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Des Freedman and Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), Media Terrorism. Global perspectives. London: Sage, 2011, 336 pp.

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Book reviews

Des Freedman and Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media & Terrorism. Global perspectives*. London: Sage, 2011, 336 pp.

Media and Terrorism consists of 18 chapters written by the two editors and twenty-four contributors. The book is subdivided into an introduction and four parts (Context; Global Representations of Terrorism; Terrorism on the Home Front; Journalists and the "War on Terror"), each one with a brief introductory note. The contributors' academic backgrounds show an expertise in different fields, such as media and conflicts, media and immigration, journalism and blogging.

Even if there is growing evidence of the difficulty to define terrorism and to draw boundaries between terrorists and combatants, some institutions don't seem to acknowledge it. A major claim of the book is that, among the institutions that tend to "naturalize" such terms, a central role is played by the media.

Over the last decade, the expression "war on terror" has become a common one in most media and political discourses. Although this is a highly controversial expression, it is more and more taken for granted in speeches and writings by a large number of journalists and political leaders throughout the world. Even less questioned in the public space is the overlap that is generated in western public discourses between terrorism and Islamic terrorism. At this regard, in chapter two, Lena Jayyusi makes the important point that Islamic terrorism is widely perceived in Europe as the greatest terrorist threat even though in 2009, for instance, only one out of almost three hundred terrorist attacks in Europe was produced by an Islamist group. Lewis stresses this point with reference to the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 people and injured hundreds more. The bombing was first reported by the western media as Islamist terrorism, then, two days later, it turned out to be a terrorist act from domestic, right-wing, Christian extremists. "Indeed, the recent history of terrorist activity in the US suggested that this [the right-wing, Christian extremism] was, and continues to be, one of the most likely sources of terrorist activity in the US" [p. 262]. Lewis argue that the tendency to blame Muslims is partly due to the connection of the specific terrorism narrative (the Orientalist narrative about the terrorist threat) to a grand narrative played out on the geo-political stage.

Most of the book is about representations and the power of framing and counter-framing. These representations are important parts of the discourses producing justifications for political and military actions and speeches as well as for acts of diplomacy; the persistence of these representations produce several predictable and unpredictable social effects. A number of these "consequences" are mentioned by the editors in the introduction. For instance, they raise such an important point:

> In Russia, the government has tried to link its Chechen problem with international terrorism […] The suppression of Muslim minorities in China north-western Xinjiang region was also framed as China's war on terrorism […] Across the Middle East, often unrepresentative governments have used the pretext of terrorism

further to strengthen their grip on the levers of security states as well as to curtail civil and journalistic liberties. For example, during the 2011 NATO-led bombing of Libya, the government of Muammar al-Qaddafi claimed that the rebels in the Eastern part of the country were supporters of al-Qaeda [p. 5].

Something similar has just happened in Syria, with President Bashar Assad accusing Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Erdogan, of supporting terrorists in the country. As the authors argue in the book, terror "is a label used [globally] by the powerful to justify their own actions and to de-legitimize the response" [p. 23]. The fact that Arab governments have used the "war on terror" discourse to suppress domestic oppositional voices is well illustrated by Helga Tawil-Souri in chapter 14.

Other effects are dealt with by Lena Jayyusi in the second chapter of the book. She considers, for instance, the disproportionate reactions that took place in western societies against Muslims migrants, illustrating the cases of the bans on Muslim women's burqa and niqab in France in 2009 and the ban of minarets in Switzerland. She shows how the discourse of Islamic terrorism and that of the position of women in Islamic countries produce both foreign and internal political reactions and create a fake interrelation between them in public debates.

The relationship between media discourses on Islamic terrorism and media representations of Muslim migrants and asylum seekers (the domestic impact on multiculturalism) is a specifically analyzed object of the book. It is the topic of three chapters dealing mainly with mainstream news media contents in Britain (ch. 8 by Khiabany and Williamson), France (ch. 13 by Mattelart) and Australia (ch. 16 by Lynch et al). Besides the analysis of the media, Khiabany and Williamson describe how the civil rights of British Muslims have been circumscribed, by exploiting the securitarian discourse linked to the Islamist terrorism as a global threat.

The editors argue also that the mediation of terrorism is likely to become increasingly contested and represented by using new and largely unpredictable frames. This has to do with: a) the growing presence of new and alternative media (the new media ecology); b) the presence of important non-Western "old" media broadcasting worldwide (the so-called Al-Jazeera effects); c) the diminished power of the US and the growth of BRICS. In their words, "Both China and India represent civilizations whose roots are not in the Abrahamic religions and their perception of Islam therefore is less likely to be influenced by discourses that refer to the Crusades and the clash of civilizations" [p. 15]. To this regard, it is extremely useful to read the chapter written by Helga Tawil-Souri, where the representations of the "war on terror" in the Arab media are analysed and put in context, illustrating the diversity within the Arabian media systems.

In order to partly capture the complexity of the issue, the editors planned to be as inclusive and open as possible, by considering a large selections of media (newspapers, television, cinema, video games, social media) and genres (news, television series, etc.), by looking at the relationship between media and terrorism from both Western and non-Western perspectives (case studies are collected from South Asia, Russia, The Arab world, etc.) and by holding together different disciplinary insights and methodological approaches (framing analysis, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, newsmaking). This constitutes both the strength of the volume and its weakness. It would

have been useful to include some remarks holding together the heterogeneity of the numerous contributions. The contrast between the critical (even radical) approach of many papers and the paternalistic Anglo-American perspective of others (see, for instance, chapter 4 on "Public Diplomacy versus Terrorism") may generate confusion in the reader.

The editors also tried to address, at least in some parts of the book, the broad social construction of terrorism, refusing a narrower media approach. Toby Miller's paper on the electronic games that reproduce war is a good example of such a collective effort. Miller "points to the well-established relationship between sections of US academia and the US military, going back to the First World War, through the Cold War years and the "war on terror," and how complicit campuses have formed a symbiotic ideological and material relationship with the Pentagon, promoting US interests worldwide as a de-territorialized overlord" [p. 97].

Overall, the book edited by Freedman and Thussu offers an excellent overview of some of the big issues involved in the very complex relationship between terrorism and the media in the current glocal system. A clear value of the book is represented by the intrinsic interest of the numerous case-studies presented, e.g. that of al- Zawahiri's online open meeting for Al Qaeda in 2008, in which he answered questions from the public. The case is illustrated by Seib [p. 66] as an example of Al Qaeda's public diplomacy. It would have been useful to read a few pages relating such an interesting case-study to the debunk of "the myth about the power and popularity of online "jihadist media" in the Arab landscape" [p. 240]. As the example shows, given the value of the empirical material and the theoretical analyses presented in the book, the whole enterprise would have much benefited from a few conclusive remarks by the editors: it would have been an opportunity to link together even the most heterogeneous contributions as well as to detect and develop new topics partially hidden beneath the main arguments developed in the pages.

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