

AHRC funded project

European Television Representations of Islam as Security Threat: A Comparative Analysis

1. Research context

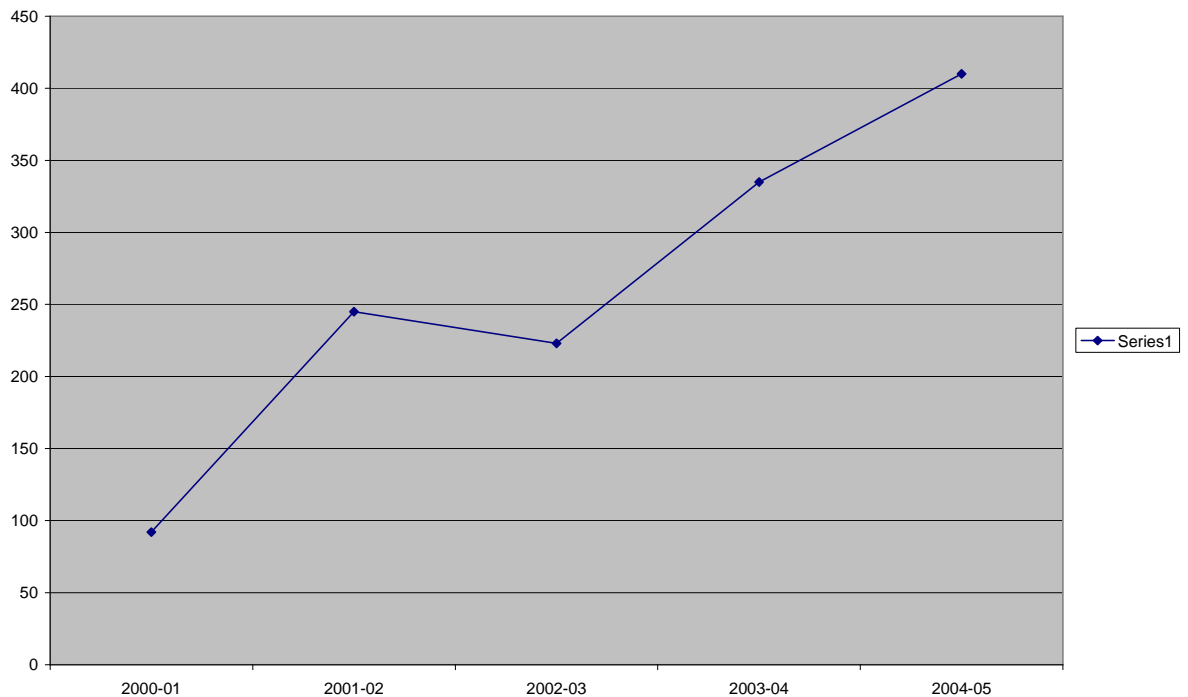
- 1.1 The project's *geopolitical context* is the widespread Western perception of Islam as a seedbed of attitudes which feed terrorism, especially in the light of 7/7, 9/11, 1-3 September 2004 (Beslan), and the related conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- 1.2 The *comparative context* comprises three states exhibiting **similarities**, including:
- (i) a post-imperial legacy of relationships with former Muslim colonies;
 - (ii) a sizeable Muslim population;
 - (iii) involvement with the 'War on Terror'
 - (iv) susceptibility to Islamic-inspired terrorist activity.

And **differences**, such as the following:

- (i) Britain has, following 9/11, identified itself more closely with the US than France or Russia, notably on Iraq, while neither Britain nor France has sanctioned Russian policy towards Chechnya;
 - (ii) In Britain and France the Islamic 'threat' is more closely tied to questions of immigration/integration and asylum than in Russia which is currently engaged in conflict with an Islamic enclave, has a longer-established Muslim population and, following centuries of Mongol-Tatar occupation, constructs its identity in relation to Islam differently;
 - (iii) The Russian media still bear a totalitarian stamp, whilst the British and French media are underpinned by mature civic cultures.
- 1.3 The *local context* is interdisciplinary collaboration between two departments through Surrey University's Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM). Hutchings directs the European Visual Media Research Group in the Culture, Media and Communication Department. Flood (Politics Department) has a particular interest in political communication, and is a Director of CRONEM.
- 1.4 The *scholarly context* is the growing volume of work on representations of Muslims as threat. Anglophone research in this mode is oriented towards identifying the impact of western media bias against Islamic cultures. For example, Said's (1997) seminal study demonstrates how Islamic groups are induced first to assimilate then perpetuate western media images of Muslim hostility. Poole (2002) details British media stereotyping of Muslims in the context of the new global order. Qureshi and Sells (2003) analyse post-9/11 constructions of the Muslim as enemy. Sanadjian (2002) and Lyon (2005) examine the retrograde influence of the anti-terror campaign on Western multiculturalism. There is considerably less scholarship on French or Russian media representations. In France and Russia attention has focused on Islam itself; Sifaoui's (2002) monograph on the Islamic threat to French integrity builds on Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis; a parallel Russian body of work (e.g. Brass and Shumilin 2004) promotes the establishment line on Chechnya and global terror. A British counterweight is Russell's (2005) exposé of Russian demonisations of Chechen Muslims after 9/11.
- 1.5 Lacking is any cross-national study of media discourses on Islam and Terror. Synthesising theoretical paradigms from political analysis and cultural/media studies, the project will facilitate an interdisciplinary account of how national media systems in different political-cultural environments integrate images of/discourses on Islam into distinct representational systems. We thus aim to avoid homogenising the object of

study: not all media systems stereotype Islam to identical extents or for identical reasons, just as not all Muslims are fundamentalist terrorists.

- 1.6 The project will focus on television, the most widely accessed news source, and in which both researchers have prior expertise.
- 1.7 The co-applicants complement one another: 1) Hutchings' (2004 and forthcoming) work on television, literary culture and the representation of terror is enhanced by Flood's (2002 a and b) research into political myth and ideology; 2) Flood specialises in French political issues, including immigration/identity, while Hutchings leads an AHRB project examining post-Soviet television culture; both share an interest in British television; 3) together they offer expertise across three major European nations and two overlapping disciplines.
- 1.8 In May 2005, the Integrum Database of post-Soviet media texts was used in an investigation of frequency of coverage of Islam and its links with security. Deploying various search terms, including 'terrorism and Islam', 'security and terror', and 'Muslim and threat', we ascertained through analysis of numbers of 'hits' that, from a low base, an early peak was reached after 9/11, succeeded by a decline, then a steep rise following Beslan and an increase in Chechen-related terrorist activity. Indications are that the rise no longer correlates with particular incidents, suggesting that representations, detached from the realities in which they ground themselves, have acquired independent momentum.



Since the Database also provides selective news transcripts, the subscription cost is included within our budget.

- 1.9 In August-September 2004, the co-applicants undertook a pilot project based on recordings of news bulletins in the target countries. The project coincided with heightened insurgency in Iraq and 'asylum' controversies in Britain and France, and Beslan. It generated a preliminary analysis of differences in frequency, salience and framing of Islam-related issues. Its main outcome was a paper analysing Russian reports on Beslan, contextualised by comparisons with British and French coverage of the event, and of Iraq (Hutchings forthcoming). The findings focused on nation-building strategies (rearticulated myths of Soviet 'space' and a fragmented Russian

national 'family' occasioned by Beslan were mirrored in the BBC's implied comparisons of British moderation in Basra with American heavy-handedness in Najaf, and French attempts to achieve 'equidistance' between rebel claims and allied rebuttals); tensions between (i) the breaching of media representational norms through the adoption of a rhetoric of 'excess' (not replicated in France and Britain) and (ii) the invocation of a familiar 'terror siege' paradigm with identifiable rituals (the citing of 'expert opinion') and linguistic markers (the designation of the siege as a '*terakt*' and the terrorists as '*bandity*'; the denomination issue arose also in the contrast between British references to the Iraqi insurgent al-Sadr as a 'radical cleric' and his followers as 'gunmen', and the less judgmental French use of '*milicien*'); the embedding of legitimating vernacular discourses within official media condemnations (a phenomenon more prevalent in Russian than in French or British news).

- 1.10 Some of these generalisations were later tested against coverage of the 7/7 London bombings when the BBC intensified Russian emphasis on moderate Islamic condemnations but initially relegated to the margins attempts to link the incident with British involvement in Iraq, or with Islamophobia. Given its earlier willingness to locate the causes of Beslan in Chechnya, the BBC thus mirrored the strict parameter setting which it identified in Russian coverage of Beslan.
- 1.11 Conversely, Russian news projected onto Britain faults for which it was earlier criticised (e.g. the BBC's decision to excise scenes considered too distressing; complaints about police reticence in releasing fatality numbers).
- 1.12 The need to further test these and other points against European coverage of similar terrorist acts informs our Research Questions.

2. Research questions

- 2.1 Where do the respective broadcasts locate the positions of the nations whose official voices they articulate within the 'geopolitical space' of the 'War on Terror'?
- 2.2 How are constructions of 'terrorists', 'ethnic minorities', 'immigrants' and 'Fundamentalists' linked within the different representational regimes and how do they reflect historical and current relationships with Islamic cultures?
- 2.3 How are these images mapped onto discourses of national identity articulated by the bulletins?
- 2.4 Where do the issues feature within the news agendas and 'semiospheres' generated by the broadcasts and how do they shape these phenomena?
- 2.5 How is treatment of the 'Islamic threat' incorporated into the media cultures of which the news programmes form part?
- 2.6 How are the various 'voices' (those of officialdom; the 'ordinary citizen'; the 'moderate Muslim' etc.) assimilated into the broadcasts' discursive structures and the larger ideological systems framing them?

3. Research methods and analysis

Theoretical framework

- 3.1 Any basically pluralistic political culture (including Russia) is subject to competition for domination of political language and public policy. To compare the sets of political/social values and assumptions underpinning the framing of the Islam/security issue, the project draws on advances in the theorisation of ideologies (Freedon 1996)

as distinctive, evolving configurations of concepts which can be grouped by family resemblance but also analysed in terms of local variation within each group.

- 3.2 Literature on political communication (Bennett and Entman 2001; Curran 2002; Kuhn and Neveu 2002; McNair 2000, 2003) provides tools to analyse the intersection between ideological and technical factors shaping TV representations of the Islam/security issue through editorial choices (of inclusion/exclusion, running order, duration and salience), alongside news values and news-gathering practices, in relation to the structures and resources of the news organizations involved.
- 3.3 Analysis of how the media communicate ideologically coloured understandings of the issue requires attention to the verbal dimension in the light of discourse-sensitive, media/cultural-studies models of the relationship between language, legitimacy and power (Thompson 1990; Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 1998). This will enable scrutiny of how different 'voices' (those of officialdom; the 'ordinary citizen'; the 'moderate Muslim', etc.) are assimilated into the broadcasts' discursive structure
- 3.4 Since the visual impact of broadcasters' choices of location, duration, focus and viewpoint is essential to the representation of Islamic/security concerns to national publics, text-based approaches will be complemented by those dealing with screen media-specific codes, alongside models of the word/image interplay which structures TV messages (Fiske 1987; Hartley 2004; Mitchell 1994).

Methodology and analysis

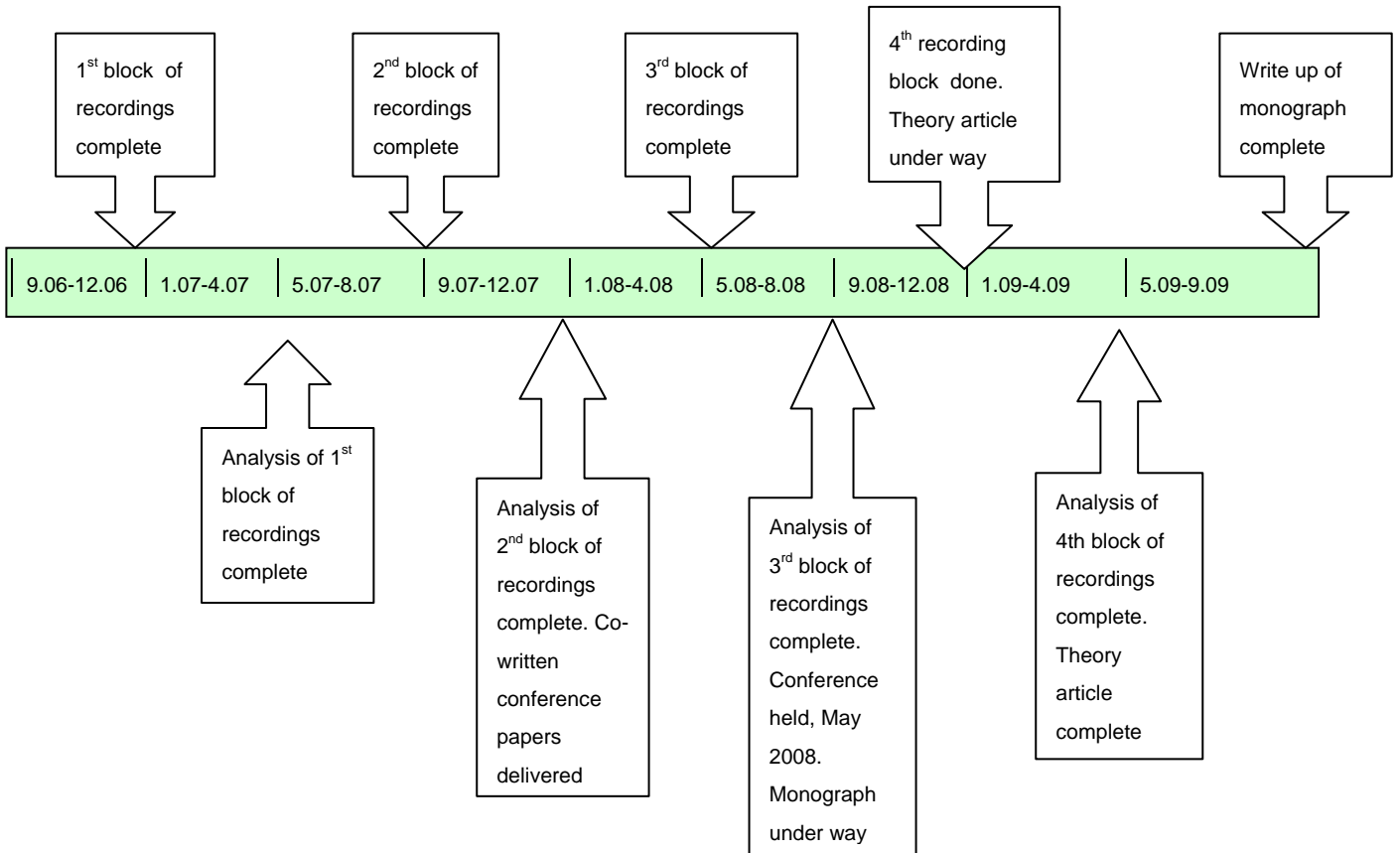
- 3.5 The analysis will be two-dimensional, focusing on recurrent representation patterns *within* each country's programming in order to define similarities and differences *between* those countries, enabling us to meet Objective 1, which informs our remaining objectives.
- 3.6 Through a frequency analysis of air time devoted to (i) Islam, (ii) the War on Terror, (iii) immigration, and (iv) the Islamic dimension of the War on Terror, we will construct a 'semantic macrostructure' (Van Dijk 1991). Analysis of coherence relations within this macrostructure will determine the positioning of (iv) in relation to (i), (ii) and (iii). (See Objective 2.)
- 3.7 To determine the weight attached to the value hierarchies established by the macrostructure, we will conduct a frame analysis (following Norris 2003) examining how reports on Islam, terror and immigration are correlated with broader news agendas and generic rules, and thus how the security 'semiosphere' shapes the meanings it generates. (See Objective 2.)
- 3.8 The agendas are further illuminated through 'syntagmatic' analysis: how running orders integrate reported items into meaningful sequences; how the stories with which they are juxtaposed, their typifying/'anomalising' function and the transitions between them clarify their representational burden (see especially Objective 1); how the story structure of individual items (the breaching and restoration of norms) supports that burden; how stories constitute an ongoing macro-narrative (making 'history' as it happens); how oral narration integrates with description, argument and multi-media signals in the production of political and nation-building meaning (Flood 2002a). (See especially Objective 3.)
- 3.9 On the 'paradigmatic' level we will identify valorisations of key players in the narratives, linking them with stereotypes of good and bad Muslims (following Poole 2002; Mamdani 2004). At a higher level of abstraction, the valorisations will be tied to common structures of self and other, centre and periphery from which the images and narratives are selected. (See Objective 3.)

- 3.10 A discourse-analytical approach to the articulation of key voices (officialdom, 'fundamentalist', etc.) animating the myths and discourse types will highlight how tensions between the positions from which these voices speak are accommodated within the morphological systems of particular ideologies (See Objective 4)
- 3.11 This will be supplemented through analysis of local semantics, especially lexicalisation and implicature (the denominations used for terrorists; changes in the credibility status of quoted speakers through use of words carrying different presuppositions), syntactic style (e.g., passive constructions to disguise in-group agency), rhetoric (e.g. metaphors of 'swamping'), quotation patterns (direct and indirect quotation to (de)legitimate particular perspectives), and argumentation (justification strategies for free speech curtailments). (See Objective 1 and throughout Objectives 1-5.)
- 3.12 Textual analysis will be accompanied by an examination of the televisual codes (cropping and framing devices; point of view shots; diegetic and non-diegetic use of sound). (See Objective 1 and throughout Objectives 1-5.)
- 3.13 At every level we will remain attentive to issues surrounding the fit of Freedden's morphological approach to ideology with the semiotic approach favoured in cultural studies, working towards an overview of those issues published as a separate output (Objective 5).

Data collection

- 3.14 The main evening bulletins on the principal public broadcasting channel in each country (BBC1, France 2, 1st Channel) will be recorded in 12-week blocks, each followed by 12-week analysis blocks, over two years. Our university is equipped with satellite television but we have budgeted for two extra DVD recorders to cope with the increased volume of recordings projected, and a dedicated part-time technician to do the recordings.
- 3.15 Storyboards will establish the number/order of items and running time. Relevant items will be transcribed verbatim in conjunction with description of visual sequences.
- 3.17 Recordings will be made of other current affairs programmes. These will be summarised and, where relevant, transcribed by the ROs, supported, where necessary, by the services of a professional transcription service.
- 3.18 The Research Officers will complete their work by the end of Year 2. During Year 3 the balance of the work of the investigators, who will devote on average one day a week to the project, will shift from oversight and project management to a focus on the major publications.

Timeline and Milestones



4. Outcomes, Audiences and Dissemination

The major outcome will be a detailed account, informed by a cross-European perspective, of how the 'War on Terror' articulates with issues of integration and national identity. It will be disseminated through a co-authored monograph structured around our Research Questions, a theoretical article and a conference on Cross-Cultural Representations of Islam organised under CRONEM's auspices. Expenses are accounted for in our budget. The theoretical article (3.11) will be published in a refereed journal such as *Media, Culture and Society*. We will further disseminate findings through single presentations at nation-specific conferences in France, Russia, the UK and the USA, and joint presentations at the conferences of British and US Media and Political Studies associations. The primary audiences will be scholars of political and cultural/media studies with interests in representation, the War on Terror, Islam and multiculturalism, and the connections between them. The project will also be addressed to scholars of contemporary French and Russian society. Finally, it will represent a timely intervention into the wider national debate currently underway in the UK on terrorism, religion and multiculturalism, reinforcing the project's overall value for money.

5. Project management/ROs

- 5.1 The scope of material to be processed and analysed and the linguistic expertise entailed require us to appoint 2 bilingual ROs (French-English, Russian-English), each with a PhD in a relevant aspect of contemporary political/cultural analysis. They will each be equipped with a laptop and DVD viewing facilities. Their duties will initially be to
- coordinate recording of the news broadcasts;
 - collate and annotate the results;
 - transcribe/arrange the transcription of relevant items (specialist transcription equipment will be bought to supplement what is available through our Centre for Translation Studies);
 - carry out bibliographical searches;
 - contribute to the analysis of the recordings by constructing storyboards and identifying discourse types, quotation patterns, narrative structures, visual codes, etc.
- 5.2. In the interests of their career development, the ROs will then be inducted into co-writing conference papers and co-organising the conference at which they will also present single and joint-authored papers. The ROs will be encouraged to develop these papers as journal articles and thus consolidate their publishing records.
- 5.3 Flood will manage the French-English RO, Hutchings the Russian-English RO. The two ROs will share work on Britain. They will submit monthly written reports on their activity and attend weekly project meetings.
- 5.4. A part-time project administrative assistant will assist in coordinating meetings, conference organisation, file-keeping, etc.

6. Justification of Resources Sought

Justification of resources sought and time spent is embedded in Sections 1.8, 3.14, 3.17, 3.18, 4.0 and 5.1 above.

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