

THE QUESTION OF CONTENT IN THE STUDY OF TERRORISM AND THE TIMELY LINK TO SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo se centra en el análisis de las representaciones del terrorismo articuladas por el contenido, basado en el supuesto de que el contenido es completamente indispensable para una explicación psicosocial de terrorismo. Se presentan dos estudios exploratorios: El primer estudio pretende recoger la representación del terrorismo e identificar los principios de la organización de las representaciones del terrorismo de los adolescentes griegos. El segundo estudio analiza la forma en que estos principios de organización son normativamente o semánticamente establecidos. El análisis de los criterios semánticos empleados indican tres dimensiones normativas, relevantes para los temas clásicos del campo de la influencia social. Se argumenta además que plantear el asunto del contenido en el estudio del terrorismo puede mejorar nuestra comprensión de los mecanismos generadores de influencia social

ABSTRACT

This paper makes a case for an analysis of representations of terrorism informed by content, based on the contention that content is absolutely indispensable in a social psychological account of terrorism. Two exploratory studies are presented: Study 1 aimed to map the representational field of terrorism and identify the organizing principles of Greek adolescents' representations of terrorism. Study 2 aimed to explore how these organizing principles are normatively or semantically anchored. The analysis of the semantic criteria that were employed pointed to three normative dimensions, relevant to classic concerns in the field of social influence. It is further argued that raising the issue of content in the study of terrorism may lead to a timely advancement of our understanding of the generative mechanisms of social influence.

Key words: representations of terrorism, social influence processes, normative representations

Studies on terrorism have increased in recent years, in a changing world in which, in all probability, we are witnessing the old, well established *social paradigm* in perceptions of the world is being substituted by an emerging *cultural paradigm*, as Alain Touraine put it (2005). The plethora of studies on terrorism is hardly surprising in the international context after 9/11 which has accelerated change, with terrorism acting either as a cause or as an extreme symptom of a process of transformation.

Besides its unquestionable impact on public life, terrorism is a unique research topic that simultaneously incorporates a number of hot theoretical issues in social sciences. As such we shall consider neither the baseline level of delinquent behavior, nor the simplistic reduction of terrorist activity to individual motives and processes. Instead, our aspiration for the topic of terrorism reflects this phenomenon's genuine challenge to classic conceptualizations in social psychology, and in particular to social influence processes. As a topic, terrorism encompasses all questions and problems in minority influence (Kruglanski, 2003), such as strategies of influence, perceived consistency or dogmatism, and resistance to minority influence ranging from denying the validity of terrorist messages (Mugny and Pérez, 1986), to psychologizing their perpetrators (Papastamou, 1986). Terrorism bears upon these issues in an unparalleled way, by bringing forward the question of content -both in support, and against it. The content of speech is at least as important as the source, the style of expression, the timing and the motivation of speaking. In fact, in the study of terrorism content is absolutely indispensable. The conditions that nurture terrorism, perpetrators, targets, causes and effects, all interact, and compose a unique picture of the event in question. By isolating content and by focusing solely upon presumably pure cognitive processes, we risk making a huge methodological and epistemological mistake. When de-contextualizing political violence in general, one reduces a rich field of study into an anecdotal event of minor importance.

By choosing not to dispose content, we are faced with the ideological constraints of terrorism -a pre-eminently political and symbolic concept in the service of several ideological functions (Crenshaw, 2000). As Nuzzo (2004, p.337) comments, "[i]mmediately labeled as a terrorist act, 9/11 has gained for the Bush administration and for American public opinion the status of an original event without cause and without ground." The condemnation of terrorism in presumably healthy societies is woven of moral rather than of political thread. The mainstream anti-terrorist discourse confronts terrorism with presumably non-debatable claims, by assuming that any political endeavour in terrorism is hypocritical and immoral. On the other hand, a rival discourse, more politically flavoured and less prominent, stands up for terrorist activity as an alternative means of political action when mainstream politics are considered as ineffective or irrelevant to the political agenda in question. What may we infer about the normative representations which hold these diverse, strategic perceptions of terrorism together? At present, not much. By asking such questions, however, the apparent drawback of dealing with content may in fact lead to advancements

of our understanding of the generative mechanisms of social influence. This endeavour is also relevant to the theoretical issues of social representations. The prospect of linking social representations and social influence processes was present already in Serge Moscovici's (1961) original work on psychoanalysis.

Content in the case of terrorism, bears on a number of issues, ranging from domestic concerns about security or civil rights, to perceived implications for international arrangements. The representational field of terrorism (Doise, Clémence and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Moscovici, 1961) would incorporate a) the thorny issue of what terrorism is (and thus what is not), b) the legitimacy of anti-terrorist measures that may in fact turn against established civil rights, c) perceptions of the national and/or international context wherein changes take effect, d) the development of public policy, and e) interpretations of terrorist behaviour itself. It should go without saying that this is not an exhaustive list of related issues but, rather, a comprehensive account of the diversity and complexity of the matter. We will now consider these issues in turn.

The issue of how terrorism is defined, in lay thinking as well as in scholarly accounts, is a question about the contrasted interpretations of the meaning of terrorism. Terrorism is a deeply contested concept, and the term itself is used polemically and rhetorically, rather than analytically. More often than not, it is a pejorative label, "used to condemn an opponent's cause as illegitimate rather than describe behavior" according to Crenshaw (2000, p. 406). "To label an enemy a terrorist is to forbid the search for the ground or reason for action", Nuzzo says (2004, p. 338). In fact, in popular discourse terrorism is a pejorative label as much as an analytical tool that perpetuates dualist, simplistic conceptions of the world, such as the battle between *good* and *evil*. The events that followed 9/11 have largely reaffirmed these properties of the term, by affording terrorism a tremendous emotional impact and relocating it to the heart of the political debate about the international order. Within the context of the international anti-terrorist campaign launched by the U.S. and their allies, terrorism is taken to represent an ultimate threat to the international order, public security, and western culture. In Greece, where our studies were conducted, the concept of terrorism is particularly pregnant with meaning because leading members of the Greek *November 17* organization were arrested and brought to trial in early 2003, whereas in other European countries, similar terrorist groups inspired by left-wing and anti-imperialist movements in the 1970s had long been disbanded (see Kassimeris, 2000). The arrest and prosecution of the *November 17* organization fuelled a debate about the preconditions and

consequences of terrorism, at a time that other forms of terrorism with different agendas had been at the heart of the public debate on terrorism world-wide. What is more, the international anti-terrorist campaign run by the U.S. and the war on Iraq, have been met with the disapproval of the Greek population according to the polls, and have fed a vague anti-imperialist discourse that makes anti-power accounts of terrorism more plausible.

The second issue on antiterrorist measures concerns tolerance of restrictive and punitive actions allegedly aiming against terrorism and certainly affecting the political conditions in each country. Besides the ways in which acts of terrorism are considered to destroy human rights and fundamental freedoms, relevant concerns have been expressed in the U.N. about “the ways in which acts of terrorism function as the rationale by governments to crack down on dissident groups and critics of a regime,” and “the ways in which counter-terrorist legislation adopted by governments infringes on human rights and civil liberties of persons in those states” (Joyner, 2004, p. 243). How far can tolerance of violations of civil rights in the name of fighting terrorism go, and to what cost? How much is perceived legitimacy of the means of anti-terrorist struggle facilitated by the perceived priority of collective security over civil liberties?

The next two issues, namely perceptions of the national and/or international context in which changes take effect, and the revision of relevant policies might profitably be considered to be two aspects of a single issue. Terrorism receives various meanings in a fluid context, particularly when it is identified with globalization. In such a context, the international anti-terrorist campaign may be perceived as an inescapable outcome of the process of globalization, or as an unavoidable obligation in the name of progress and/or in the service of tactics; alternatively, it may be thought of as a Trojan Horse aimed to infringe upon the rights of individual sovereign states within their territories. In these broader issues about the sovereignty and perhaps the viability of nation-states, terrorism may be perceived (and thus work) as a catalyst accelerating change. By taking issue with terrorism one may simultaneously express his/her views on the more general picture. This is where preferred policies on national and/or international level come into play, since the above views are intertwined with individual positions on what should be done in response to terrorism. Suggested policies may range from the welfare state in individual countries, to coordinated initiatives in international *fora*, and from minority rights in individual states, to taking issue with broader cultural divisions in the form of rival Cultures, according to Huntington’s (1996) popular thesis.

Our last issue, interpreting terrorists' behaviour, is a delicate one, heavily loaded by scholarly, institutional, and popular discourses on individuals' involvement in terrorist activity. Personality theories of terrorism postulate that there is a specific psychopathology of terrorism. Silke (1998) identified a tendency to see terrorists as motivated by personality disorders such as paranoia and narcissism. According to a widely shared contention, some times blatantly and other times more subtly circulating through the media, terrorists are somehow abnormal. In line with scholarly works reducing terrorism to terrorists' past traumatic experiences, such as Pearlstein's (1991) portrait of Ulrike Meinhof, a founding member of the German RAF, in Greece there has been an extensive debate on the psychological portrait and pathological motivation of the alleged leaders of *November 17*, instigated by prominent print and television journalists. The alleged founder's commitment to terrorism, for instance, was attributed to a failed attempt to take after his father's distinguished involvement in the 4th *International*. On the other hand, the presumed popularity of a sort of *anti-power* account of terrorism in Greece (be it due to the relevance of American foreign politics for Greek national identity concerns, or due to other reasons) is likely to give appeal to alternative attributions of terrorist activity that are more in line with an anti-individualist account of societal -and world- order.

All the above can be conceptualized in terms of contrasted meanings and positions on terrorism and anti-terrorism, depending on individuals' views on relevant issues. This divergence in attitudes towards terrorism and anti-terrorism does not eliminate the possibility of consensus on the criteria that are made available when processing particular discourses. Endorsing a discourse that is relatively tolerant of terrorist activity, may be rationalized in the same terms as endorsing an absolutely intolerant discourse: Both discourses may be considered by respective advocates as progressive and modern, inasmuch as these are postulates of a *Zeitgeist* that practically condemns being conservative or outdated. In other words, the normative content of the representations underlying terrorism may be consensually shared irrespective of individual positions on the matter of terrorism. Our ongoing research findings further reveal a highly consensual acceptance of discourses that might prove critical of the role of power in perpetuating terrorist activity, by stressing uneven social distribution of resources, injustice, etc.

The question is how the above discourses would be processed if their conflictual properties could be made salient in relevant judgments, i.e. how rationalization (of endorsed positions or attitudes towards terrorism) would proceed if one had to judge how conflictual (or revolutionary, radical, etc.)

a popular discourse on terrorism was. It has been established that, whenever people may choose, they avoid conflict (see Pérez and Mugny, 1993). Thus, in principle a favoured discourse on terrorism would be considered or presented as non-conflictual and probably by implication as non-revolutionary, non-radical, etc. Yet, terrorism has an indispensable conflictual element. Either as “premeditated violence ... in the pursuit of specific political, religious, or social objectives,” (Parker and Stern, 2002, p. 604) or as “asymmetrical deployment of ... violence against enemies outside the forms of contention routinely operating within the current regime,” (Tilly, 2003, p. 233) violence is a *sine qua non* in any definition of terrorism. The widely accepted model of democratic dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes requires that resorting to violence in order to regulate human coexistence be considered inappropriate (Russett, 1993; see also Arendt, 1969). However, in the context of liberal democracy violence may in principle be used in the name of the *population* or the *people* and be ultimately legitimized by them. Alternative definitions of terrorism stress that terrorist violence is just a form of political action aimed at a political change (Hoffman, 1998), or even a just reaction to an oppressive regime in the pursuit of restoring justice and emancipation (e.g., Braud, 2004).

Hence, conflict in the form of taking issue with terrorist violence, may not be avoided when positioning oneself towards terrorism. Popular accounts of terrorism stressing issues such as the social division of labour and world injustice, have a conflictual load that requires processing. Of course, inequality does not translate necessarily into conflict (Cramer, 2003), just as the popularity of a potentially anti-power discourse is not bound to lead to some sort of social reform. Instead, our point is that in positioning oneself with respect to terrorism and thus violence, a multifaceted socio-cognitive processing is involved, touching on various concerns such as, for instance, how closely the discourse in question relates to the *Zeitgeist*, how effectively that discourse distances itself from terrorist violence, and what issues are being raised -whether these are abstract issues such as definitions of terrorism, or practical matters such as particular anti-terrorist measures with direct implications for social life.

In the present paper, Study 1 aims to map the field and explore the structure of positions towards terrorism, i.e. identify the organizing principles (Doise, 1992-93; Doise, Clémence and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993) of participants' representations of terrorism. Next, Study 2 addresses the normative content of representations of terrorism more directly.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure

One hundred forty-eight secondary school students of both sexes, aged 16-17, took part in this study.

Participants were asked to take part in a research carried out by the university, over *a number of critical issues of public interest*. The questionnaire was administered to participants immediately after they agreed to participate and were assured that their answers would be treated confidentially. Data were collected in students' classrooms in Athens, in successive sessions each lasting approximately 15 minutes.

Material

The questionnaire was based on the results of a larger-scale survey that we carried out in December 2002, in anticipation of the trial against *November 17* organization. One thousand twenty-seven university students of both sexes were questioned on a number of issues about terrorism, just-world beliefs (Lerner, 1981), political affiliations and ideological positions, and other constructs (see Papastamou, Prodromitis and Iatridis, 2005).

In its present form, the questionnaire featured five sets of items addressing a) definitions of terrorism (10 items on the political or non-political nature of terrorism, relations of terrorism with state-power, etc.); b) tolerance of restrictive and punitive actions taken by individual states (8 items); c) international implications of terrorism and counter-terrorist action and their impact on the sovereignty of individual states (5 items); d) policies that individual states should develop with respect to ethnic and cultural minorities (7 items); e) attributions of terrorists' behaviour (17 items), based on Furnham and Henderson's (1983) attributions for delinquency scale. The full content of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix. Seven-point Likert-type scales were used in all measures.

Results

Each set of items was entered in principal component analysis with orthogonal rotation. A four-factor solution accounted for 59.5% of variance in responses related to the definitions of terrorism; factors were labelled (in order of appearance in Table 1), *anti-power position*, *political opposition to terrorism*, *societal opposition to terrorism*, and *liberal position*. This four-factor solution appears to have captured a satisfactory range of positions on terrorism that circulate in public discourse. Three factors accounted for

60.2% of responses over domestic actions against terrorism and were labelled *abuse of violence, police control over citizens, and control over foreigners*, respectively. Three factors accounted for 72.2% of variance in responses about the international implications of terrorism, and were named *globalization of anti-terrorist struggle, cynical appraisal of globalization, and ethnocentric opposition to globalization*. Another two factors (50.8% of variance) emerged from the analysis on the preferred policies towards ethnic minorities and cultural divisions, named *dialogue between Cultures, and clash of Cultures*, respectively. Last, five factors accounted for 57.5% of variance in attributions of terrorists' behaviour; they were labelled, in order of appearance in Table 1, *inclination to evil, psycho-social disadvantage, social reaction, escape from daily routine and victimization*.

Table 1
Principal component analyses
(Varimax rotation) on the five sections of the questionnaire

A. Definitions of terrorism					
Component	<i>Anti-power position</i>	<i>Political opposition to terrorism</i>	<i>Societal opposition to terrorism</i>	<i>Liberal position</i>	M
% of Variance	15.8	15.6	14.2	13.9	
Q5 State power threatens individual rights	.82	.00	-.09	.06	5.07
Q8 State power threatens collective security	.65	-.14	-.40	.05	4.45
Q3 Terrorism undermines democracy	-.14	.74	-.02	.10	5.05
Q9 Terrorism violates human rights	.08	.67	.17	-.01	4.90
Q6 Terrorism against civilized societies	-.14	.23	.75	.07	5.05
Q1 Power maintains terrorism	.17	.43	-.51	.09	4.30
Q2 Collective security comes first	.11	-.24	.01	-.71	3.41
Q4 Eradicate social inequality - injustice	.05	-.27	.32	.71	5.59

Q10 Individual liberties come first	.22	.08	-.29	.59	6.12
Q7 Terrorism has political motives	.59	.42	.48	-.07	5.28

B. Action against terrorism

Component	<i>Abuse of violence</i>	<i>Police control over citizens</i>	<i>Control over foreigners</i>	M
% of Variance	23.6	19.3	17.2	
Q4 Physical violence	.83	.20	.07	3.11
Q2 Psychological violence	.76	.07	.19	4.41
Q8 Capital punishment	.71	.13	.06	2.72
Q5 Tapping phone-calls	.10	.85	.14	2.07
Q3 Daily life under surveillance	.27	.83	.07	2.10
Q6 Abolishing political asylum	.18	-.06	.76	4.36
Q7 Control over entrances	.10	.06	.61	6.49
Q1 Simplifying extradition	-.01	.25	.60	4.33

C. International implications

Component	<i>Globalization of anti-terrorist struggle</i>	<i>Cynical appraisal of globalization</i>	<i>Ethnocentric opposition to globalization</i>	M
% of Variance	29.3	22.1	20.8	
Q1 Terrorism is international phenomenon	.86	.04	.15	5.83
Q3 Terrorism is internal affair	-.71	.06	.33	3.50
Q4 Excuse for domination of U.S.A.	-.31	.76	-.15	5.17
Q5 International alliances unavoidable	.36	.72	.18	4.74
Q2 Threaten sovereignty of national states	-.05	.00	.93	4.16

D. Policies against terrorism			
Component	<i>Dialogue between Cultures</i>	<i>Clash of Cultures</i>	M
% of Variance	32.8	18.0	
Q6 Recognize minorities' rights	.73	-.17	5.27
Q2 Take care of minorities	.72	-.19	4.73
Q1 Actively seek justice	.67	.05	6.00
Q5 International Org's stand up for the weak	.64	.02	5.74
Q3 Fight against religious fanaticism	.61	-.27	5.32
Q4 Marginalize minorities	-.03	.81	3.87
Q7 One Culture prevails	-.14	.68	2.22

E. Attributions of terrorists' behavior						
Component	<i>Inclination to evil</i>	<i>Psychosocial disadvantage</i>	<i>Social reaction</i>	<i>Escape from daily routine</i>	<i>Victimization</i>	M
% of Variance	17.8	13.2	10.5	8.2	7.9	
Q12 Take pleasure in breaking law	.77	.25	.04	.01	.04	4.45
Q4 Resist obeying to rules of social life	.74	.03	-.13	.04	-.01	4.82
Q11 Enjoy causing harm	.72	.33	.01	-.01	.20	4.49
Q16 Resist assimilation	.66	-.17	.01	.25	.08	3.96
Q10 Can't differentiate between Good-Evil	.55	.30	-.01	.18	-.01	3.60
Q5 Have limited mental capacities	.50	.26	-.40	.10	.10	2.71
Q7 Were oblivious to religious training	.00	.64	-.04	.03	.28	2.79
Q6 Suffer from emotional instability	.09	.62	-.11	.32	-.13	3.89
Q13 Have less physical prowess	.20	.59	-.06	-.25	.01	2.01
Q15 Come from broken families	.22	.56	.01	.29	.05	3.31
Q8 Let themselves be carried away	.33	.51	.17	-.05	.37	3.76
Q14 Make clear there is no justice	-.01	.06	.78	-.15	-.25	5.41
Q2 Distribution of wealth is unfair	-.21	-.19	.72	.04	.18	5.32

Q9 Are driven out from society	.24	.11	.58	.47	.07	4.67
Q17 Have no resources to escape routine	.18	.08	-.06	.80	.04	3.12
Q3 Society is too loose	.11	.05	-.16	-.04	.80	4.51
Q1 Suffer from lack of affection	.05	.32	.26	.36	.55	4.17

Participants' scores on the items with high loadings in each factor were averaged, after reversing the scores in items with negative high loadings in factors *societal opposition to terrorism*, *liberal position*, and *globalization of anti-terrorist struggle*. The factors *ethnocentric opposition to globalization* and *escape from daily routine* (where only single items loaded highly) were considered to provide an unstable basis for an organizing principle of representations of terrorism, and were ignored in subsequent analyses. Thus, fifteen new variables were produced, as many as the factors presented above minus two.

All four definitions of terrorism were answered favourably (i.e. all means were above the scales' mid-point), however the liberal position ($M = 5.43$) evoked more favourable responses than any other definition ($F3, 441 = 15.95, p < .001$; individual comparisons indicated no significant differences between the three other definitions, see Table 2). As regards tolerance of restrictive measures against terrorism, control over foreigners evoked the most favourable responses ($M = 5.06$). On the contrary, participants disagreed with abuse of violence ($M = 3.41$) and even more so with police control over citizens ($M = 2.09$; $F2, 294 = 214.26, p < .001$; all comparisons being significant at $p < .05$). As regards the international implications of terrorism, participants approved of globalization of counter-terrorist action ($M = 5.16$), and stressed the negative consequences of globalization simultaneously (cynical appraisal of globalization: $M = 4.94$; $t(147) = 1.32, n.s.$). As for the policies towards ethnic minorities and cultural divisions, participants clearly opted for dialogue between Cultures ($M = 5.41$) as opposed to clash of Cultures ($M = 3.06$; $t(147) = 13.57, p < .001$). Last, terrorists' behaviour was attributed to social reaction ($M = 5.13$) more than victimization ($M = 4.34$) and inclination to evil ($M = 4.01$). Still, the latter two attributions were answered more favourably than the *psycho-social disadvantage* account ($M = 3.16$; $F3, 441 = 74.88, p < .001$).

As a next step, these fifteen variables were entered in principal component analysis, in order to see how concrete positions on terrorism are inter-related. A scree-plot suggested a three-factor solution that accounted for 40.3% of variance. As may be seen in Table 2, the first factor was mostly

comprised by all means of domestic action against terrorism (abuse of violence, police control over citizens, control over foreigners), clash of Cultures, and all reductionist accounts of terrorist behaviour (victimization, inclination to evil, psychosocial disadvantage). These essentially anti-terrorist claims were further opposed to the liberal position. On the other hand, the second factor featured the most favourable positions, i.e. dialogue between Cultures, the liberal position, the political opposition to terrorism, the social reaction account, and globalization of counter-terrorist action as well as the cynical appraisal of globalization. Some of these positions (e.g. liberal position, dialogue between cultures) might run counter to prevailing assumptions of anti-terrorist struggle, whereas others (e.g. globalization of anti-terrorist struggle, cynical appraisal of globalization) might not. Last, the third factor opposed the societal opposition to terrorism and two reductionist accounts of terrorist behaviour (inclination to evil, and psychosocial disadvantage) to the anti-power position and, though less so, to the social reaction account and the cynical appraisal of globalization. Considering the positive signs of the former positions (i.e. societal opposition to terrorism, etc.) this factor was flavoured by anti-terrorist claims just as factor 1.

Table 2
Principal component analysis
on 15 organizing principles of representations of terrorism.

	Component	1	2	3	M
	% of Variance	18.6	11.0	10.7	
CONF2 Clash of Cultures	.65				3.06
ACT1 Abuse of violence	.60				3.41
ATTR4 Victimization	.59				4.34
ACT2 Police control over citizens	.57				2.09
ACT3 Control over foreigners	.49				5.06
CONF1 Dialogue between Cultures			.76		5.41
TER2 Political opposition to terrorism			.51		4.98
TER4 Liberal position		-.31	.51		5.43
ATTR3 Social reaction			.49	-.37	5.13
GLOB2 Cynical appraisal of globalization			.39	-.33	4.94
GLOB1 Globalization of anti-terrorist struggle			.38		5.16
TER3 Societal opposition to terrorism				.66	4.38
TER1 Anti-power position				-.60	4.75
ATTR1 Inclination to evil		.46		.57	4.01
ATTR2 Psycho-social disadvantage		.49		.56	3.16

Note. Loadings below .30 are omitted.

Discussion

Two points manifest themselves in these results. First, besides the notable exception of *control over foreigners*, prominent anti-terrorist claims were the least favourable positions about terrorism. These positions were organized in two factors which shared some common assumptions (inclination to evil, and psycho-social disadvantage of terrorists) but at the same time were opposed to two diverse positions on terrorism, i.e. to the liberal position (factor 1), and the anti-power position (factor 3).

Second, most favourable positions about terrorism were accounted for by the same factor, incorporating both anti-terrorist and non antiterrorist-claims. Thus, an element of ambivalence was present in participants' responses. For instance, just as participants acknowledged the international nature of terrorism and counter-terrorist action, they also considered counter-terrorist struggle as an endeavour in favour of unilateral American interests (cynical appraisal of globalization). And, just as participants strongly stood up for the liberal position, they endorsed the political opposition to terrorism too. However, the anti-power position was not accounted for by the same factor as other favourable positions about terrorism. Considering also that the anti-power position and (though less so) the liberal stance were opposed to two distinct and yet interrelated sets of strong anti-terrorist claims, it might be that the anti-power position serves as an alternative anchor in shaping perceptions of blatant anti-terrorist views. The next study set out to shed light on these findings by addressing how these organizing principles are normatively framed.

Study 2

In this study we question how differential accounts on terrorism are viewed in terms of normative or semantic, along with evaluative, differences. Unlike evaluative differences, the focus on semantics requires some social consensus in employment of various criteria. As was mentioned above, endorsing a discourse tolerant of terrorist activity might be rationalized in the same terms as endorsing an intolerant discourse, since both discourses may be considered as progressive and modern, in line with the *Zeitgeist*. The normative content of the representations underlying terrorism may be consensually shared irrespective of individual differences. Thus, this study focuses on the normative standards against which concrete positions on terrorism (as identified in Study 1) would be viewed and processed. To this end, this study addresses and measures perceived conflict and other standards such as perceived progressiveness, moderateness, and fairness, in rival accounts of terrorism.

Method

Participants

Participants were 345 secondary school students of both sexes, aged 16-17. They all studied in public schools in Athens, in the same districts as in Study 1.

Procedure

The items that were averaged in Study 1 were combined together in 15 texts (as many as the new variables in Study 1). Grammatical conjunctions were only used between relevant items for the purpose of enhancing comprehension. The three items that were reverse-scaled in the pilot before averaging, were now presented in negative form (e.g. "When it comes to the collective security of citizens, individual rights and liberties should come second" was changed into "...should never come second").

All participants were pre-tested on three questions, addressing whether terrorism is a political crime (vs. a non-political crime), politically motivated (vs. non-politically motivated) and justified (vs. non-justified). Then, participants were presented with the above texts and asked to answer a number of questions on each of them. Due to the time and effort required for this task, for practical reasons participants were randomly assigned to four groups, each group presented with a questionnaire featuring either a) the texts about the definitions of terrorism, or b) the texts about restrictive measures against terrorism, or c) the texts about the international implications of terrorism and relevant large-scale policies, or d) the texts about the attributions of terrorists' behaviour. Participants were instructed to read carefully each text they were presented with and indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with them. Immediately thereafter, they were asked to rate each text on a number of bipolar scales.

The procedure was repeated several times in participants' classrooms, each session lasting approximately 40 minutes.¹

Measures

Besides participants' agreement or disagreement with the content of each text, 15 bipolar scales measured assessments of texts on various attributes. These scales (all 7-point) were anchored on their extremes as follows: Progressive - Conservative, Outdated - Modern, Moral - Immoral, Close-minded - Open-minded, Moderate - Extreme, For Power - Against

¹ For exploratory reasons, after rating each text on the bipolar scales participants were further asked to fill the questionnaire about terrorism that was used in Study 1.

Power, Fair - Unfair, Submissive - Revolutionary, Pretentious - Honest, Insensitive - Sensitive, Realistic - Unrealistic, Left-wing - Right-wing, Consensual - Conflictual, Balanced - Imbalanced, Outcast - Socially integrated.

Results

Participants' positions against terrorism, as tapped in the pre-test, indicated an acknowledgement of terrorism's political agenda and a disavowal of terrorist practice at the same time. On a 7-point scale, terrorism was considered as a political (rather than non-political) crime ($M = 3.84$), politically motivated ($M = 2.80$), and unjustified ($M = 5.00$). No significant difference between the four groups of participants was encountered on any of these scales ($F_3, 345 < 1$ on each scale).

Scores of agreement with each argument were entered in repeated-measure ANOVAs in each group. The results were almost identical to those in Study 1, where the scores on individual items were averaged (Table 3).

Table 3

Mean agreement with the content of the 15 organizing principles of representations of terrorism in Study 2, and mean ratings on the three normative dimensions.

	M	Normative dimensions		
		<i>Zeitgeist</i>	<i>Minority approach</i>	<i>Denial of conflict</i>
TER4 Liberal position	5.86	5.35	4.66	4.59
TER1 Anti-power position	4.84	4.69	4.56	3.91
TER2 Political opposition to terrorism	4.67	4.21	4.18	3.82
TER3 Societal opposition to terrorism	4.49	4.00	3.93	3.67
ACT3 Control over foreigners	4.56	4.43	3.87	3.91
ACT1 Abuse of violence	2.39	2.77	3.29	2.39
ACT2 Police control over citizens	1.89	2.70	3.24	2.54
GLOB1 Globalization of anti-terrorist struggle	4.96	4.79	4.11	4.02
GLOB2 Cynical appraisal of globalization	4.98	4.08	3.85	3.47
CONF1 Dialogue between Cultures	5.69	5.12	4.56	4.38

CONF2 Clash of Cultures	2.57	2.95	3.44	2.69
ATTR3 Social reaction	5.19	4.71	4.57	4.01
ATTR4 Victimization	4.51	4.06	4.09	3.91
ATTR1 Inclination to evil	3.91	3.50	3.88	3.17
ATTR2 Psycho-social disadvantage	2.90	3.09	3.76	3.37

Once again, all four definitions of terrorism were rated favourably, however the liberal position evoked more agreement than any other position ($F_3, 267 = 11.68, p < .001$); control over foreigners attracted significantly more agreement than abuse of violence and police control over citizens, both rejected by participants ($F_2, 156 = 73.10, p < .001$); globalization of counter-terrorist action was approved as much as cynical appraisal of globalization ($t(82) < 1$); accordingly, dialogue between Cultures was agreed upon far more than clash of Cultures ($t(82) = 10.63, p < .001$). Lastly, terrorists' behaviour was attributed to social reaction more than victimization and inclination to evil; still, these two were answered more favourably than psychosocial disadvantage ($F_3, 288 = 38.29, p < .001$).

Semantic differences

Mean ratings of each argument on the 15 bipolar scales were entered in hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward's method), after reversing the scores where appropriate (so that the higher the score, the more favourable the evaluation on each scale). Mean scores on the arguments with which participants agreed the most were taken as guides in reversals of political attributes. Interestingly, the most popular arguments were those that were considered more against power, more revolutionary and more left-wing than the others. The arguments that were agreed most were also considered less conflictual than the others, but non-consensual in absolute terms.

This analysis produced three constellations of attributes:

- a) attributes that stress progressiveness and keeping up with the *Zeitgeist* (*progressive, modern, open-minded, moral, fair: Zeitgeist*);
- b) attributes articulating what we might call a minority approach, distancing itself from conformity and power (*against Power, revolutionary, left-wing, realistic, honest, socially integrated: Minority approach*); and
- c) attributes celebrating denial of conflict (*consensual, moderate, balanced, sensitive: Denial of conflict*).

This classification captures well a wide range of concerns encountered in the field of social influence (Moscovici, 1979, 1985; Moscovici and Doise, 1992), and crosscuts formal analytic distinctions. Progressiveness, modernity, open-mindedness, and other attributes celebrated by the *Zeitgeist* raise concerns about the validity of the arguments in question. What we call a “minority approach” directly relates to the issues lying at the heart of minority influence processes, i.e. power, novelty, and conformity. Last, denial of conflict is critical to positioning oneself on hot social issues such as terrorism (see Pérez and Mugny, 1993).

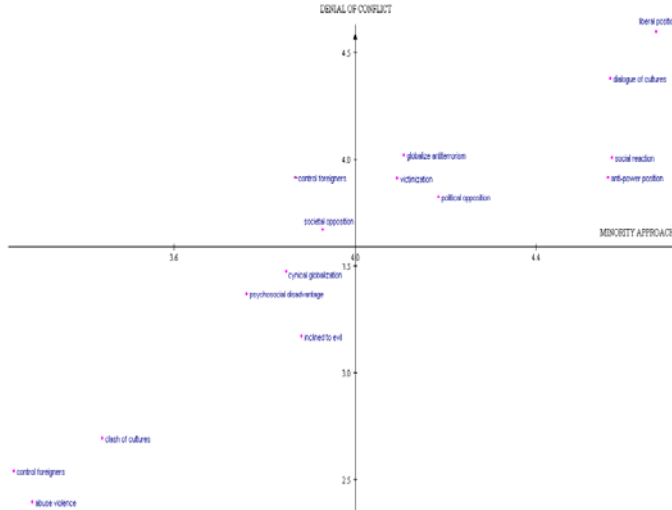
An inspection of Table 3 suggests that the arguments with which participants agreed the most attracted the most positive attributes in general. For instance, the liberal position was clearly superior to all other definitions of terrorism in the dimensions of *Zeitgeist* ($F3, 267 = 24.721, p < .001$) and *Denial of conflict* ($F3, 267 = 20.939, p < .001$). By the same token, dialogue between cultures was superior to clash of cultures in all dimensions (all $p < .02$). However, a closer look at Table 3 indicates that not all evaluations fit this general pattern. The liberal stance was perceived as relevant to the “minority approach” as the anti-power position (note also that the liberal position was presented as less conflictual than all other accounts whereas the anti-power position was considered as conflictual as the other two). Also, the social reaction account attracted higher ratings than other attributions in all dimensions except for that of *denial of conflict* where social reaction did not reliably differ from victimization. Last, in spite of equal agreement levels, the acknowledgement of the international nature of counter-terrorist struggle and the cynical appraisal of globalization differed systematically on all attributes (all $p < .001$).

A bivariate analysis with the aid of the SPAD statistical package (version 4.5) was further conducted to capture the differences in the normative standards against which our organizing principles of representations of terrorism were appraised and processed. Figure 1 is a graphic illustration of the positions of the 15 organizing principles in the space defined by juxtaposing *Denial of conflict* and *Minority approach* (Figure 1a), as well as *Denial of conflict* and *Zeitgeist* (Figure 1b). In both illustrations in Figure 1, the most favourable arguments about terrorism figure above the means in respective axes, whereas the least favourable arguments concentrate below the means. Exceptions are cynical appraisal of globalization, figuring below the means of *Denial of conflict* and *Minority approach* (Figure 1a); control over foreigners, figuring above the means of *Denial of conflict* and *Zeitgeist* (Figure 1b); and victimization, exceeding the mean on all axes.

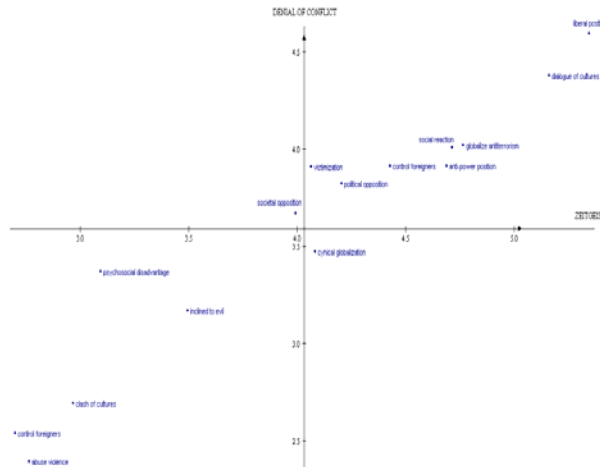
Figure 1

Positions of the 15 organizing principles in the space defined by juxtaposing “Denial of conflict” and “Zeitgeist (a), and “Denial of conflict” and “Minority approach” (b).

a)



b)



Discussion

This study addressed the normative content of representations of terrorism and counter-terrorist action by Greek adolescents. Participants were confronted with either of four issues relevant to terrorism (definitions, restrictive actions, international implications and policies, and attributions), and processed a number of arguments on respective issues.

Perceptions of terrorism and counter-terrorist action prove systematic. Anti-terrorist discourse and blatant measures in the name of counter-terrorist struggle were largely disputed, whereas the most favourably-endorsed arguments were those that challenge directly or indirectly the assumptions of the prevailing anti-terrorist political discourse: The *liberal position*, with its emphasis on the societal causes of terrorism and on civil liberties simultaneously; *dialogue between cultures*, resisting repressive action against minorities; and the *social reaction* account of terrorists' involvement, emphasizing causes that reside within the society rather than the individuals.

What is more, the arguments participants favoured most were presented as more pro-Zeitgeist, less conflictual and still more challenging to the status quo. The fact that evaluations were preceded by individual statements of agreement to each argument credits these judgements with a rationalizing function, which may only emphasize the importance of this puzzling evidence. Hence, perceptions of terrorism appear to relate to a normative context that favours concerns of keeping up with the Zeitgeist and of avoiding conflict, as well as political concerns of distancing oneself from conformism and power.

General discussion

This paper suggested an analysis of representations of terrorism informed by content, based on the contention that content is indispensable in a meaningful social psychological account of terrorism. It was further argued that raising the issue of content in the study of terrorism might lead to a timely advancement of our understanding of the generative mechanisms of social influence.

Two exploratory studies were presented in support of these claims. Study 1 aimed to map the representational field of terrorism and identify the organizing principles in shared meanings about terrorism. This research did not mean to provide an exhaustive list of related issues but, instead, it aimed to capture a comprehensive range of meanings associated with terrorism depending on their prevalence in the international and Greek con-

texts. Besides, to put our results in perspective within a social psychological approach emphasizing the importance of studying content, this study (as well as the next one) explored the representations of Greek adolescents at a time when terrorism prevailed in the public sphere due to the arrest and prosecution of members of a well-known Greek terrorist organization. Thus, the issues tapped in this study ranged from what terrorism is about in our participants' view, to the perceived legitimacy of anti-terrorist measures, and from perceptions of the national and/or international context of terrorism and the development of appropriate public policy, to the attributions of terrorist activity.

Due to the exploratory nature of our research, we set out to capture a wide array of principles organizing the meanings in question, by analyzing separately each thematic section of our questionnaire. This approach resulted in a detailed account of 15 organizing principles of representations of various issues related to terrorism rather than of terrorism *per se*. The results of this study indicated that some of the most prominent assumptions of the international campaign against terrorism, such as the need to restrict civil liberties and the attribution of terrorists' involvement in illegal activity to terrorists' ill motives, were the least favourable positions about terrorism. The only position attracting high levels of agreement was the call to control foreigners as a means of combating terrorism. This appeal encapsulates a type of xenophobic shift which is most likely in line with the emphasis on internal security placed by the Greek and other governments in response to 9/11 (Brouwer, 2003; Papastamou, Prodromitis and Iatridis, 2005). The least favourable, essentially anti-terrorist claims were further opposed to a set of arguments most of which may be considered to run counter to prevailing counter-terrorist assumptions inasmuch as they emphasize, for instance, the societal causes of terrorism, the inviolability of civil liberties, and the inappropriateness of repressive action against minorities. However ambivalence was also present in participants' views as they endorsed mutually exclusive claims simultaneously (e.g. that anti-terrorist struggle should become international, and that international anti-terrorist struggle only serves the American interests). Furthermore, the arguments opposed to essentially anti-terrorist non-favourable claims did not form a concrete front since what we called the *anti-power position* to terrorism (emphasizing the threat of state-power for both individual rights and collective security) served as an alternative anchor of positioning oneself against prominent anti-terrorist claims. In fact there was some evidence that the anti-power position and a position in support of the societal causes of ter-

rorism and of civil liberties simultaneously (i.e. a *liberal position*) work as different anchors to this end.

Study 2 aimed to explore how these organizing principles of representations of terrorism are normatively or semantically anchored. The analysis of various semantic criteria pointed to three large encompassing normative dimensions: a) progressiveness and keeping up with the *Zeitgeist*, b) distancing oneself from conformity and power (*minority approach*), and c) denial of conflict. We argued that these dimensions correspond to key concerns in the field of social influence (Moscovici, 1979, 1985; Moscovici and Doise, 1992), namely concerns with the validity of the arguments in question; with power, novelty, and conformity; and last, with conflict and social consensus. These dimensions were systematically employed in the processing of various arguments such that the most favourable arguments were presented as more pro-*Zeitgeist*, less conflictual, and more challenging to the status quo. Considering that terrorism is all about violence and thus conflict, one would expect that a favoured discourse on terrorism would be presented as non-conflictual and, by implication, as non-radical. However these results suggest that our participants form their views about terrorism in a normative context that celebrates keeping up with the *Zeitgeist*, avoiding conflict and, still, distancing oneself from conformism and power. It is worth noting that the *liberal position*, the most favoured account of terrorism, was considered as *against power* and *revolutionary* as the *anti-power position* whereas the latter was certainly presented as comparatively more conflictual and more distant from the *Zeitgeist*. Nevertheless this pattern of results probably captures a shift in the normative standards against which ideological positions are being held and change, which may question our assumptions about the social actors and stakes of social influence (see Mugny, 1982).

Our work in progress indicates that this is a serviceable perspective, yet it should go without saying that a significant advancement in this perspective requires direct tests of concrete hypotheses -an endeavour we have been pursuing for some time now. For instance, if perceived conflict is critical to the processing of the non-essentially anti-terrorist definitions of terrorism (such as the *liberal* and *anti-power* positions), experimentally making those arguments' conflictual elements more salient would probably lead to an even higher endorsement of the most favourable and consensually accepted definition, i.e. the liberal stance: In line with the anti-conformist normative context to which our participants had access, and yet too costly to identify with, the anti-power position would probably trigger a socio-cognitive conflict giving way to increased endorsement of the highly

consensual liberal position (see Pérez, Papastamou and Mugny, 1995). Another hypothesis would address the effect of psychologization of terrorists in the form of the reductionist accounts of terrorists' behaviour. Would these unfavourable accounts induce those subjects who are least tolerant of terrorism to endorse them more (Papastamou, Mugny and Kaiser, 1980)?

Thus considering content as an indispensable aspect of a meaningful study of terrorism does not rule out the possibility of an experimental approach on terrorism informed by content. More broadly, we are convinced that a perspective on the contents associated with terrorism is not just optional, if we mean to question, for instance, how political violence is reduced to terrorism and vice versa, how terrorism is promoted to an alternative means of political action, or whether terrorist practice signifies a shift from the collective expression of social thinking to the individual anchoring of cultural identities. In short, we need to retain content if we wish to avoid the reduction of terrorism and/or political violence to a theoretically meaningless criminal activity. At this exploratory stage, at least, the present findings suggest that we might thereby enrich the analysis of social influence processes with their ideological contents and the normative representations that lie behind them. Eventually, a social psychological theory of political violence might lay the foundations for a theory integrating social influence processes and social representations.

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Appendix

A. Definitions of terrorism

- Q1 Power maintains terrorism in order to justify its own arbitrary acts and abuse of violence.
- Q2 When it comes to the collective security of citizens, individual rights and liberties should come second.
- Q3 Terrorism as a means of political action undermines democracy.
- Q4 The only effective way to combat terrorism is to eradicate what really causes it, i.e. social inequality and injustice.
- Q5 Arbitrary use of State power threatens individual rights more than terrorist acts do.
- Q6 Terrorism disguises its criminal face beneath fake political arguments and thus violates the fundamentals of a civilized society.
- Q7 Terrorism is a violent means of struggle with political motives and a political agenda too.
- Q8 Arbitrary use of State power threatens the collective security of citizens more than terrorist acts do.
- Q9 Terrorism as a means of political action violates human rights.
- Q10 Individual liberties and rights of citizens should always come first in a civilized world.

B. Action against terrorism

Combating terrorism requires:

- Q1 Revisiting and simplifying procedures of extradition of suspects.
- Q2 Allowing psychological violence during interrogation of suspects.
- Q3 Having citizens' daily life under surveillance.
- Q4 Allowing physical violence during interrogation of suspects.
- Q5 Tapping of citizens' phone-calls.
- Q6 Abolishing political asylum for suspects.
- Q7 Increasing control over all entrances to a country (ports, airports, borders).
- Q8 Re-establishment of capital punishment for those convicted for terrorism.

C. International implications

- Q1 Terrorism is an international phenomenon, and so is the struggle against it.
- Q2 International alliances against terrorism threaten the sovereignty of every national state.
- Q3 Terrorism is an internal affair of individual countries, and so is the struggle against it.
- Q4 International alliances against terrorism are an excuse for establishing domination over the whole world by the U.S.A.
- Q5 Due to globalization, international alliances against terrorism may no longer be avoided.

D. Policies against terrorism

Extinction of terrorism in the long run requires that:

- Q1 Social injustice be exterminated and justice be actively sought (e.g. by reinforcing the Welfare State).
- Q2 Each country try to accept and take care of all ethnic and religious minorities living therein.
- Q3 All kinds of religious fanaticism be fought against wherever they appear.
- Q4 Each country try to marginalize and defeat all ethnic and religious minorities living therein.
- Q5 International Organizations actively stand up for the national rights of weak states.
- Q6 Each country recognize the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.
- Q7 One of the two rival Cultures (i.e. Western vs. Muslim) prevail.

E. Attributions of terrorists' behavior

The reason why some people commit terrorist acts is that:

- Q1 They have suffered from lack of affection in their environment.
- Q2 Social distribution of wealth is outrageously unfair.
- Q3 Our society is too loose.
- Q4 They resist obeying to the basic rules of social life.
- Q5 They have limited mental capacities.
- Q6 They suffer from their impulses and emotional instability.
- Q7 They were oblivious to religious training.
- Q8 They let themselves be carried away by the wrong people.
- Q9 More and more often they are driven out from society.
- Q10 They haven't learnt to differentiate between Good and Evil.
- Q11 They enjoy causing harm.
- Q12 They take pleasure in breaking the law.
- Q13 They have less physical prowess than the rest of people.
- Q14 They mean to make clear that there is no social justice.
- Q15 They come from broken families.
- Q16 They resist any attempt to assimilate them into society.
- Q17 They have no resources or capacities to escape their daily routine otherwise.

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