10th International LAB Meeting - Winter Session 2008

European Ph.D. on
Social Representations and Communication
At the Multimedia LAB & Research Center, Rome-Italy

Social Representations in Action and Construction in Media and Society

"Developing Meta-Theoretical Approach to Social Representations Literature: the contribution of Italian Scholars belonging to the International So.Re.Com THEmatic NETwork"

From 26th January - 3rd February 2008
http://www.europhd.eu/html/_cnda02/07/12.00.00.00.shtml

Key Lectures
“Islam, media and Social Representations. Theoretical Issues and Cross-National Comparisons”

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Xth Lab Meeting - 2008, Feb 1th
Theoretical issues: more general

- Language, discourse and social representations; *critical* perspectives; interdisciplinarity (Billig 1991; van Dijk 1997; Moscovici 2001; Fairclough 1992; Kress 1996)
- Mass media and social construction of representations; evolution of media; a discursive approach to mass communication (Friedman et al. 1999; Sommer 1998)
- Culture and psychological processes; the nature of culture; the nature of mind; intercultural dynamics (Geertz 1973; Cole 1996; Mantovani 1998; Mazzara 2007)
- Social identity and intergroup relations; collective memories; imagined communities; the social construction of group conflict (Tajfel 1978; 1981; Anderson 1983; Abrams, Hogg 1999; Roudometof 2002; Wilmer 2002.; Verkuyten 2004)
- Social processes; migration; globalisation; multicultural and intercultural society; cross-cultural adaptation; intercultural communication (King & Wood 2001; Berry, Sam 1997; Appadurai 1996; Webster 1997; Steinberg 2001; Holliday et al. 2004)
Theoretical issues: more specific

- The *Orientalist* perspective (Said 1978, 1995; Ghareeb 1983; Sayyid 1997; Sardar 1999; Ma 2000)
- *Islam* as a cultural construction; as a system of peoples, traditions, specific versions of religion; the *European* and specific *national* versions of Islam (Hourani 1991; First 2002; Gilsenan 1990; Hunter 2002)
- *Islam* and the *West*; as seen by western society; as seen by Islamic society (Hippler, Lueg 1995; Bamyeh 1999; Hafez et al. 2000; Rugh 2004)
- The *clash of civilization* thesis (Huntington 1996; McKinnon 1997; Marfleet 2003; Seib 2004)
- Terrorism, feeling of unsecurity and media; the idea of *Jihad*; an emerging *frame*; before and after 9-11 (Rabbie 1989; Schaffert 1992; Dobkin 1992; Paletz & Schmid 1992; Esposito 2002; Chermak et al. 2003; Norris et al. 2003; Veer, Munshi 2004; Ben-Yeuda 2005).
Methods in media research

• methodological vs epistemological options; discourse analysis, content analysis and social constructionism
• qualitative analysis; sampling, reliability, validity; generalisation vs special cases
• lexical and textual vs rhetorical analysis; language vs images; explicit vs implicit content
• possible support from computers; advantages and risks of CAQDAS
• specificity of different media; new media and Internet; media discourse and interpersonal relations; mainly in new media environment
• new actors on the scene; self-presentation of Others and intercultural communication issues.
Islam representations and media

Main results

- homogeneity of findings; slight differences in relation to time, circumstances, countries, media; even political orientation
- an “essentialist” vision; mass description; lack of personal and individual details
- increasing coverage; Islam as a salient issue; suddenly recognizable;
- anecdotal evidence vs systematic coverage; Islam and newsmaking processes
- global Islam vs specific national Islam; Muslims in the West; in relation to immigration and multi/intercultural society
- which voice of Islam; good vs bad; moderate vs extremist; local vs global; personal vs institutional
- few main topics: beliefs; education and value transmission; mixed marriages; *hijab* and gender issues; construction of mosques
Elements of Islam representation

- monolithic, undifferentiated; religious homogeneity more important than any possible cultural difference
- pre-modern if not medieval; unchangeable, in time and space; against enlightenment tradition; dominated by instincts, fanaticism, superstition, esotism; the core of orientalist discourse
- common psychological traits; an “islamic character”; radicalism, fundamentalism, group cohesiveness, obedience; specific and homogeneous set of values; sexism
- crucial role of religion in individual and collective life; religion as a pervasive menace
- violence as a means for maintaining society; for spreading the faith; more or less close link to international terrorism.
Conclusions

• A stable set of constitutive elements; the core of orientalist discourse
• Discoursive fluidity, in order to accommodate changing situations, socio-historical specificity, cultural evolution;
• The security topic and counter terrorism war as a new frame for old contents
• European and National Muslims as an emerging topic; cross-categorisation and common ingroup models
• Mass media, newsmaking processes and social representations.