

# Global and local “performance” of terror on the internet: Towards a framework for analysing different dimensions of mediated terrorism

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## Abstract

*This paper argues for a new conceptual framework with which to examine the complex links between global and local dimensions of the discourse on the “war on terror” and the ways in which these intersect and influence each other. Using Butler’s concept of “performativity” and the notion of “affect” as its core, and the internet as the site of analysis, this paper develops a framework to investigate three overlapping and distinct fields of performance: acts of terrorist violence, enactments of counter-measures by states, and the politics of affect among citizens as displayed in responses to and through the transnational, mediated spaces of the internet.*

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Contemporary acts of political violence have global consequences. In terms of the interconnections between terrorist groups, attempts by states to counter terrorism, and public concerns about security, local terrorist incidents and the responses to them have been granted global visibility through their mediatisation. Apart from the incontestable “real” damage to life and property, the enactment of terrorism has inevitable symbolic consequences. The principal aim of this paper is to use different conceptualisations of the notion of “performance” to suggest a conceptual framework with which to systematically examine the mediatisation of terror and the responses to terror by the state and citizens in different global and local contexts. Using the internet as the primary site of research, this paper argues, will provide the opportunity to examine the performance, in terms of words and images, across three fields: acts of terrorist violence; enactments of counter-measures by states; and the politics of affect among citizens as displayed in responses to and through the transnational, mediated spaces of the internet. The uniquely dynamic, internationally accessible, and globally participatory aspects of the internet allows the complex mapping of the discourse of global terrorism, including news footage, reports, video clips, political speeches, as well as online discussions and posts from the general public, particularly since “9/11”. The suggested framework seeks to utilise the concepts of “performance” and “affect” to engage with the discourses on terror, both global and local.

## Intersections of the global and the local

Crucial here are the ways in which global concerns intersect with local variants, and the intertextuality evident in phrases and images, justifications and anxieties expressed by perpetrators, politicians, journalists and the general public across diverse regions of the globe. Anti-terrorism in these regions has displayed both disparate and overlapping

concerns that reflect both a common project against terrorism as a globally present threat to democracy and national concerns that manifest anxieties about regional security, anti-terror laws and the challenge of multi-ethnic and multi-religious populaces. This intersection of global and the local is reflected in the demands and rhetoric of the perpetrators, which contain locally relevant demands expressed in globally recognisable rhetoric. While these are most clearly discernible in the news media, in the fictional realm too, such intertextuality is noticeable in the use of widely recognised sequence of images, mis-en-scene, and allusions in the dialogue. This intermixing between fiction and non-fiction is exemplified, famously, in the immediate responses to 9/11, both by those who had witnessed it first hand and those who had watched the news footage, which included several references to the events unfolding “as in a movie” (e.g. see Sontag, 2003). While there have been several attempts at analysing media representations of 9/11 and other terrorist “events”, none of these has adequately covered the performance of terrorism and the counter-performance of the state.

Roskam’s argument (in *The Age*, 18 July 2007), accusing Judith Brett of denying the existence of the threat of terrorism in Australia, and of erecting an entire edifice, which to him was symptomatic of “left-leaning” thought, is symptomatic of the deep rifts that are evident in discussions and debates on terrorism as a quintessentially 21<sup>st</sup> century threat to societies, both western and non-western. These are not merely intellectual or ethical concerns, but inform policies and regulations on national and international security. Such concerns are not restricted to Europe and North America, but also include regions such as South Asia and the Middle East, where acts of terror and the existence of organisations willing to resort to violence have been a fact of life for quite a while, and where the currency of terrorism has recently assumed new value and a novel configuration, particularly since 9/11. Unsurprisingly, acts of terror in diverse locations, while seemingly retaining global connections, assume particular local significance. This global–local dimension, manifest in pronouncements by perpetrators and victims of terror as well as by the state, is a central feature in enactments of both terror and anti-terror, with the media, broadly conceived, playing a crucial role in the display and performance of these opposing positions. Much has already been written about the iconic status of 9/11 news footage as having assumed a global currency. The grizzly images on the internet of the beheading of kidnap victims in Iraq and the recent attacks in Mumbai were arguably performances for a global audience by disparate extremist groups with localised grievances.

This complex scenario of globally-mediated local acts of terror underlines the importance of both the “real” and symbolic aspects of contemporary terrorism. This is further demonstrated by the British Foreign Secretary Miliband’s recent denunciation of the phrase “war on terror” (*The Guardian*, 15 January 2009) on the grounds that its suggestion of a unified, global enemy, while it had the merit of underlining the gravity of extremist violence, ignored the disparate motivations and identities of terrorist groups. Lashkar-e-Taiba in South Asia, Hezbollah in the Middle East, various Shia and Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq each has a different cause, and are, according to Miliband, as diverse as the extremist groups active in Europe in the 1970s. And yet, while their demands, their terrorist acts, and their victims may be confined to a specific locale, their rhetoric often displays a global awareness and appeal. Similarly, the concept of the “war on terror” allowed politicians and government officials to speak of the acts of terror in

their locales as aspects of a global problem, and consequently of the need to locate such localised acts within a global discourse.

The 9/11 attacks have been seen by several commentators (Scruton, 2002; Buck-Morss, 2003) as a watershed event, marking, for Scruton, the transition to a new form of global governance predicated upon a deep cleavage of cultural and religious difference. Such events are said to challenge the liberal perception and conception of cultural diversity as pluralistic co-habitation in a “global ecumene” or a multicultural nation. They contribute to the reification of difference that resurrects the divisions between a professed “us” and an ostensible “them” drawn along the lines of cultural uniqueness and difference, and pose challenges to security on both the global and national level, and to the cohesion of a nation’s populace. If the performance of terrorism exploits such perceived and real differences and the apparent marginalisation that these apparently contribute to, anti-terror discourse and the ethical values that underlie anti-terror laws have often necessitated the complex and delicate negotiation of such ethnic and religious difference, multicultural policy and citizenship. Expressions of affect from the general public after terrorist incidents and in response to declarations by political leaders too have professed the existence of such difference.

Underlying local anxieties are abiding tensions intrinsic to multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. In Europe, the terrorist bombs in London and Madrid, the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam, and the controversy following the publication of the cartoon in Denmark featuring the Prophet Mohammed have all prompted calls for investigating the consolidation of Islamic radicalism and the emergence of the “enemy within”. In the Middle East, extremist incidents in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq have re-ignited both military responses and a war of words, one consequence of which is the heightened emotional responses from the various publics. South Asia has had a history of conflict along ethnic and religious lines, with separatist groups in Kashmir and Sri Lanka, and the rise of extreme forms of Islam in Pakistan and Afghanistan. And the Bali bombing in Indonesia and Islamic extremism in the Philippines are of concern to South East Asia and Australia. In all these regions, there has emerged a coalition of diverse groups under different names from al Qaida to the Taliban to Laskhar-e-Taiba, whose demands display a complex interlinking of the global and the local, articulated in anti-Western and anti-state rhetoric.

Equally, counter-terrorism in these regions has displayed both disparate and overlapping concerns that reflect both a common project against terrorism as a globally present threat to democracy and national sensitivities regarding the enactment of security policies on a multi-ethnic and multi-religious populace. The articulations of the state also consequently portray a global-local dialectic, revealing global concerns refracted through a local prism. For instance, whereas in Europe and Australia the challenge regarding counter-terrorism has been around the rise of radical Islam in multi-ethnic societies, terrorist incidents in India, prompted by historical sub-national movements in Kashmir and elsewhere, have been recently re-interpreted by the state as evidence of global terrorism. The rhetoric of both the state and the perpetrators, therefore, arguably shares a similar framework in terms of the iteration of global discourse on terrorism in relation to local acts of terror (Harindranath, 2007; 2009).

Thirdly, global–local dialectic is also reflected in the public response to both terrorist acts and the states’ attempts at countering them in multicultural societies. If the performance of terrorism exploits perceived and real differences, counter-terrorism

policies and the ethical values that underlie anti-terror laws have often necessitated the complex and delicate negotiation of such ethnic and religious difference, multicultural policy and citizenship. Expressions of affect from the general public after terrorist incidents and in response to declarations by political leaders also have professed or contested the existence of such difference.

The politics of affect embraces the uneasy alliance between “real” and mediated experience of terrorist events mentioned earlier. For Buck-Morss (2003), 9/11, by staging violence as a global spectacle, has initiated a novel configuration of extremist violence, the media and a global public sphere. The global–local dialectic that is intrinsic to this configuration, she argues, requires a revision of the politics of “think global, act local”, replacing it with “think global, act global”. This is a difficult task, as there is not only no agreement on what constitutes the discursive terrain of the global public sphere, but also because its performative modality is predominantly visual and immanent, which entices immediate empathetic identification which disappears just as easily.

The centrality of spectacle to contemporary global politics was exemplified in the media event surrounding the release of about a dozen British sailors by Iran in 2007. While the question of whether or not the sailors had transgressed international maritime boundaries may never be determined with any certainty, what is perhaps even more significant is the ostentation of the display of the young sailors on Iranian television, and a subsequent counter-display after their release on British television. The capture itself seemed incidental to the jostling for position in terms of spectacle. Seemingly dissatisfied with the infliction of manifold destruction, the contagion of conflict has taken on another dimension, that of imagery. In the context of instantaneous global communication and satellite broadcasting, images have assumed a specific currency.

## **Analysing media discourse**

There has been a raft of academic research and publications on post-9/11 global culture. A few have examined how the immediacy of television and new technologies of communication have contributed to the dissemination of images of terrorism in real time, and the social and political consequences of this (Derian, 2005). In *Portents of the real: a primer for post-9/11 America*, Willis (2005), informed by cultural studies, provides a complex commentary on the political ramifications of “the culture of pathological worry” and the state-sanctioned “narrative of good vs. evil”. Studies with a broader remit have sought to examine the media images as “spectacle”, characteristic of the post-Fordist age. A recent example of this is Retort’s *Afflicted powers* (2005), which revives Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation and combines it with Guy Debord’s theories on spectacle to analyse post-9/11 global politics and Empire.

Visuality is crucial to the performance of terrorist acts. It has been noted, both in popular media and in academic studies, that publicity is the “oxygen” that extremists seek, a proposition that has recently animated discussions regarding the reporting of terrorist incidents, their aftermath and of perpetrators’ demands. These debates are indicative of the fact that, following on from 9/11, both chronologically as well as in terms of the modality of news coverage that it launched, news organisations have had an uneasy relationship with extremists, formed on the basis of the former’s constant search for audience rating and the latter’s need for publicity. As Nacos (2002) has observed, even more than harming immediate victims, the violent “street theater” of

terrorism seeks an audience of mass publics through the media. This symbiosis between the media and terrorism is indicative of the fact that media coverage is vital for both terrorism and the understanding of it (van der Veer, 2004). If, as formulated by Appadurai (1996), global mediascapes visually and narratively, through characters and plots, provide the “scripts” with which modern cultures imagine themselves and others in a global environment, mediated terrorism and the political and public responses to it are redolent of the complex interplay between the local and the global. Sontag’s (2003) argument about the paradoxical status of representations in contemporary media-rich societies, mentioned above, underlines this point. It has become *de rigueur* among a few theorists inspired by Baudrillard that, in the current media-saturated world the image reigns supreme, has even taken over as “real” experience. Sontag’s point however is different—not so much that the image has supplanted the real but that the vocabulary available to us to describe and even experience spectacular incidents is informed by mediated imagery.

In media research, most post-9/11 studies have focussed on an analysis of media representations and modes of production (e.g. Zelizer & Allan, 2002; Nacos, 2002; van Der Veer & Munshi, 2004; Allan & Zelizer, 2004). A few, such as Kavoori and Fraley (2006) have attempted to understand and theorise the broader thematic issues related to media’s coverage of terrorism, exploring orientations, genres, contexts and frames. For instance, Cottle (2006) in Kavoori and Fraley explores the “communicative architecture” of television news coverage of terrorism. Animating the van Der Veer and Munshi (2004) collection, containing case-studies based largely on textual analyses of news, is the conviction that societies in the Middle East and Asia are less progressive than those in the West. The essays therefore have broader concerns than textual representation, and the case studies, examining depictions and silences in the media, attempt to demonstrate the complex socio-cultural formations in Islamic and Asian societies, as well as the diverse ways in which public discussions of terrorism are curtailed in the West. While such publications provide illuminative and challenging commentaries and analyses, there has been no research on the complex ways in which the discourse and performance of terrorism and anti-terrorism complement and feed each other, and significantly, how this performance contributes to the formation of specific structures of feeling.

These regimes of emotion shape notions of belonging among, for instance, Muslim communities in Australia, the United Kingdom and India. Issues pertaining to the nature of civil society, belonging and democracy are increasingly at the forefront of public debate. Exemplary here are the current concerns regarding the emerging global civil society, to which contemporary technologies of communication are said to contribute (Benhabib, 1996; Gross, 2002; Harindranath, 2006). Of primary significance here is the politics of affect in relation to post-9/11 global discourse. The legal, rhetorical and emotional aspects of this discourse are of central importance as they impact on questions of race, religion and the politics of exclusion and inclusion. Derrida’s (2003) diagnosis of contemporary terrorism as a symptom of an “autoimmune disorder” is relevant here. He extends the analogy of the disorder, whereby an organism’s defence mechanism displays an involuntary suicide, thereby threatening its ability to defend against an external aggressor, to denote terrorism’s effects on the body politic include an undermining of democracy and its legal institutions, as well as the demarcation between secular and religious forces within it.

The imposition of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) in India and the Patriot Act in the United States of America, and the debates regarding the duration of detention without trial of terrorist suspects in the United Kingdom, exemplify Derrida's point. Significant in this context is the changing relationship between the West and its Islamic "other", and political consequences and media representations of this relationship, in so far as it has been figured in terms of the intractability of Islam within discourses of globalisation and liberal democracy. Several theorists have explored this dynamic—for example, Ameli (2002) and Buck-Morss (2003). This climate of fear and the racialisation of politics contribute to contemporary notions of civil society and belonging. In light of Roland Robertson's (1992) seminal account of globalisation as something that involves an emerging "global consciousness", it is worth noting that since 9/11 there has been the emergence of a new "global consciousness" of terrorism, in part because the language and mediated imagery of terrorism has been invested with global currency.

Huntington's infamous "clash of civilizations" thesis has been adopted as an organising principle in the post-9/11 political culture, in which diverse protagonists, assuming extreme positions, have developed binary oppositions between the so-called democratic (mostly but not exclusively Western) and the putative "Islamic" worlds. This discursive construction of a supposed clash also underlies justifications for the "war on terror" that has assumed global proportions, forming, as Erjavec and Volcic (2007) argue following Fairclough, a global "discursive order". Like other global discourses, however, the "war on terror" displays a local variant, in which the specificities of local and regional politics have been able to establish links, mostly dubious, with the concerns expressed globally. One of the more significant aspects of this is the refraction of the Muslim-as-Other binary through the lens of local political pragmatism. The concerns expressed by Roskam, mentioned above, need to be examined in this context: the immediate effects of acts of terrorism are undeniably "real", but the discursive politics underlying the local manifestations of the global war on terror and the justifications to which these contribute also need to be accounted for. Examining the "performance" of political leaders' mediated responses to acts of terror allows for a closer examination of these manifestations and justifications in different countries and regions. Habermas's distinction between three types of terrorist activity is relevant here: "indiscriminate guerrilla warfare" (typified by Palestinian or Sri Lankan suicide militants), "paramilitary guerrilla warfare" (national liberation movements) and global terrorism, which have even less political legitimacy (cited in Borradori, 2003, p. 56).

Butler (2004) has made a persuasive case about the public sphere as being constituted by both what is and cannot be said. The media, as central to the formation and maintenance of the public sphere in modern democracies, embody the limits of what can be uttered and shown. These limits of the sayable and the see-able are regulated by both social and cultural conventions of what is considered decent and acceptable, as well as by prescriptive policies that police media representations. The recent controversies surrounding the exhibition of the artist Bill Henson's photographs in Australia, on the grounds of decency in relation to images of children, and the BBC's refusal, on the grounds of its avowed policy of objectivity, to telecast a charity campaign for donations for victims of warfare in Gaza demonstrate the validity of Butler's argument. On the other hand, however, the conventions and policies that underpin such regulatory practices are themselves revealing of the contestations and debates that characterise the public sphere in Australia and the United Kingdom, and the moral values and ethical considerations that underlie them.

What does this mean in terms of media and terrorism? The variously mediatised performative aspects of terrorism function within such conventions and policies, and at times transgress the limits prescribed by them. This is revealed, for instance, in Al-Jazeera's telecast of Bin Laden's pronouncements against the American media's refusal to do so in the interest of national security, and in the affect caused by images on the internet of ritualised beheading of hostages by extremists. While the former, in particular, has been rightly seen as indicators of the limits of Western democracies in which the interests of governments and their policies are seen to over-ride the right to information and free speech (van der Veer, 2004; Butler, 2004), it is possible to locate in both Bin Laden's proclamations and the justifications for the refusal to telecast them the opposing performative elements of mediatised terrorism.

### **The internet as a research site**

As a conduit and a virtual space for the mediatisation of these multifarious aspects of global discourses on terrorism, the internet provides a unique opportunity for the analysis of those discourses. The technology of the internet, particularly its interactivity, has enabled the sharing of information and user-generated content, so much so that it has generally been accepted as a space for national and transnational political activity (McNair, 2008; Hassan, 2008; Castells, 2001; Rheingold, 1993). Crucial here are two, relatively uncontested, aspects of the internet. Firstly, its technology and its complex architecture engenders the co-presence of texts and images, which are hyper-linked. Secondly, the internet, as a global digital network of social and political "networks", a virtual geography that transgresses traditional national borders and orthodox cartographies, promotes, as Castells' (1997; 2001) has pointed out, a radical transformation in global and national political spheres. These two aspects together constitute arguments about the potential of the internet for the actualisation of deliberative democracy: decentralised cultural production allows for direct involvement of participants through blogs, posts and transnational discussions. While the debate on whether this entails a democratisation of communication is unresolved (Hindman, 2009), Castells' (1997) argument about the relations between network society, the politics of identity and social movements is significant to this paper's focus on the complex network of inter-relations between mediatised political violence, counter-terrorism and public concerns within and across regions.

In addition to the iconography of terrorist spectacle, the internet has facilitated the emergence of a "networked adversary" promoting a single global narrative (Ranstrop, 2007). As pointed out in Eriksson and Gicomello (2007), security in the digital age requires a close examination of terrorist networks in cyberspace. In addition to this, however, the internet, as an *originating*, as opposed to a merely transmission medium, provides the opportunity for new forms of interaction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). It has consequently become a site for not only the publicity of terror, but also for the contestations of and justifications for state responses and public assessments of security. By examining the intricate network of performances from extremists, political leaders and the general public, it is possible to analyse new formations of identity politics based on physical and virtual religious and ethnic networks.

What is crucial here is the complex inter-relationship, as manifested through the internet, between the mediated performance of terrorism, counter-terrorism by the state, and the emotional and political responses of the public, all of which evoke diverse conceptions of the cultural politics of difference. The choice of the internet as a primary

field of analysis therefore constitutes an innovative and significant possibility for the examination of the complex web of narratives that together constitute the global and local dimensions of the mediation of terrorism. While the hyper-textual and multimedia dimensions of the technology makes it an ideal site for a multi-regional study of the mediation of terrorism and counter-terrorism, its apparent openness for user-generated content permits the examination of public responses to terrorism.

Paradoxically, the technology also allows for the performance of acts of terror. The beheading of hostages, whose images, posted on the web, have a global reach, arguably becomes an effective act of global terror through its enactment on the internet. As Retort (2005) argues, the extremist adherents of radical Islam, despite their traditional disavowal of the image, have exploited the internet's potential for globalising spectacle.

Apart from the internet as the site of data and analysis, the other major innovation in this approach is its methodology. Firstly, qualitative analysis of the diverse types of internet content presents a challenge (Consalvo et al., 2004), and there is as yet little agreement on standard ways of carrying out research on interactive multimedia. The method of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) proposed by Herring (2004), while adequate for the study of posts and online discussions as verbal language, requires further refinement before it can be applied to images, clips, graphics and their inter-relations on the internet landscape. Utilising the multi-modal social semiotic analysis elaborated in Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and attempted in Herring et al. (2002) enables the refinement of a methodology specifically suited for the analysis of the internet's multimedia environment.

The concept of "performance" is apposite here. While there have been several attempts at analysing media representations of 9/11 and other terrorist "events", none of these has adequately covered the performance of terrorism, the counter-performance of the state and public affect. "Performance", as conceptualised by Butler (1993), differs from the notion of "mediatised performance" used by Cottle (2004) in his analysis of the murder of Stephen Lawrence and its aftermath in London, and also differs from the more recent use of the concept in Eyerman's (2008) account of the assassination of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam as a "social performance". These manifold formulations of "performance", singly and together, offer a promising way of examining the complex network of the three groups of actors (perpetrators, the state and the public) in the chosen regions.

Butler's (1993) conceptualisation of "performativity" is relevant to here in two important ways. Firstly, her emphasis on the process of recitation and reiteration of discourses as constituting specific cultural and historical practices enables the systematic examination of the repetition and iteration of language and images characteristic of the global-local interaction identified in this paper. Secondly, performativity, construed as discourses that constitute the object, facilitates the close analysis of the enactment of terror, counter-terrorism and security in multi-ethnic societies. Cottle (2004) and Eyerman (2008), building on Victor Turner's analysis of ritual as social performance in their analysis of the two murders as mediatised events, engage with the wider context of institutional and societal racism, and radical Islam in Europe, respectively. Their conceptualisation of performance provides a useful framework for the analysis of the ritualised aspects of enactments of terror as spectacle, and for the examination of how terrorism and counter-terrorism impact on notions of belonging and citizenship. Synthesising these three conceptions and applications of the notion of "performance" provides the main conceptual scaffolding of this approach.

Given the aim to trace the network of the interlinked fields of terrorism, counter-terrorism and public response to both as manifested on the internet, the analytical framework may combine discourse analysis of texts, visual analysis of clips and images from chosen websites, and a broad sociological analysis of the performative aspects of the three fields in, for instance, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia. As stated earlier, while existing research has mostly focussed on the news coverage of 9/11, there have been few comparable studies on the coverage of terrorist incidents in these regions, and fewer on the inter-relations between them.

The dynamic environment of the internet will allow access to news stories, news clips from diverse sources, as well as blogs and online discussions sites with contributions from the general public. The qualitative, multi-modal analysis of the different websites can potentially elicit the following discursive domains of performance in the three chosen fields, the analysis of which can locate the commonalities and differences between these fields across different regions.

1. Interpretive and classificatory performance: the explanatory and classificatory aspects of the process of “recontextualisation”, the re-presentation of social events through the contextual rationale of another social event, which in turn influences the ways in which these events are represented, evaluated and legitimised (Fairclough, 2003). What is central for our purposes is the way in which recontextualisation contributes to the production of particular interpretations of terrorist events by the media and the public, and how these are related to other discursive regimes. An example of this is then Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee’s attempt to equate 9/11 with “Islamic extremism” in India (Chakravartty, 2002).
2. Spectacle as performance: the visual analysis of the iconography of mediatised terrorism—that is, clips and images of both enactments and the media coverage of acts of terror as ritualised performance. Firstly, this adds a crucial dimension to the analysis: it is possible to locate the spectacular aspects of acts of terror and the efforts to counter them through the invocation of specific moral and legal discourses and national histories. Secondly, the visual aspects of terrorist incidents contribute in important ways to the circulation of discourses on terror, and how such acts are imagined in the public sphere. Such imaginings and how they in turn contribute to notions of otherness or belonging are crucial to the study of the intersections of terrorism discourse and democratic formations. The significance of spectacle on the internet is illustrated in the broadcast on Al Jazeera of the images of the ritual beheading of prisoners in Iraq, and the posting on YouTube of images of alleged torture from Abu Ghraib.
3. Political performance: the linguistic and visual aspects of terrorism as enactments designed to cause political, social and moral instability, and of the “counter-performance” of the state and the range of discursive strategies adopted by the main players and most visible actors in the political scene. Such performative actions have both manifest and latent symbolic reference, and such social performances, like theatrical ones, symbolise particular meanings only because they relate to more general, taken-for-granted meaning structures—in this case, conceptions of extremism and national security—within which their performances are staged. Video clips of the British Foreign Secretary’s recent pronouncements on the phrase “war on terror”, and the Pakistani Prime Minister’s response to the 2008 Mumbai attacks are illustrations of political performance.

4. The performance of affect: a close analysis of blogs and online discussions from the readers of the diverse websites to examine their emotional and political responses to acts of terrorism, security policies of the state, and to perceived enemies and threats to personal and national security. The legal, rhetorical and emotional aspects of public affect are of central importance as they impact on questions of race, religion, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. The climate of fear and the racialisation of politics contribute to contemporary notions of civil society and belonging. An instance of affective performance emerged on online discussion pages of the Indian television news agency NDTV following the attacks in Hyderabad, displaying a variety of responses to the incident, including deliberations of the role of Muslims in India.

The richness of the data and analysis will stem from the examination of the ways in which global discourse on terrorism, including the “war on terror”, intersect with local enactments of terror and counter-terrorism, and in important ways contribute to the sense of security and threat among the public. Crucially, these in turn contribute to justifications of new policies to counter terrorism, and to the politics of affect among different ethnic and religious groups in the various regions. A clear understanding of the commonalities and variations of these across different regions, and how these in turn reveal local political and social concerns, is crucial to the development of inter-state and inter-regional cooperation on international security.

To conclude, the proposed framework provides the opportunity to analyse news reports, blogs, news clips, photographs on relevant internet sites to systematically delineate the performance intrinsic to terrorism and counter-terrorism across the different geographical regions. It enables the examination of the ways in which global concerns about terrorism intersect with local variants, and the iteration evident in phrases and images, justifications and anxieties expressed by perpetrators, politicians and journalists. This refraction of the global through the local is manifested in both counter-terrorism in multi-ethnic societies and in the demands and rhetoric of the perpetrators, which contain locally relevant demands expressed in globally recognisable rhetoric. Examining the performance of terrorism and counter-terrorism on the internet allows the tracking of the main constituents of public responses, both emotional and political, to both acts of terror as well as the political rhetoric justifying counter-terrorism in multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities in national, regional and transnational contexts, and to develop, using the distinctive characteristic of the internet as a transnational, multimedia space and a conduit for the global-local dialectic, a relevant analytical framework to examine the complex network of interconnections between the three fields, both within and across diverse national contexts and geographical regions.

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