

# **International Journal of the Humanities**

Volume 2, Number 2

Article: HC04-0158-2004

## **Are the Media Globalising Political Discourse?**

The War On Terrorism Case Study

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**Edited by Tom Nairn and Mary Kalantzis**



# International Journal of the Humanities

Volume 2, Number 2



This paper is published at [www.Humanities-Journal.com](http://www.Humanities-Journal.com)  
a series imprint of the [UniversityPress.com](http://UniversityPress.com)

First published in Australia in 2004-2006 by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd at  
[www.Humanities-Journal.com](http://www.Humanities-Journal.com)

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ISSN 1447-9508 (Print)  
ISSN 1447-9559 (Online)

The International Journal of the Humanities is a peer-refereed journal published annually. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by the Associate Editors through an anonymous referee process.

Papers presented at the Second International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities,  
Monash University Centre in Prato, Italy, 20-23 July 2004.

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# Are the Media Globalising Political Discourse?

## The War On Terrorism Case Study

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### Abstract

*The paper challenges the claim that an increasingly global media is creating a homogenisation of political discourses at the international level. In particular, it explores the extent to which the U.S. government managed to affect global perceptions of the War On Terrorism through the media in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 events.*

*The research starts from the consideration that the U.S. government created, through the repetition of consistent messages, a very specific interpretation of the 9/11 events (a War On Terrorism frame) and attempted to export it globally in order to support its own foreign policy objectives. The analysis then focuses on the comparison between the War On Terrorism frame as delivered by the U.S. government and its reproduction within both the political and media discourses in a range of local cases at the international level. They include the U.S., France, Italy and Pakistan.*

*The research questions current literature on globalisation by drawing on political communications' framing theory. More in detail, it suggests first that there is no evidence of an on-going globalisation of either political or media discourses; secondly that the local nation-state level plays a key role in understanding the mechanisms of frames' spreading at the global level; and thirdly that national culture is a major determinant in defining local political and media discourses' contents, even in presence of a strong persuasion attempt by a powerful international actor such as the U.S. government.*

**Keywords:** Framing, War On Terrorism, Media, Political Discourse, Media Discourse, Globalisation, Cultural Imperialism

### Introduction: The War On Terrorism

We live in an 'age of terror':<sup>1</sup> terrorism is portrayed by politicians as the biggest threat of our time. After a series of attacks against Western targets and a latest "spectacular" in Madrid in March 2004, there is a widespread idea that democracies around the world are engaged, willingly or not, in a war against terrorism. The War On Terrorism seems to have become a historical label marking the beginning of a new era. It is increasingly regarded as the new ordering principle of international relations. Its scope, capacity to affect international politics from the international to the local level and potential to last, in the words of the secretary of State C. Powell, 'as anyone can imagine',<sup>2</sup> can be compared to that of the Cold War.

Before 9/11 and its immediate aftermath, however, the War On Terrorism did not exist. Although the U.S. reaction to the "attacks" appeared an understandable act of self-defence, the response could have taken a completely different form. The attacks could have been dealt with by means of law enforcement only or through covert intelligence operations. The U.S. could have reacted through the UN structures rather than promoting a variable-geometry coalition against terrorism. A variety of alternative lines of action could have been followed. The U.S. administration's choice, pre-emptive strike, was just one of them. Attacking Afghanistan was compatible with a very specific interpretation of the events as an 'act of war' within a global conflict, the War On Terrorism, that witnesses the struggle between 'freedom-loving countries' defending their way of life and 'evil' terrorists. Such an interpretation was instrumental to pursuing specific interests and was part of the U.S. government's effort to frame the events in a certain way.

This view is supported by conspiracy theorists who regard the War On Terrorism as the instrument adopted by the U.S. to establish its power on a global scale. In this perspective the War On

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Corbin, "The Age of Terror," *The Guardian*, March 17 2004.

<sup>2</sup> On September 16 2001 C. Powell said: 'We're probably going to be in the counter-terrorism business to a very high level of intensity for as long as anyone can imagine, as long as there are people out there who are willing to do the kinds of things those terrorists did this week' (U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/4923pf.htm>)

This is emphasized again on September 21 2001: 'it is a campaign that will go on for as long as it takes to be successful', 'for as long as I can imagine' (U.S. Department of State,

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<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/5004pf.htm>, accessed May 2004)



Terrorism is the ultimate propaganda campaign, ranging across all aspects of life and pursued on all media outlets, selling America as if it was a commercial brand. Even leaving this aside, the consideration of the widespread support for the U.S. action against Al-Qaida in Afghanistan or of the very fact that the idea of a struggle against terrorism has become one of the main priorities on political agendas all over the world, encourage thinking that the U.S. government has indeed affected international perceptions of the 9/11 events and their development.

The suspicion is not only that we are witnessing the creation of a global political discourse, but also that this is being imposed by a specific political actor. The consideration of the nature of the War On Terrorism, not only a struggle against terrorism, but also a fight for "hearts and minds", a propaganda campaign selling freedom and democracy ('our civilisation') and 'what the U.S. stands for', could actually lead to further labelling this process as an act of "cultural imperialism". The media seem to have contributed to this through their massive coverage of the 9/11 attacks. In fact, during and immediately after the attacks the world media attention was focused on the U.S. government's reaction, therefore opening up direct communication channels with the rest of the world. In this context the U.S. could be regarded as a sender of a message and foreign countries as receivers.

This paper essentially explores whether there is any empirical evidence that the media are contributing to a globalisation of political discourse. The argument will be developed in four steps. It first sketches the theoretical framework of the research: the War On Terrorism case study allows to test a series of widely shared, although questionable, assumptions about the role of the media and communications technologies in the globalisation phenomenon. The second part is a description of the empirical findings of the research: it briefly presents some observations about the national contexts which have been analysed. The findings refer to both political and media discourses and do not provide evidence supporting a homogenisation of contents on a global scale. The third section deals with the interpretation of the data: I will attempt at explaining why globalisation is not occurring. I will particularly try to define the mechanisms and factors preventing it. The paper will end with conclusions outlining the empirical, theoretical and methodological lessons that can be drawn from the case study.

### **A Theoretical Framework: The Broader Questions**

From a theoretical point of view the research starts by picking up Tomlinson's critique of a conflation of culture and its technologies within the globalisation debate:

Discussions of globalization often take "culture" to mean something rather different [than 'meaning construction'],<sup>3</sup> eliding it with the globalizing communications and media technologies via which cultural representations are transmitted. [...] Now though communications technologies are absolutely central to the globalization process, their development is clearly not identical with cultural globalisation. (Tomlinson, John. *Globalization and Culture*. Oxford: Polity, 1999, p. 20)

This is the main point being questioned by the study and is related to other unconvincing, although widely shared, assumptions that can be found elsewhere in the literature about dependency theory, media imperialism and cultural imperialism. They are briefly reproduced here:

*The media reproduce political ideology.* According to this view, particularly in Marxist critique, the media reproduce frameworks consonant with the interests of dominant classes.<sup>4</sup>

*There is a unidirectional flow of information among countries.* This idea is especially present in media imperialism and dependency theory. While the former focuses on unbalanced flows of information among countries,<sup>5</sup> dependency theory sees the role of culture, including television and other media production, as both economic and ideological.<sup>6</sup> This leads to concentrating on structures and economic factors rather than on the interaction of the audience with the actual texts or content of the cultural products.<sup>7</sup>

*Information has necessarily an impact on the receiving audience.* The audience is seen as passive and absorbing the messages it receives. The simple diffusion of information or of a cultural product (ranging from music to McDonald's hamburgers) is interpreted as evidence that the local context is being affected by globalisation.

*The instantaneousness of information transmission annihilates space.* This refers to the idea that globalisation creates a sense of interconnectedness and proximity that make the spatial dimension less relevant to our lives. J. Tomlinson calls this

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<sup>3</sup> For Tomlinson the question of globalisation's impact on culture has to do with 'how globalisation alters the context of meaning construction: how it affects people's sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life.' John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Oxford: Polity, 1999). p.20.

<sup>4</sup> James Curran, "The New Revisionism in Mass Communication Research: A Reappraisal," *European Journal of Communication* 5, no. 2-3 (June 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Kwadwo Anokwa, Carolyn A. Lin, and Michael B. Salwen, *International Communication: Concepts and Cases* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), p.230.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.



“deterritorialization” while Giddens refers to it as a “disembedding” from time and space.<sup>8</sup>

*Lack of empirical data.* In addition to this comes the consideration that a substantial part of the talk about globalisation or cultural imperialism is abstract. Where empirical evidence exists, it is limited to very restricted fields where “culture” is meant either in economic terms (spread of capitalism, advertisement, the diffusion of brand-specific products), in terms of the entertainment industry’s contents (cinema, TV, music), or the technological dimension of the new media, especially the Internet.

The paper aims at challenging these points. It argues that the interactions among actors, especially political authorities and media, are more complex.<sup>9</sup> The very idea that there is any such single entity as “the media” is misleading: the “the media” becomes an unhelpful catchall label creating a fictional actor that in reality does not exist. There are different media channels such as TV, newspapers, the Internet whose performances are very different.<sup>10</sup>

The research also stresses that it is necessary to look at the contents of the information exchanges: in fact, despite the talk of an ongoing globalisation, generally understood as a “homogenisation”, it is not clear what it is that is being “globalized”. This applies to the topic of cultural imperialism: what is culture? Which aspects of culture are supposedly being imposed?

The fact that a communications infrastructure exists does not mean that contents are necessarily transmitted through it and, even if they are, it does

not mean they will have any impact on the receiving audience. The audience is a far more complex actor than a passive “sponge”.

## Research Design

These considerations have led to the choice of a research design capable to capture the interaction between media and political actors while focusing on the contents of their exchanges. The final objective, within the case study of the War On Terrorism, is measuring the actual extent of political and media discourses’ homogenisation.

This is done by means of content analysis of media discourses (national newspapers articles)<sup>11</sup> and political discourses (governmental public statements)<sup>12</sup> in a range of international cases. They are, apart from the U.S., Italy, France and Pakistan. The time span of the analysis ranges from September 11 2001, day of the attacks against the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, to November 13 2001, fall of Kabul and end of the first phase of the War in Afghanistan. The method of analysis combines frame theory with critical discourse analysis.<sup>13</sup>

Framing theory belongs to the theoretical kit of political communications and relies on the idea that issues can be constructed through language, especially through selection and saliency. According to Entman a frame promotes an issue’s problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.<sup>14</sup>

By establishing comparisons between political and media discourses I will be looking for the reproduction of the U.S. government’s War On Terrorism frame as evidence of a homogenisation of

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> The politics/media relationship is interpreted in a variety of ways by different scholars, depending on which side is regarded as dominant and able to impose its influence on the other party. Chomsky’s propaganda model (1994) emphasizes the politicians’ capacity to shape media contents. Other approaches, for example Cook (1998) or Graber, McQuail and Norris (1998), identify the media as the actor dictating the political agenda. This research supports the view interpreting the media/politicians relationship as ambivalent (Cohen, 1963). On the one hand the media are able to set the political agenda: politicians rely on the media, even if only because they get first to the information, to know which issues are perceived as important by the public and need to be dealt with. The media also set the public’s agenda, as Cohen writes, not by telling them what to think, but ‘what to think about’. On the other hand politicians can affect media’s agenda: the media rely on politicians as a constant source of stories and information. There is therefore a reciprocal exchange among the media and the political worlds.

<sup>10</sup> Content analysis of six different British national newspapers within the Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks Project (Final Report, 2004 forthcoming) reveals that there are different media and as many different media performances. The media seem to be more a “stage” than an “actor”. This does not mean ignoring media responsibilities. The different media do contribute to shape their contents by applying news selection criteria. The final result, or the sum of all the perspectives by the different media, is not, however, a choice by “the media” as a conscious entity. While the media are not just a showcase of information flowing out of control, they should be better conceived as, at least, a heterogeneous actor.

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<sup>11</sup> The study has been carried out on national newspapers: *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere Della Sera* (Italy), *Le Monde* and *Liberation* (France), *The Dawn* (English newspaper from Pakistan). The sample includes all articles mentioning “terrorism” (“terrorismo” on the Italian newspapers, “terrorisme” on the French dailies) that have been published during the time span under study (September 11-November 13 2001).

<sup>12</sup> The political discourse includes all public statements made by political authorities (Presidents, Prime ministers, Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Defence as well as their spokespersons) in the U.S., Italy, France and Pakistan within the time span under analysis (September 11-November 13 2001).

<sup>13</sup> I refer to the definition of discourse used by critical discourse analysis: ‘I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world’. Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse : Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 124. For more on critical discourse analysis and its method see also Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> I am referring to framing theory (Entman) for the detection and analysis of frames both in political and media discourses. ‘To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’. Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993), p.52.

contents. The U.S. government's rhetoric after 9/11 was in fact dominated by the repetition of very consistent messages. They clearly constitute an "American" War On Terrorism, which can be described in very essential terms as the following:

The 9/11 events were explained as an 'act of war' on civilization (problem definition) by evil terrorists (moral evaluation) motivated by hate for human life (causal interpretation) against which the world should unite to defeat barbarity and defend freedom (treatment recommendation).

## **Observations**

The main finding coming from examining the contents of the War On Terrorism frame in each national case is that they have very little in common with their American counterpart. The War On Terrorism frame is particularly broad and complex. Its contents could be described at length to demonstrate how different the framing of the 9/11 events by international politicians is from the U.S. government's War On Terrorism. This, however, goes far beyond the scope of this paper. Here I am just going to make a few examples to stress the point that it is possible to identify a variety of War On Terrorism frames, none of which is an exact reproduction of the U.S. government's model.

## **Political Discourses**

The analysis of the political discourses reveals that there is no evidence of the U.S. government's War On Terrorism frame being reproduced in the national contexts I have examined. What is very clear is that local political actors actively appropriate the War On Terrorism frame: despite listening to the U.S. government's message through the media, they develop their own interpretation of the events. The national frames are characterized by new and independent features, by the repetition of similar terms acquiring different meanings, by the absence of key concepts of the US government's frame and by the presence of different systems of meaning. These elements will now be looked at more in detail.

*Independent features.* They are new aspects which are not present in the U.S. government's War On Terrorism. The Italian case, for example, develops an "economic" interpretation of the frame: the War On Terrorism is not properly termed a "war", rather a 'struggle' or fight that has to be won by addressing the causes of terrorism, mainly poverty and desperation. Terrorism is a phenomenon associated to the Middle East and a practical proposal made by the Italian government for tackling the issue is a "Marshall Plan" for the area, particularly to ease the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the U.S. Government's frame, the War On Terrorism seems to cover a variety of measures and ambitious objectives. It is a 'new kind of war' to be waged on all fronts: judicial, financial, diplomatic,

military and it is aimed at fighting all forms of terrorism everywhere in the world. The global approach and the use of a variety of policy tools are present also in the Italian framing. They are extended, however, to tackling a broader range of issues than terrorism alone. Italian authorities claim that their fight against terrorism should also deal with the 'governability of globalisation', the need of economic progress in developing countries, even the protection of the environment. In the economic interpretation of the Italian government tackling these issues is a prerequisite for addressing the causes - poverty, desperation, regional economic imbalances- of terrorism.

France also develops a different interpretation of the cause of terrorism: differently from Italy the French government states that 'we must not believe that terrorism is created by world's injustice'. This is exactly the opposite of what emerges from the Pakistani political discourse: the causes of terrorism are political disputes. They are sources of injustice and the most controversial are the Palestine/Israel confrontation and the situation in Kashmir. While also other foreign politicians mention the Middle-East crisis, the Kashmir issue is definitely local.

*Repetition of terms.* Despite the reproduction of the same words or expressions across the case studies, they assume a completely different meaning in relation to the broader context in which they are used. A very good example is represented by the concept of "freedom". The U.S. government interpreted the 9/11 events as an 'attack on freedom and democracy'. The Italian Prime Minister also defined the events as an attack on 'our freedoms'. The similarity between the meaning attributed to the attacks in the U.S. political discourse and the Italian case, however, is only apparent. The Italian government talks, in fact, about "freedoms", referring with this expression to the constitutionally granted individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of thought, assembly, etc. The French politicians also refer to 'freedoms' as the rights granted by the Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme. Both the Italian and French politicians' reference to 'freedom' is therefore much more specific than the popular, but perhaps too generic, American "freedom". "Freedom" is therefore understood in local terms, as a "cluster of freedoms" expressing what it means to be free in an Italian/French society.

*Omissions.* These are essential features of the U.S. government's War On Terrorism frame that are missing in local political discourses' portrayal of the 9/11 events. The narrative concerning the terrorists' identity and motives, as well as the 'doctrine' of pre-emptive strike represent two examples. They are both missing in the rhetoric of the Italian and French politicians.

The terrorists in the U.S. government's frame are 'evil', live in 'holes', operate in 'shadows', they

'prey on the innocent and run for cover'. They 'hate life', particularly they hate the U.S. 'because America loves freedom'. There is no point in negotiating with them because they have no real purpose to achieve, no political end: they are simply, as President Bush puts it, 'flat evil'. The whole imagery of the contrast between good and evil, light and dark is missing from the frames in the European contexts. Terrorists, although responsible of deeds labelled as 'mad bestiality' (Italian President), are motivated by desperation and poverty (Italy) or fanaticism (France). Even if no killing of innocent people can be justified, there is an idea that, by acting on the cause of that desperation through economic development (in the Italian case) or through education and knowledge (in the French view), it is possible to provide a solution to terrorism.

This is possibly also why the theme of pre-emptive strike is not present in the European political discourses. Pre-emptive strike "makes sense" in the context of a fight against a ruthless enemy who has no regard whatsoever for the life of innocents, so evil that it is almost dehumanised and with whom it is not possible to establish a sensible dialogue. Pre-emptive attack becomes meaningless in a political context in which there is a belief that a solution can be found.

*Different systems of meanings.* Each political actor seems to be living in a different world: while the U.S. government claims that 9/11 'has changed everything' and that all countries are confronted with the choice of either taking side with the terrorists or with the 'freedom-loving nations' ('you are either with us or against us'), the other countries I have examined do not share the same Manichean vision of the world. Pakistan for example, refers several times to an 'international community'. The country sees its joining the international coalition against terrorism as a way to become more integrated into it. This view, in turn, is very different from the French government's take. The French foreign minister Vedrine states that the terrorist attacks have proved, by revealing that in the world there are deep antagonisms, that an international community does not actually exist.

## **Media Discourses**

Even if only preliminary results of an ongoing research, the observations about the media discourses not only confirm that there is no current homogenisation of international political and media discourses. They also highlight how local media discourses differ with each other.

*A different discourse.* On the one hand media discourses are considerably different from the political discourses and display a great degree of independence from them. In fact, while the political authorities keep on repeating in all cases that the struggle against terrorism is not a clash of

civilization, this is a very recurrent argument in the media ('this is a clash of civilisation'). Other themes that are not mentioned by political authorities, but are reported by the media are the possibility that the U.S. is planning to attack Iraq (France and Italy) or the idea that the U.S. is attacking Afghanistan rather than Al-Qaida since air strikes are directed towards the country's main towns (Pakistan). On the other hand media do follow the political discourse, particularly in attributing importance to what is addressed by the politicians as priorities on the political agenda. For example in Italy the war in Afghanistan takes almost exclusively the form of a debate about peacekeeping operations in the post-war scenario. Furthermore in this local case it is not uncommon that the main item on the political agenda is not at all related to terrorism. An example is offered by the debate about the passing of the budget law ('legge finanziaria').

*A more global discourse.* Media discourses are indeed more "global" than their political counterparts: they present more common elements among each other than the political discourses. Apart from the already mentioned idea of a 'clash of civilisation', another common feature is the idea that the war in Afghanistan is not going to plan and is somehow "disappointing" in its progress. Although these common points do raise the question of what should be the extent of the similarities before being able to talk about a "homogenisation", they are so marginal to the scope of the War On Terrorism frame, which is a more complex interpretation of the international events occurring after 9/11, that do not seem to qualify as a genuine example of "globalisation".

## **Interpreting the Data**

The most important remark that can be made after the analysis is that, although the War On Terrorism has a global scope, the local dimension is essential. The U.S. government's frame of the War On Terrorism is interpreted from different national perspectives. The factors that shape the form it eventually takes in each local context are now analysed more in detail.

*Geography (Geopolitics).* The geographical distance from the location of the 9/11 attacks plays a role in affecting the way the events are interpreted by foreign politicians and media. This is quite evident when comparing the French political discourse with the Italian political discourse. In fact, the attention on the part of Italian politicians to the events amounts to very little if compared to their French counterparts: Italy places itself as a local actor within the Mediterranean area. France, instead, clearly plays the role of a world power, which needs to closely follow international developments.

*Belonging to International Organisations.* The effect of the affiliation to International Organisations is particularly evident in the Italian case and its

“economic interpretation” of the War On Terrorism: this is largely affected by the fact at the time of the terrorist attacks the country is holding the presidency of the G8 forum. Both Italy and France’s political discourses are shaped by their belonging to the EU and NATO as well as the UN. Related to the institutional affiliations are their respective legal frameworks: EU countries constantly refer to their own national Constitutions, to the UN Charter of Human Rights and the NATO treaty, especially Art. V and its provision that an attack against one member of the alliance is an attack against all.

*National identity.* This is deeply affected by geography and is particularly obvious in the Pakistani political discourse in which the country is described as being constantly under the threat of the neighbouring India. The participation to a struggle against terrorism is interpreted as a way of countering not only Al-Qaida, but also ‘Indian terrorism’. Italy, instead, perceives itself as being in close contact with ‘Mediterranean’s Southern shore’ and playing the role of a bridge towards the Balkans and the Middle East. This explains the small-scale interpretation of the War On Terrorism and the little attention devoted to the war in Afghanistan.

*Local culture.* Culture is here understood mainly in terms of history and shared values. In France the interpretation of the very meaning of terrorism is shaped by its tradition of a centralised and secular Republic. Terrorism is dreaded for its potential in disrupting society and the very fabric of the State. In the Italian political discourse terrorism is seen through broad references to the country’s historical past, religious background and traditional values. The struggle against terrorism is mainly seen as a fight against barbarity. In this sense it often associated to the tradition of liberal thought, Humanism/Renaissance, Catholicism. The War On Terrorism, because of these values it aims to defend, is therefore understood as part of the Post-WWII legacy, particularly the fight for a democratic Constitution at the basis of the Italian Republic. Pakistan, in a different perspective, sees the struggle against Al-Qaida’s terrorism as a fight against a perversion of Islam. This is consistent with its self-perception as the ‘fortress of Islam’.

*The already existing political agenda.* The French case tends to interpret the threat of terrorism as caused by fanaticism, in turn fed by lack of education. This interpretation makes more urgent the pursuing of the already existing attempt at establishing a ‘dialogue des cultures’ (dialogue of cultures). Also the claimed need to improve the EU legal frameworks to face the new threat of terrorism is exploited for accelerating the project of an EU defence and enlargement already on the agenda. From this point of view Pakistan describes joining the international coalition against terrorism as the best choice in the interest of the country. National

interest is a constant and explicit reference in general Musharraf’s speeches.

*The role of the media.* The media affect the reproduction of the frame because they are the politicians’ sources of information. They affect the way politicians understand the U.S. government by conveying just certain aspects of the frame (partial transmission of information), but also by advancing their own interpretation of the related issues (independent framing).

*Interactions, information exchanges among the actor.* The War On Terrorism is a complex frame that develops over time in directions that are not just defined by the U.S. government, but also by foreign “contributors”: interactions and information exchanges among actors do affect the contents of the frame. This is particularly evident in the decision by the U.S. government to extend the objectives of the War in Afghanistan. While this was at the beginning exclusively about the rooting out of Al-Qaida training camps, it later extends to nation building, therefore making the War On Terrorism about providing democracy and freedom (a very well-known argument in the context of the Iraqi War). It is clear that the U.S. government feels the need to adjust its messages to “feedback” from international audiences.

## **Conclusions**

With reference to the empirical observations about the War On Terrorism case study it is possible to conclude that there is no evidence of a globalisation of either political or media discourses, let alone cultural imperialism on the part of the U.S. government.

The local national level, particularly geography, plays a key role in understanding the mechanisms of frames’ spreading at the global level. This occurs despite the annihilation of space and time achieved by the current live coverage of events on a worldwide scale. Local culture is a major determinant in defining local political and media discourses’ contents, even in presence of a persuasion attempt by a powerful international actor such as the U.S. government. In general local actors actively appropriate the contents of the U.S. government’s War On Terrorism frame and reinterpret them in a way that suits their long-term interests. A quote from the French foreign minister Vedrine indeed summarizes the findings of the research and confirms them from the perspective of an insider of the political process:

All big [international] crises are translated into a redistribution of power relationships, but each actor tries to exploit the situation to achieve his/her permanent objectives (Hubert Vedrine, French foreign minister, speech to the National Assembly, September 14 2001)

This paper raises methodological questions. In fact, by trying to measure the extent of globalisation in empirical terms, through a multi-disciplinary approach combining political communications, media studies and discourse analysis, the research reaches very different conclusions from what is widely claimed in literature about globalisation or cultural imperialism. This could perhaps suggest that the widespread idea of an ongoing globalisation could be the effect of inappropriate methodology and superficial analysis. This aspect should deserve more attention in future research.

The study also seems to confirm the utility of the concept of frame not only in political communications and media studies, but also in undertaking research about the contents of globalisation. In fact, especially when referring to cultural globalisation, researchers talk about "culture" as an all-encompassing term. But what is culture in practice? Approaching the topic in terms of frames could be a way of breaking "culture" down by making it more manageable and defining the focus of the analysis in less abstract terms.

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