**The Media-Security Nexus: Researching Ritualised Cycles of Insecurity**

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**Introduction**

The media-security nexus refers to the ways in which media furnish the conditions that shape how security is conceived and experienced in the interactions between security actors, media producers and audiences. It is not simply that the media are the main delivery mechanism for public knowledge about security. Rather, the precise nature of security threats, and the human and policy responses to those threats, are also produced and reproduced in and through these relationships. This apparently simple observation has important implications for research into security, media and citizenship.

The concept of the media-security nexus was initially developed by Gillespie (2007a to refer to an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach that was developed in order to investigate the relationship between media and security in Britain during the early years of the ‘War on Terror’ and in the shadow of widespread concerns about climate change, economic anxiety, local crime, immigration and other social insecurities. It was premised on the assumption that ‘new security challenges are *constituted* in the intersecting relationships between political and military actors, news producers, news representations and discourses, and news audiences’ (ibid 2007a: 275). News audiences, citizens and publics were understood not as discrete categories but as co-terminous.

The approach drew on prior research on transnational television cultures which foregrounded the complex, cross-cultural negotiations of identities that take place around security events among diaspora audiences (Gillespie 1995). In particular, it documented the often painful ‘ambivalent positionings’ that had to be negotiated by young British Muslims when faced with the Iraq War of 1991 and its mediations. Ethnographic audience research proved to be a useful, culturally sensitive way of understanding citizen perspectives. It foreshadowed what was to become a profound disjuncture between state, citizens and news media in multicultural societies around security issues (O’Loughlin and Gillespie 2012).

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, the growing interest in media and migrant transnationalism coincided with the work of leading scholars in politics and international relations on cultures of security (Croft 2012; Katzenstein 1996; Weldes 1999). Security research had long sidelined or simply ignored questions of culture and media. Hypodermic models of media effects, prevalent in security research and policy thinking, were based on unexamined assumptions about the power of the media over audiences. Audiences were seen as having little agency to interpret media in ways other than that intended by media ‘messengers’. The need for more complex and holistic approaches to culture and media became an urgent priority in the post-Cold War period characterized by a proliferation of national news media channels and new interactive technologies of communication. In the UK, the interdisciplinary research programme ‘New Security Challenges’ broke new ground in its emphasis on culture and communication and examined how contestations over the meanings of security played into decision-making.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Our core argument is that the security-media nexus approach is necessary to understand and explain why, how, where and for whom security issues emerge and intensify at specific moments, only to fade away and re-emerge. It enables us to understand the uneven temporalities and shifting locations of security dilemmas and to recognize patterns of similarity and difference in how media producers, publics and policymakers debate and negotiate, legitimize and contest security policy. It forces us to conceive of security actors, whether states or non-state protagonists, not as independent agents acting and impacting on society, exerting *power* *over* media and audiences, but as an integral part of our shared and mediated social worlds. It requires us to think of how *power* works *through* large news media organisations such as the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera, and of audiences as active agents in processes of meaning-making with the *power to* shape the media-security nexus.

Our media worlds are marked by contradictory tendencies: they are increasingly global and local, diversified and homogenized, interconnected and fragmented. Journalists, citizens and security actors and practitioners are unavoidably caught up in complex relationships, making it very difficult for researchers to capture the fluctuating yet perpetual presence of critical security events and dilemmas. ‘New’ security challenges precipitated by life-changing ‘critical events’ (Das 1996) are not anterior to these relations, but produced through them. Hence security threats are not obvious or given. Scientific evidence, political claims, public opinion polls and shocking media reports may all contribute to the creation of a security concern. But the power of media or states to set security agendas has to be explained by exploring the unfolding of the media-security nexus over time.

The study of a media-security nexus depends on three theoretical claims about communication. The first claim is that while communication is usually conceptualized through a transport metaphor – news ‘travels’ fast, the president must ‘get her message across’ – communication of news is more accurately conceived through a ritual model (Carey 1989). A news story or image may occasionally seem arresting, but what is more important, in terms of power and social order, are the everyday rituals whereby audiences consume news in multi-layered serial narrative forms. Ritual processes of consuming and interpreting serial news narratives are an integral focus of the media and security nexus (Gillespie 1995). Seriality matters because media rituals create standardized frames for representing security news and shape patterned audience and policy responses to it and in so doing these processes contribute to the cyclical reproduction of insecurity.

Second, that nexus involves not just analysis of a few mainstream media outlets but of media cultures, in the holistic anthropological sense, or as media ecologies (Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2010). The term ‘media’ includes environments, actors and technologies together. Media are understood as akin to organic life forms existing in a complex set of interrelationships within a system that strive for balance but are constantly changing and evolving (McLuhan 1994; Postman 1970). As technology changes and new actors gain power, these interrelationships alter. Since the emergence of mass internet access and mobile telephony in the 1990s and 2000s more social relations and security events are recorded, disseminated and debated, potentially on near-instantaneous and de-territorialized scales. Actors are forced to adapt. Journalists, security actors and publics inhabit participatory, multi-modal and multi-lingual media ecologies made up of overlapping local, national and transnational circulations of competing narratives, varying visibilities, and evolving repertoires of response and behaviour (Deuze 2012; Miskimmon et al. 2013). Media-security nexus research seeks to captures this cultural and political complexity. It treats each new security event as a discrete focus of analysis but situates it in the wider context of prior salient events that have been subjected to the same analytical approach. The media-security nexus framework enables comparisons of events over time and place via the application of a systematic, robust methodology that produces a more comprehensive analysis of how processes of ritualisation and securitization go hand in hand, and points to interventions that can break these vicious circles[[2]](#endnote-2).

The ideas of communication as ritualistic and media cultures as ecological lead us to a third theoretical claim about communication: the diffuse and indeterminate nature of media power. The *power to* set agendas and define the meaning of security issues does not lie exclusively with elites. The mechanics of communication operate through ongoing but evolving rituals, which are disrupted and reinvented by the internet and social media. While certain actors may learn to game the rituals to their benefit in order to transport the 'right' message to intended audiences, audiences interpret news media in often unforeseen and unforeseeable ways in specific cultural and political contexts. As media systems evolve, they have to cope with the co-existence of broadcast (one-to-many) and networked (many-to-many) models of communication – hybrid systems in which increasing numbers can individualised mass communication - self -broadcasting and interact directly in real-time with officials, journalists and conflict protagonists (Chadwick 2013; Castells 2007).

Dissent and contestation operate not only among citizens and through citizen media but also among elites (Hallin 1989). Policymakers struggle to define the security issues on which they are legislating and frequently fail (Dillon 2013). The lines of power and influence through which the meanings of security issues are constructed and contested must therefore be treated as, to varying degrees, open and provisional – comprising different forms, modalities and strengths of power: power *over*, power *to* and power *through* (Gillespie 2005). There are notable occasions when political leaders have successfully mobilized power over public opinion to support a security policy, but there are equally notable occasions when they do not. This indeterminacy indicates why the media-security nexus is therefore to be explored and explained.

Constructing methodologies to gain analytical purchase on the media-security nexus in this context requires an approach that understands methods not as culturally neutral tools but as active agents in shaping the fluid social and political realities under study. Any study of the media and security nexus needs to deploy mixed and mobile methods (ethnographies of media organisations and audience, discourse and social media analyses alongside big data and other forms of quantitative research) in order to be responsive to the emergence of new technologies, applications and actors and how these interact with those already existing. It must track shifting discursive repertoires as well as visual and auditory regimes of representing security (e.g. the recent representation of the migration policy crisis as a security crisis).. Lines of causation will often be multi-directional and fuzzy at interactions across times and places, exhibiting both continuity and change (Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2010). Methods used to study security dilemmas in one election are outdated by the next election as media systems feature different dynamics and audiences-cum-citizens communicate with each other and with media and political organisations in new ways (Karpf 2012), so our methods must be responsive, agile, iterative and reflexive.

The value of the media-security nexus as a conceptual tool and systematic methodological framework is that one can investigate different events and locations of security over time and thereby find which if any have primacy or, more likely, how power and meaning are organized across different sites via ritualized processes.. While deductive theorizing can be done by testing existing theories of, say, agenda-setting or public engagement, the value of the media-security nexus approach is that it allows for inductive theorizing because innovative mixes of methods that produce rich and robust empirical data can challenge epochal theories of change and policy-led definitions of security. The need to identify sites and dynamics of communication, and to discern the often very different security dilemmas that preoccupy different social groups and security actors, can lead to new propositions about power and influence that can, in turn, lead to new theories of media, power and security. Analysing these shifting dynamics through a media-security nexus lens can allows transnational collaborative comparative research projects to develop, and can foster vibrant international networks that connect academics, journalists and policy-makers, practioners and publics (for details, see author’s websites at The Open University's Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change and Royal Holloway's New Political Communications Unit).

Our mode of theorizing goes with the grain of thinking about security since the Cold War ended. While nuclear arms races and proxy wars are far from over, the concept of ‘security’ has necessarily come to be treated as multi-faceted. Traditional security studies focused on defence at home and the use of kinetic force abroad. But the categories of ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ are blurred requiring us to embrace forms of methodological transnationalism in our thinking and practice. National security concerns must also be understood in relative terms and tied to global and local threats. Whether in stable or pre/post-conflict societies, politicians and publics alike worry about economic and social insecurity, and about the consequences of individuals and groups feeling alienated; do they lack ‘resilience’ to act as responsible productive citizens and might they be ‘radicalized’ to act in violence against society? Researching the media-security nexus comparatively, transnationally using a shared analytical framework with common points of reference has allowed our research teams to to identify what counts as a ‘security’ issue and hence what counts as security at different moments and in different places and yet to connect and trace patterns as well as divergences across apparently disparate events.

In sum, a whole set of actors shape the meanings and experiences of security and conflict and we must explain how those meanings and experiences feed back into actions and policies. This analytical challenge is daunting but unavoidable if security studies are to make a substantial contribution to enlightened security policy and its ability to effect conflict resolution, diplomacy and peace. Having provided an overview of of the media-security nexus approach, the remainder of this chapter explores how some scholars and practitioners have researched the media-security nexus in the UK over the last fifteen years. It presents the methods used and the findings generated. It concludes by setting out some questions of enduring significance and potential new directions for research.

**After September 11 2001: Television News and Transnational Audiences**

Al-Qaeda’s attacks on the East Coast of the US on 11 September 2001 acted as the trigger for a body of research on the media-security nexus that scholars observed unfolding. US President Bush declared a war on terror. World affairs – and news reporting – became intently focused on a concept of security as counter-terrorism. The politics of identity and multiculturalism in the UK became entwined with the politics of risk, threat and danger posed by Islamist migrant and diasporic groups. News media were inescapably implicated in these processes. A series of projects that we undertook in the UK (outlined below),in the UK sought to combine methods and disciplinary approaches to explain how understandings of security were generated in the interactions of policymakers, journalists and publics.

The first of these, *AfterSeptember11* [[3]](#endnote-3)aimed to understand how transnational television news covered the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing Western intervention in Afghanistan and how diaspora and British audiences responded to this coverage (Broadcasting Standards Commission 2002). A collaborative audience ethnography was carried out involving over a dozen bi-lingual researchers who investigated news-viewing in multilingual families and households in the UK on and after 11 September 2001 (Gillespie 2006). The attacks understandably triggered deep emotional responses in viewers. Many people experienced a sense of trauma that lasted for weeks and months.

In thinking through the causes, meanings and consequences of these events, diaspora viewers offered memories of their own ‘ground zeros’ – Halabja, Palestine and the Iraq War of 1991 among many others. In the process of casting and structuring of blame, innocence and guilt became relativised. If viewers were cynical about political leaders past and present, they were also deeply distrustful of all news media, regardless of language or source. Audiences became ‘sceptical zappers’, avidly comparing and contrasting coverage on a range of channels from BBC to Al-Jazeera to CNN and a host of other language media, actively seeking alternative news sources because of perceived bias in Western media reporting.

To complement this collaborative ethnography, research into the competing news agendas of UK and US news media was carried out. There were some striking examples of acknowledgement of the Palestinian cause on UK news bulletins, as the programmes attempted to provide a frame and context for the 11 September 2001 attacks. Findings from textual and discourse analysis of these news bulletins ran counter to the perceptions of audiences who took part in this project, who felt that TV news coverage of the Middle East and Palestine was minimal and biased towards Israel. The articulation of audience ethnography and discourse analysis served to open up pressing questions about dissonances and disjunctures between what is seen and heard on TV and how it is interpreted (Gow and Michalski 2008).

News media had long been charged with amplifying fear among audiences by sensationalizing events in a way that creates ‘moral panics’ (Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978; Poynting et al. 2004). Equally, however, the *AfterSeptember11* team found that security-oriented news in mainstream British news could contain insecurity by packaging potentially alarming or catastrophic events in familiar, sanitized (e.g. concealing the moment of death by blank screens) and reassuring formats (e.g. the personalisation of news via uses of melodramatic conventions). This was not the case among Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Kurdish news providers where cultural conventions of the portrayal of violence and death differ markedly. This cultural dissonance generated questions in subsequent research about how news producers and audiences managed the dynamics of involvement and attachment when faced with traumatic and upsetting news. The ‘modulation of terror’ was then studied in ways that began to tie in much more closely the iterative analysis of news audiences and discourses (Gillespie 2007a: 286; Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2007: 14) This work enabled us to get a clearer picture of how audiences juggle imperatives to stay informed – the presumed duty of good citizens – with the need for ontological security – the need to keep anxieties at a safe distance so as to carry on with everyday life. But, of course, the task of understanding the media-security nexus must go beyond the study of the intersections of news discourses and audience reception. It must also pay focussed attention to how governments and security policymakers relate to news organisations and seek to legitimate their policies to publics.

**Shifting Securities: TV News Cultures Before and After the Iraq War 2003**

In the context of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the political, legal, moral and operational frameworks for using armed force required systematic analysis. The calculus of risk and threat changed when Western governments undertook ‘pre-emptive’ action without public consent and with information not made public. The tensions between the duty of the state to inform its citizens and the realities of secrecy, censorship and propaganda had rarely been greater than around the decision to intervene in Iraq in 2003, foregrounding the vital role of news media in legitimising security policy (Gillespie 2007b; Gow and Michalski 2008).

*Shifting Securities*[[4]](#endnote-4) took the 2003 Iraq War as a trigger to explore discourses and perceptions of security among diaspora and national publics, news producers and policymakers in Britain. The study consisted in three interacting strands: (i) collaborative audience ethnography; (ii) discourse and content analysis of news media texts and (iii) semi-structured interviews with security policy-makers and journalists. All three strands were brought into dialogue together in a special journal issue *News Cultures, Multicultural Society and Legitimacy* (Gillespie et al. 2010a).

Analysing these interactions allowed the *Shifting Securities* researchers to explain the sense of loss, alienation and insecurity many citizens, particularly racialized religious minorities including British Muslims, felt after the 2003 Iraq War. For example, policies that aimed to increase the security of the British population involved the government asking Muslims to carry out surveillance of their communities and to report any threats of ‘radicalization’ among ‘vulnerable’ youth. Such policies aimed to harness the eyes and ears of ordinary people in their everyday interactions. But these strategies, alongside stereotypical news media representations, had the effect of criminalizing south Asian and Middle Eastern diasporic groups in general. ‘Muslim communities’ became distrusted for harbouring and even producing ‘homegrown terrorists’.

A cyclical intensification of insecurity unleashed a chain reaction in the media-security nexus that bore some striking similarities but also important differences to prior critical media events. In particular, it was reminiscent of the ‘ambivalent positionings’ adopted by British Muslim youth during and after Iraq War in 1991 mentioned earlier but occurring in a very different media and political conjuncture. Nevertheless, it was quite clear that these prior political experiences were profoundly shaping of how the Iraq War 2003 was seen. Again, our collaborative audience ethnography was prescient in warning that: (i) the ritualized interactions between policymakers, journalists and news audiences (addressed as national citizens in a transnational news milieu) constituted the media-security nexus as a 'battlespace' of mutual disrespect and suspicion; (ii) this exacerbated the marginalization and racialization of many ethnic minority groups but in particular British Muslims, who faced declining prospects for multicultural citizenship and (iii) security policymakers struggled to find public legitimacy in view of the growing scepticism and hostility of national and diasporic news media and audiences (Gillespie 2007a: 293).

*Figure 1. Ritualised cycles of insecurity*

**Media** (mainstream British terrestrial and international satellite TV, emerging internet, press assuming role of government opposition)

**News publics** (ethnic and linguistic diversity, changing forms of citizenship)



**Policy**

(Government, military, security services, aiming for security and legitimacy)

Policymakers’ perceptions of security matters and those of citizens diverged greatly, and government seemed unable to engage in the kind of open, give-and-take debate through which popular legitimacy might be generated. The legitimacy of security policies was also undermined as audiences were exposed to images of death and destruction, torture and abuse. Such images contradicted government narratives justifying military action. Overall, this media-security nexus was marked by structural conflict between media, policymakers and publics (Gillespie et al. 2010a). Citizens complained they were caught up in the crossfire of media and political ‘wars’ and could not find credible, impartial information.

If *AfterSeptember11* showed a fragmenting media landscape, *Shifting Securities* explored this further and explored the consequences for intercultural dialogue and democratic debate as a result of news audiences consuming news in diverse languages, from radically different perspectives and through different cultural/political prisms and experiences. If people consumed news from beyond national borders and had multiple overlapping identifications that did not map onto national communities, how could a deliberative model of democratic communication and accountability tied to national policymaking operate?

**Diasporas and Diplomacy**

*Shifting Securities* found mainstream national news media, especially BBC News, provided the staple news diet for the majority of those interviewed, regardless of social and cultural background.This finding challenged the widespread idea in the mid-2000s that increasing media diversity (technologies, platforms, languages and sources) had reduced the significance of mainstream news. There was recourse to ‘new’ media, particularly at moments of crisis, but public service television channels remain the primary source of news, particularly for security issues, for the majority. This also challenged the idea that minority ethnic groups forge insular diasporic media ghettos that impede social integration or promote anti-western, anti-democratic ideologies. The ethnically diverse respondents aspired to have full access to resources for citizenship and to participate fully in national debate.

BBC World Service proved to be particularly important for refugee diasporas – for Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians and Somalis who, in their homelands, had relied on the BBC’s foreign language services as reliable and trusted news sources. Fleeing war, political conflict, economic hardship, persecution, these refugee diasporic groups that we interviewed tuned into or logged on to the BBC World Service’s Pashto, Arabic, Somali channels to find out what was going on back home. We observed groups of Somalis huddled round computer screens in internet cafes in London listening to the latest news bulletin on the Somali service. We noted the online debates that occurred on the BBC Arabic’s online spaces that brought audiences in the Middle East and the Arabic diaspora into dialogue via the mediation of the World Service. And, among Afghan refugees, we observed the huge importance of the BBC World Service’s radio soap opera, *New Home New World* (or ‘The Afghan Archers’ as some BBC staff called it) where a cocktail of entertaining drama, news and information, security policy and public diplomacy converged to shape understandings and responses to war and security issues (Skuse, Gillespie and Power 2010).

These insights led to a new research project *Tuning In: Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service* (2007-14).[[5]](#endnote-5) It investigated the media-security nexus through the prism of a multi-disciplinary study of the BBC World Service’s diasporas (Gillespie and Webb 2012). Combining an organisational ethnography with historical research, it examined the relationship between audiences and the BBC’s diaspora producers (based in Bush House in London who gave voice to BBC broadcasts across the globe for eight decades), in the context of funding by the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office as one of the UK’s major public diplomacy partners. It explored new configurations of audiences, especially the digital diasporas brought into being by new technologies and new patterns of communication and the ways in which critical security events were negotiated on line, such as the Mumbai Bombings (Gillespie, Herbert and Andersson 2010).

This study documented and analysed the role of the World Service as an essential part of the UK’s diplomatic infrastructure and the role of diasporic staff as diplomatic intermediaries – mediating the relations between the UK government, the BBC and overseas publics not only at moments of intense crisis in the past and present, but also in the daily affirmation and communication of British security interests and policies abroad via the serialisation of news and drama and its ritualistic consumption. Our case studies of the security-media nexus ranged from Suez and the Hungarian Uprisings (Webb 2014) to the on-going Israel-Palestinian conflict and the Arab Spring.

Each case study created its own tailor-made methods but within a shared analytical framework. For example, we worked closely with BBC Audience researchers and their ‘big data’ sets derived from social media to analyse digital diasporas and new audience configurations, including the meaning of engagement. We found that before and during the Arab Spring, it was not the content of news and debate but rather the forms of debate fostered by the BBC Arabic’s online spaces where the public diplomacy value, from a UK government perspective, could be located (Gillespie 2013). This study of the security-media nexus over decades and in very diverse locations proved the potential for flexible adaptation but also for cumulative and comparative analysis.

*Shifting Securities* inspired several other important lines of enquiry as various research teams tried to explore different aspects of this media-security nexus. For example, following the 7/7 London bombings of July 2005 a study of the ‘interactional trajectories’ through which memories of the bombings formed in the aftermath proved very fruitful (Brown and Hoskins 2010; Hoskins 2011; Lorenzo-Dus and Bryan 2011).[[6]](#endnote-6) Survivors and victims’ families were interviewed, and the personal and public memorials that emerged on the internet and in public spaces were investigated, tracing how the terrorist attacks were treated in the legal inquest in the years that followed (Hoskins 2011). These studies also continued the line of multimodal television analysis of security events from the *AfterSeptember11* and *Shifting Securities* projects. This project was another benchmark in the qualitative study of the media-security nexus because the constant comparison of the experiences of 7/7 participants and those of the legal investigators opened up uncertainties and indeterminacies that constitute the experience of living through such deeply traumatic events. The project offered a ‘phenomenology of the event’, illuminating how aspects of a security event – in this case a terrorist attack – can be stretched, warped, and in some cases erased, through experiences extended through times, spaces and specific places (O’Loughlin 2011).

***Legitimising Discourses of Radicalisation***

By the end of 2007 ‘radicalisation’ had become a key term in this nexus, indicating government concern that ‘home-grown’ Muslims were turning to political and religious violence against the states they inhabited or travelling to fight for Islamic militant organisations overseas. News media devoted attention to the 7/7 bombers and the process through which apparently peaceful individuals could be radicalised and blow up their fellow citizens. If *Shifting Securities* showed that the ritualized interactions of policymakers, journalists and citizen audiences constituted a ‘battlespace’ of mutual disrespect and suspicion, then it was likely that policymakers would face difficulties introducing further counter-terrorist policies. In this context, Hoskins led a further project, *Legitimising the Discourses of Radicalisation* [[7]](#endnote-7) which asked: (i) how do ‘radicalising’ discourses circulate and persuade those ‘vulnerable’ to radicalisation? (ii) how did *the very fact of having to debate radicalisation* feed into the existing ‘battlespace’ of mutual suspicion, given that British Muslims already felt over-scrutinized, journalists were uncertain of the government’s motives and government was not entirely sure how the risk of radicalisation could be calculated?

The *Legitimising Radicalisation* team extended the multi-method approach of *Shifting Securities* by analysing the Jihadist online environment, mainstream English and Arabic media coverage of radicalisation and audience ethnography in three countries. They identified how different sections of societies engaged with the issue of radicalisation (Awan et al. 2011). This enabled them to see how the apparently threatening radicalising agents of Al-Qaeda connected to social groups through their own web presence but also journalists’ remediation of Al-Qaeda videos and statements. The researchers could track how citizens engaged with this ghostly but threatening presence in their daily news rituals, and how this shaped their attitude towards government security policy.

The findings were somewhat surprising. First, researchers found that even jihadist sympathizers felt detached from the Al-Qaeda core. The jihadist media culture was made up of core websites featuring members who were committed without deviation or question to the jihadist campaign. Outside the core was a ‘grey zone’ of individuals who potentially had sympathy for the campaign but questioned the legitimacy of some violent acts, particularly violence that killed Muslims or civilians. The core members offered little guidance or recognition to potential sympathizers, who had to turn to mainstream media such as BBC or Al-Jazeera to find out what core Al-Qaeda had been doing. This meant that BBC and Al-Jazeera were in effect the primary mediators of Al-Qaeda and contributed to any ‘radicalising’ effect by sustaining Al-Qaeda’s presence and credibility.

Secondly, the team also found that journalists and the security experts that they interviewed were uncertain about the nature of ‘radicalisation’. There was little pattern to who was radicalised – it could be people of different ages, religions, levels of education and socio-economic class, making prediction difficult. Mainstream news media, which must find facts to report, struggled when few facts were available and security services were slow to release information. The result was news coverage that ‘clustered’ different signs of radicalisation, often taken from eyewitnesses who may be unreliable: ‘he suddenly grew a beard’, ‘she became much more religious’, ‘they always met after Friday prayers’. Since these ‘signs’ applied to large numbers of people, mainstream news coverage may have inadvertently contributed to stereotyping, particularly of British Muslims.

Finally, the ethnographic audience research demonstrated that ordinary citizens did not trust news about ‘radicalisation’. Government and media discourses of radicalisation were not credible or trustworthy to many ordinary citizens. UK news publics were uneasy with the concept of radicalisation in their everyday engagement with the domains of politics and religion. So, if de-radicalisation played a role in counter-terrorism policy in the UK and citizens were not convinced what radicalisation might mean in the first place, this had consequences for the legitimacy of UK security policy. News reporting of issues related to ‘radicalisation’ had not helped to clarify its meaning or its legitimacy in the public understanding of Government strategy on terrorism.

An objective of the *Legitimising* project was to arrive at a model of how radicalizing discourses *and* news about radicalization circulated in a global media ecology. Triangulated, iterative methods brought to light pivotal actors in the circulation of jihadist messages which had yet to be researched, for instance translation agencies and ‘grey zones’ such as Al-Jazeera Talk which host both mainstream and jihadist materials side by side. Fully mapping this media ecology illuminated how particular experiences, rituals and discourses were present among particular groups, and the role of different media outlets, technologies and infrastructures in enabling this (Figure 2 below).

*Figure*

**Information infrastructure**

* Technical apparatus
* Emergent and unplanned, but largely durable and reliable
* Political, legal, economic and scientific drivers

**Experience, discourses**

* The product of processes below
* Feed back to give meaning and define action towards the processes below

**Audiences/Citizens**

* Increasingly diffused
* Target of propaganda
* Confer legitimacy
* Varying levels of media literacy, tendency to participate and remediate

**Jihadist media**

* Professional and amateur
* Multilingual
* Hierarchy vs. autonomy

**States**

* Governments, security agencies, police

**Translation agencies**

* Site, NEFA
* Only translate verbal not visual text features

**Mainstream news media**

* Big media (BBC, CNN)
* Amateur content blended into professional news sites
* Multilingual
* Subject to regulation

**Media grey zones**

* Al-Jazeera Talk
* Social media, discussion fora, video upload sites

*2.*

*The media ecology of terror (from Awan et al. 2011: 123)*

Typical of inductive research, this approach threw up insights not expected when the project began. The team was able to identify the gatekeepers of jihadist materials and, more importantly, contribute to emerging debates about the changing forms of gatekeeping emerging in a digital media ecology in which audiences themselves now shared, or re-broadcast, a large proportion of news themselves across social media. The role of translation agencies such as NEFA (Nine/Eleven Finding Answers) suddenly fell into place as it became clear that many news organisations lack Arabic journalists or translators. As these new issues and processes came to light, the media-security nexus took on a more complex appearance: a multiplicity of intersecting rituals and interdependencies.

Nevertheless, the core concerns of media, policymakers and publics continued to receive attention. *Shifting Securities* inspired further research on ‘everyday’ security and how citizens lived with security events. Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister (2013a; 2013b) carried out sustained focus group research to understand whether people in the UK felt more secure as a result of counter-terrorism policy.[[8]](#endnote-8) They found participants held a range of views on what security means, from simple human survival to contentment, hospitality, equality and freedom. This range was reflected in variation in how people thought about security. Those who equated security with survival presumed others held the same narrow view as them; it was just common sense. Others held more complex and multi-layered ways of understanding security, especially those individuals who could hold several understandings of security together at once. They were more inclined to consider how others might reflect on different forms of security too. In addition, a person’s conception of security shaped their evaluation of recent counter-terrorism policy. Hence, there is policy value as well as scholarly interest in addressing not just what but *how* people think about security.

Stevens and Vaughan-Williams extended this research with a large survey study of UK public understandings of threat and security.[[9]](#endnote-9) Alongside these studies of the policy-public dyad, Robinson et al. (2010: 25) set out to explore ‘wartime media-state relations, and the media-foreign policy nexus in general’ by asking whether government elites were able to achieve positive news coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003.[[10]](#endnote-10) Their systematic content analysis of UK news coverage of the war, as well as interviews with national press and TV journalists, demonstrated that government still retained significant scope to set the agenda and framing of news reporting. Were journalists ‘mouthpieces for government officials’ (ibid: 50)? They were found to be largely due to journalists’ patriotism and their ideological commitment to humanitarian intervention. These findings reinforced the importance of multi-modal analysis of news, since visual content – particularly a few key photographs – played an important role in anchoring certain pro-war narratives.

More recently, researchers of the media-security nexus have developed methodologies to capture the digital dimensions of dynamics between media, policymakers and publics. The challenge remains: finding methods that capture ‘how new security challenges are *constituted* in the intersecting relationships between political and military actors, news producers, news representations and discourses, and news audiences’ (Gillespie 2007a: 275). Recent security challenges include cybercrime and cyberwarfare, pandemics and water shortages, alongside the continued series of military and humanitarian crises and terrorist attacks. It is now necessary to build in social media analytics to capture digital communications by media, policymakers and publics *alongside* the traditional methods of mainstream media analysis, elite interviews and audience ethnography used by *Shifting Securities*.[[11]](#endnote-11) Data has never been so abundant. However, systemacity and synthesis are needed to build coherent frameworks to capture Gillespie’s cycles of mistrust or Hoskins’ interactional trajectories in hybrid media system. Analytical frameworks must capture how actors concerned with security engage simultaneously with traditional media logics of immediacy, visuality and simplicity *and* social media logics in which what circulates is that which can be shared and reprogrammed (Chadwick 2013; van Dijck & Poell 2013). The nexus is under perpetual qualitative transformation. We conclude this chapter by pointing to enduring questions and some strategies for future research.

**Questions for Media-Security Nexus Research**

Researching the media-security nexus allows us to address a number of questions of academic and political importance. Here we focus on power and effects, temporality, and identity.

*1. Power and effects*

The *Shifting Securities, Diasporas and Diplomacy,* and *Legitimising Radicalisation* projects indicated the enduring significance of mainstream media for public consumption of news about security. Robinson et al.’s news management project suggested that government succeeded in setting the terms of reporting the 2003 Iraq War. It would seem a reasonable hypothesis, then, that mainstream media are vehicles for government to exert some degree of *power over* the security agenda and to legitimate and garner support among the general public for war and security policies. However, the research findings are more complex and ambivalent about government and media power. The evidence from media-security nexus research is that we need to consider power, like security, in relational terms. We need to consider manifestations of government power *over* security agendas in relation to producers and audiences’ *power to* contest and reframe these agendas. We need to understand how power works *through* large legacy broadcasters like the BBC and World Service over time and globally as well as through citizen media in the short term. Despite the rhetoric of transformation, it remains to be seen if citizen media will have enduring political consequences. Audiences are both loyal and fickle but at moments of crisis they turn to mainstream news when high quality journalism that can be trusted is crucial. But news sources and platforms are proliferating at a phenomenal rate and audiences consume national news channels *and* news of their linguistic or political affiliation – making attention scarce and the job of government communication of policy difficult. Government can call for military intervention overseas and be defeated in Parliament if public opinion is not convinced, as Prime Minister Cameron realized when pushing for action in Syria in the summer of 2013. The public are a force to be reckoned with as a collective political actor. In addition, journalists and policymakers have uncertain knowledge about many security concerns, including radicalization, cybersecurity, climate change and the global economy. There is not necessarily a coherent narrative for government to project and skeptical audiences can see through spin much of the time.

Longstanding questions remain, then, about control and chaos, power and authority, legitimacy and credibility. However, researchers must find ways to grasp the degree of uncertainty and ambivalence present in the positions of media, policy and publics. It is through the media-security nexus that we see these positions being produced and contested. Security research too often and too easily brackets off discrete areas of enquiry and fails to analyse constitutive relationships as components of the bigger picture. It remains necessary for at least some researchers to find holistic, anthropological and ecological approaches that are alive to how power and influence operate in unexpected places or in unforeseen directions.

There are of course fairly entrenched and opposing perspectives on where media power lies, which have been the subject of debate over decades. Power lies either with the producer of a text and/or with the text (and there is debate over whether the image is more powerful than the word), or it lies in the interpretative abilities of audiences at the site of reception and/or beyond into the social networks of audiences. Alternatively, if power is understood as relational – existing in the relations between people and/or texts/objects, then power is found in the modes, rituals and circuits of production, circulation, regulation and interpretation (Appadurai 1986; Gillespie 1995 Awan et al. 2011). This leads to our second area of questions: media and security in time.

*2. Temporalities*

A central finding of *Shifting Securities* and *Diasporas and Diplomacies* is that legitimacy, authority, trust and credibility are temporal phenomena – they may be hard earned but quickly lost. Their generation depends on media, policymakers and publics being able to negotiate and respond to the rhythms of events and circumstances in an appropriate manner: there are crisis moments when new policy can be pushed through, calmer periods when ideas can be ‘floated’ and deliberation can occur, and there are cyclical intensifications of anxiety and insecurity about certain events, issues, institutions or leaders. While snapshot analysis of a media-security nexus at a certain moment can help illuminate some relationships, it will miss the temporal rhythms through which legitimacy and authority, trust and credibility operate together over time. Our research on the World Service offers important insights into these longer-term processes. Understanding the shifting temporalities of security has political and methodological implications.

Politically, citizens do not respond simply to policymakers; rather, they often have a sense of a mediated political world from which statements and images about security threats emerge, linger, fade, recur and create a low-level but ever-present sense of threat and insecurity. This is most evident from the ways in which citizens find tactics to cope with and manage their proximity and distance to ubiquitous media and its anxieties. Further research is needed to identify more productive ways for citizens’ concerns to reach public debate, as many of the projects discussed point to a democratic deficit around security matters. Audience ethnography has proved to be a useful thermometer for flagging early warning signs of dissent and discontent – and policy makers would be wise to recognise this value. It is much more time consuming and expensive than focus groups, however. Policy-makers want executive summaries and actionable results so researchers too need to develop more fruitful ways of communicating their results.

Following security issues over time through multi-sited ethnographies where researchers follow the people, the story, the sounds and images can be very productive (Appadurai1986). The projects discussed here began to do this. *Shifting Securities* took one news clip about US forces committing abuse in Iraq and showed it to audiences and military practitioners in the UK. They also tracked how the news migrated across English and Arabic-language media spheres. This opened up the specificity of those groups and those spheres and how meaning was generated in each. *Legitimising Radicalisation* continued this exploration of ‘remediation’ by asking how a securitising statement by a policymaker or an Al-Qaeda leader can be picked up by media, repackaged, debated, contested and adapted by other actors. In a review of the Shifting Securities project, Croft wrote that, ‘Remediation means that the intersubjective context is always in motion’ (2010: 260). Audiences will hear a leader’s statement via media and then discuss it among families in their own social networks, rather than in the abstract or in the policy/problem-oriented context of the original statement. For audiences, ‘it is not that “the government said the threat level is high”, but, “there is the government saying the threat is high. Why are they doing that, and are they correct?”’ (Gillespie et al. 2010b: 270). Following media stories and images across diverse contexts as they travel opens up these contexts and helps understand how the meaning of security is produced. Online media provide new ways of tracing and tracking stories and images across contexts.

*3. Identities and Identifications*

What subject positions are offered to individuals and groups within a media-security nexus, and how do they navigate these? During the war on terror, in many Western states government and mainstream media portrayed Muslims as either ‘moderate’ or ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’, but many self-identifying Muslims found these categories bizarre or unhelpful. How do media enable differing axes of identification and how do these intersect with vernacular and state categories? How do media enable or prevent audiences from forming identifications with distant others via personalization and contextualization or by reducing a story to graphics and numbers? How are identifications made or unmade in the intensity of drone targeting or the patient cataloguing of mass graves?

The *Shifting Securities* project demonstrated how certain identifications were activated or inhibited in different social situations. Through repeated interviews with the same citizens, over time, researchers identified how specific identifications were made and broken ‘in situ’. Interviews offered a sense of ‘push and pull’ factors – the dynamics of how certain experiences and events, not always isolated but often cumulative, shift attachments. As the media-security nexus keeps changing amid broader changes in global politics, economy and technology, how do push and pull factors evolve?

**Conclusion**

Media-security nexus research is a form of conjunctural analysis in which the articulation of research around significant actors and their relationships is orchestrated in order to integrate analysis of the diverse components of a project into a larger relational whole. *Shifting Securities* and *Legitimating Radicalisation* shed light on the security-media nexus in the first decade of the 21st century. The media-security nexus also needs to be researched comparatively and historically in different kinds of societies and across time. The *Diasporas and Diplomacy* research examined the nexus over eight decades and was a first step in this direction, but only through the lens of one organisation. One next step would to compare and contrast how different international broadcasters, in their relationships with their governments and audiences, negotiate and legitimate security dilemmas over a similar time span. Further steps might involve researchers choosing different foci -- events, generational conflicts -- and starting at different sites in the media-security nexus, whether with audiences, elites or media texts. What is fundamental is that the interplay of media, policymakers and publics is researched as an interactive process over time and place using iterative methodologies that can adapt to whatever media technology or security issue are salient to explaining the phenomenon of interest. In this way, it is hoped that interdisciplinary security studies can make significant interventions in both academia and the policy fields. For with better understanding comes better diplomacy and a better chance of securing peace.

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2. For a recent example of the application of the framework following the Paris Attacks see <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/medialibrary/research/REPORT%20Paris%20Attacks%20and%20Eyewitness%20Media%203004%2015_1.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The after After September 11 research project was based on an articulated approach to discourse analysis and audience ethnography. It sought to identify patterns of response among a very diverse group of transnational and multi-lingual households and examined their news viewing on and in the weeks following the attacks. It was led by Marie Gillespie at The Open University and James Gow at Kings College London and was jointly funded by the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the British Film Institute and The Open University. The research report was published by the BSC and is available on their website – see references). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Marie Gillespie et al., *Shifting Securities: News cultures before and beyond the Iraq crisis 2003: Full Research Report*, ESRC End of Award Report, RES-223-25-0063, (Swindon: ESRC, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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10. Robinson, P. (2004-06) *Media Wars: News media performance and media management during the 2003 Iraq War*, Economic and Social Research Council, Grant ref: RES-000-23-0551 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Gillespie and O’Loughlin have each led projects seeking to develop such methodologies. Gillespie’s research has included an exploration of how broadcasters enroll audiences as participants during periods of social change and conflict such as the Arab Spring; Gillespie led a three-year AHRC funded project ‘Tuning In: Diasporic contact zones at BBCWS’, Arts and Humanities Research Council, award Ref: AH/ES58693/1. O’Loughlin has studied the formation, projection and reception of states’ strategic narratives through digital environments as competing actors seek to define the meaning of conflict and change in international relations (Miskimmon et al. 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)