

Media & Public Debate

The international conference 'Media and Public Debate', organized by the University of Amsterdam, which was convened by Peter van der Veer, University of Amsterdam, and Shoma Munshi was perhaps one of the first international post 11 September conferences bringing together participants from all over the world. All papers primarily focused on the media coverage of the events of 11 September in the US, their aftermath, and how the use of the media as an instrument of warfare forces the analyses of the construction of public opinion in electronic warfare. In that lay the timeliness of the conference.

By Shoma Munshi

The discussions that the papers generated were lively and thought provoking. The point was raised that perhaps the uniqueness of the 9/11 event had not been sufficiently emphasized, and most of the comments and criticisms post 9/11 have been linked to the electronic media, while nuances had also been present in the print media. It was not just the American media who were guilty of this but global media as well. Asu Aksoy, Goldsmith's College, London, raised the important point that when talking of media, one was also talking of national media in national contexts; and those national media systems were reporting international news. So, in this scenario, who has con-

trol over the resources of the media? When discussed that Samuel Huntington's term 'clash of civilizations' received a new lease on life post 9/11, Irfan Ahmed, University of Amsterdam, spoke of a clash within civilizations as well. Peter van der Veer raised two important issues by pointing out that rather than focus on a criticism of the media, what was required more was an analysis of the media; and that interpretations of the media are different in different places.

The participants generally agreed that the events of 9/11 have brought to the fore, perhaps with greater urgency and focus than ever before, the following questions: identity, Islam, diaspora and multicultural citizenship, how new forms of media, particularly television

and most powerfully the Internet now provide the means for new forms of identity, and how a fallout of this 'war on terrorism' has had unintended consequences, particularly for minorities who wherever they are now, are more vulnerable than ever before.

One of the most useful consequences of this conference has been a forthcoming co-edited volume (Peter van der Veer and Shoma Munshi) from the conference presentations titled *After September 11: Media and Public Debate in Asia* on the fast track with Routledge-Curzon. This will be one of the first books to deal with such a pressing and timely issue of what is literally 'news as it happens'. In that itself, perhaps its greatest purpose is served. ◀

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