particular

### **A. THE DYNAMICS OF REPRESENTATION**

#### **1. VISUAL IMAGERY**

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that memory, both individual and social, “freeze frames; its basic unit is the single image” Interrogating the claim that imagery anchors understandings is particularly necessary in relation to recent representations of terrorism where photographs –of the ‘falling man’ jumping from the World Trade centre building in New York, of a red London bus exploded by a rucksack bomb in a quiet square, of the abuse of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison- have played such a central role in crystallising the meaning of events. Nor, as participants pointed out, are photographs the only resonant and widely reproduced images that need to be taken into account. Recent European experience has confirmed the importance of both cartoons and charts and maps marking disputed boundaries and sites of terrorist incidents.

Until recently the analysis of media representations has been limited in its capacity to meet this challenge since it has worked primarily with research approaches adopted and adapted from various currents within linguistics. In an era increasingly dominated by multi media forms this work is necessary but not sufficient. The last half decade

however has rapid growth in the study of visual culture and experiments with multi modal forms of analysis. Reviewing this work and identifying how it might be deployed in a systematic way in analysis was identified in discussion as an important task for future work.

## 2. GENERIC FORMS

It was noted that much existing work on media representations of terrorism has focused on the organisation of news reporting and current affairs coverage. Rather less has dealt with fictional representations, and less still has compared representations across genres. The pressing need for such a comparison emerged as a major theme in discussion.

It was argued that all generic forms, from news stories to spy thrillers, operated as regulatory mechanisms organising what can be said and shown, by whom and from which perspective

Discussion centred particularly on the relative potential of popular fiction. In contrast to news reporting which it was argued, tended to work within the frameworks of threat and rights, and to present actors as unproblematic representatives or advocates of particular positions, fictions were more likely to organise narratives around frameworks of redress and conspiracy and to present key actors, both terrorists and security personnel, as complex characters subject to contradictory pressures. Long running television series with ensemble casts were seen as a particularly fertile starting point for analysis since they allowed for both the development of character and for variation in the challengers and dilemmas presented.

Two popular television fiction series were mentioned as instances of these processes in action. The US science fiction series *Battleship Gallactica*, has been widely seen by critics as defending the rights framework and questioning the erosion of civil liberties consequent on the pursuit of the 'War on Terror'. The British series, *Spooks*, focuses on a secret intelligence unit engaged in counter terrorism who find themselves at odds with the state over issues of proportionality and due process.

Understanding how key popular media genres organise representations of terrorism and security is vital. It speaks directly to the expectation that in democratic societies the media system will provide the full range of cultural resources required by audience members in their role as responsible citizens. This has often been understood primarily in terms of the news system's ability to deliver comprehensive information and balanced commentary on contentious issue but, it was argued, any evaluation of the range of interpretive perspectives available to the public must include a systematic account of the characterisations, motivations, and justifications for action presented in popular fictions.

This is not to relegate news and commentary to a secondary position. Rather, it was argued, future research needs to look across the full range of television genres and develop a typology that facilitates systematic comparison of their relative openness and closure in terms of the interpretive frameworks they bring into play and their deployment within the text. Such research has important implications both for

investigations of the construction of popular understanding and for the evaluation of diversity in broadcast production.

### **3. INTERTEXTUALITY**

Research on popular representations has a strong tendency to treat media texts and artefacts as bounded entities. However, in discussion it was argued that because core elements of both form and content are continually being adapted, altered and recycled from other sources unpacking the meanings carried by any particular text necessarily involves analysing its inter-relations with the texts it borrows from and bounces off. As one way into this question of inter-textuality there was strong support for work that focused on the routes particular cultural forms, images, linguistic tags, and scenarios take as they travel through multiple sites of popular expression and the modifications they undergo. The use by jihadist groups of expressive forms derived from black American rap culture provided a particularly productive instance for debate.

## **B DIGITAL FORMATIONS**

Media systems are currently in the process of switching from analogue to digital technologies. Four central aspects of this fundamental shift were examined and discussed.

### **1. NETWORKS**

Digitalization has facilitated the creation of new global networks. The combination of high capacity, high speed, telecommunications systems and the development of increasingly powerful personal computers allows these new networks to handle both more traffic and more bulky materials, including video and film. In the public domain these innovations have facilitated the transformation of the most used segment of the Internet, The World Wide Web, from a system based primarily around text, sound and still images to one that supports both the distribution of moving images and participation in complex virtual environments offering increasingly photo-realistic simulations of actors and environments.

Discussion explored the ways that jihadist groups were using the enhanced capacity of the Web to distribute video materials. The genres most familiar in the public domain, and featured most often in news and documentary programmes, borrow forms from the sermon and political speeches, show hostages appealing for help, or are based on self produced footage of training and operations. However, it was argued strongly that research also needs to take account of the ways groups are employing more popular forms, based on music videos and computer games, to address adherents and potential converts. At the same time, it was stressed that the Web is not the only mechanism of distribution. Mosques and community centres remain important. Consequently, research needs to pay attention not only to the ways terrorists are using the Internet but also to the complex intersections between on line and off line networks.

The role of electronic networks in monitoring possible terrorist activity was also explored. Most of this material remains classified on security grounds but some does

circulate in the public domain. News coverage of terrorist attacks and of trials of suspected terrorists frequently feature footage from CCTV cameras, recordings or transcripts of monitored phone calls or conversations, and photographs from police files. The ways these materials are deployed in and across media and their possible role in shaping public images of terrorists and attitudes towards surveillance and security merit further investigation.

## **2. INTERACTIVITY**

Established media provide resources for understanding and action. Digital media provide both resources and sites of action. Two aspects of this capacity were explored in discussion.

Digital networks are two-way systems. They operate both vertically, to allow users and audience members to interact with centralised product centres, and horizontally, encouraging interaction between users (peer-to-peer or P2P exchange). These capacities have important implications for research.

In an effort to build closer and more extensive relations with their audiences, media organisations have been developing web sites that operate alongside the printed newspaper or broadcast programme. In addition to offering supplementary materials and links to other relevant Internet sources, these on line spaces host message boards where audience members can post their own comments on the item and issues and engage in other activities, including games. It was pointed out in discussion that web site supporting the British television series *Spooks* invited viewers to participate in an interactive game in which they were cast as security personnel coping with terrorist threats. Future research on representations of terrorism and security urgently needs to take account of these extensions and include both the original text of the programme or news story and all the supplementary materials that surround it on both the media organisation's own web site and the sites operated by fans, commentators and others operating independently.

The importance of video games and virtual environments, communicative forms that have developed expanded rapidly in recent year, was discussed extensively. Both differ from established media in requiring participants to adopt a particular persona and point of view. Games involve moving through 3 dimensional landscapes as a particular character, experiencing situations through their eyes, and responding to challenges and threats, often in pursuit of a pre-set goal or target. They are employed extensively in training security and military personnel in anti terrorism tactics; and variants of these scenarios provide the basis for a range of popular commercial games. These generally offer unambiguous images of the 'enemy' and encourage clear outcomes based on the exercise of force. Games produced by jihadist groups reproduce these key features but invert definitions of the enemy. Game formats are also being designed and used in educational setting to encourage critical reflection on the dilemmas facing democracies in responding to terrorism.

Although games display strong narrative dynamics it was argued that, unlike television programmes, they also need to be seen as rule sets that simultaneously facilitate and constrain both the adoption and enactment of particular points of view and the exercise of particular skills.

Games can either be played on dedicated consoles or collectively on line. Some allow players to select the character and positions they will adopt and to acquire particular sets of skills. Massive Multiplayer Online Games take place in complex simulated environments the more open of which replicate an increasing range of 'real life' institutions and activities. Within these virtual worlds, such as *Second Life*, situations are generated by the actions and responses of participants rather than being pre programmed. *Second Life* has experienced terrorist attacks designed to destroy participants' property. There was strong support in discussion for systematic, comparative research that investigated the ways in which terror and security were represented across the range of computer games and virtual environments and which explored the role of embodiment and point of view in organising player's experiences. This was seen as necessary complement to the analysis of television programming outlined earlier.

### **3. VERNACULAR PRODUCTION**

The development of personal digital technologies, particularly mobile lap top computing and multi function mobile phones, has created an expanded base for amateur production while enhanced networks allow the materials to be posted on web sites with greater immediacy. As a consequence, amateur photos and video footage produced by eye-witnesses or participants has come to play an increasingly important role in recording events. In some cases, as with the July 7<sup>th</sup> London bombings, it may be the sole record. In parallel, recent years have seen a rapid increase in lay and expert web logs (blogs) commenting on events and situations. Discussion explored the implications of these developments for professional journalism. On the one hand, news organisations have increasingly opened their web sites inviting readers, listeners and viewers to contribute testimony, visual materials and commentary. Consequently, the mediated construction of events is increasingly a joint production between journalists and their audiences. At the same time, a number of journalists are producing blogs which record their personal reactions to events, alongside their professional presentations.

The consequences of these shifting relations between objectivity and involvement, journalists and their audiences, and professional and vernacular production, present new and urgent challenges for research into the construction of public knowledge and understanding on terrorism and security. At the same time, it was stressed that research which aspired to be comparative needs to pay close attention to national variations in cultures of journalism and to differentials, both within and between countries, in patterns of public access and use of digital technologies.

### **4. THE STRATIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION AND KNOWLEDGE.**

Despite the rapid growth of digital media in recent years, it was pointed out in discussion that research on personal computing continues to reveal persistent inequalities in access and use stratified by age, household income, educational level, gender, and ethnicity. The elderly and those living in low income households are still more likely not to have access to the internet at home. Use among working age adults varies from intermittent and restricted in scope to continuous and comprehensive. Access and use is consistently highest among young people. These differentials may be ameliorated as the internet migrates to mobile phones and digital television



systems but in the immediate term personal computers will remain the major point of access. It was also pointed out that available research suggests that use is becoming more personalised as individuals compile dedicated menus of options tailored to their particular interests. This pattern is replicated within broadcasting as it moves towards multi channel systems and pay-per-view options. Social and personal differentials in access and use of major media, old and new, pose major questions for the constitution of public knowledge and debate about terrorism and security and for the role of the mass media as an inclusive public sphere promoting informed deliberation.

There was strong support in discussion for research that combined comprehensive mapping of the ways different television genres and digital formats (games and internet sites) mediate frameworks of interpretation with detailed investigation of patterns of access, consumption and use among selected population segments. It was further argued that this research was most likely to be productive if it employed a longitudinal design, tracking selected household over time as they responded to both innovations in media and shifts in the incidence of terrorism and the implementation of security measures.

### **3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS**

The seminar succeeded in its main aim of identifying key gaps in the available research on terrorism, security and the media and in mapping out an agenda for future work in this area. Participants unanimously reported that they found the discussion challenging and that the geographical and interdisciplinary mix of knowledge and expertise brought to the meeting generated genuinely novel insights.

Individual participants will build on this experience in their own work. In addition a volume of essay exploring the themes and suggestions that emerged from the meeting is planned as a contribution to developing the research agenda outlined in the above report of the seminar's scientific content.

### **4. FINAL PROGRAMME**

#### **Friday September 15th**

Afternoon Arrival

16.30 Coffee

17.00-18.00 Welcome and Introduction :

Graham Murdock. Department of Social Sciences Loughborough University]  
*'Terrorism, Security and Media in Altered Times'*

*'Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)'* Chris Godwin (Standing Committee for the Social Sciences) and Naomi Segal (Standing Committee for the Humanities)

19.00 Dinner

**Saturday September 16<sup>th</sup> Discourses/Imagery/ Media**

7.30- 8.30 Breakfast

**Session One 9.00 – 11.00 Terrorism and Security as News**

Daniel Dor (Department of Communication Tel-Aviv University)  
*'The Israeli Media and The Question of Palestine'*

Jerome Bourdon (Department of Communication Tel-Aviv University)  
*'The Israel-Palestine Conflict and the Uses of "Terrorism"'*

Rob Kroes (Amerika Institute Amsterdam)  
*'The Photographic faces of Terror and Security'*

11.00- 11. 15 Coffee

**Session Two 11.15- 13.00 Fictions of Fear and Order**

Roberta Pearson (School of American and Canadian Studies University of Nottingham)  
*'Interrogating Popular Television Drama'*

William Urrichio (Institute for Media and Re/Presentation University of Utrecht)  
*'Playing with Terrorism and Order : Video Games'*

13.00 – 14.00 pm Lunch

**Session Three 14.00- 15.45 New Media, New Interventions**

Marco Lombardi (Department of Sociology Catholic University of Sacro Cuore)  
*Jihad Communication on the Web*

Stuart Allan (School of Cultural Studies University of the West of England)  
*'Bearing Witness: Citizen Journalism in Times of Crisis'*

15.45 – 16.00 Afternoon tea

**Session Four 16.00- 17.00 Emerging Agendas**

*'Terrorism and the Media: What do We Know and What do we Need to Know?'*  
General discussion

19.00-20.00 Dinner

20.00 onwards Bar

**Sunday September 16<sup>th</sup> Interpretations and Responses**

7.30 – 8.30 Breakfast

**Session One 9.00 – 11.00 The Politics of Fear and Reassurance**

Mirca Madianou (Faculty of Social and political Sciences University of Cambridge)  
*'Understanding Affect in Responses to News about Terrorism'*

11.00- 11.15 Coffee

**Session Two 11.15- 13.00 Rethinking Responses**

John Tulloch (School of Social Sciences and Law Brunel University)  
*'Making Sense of the London Bombings: Biographies, Histories and Mediations'*

*Key Questions for Future Research'*  
General Discussion

13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

**Session Three 14.00 – 15.45 Nations, Media, Transitions**

Anna Sosnovskaya (Faculty of Journalism St Petersburg State University)  
*'Media, Terrorism and the Reconstruction of National Identity in Russia'*

Maria Heller- Soignet (Institute of Sociology and Social Policy Eotvos Lorand University)  
*'Terrorism and the Hungarian Public Sphere'*

15.45- 16.00 – Afternoon tea

**Session Four 16.00- 17.30 Taking Stock- Priorities For Future Research**

A general discussion Introduced and Chaired by Graham Murdock

Dinner 19.00-20.00

Bar 20.00 onwards

**Monday September 17<sup>th</sup>**

7.30-8.30 Breakfast

8.30 onwards Departures

## 5. INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

### Countries of origin

Seminar organisers UK (3)

Participants Italy (1), Russia (1), Hungary (1), Netherlands (2) Israel (2), UK (2)

[In addition because of dual positions held and research specialisms participants were able to contribute detailed information on the situation in the USA, France and Greece]

**Gender** female (4) male (8)

**Age** Young scholars (up to 35 years) (2), established scholars (between 35 and 55),(7) senior scholars (over 55) (3)

## 6. FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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