Education as Storytelling and the Implications for Media Literacy

Media Literacy, Security, and Youth Engagement with Global Current Affairs: The Case of *Deterrence*

By Roman Gerodimos

This paper explores the relationship between media literacy, youth global engagement, storytelling, and contemporary security, using the case study of _Deterrence_, a web documentary in eight episodes co-created with students at Bournemouth University.

The paper starts by making the case for factual, interdisciplinary knowledge as a pillar of media literacy. I argue that, if media literacy has a role as an instrument of democracy, then engaging with the content and context of issues is a prerequisite to producing informed and accurate stories, otherwise there is the danger of trying to solve problems or talk about communities that we hardly understand. I then focus on security as a rarely discussed example of the overlap between media literacy and global citizenship. At the heart of that nexus lie certain core values, including freedom, trust and the pursuit of truth. The changing nature of warfare and the emergence of hybrid threats, such as fake news and misinformation campaigns, have placed media literacy at the front line of the New Cold War.

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Concept 1: Interdisciplinary Knowledge as a 'Third Pillar' of Media Literacy

Student engagement with social and political issues is increasingly seen as being at the heart of media literacy and civic media. Over the last couple of decades there has been a shift, in terms of institutional emphasis, pedagogic practice and research focus, from the critical analysis of media messages to production-oriented approaches, and ultimately to the idea of civic intentionality, i.e.

using pedagogy and civic media to serve the common good (Mihailidis and Gerodimos 2016; Mihailidis, Gerodimos and Fromm 2019).

JML itself recently hosted a fruitful discussion on the role of agency in media literacy. Andersen and Arcus (2017: 3) note that, in the context of media literacy, "agency is the exercising of awareness through critical thinking skills to effect change personally, locally and/or globally". Ratner and Friesem (2018: 15) make a similar case for media production: "civic engagement, social and political change or connecting community to thrive for the common good are variations of the purpose of using media production". This shift obviously raises important and interesting questions about the normative assumptions and goals of such an approach. There are likely to be as many perspectives on what constitutes the "common good" as there are people, but that should not stop us from engaging in such debates that are essentially political.

Despite this strategic and collective shift of media literacy towards active civic and community engagement, there is a marked lack of scholarly attention on the international and global aspects of citizenship and politics. It is certainly easier to identify problems, pool resources, achieve consensus and use civic media to tell stories, design interventions and solutions for local or hyperlocal problems. The more you broaden the civic lens towards the national sphere, the greater is the influence of political ideology and structural factors, making this undertaking significantly more complicated. This is even more so for international affairs.

However, engagement with global current affairs is vital not just from a democratic perspective (i.e. for a more inclusive and participatory *global* citizenship), but quite literally from an existential one. The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has made painfully explicit how interconnected humans and communities are. It has highlighted the unprecedented challenges that this interdependence is posing to our security, as well as the opportunities for collaboration and solidarity.

Identifying problems that cross national borders, accessing and telling powerful stories, raising awareness, allocating resources, designing and implementing policy and practical solutions within a diverse, pluralistic and globalized community require providing citizens with the knowledge and tools that will allow them to gain, or retain, agency at that level too. Yet, the agenda of issues, actors and norms at the global arena is different from that of the domestic (local or national) one, although those certainly intersect. Therefore, "it is necessary to question which skills people need to develop in order to critically approach news on international issues, with the objective to achieve a wider perspective of the world we live, and become informed and active citizens of the world" (Di Ricco 2018: 41).

What this means in practice is that, in order to fulfil their civic mission, the curricula of media and information literacies and civic media pedagogies ought to embrace and incorporate interdisciplinary knowledge about world politics. In my teaching and research, I use the term *global current affairs* to refer to this intersection among the fields of journalism, media/news literacy, history, law, political and international relations theory (Gerodimos 2012). Global current affairs is essentially a gateway to a deeper understanding of contemporary developments, applying the 'what, when, who, how and why' of journalism at the global level through a systematic and informed analysis of world news and through the creation of narratives that link the global to the local.

Media literacy has often been conceptualised and practiced through the twin elements of theory and practice. This duality has produced an interesting debate regarding the relative value of each component and especially the extent to which either element provides students with civic agency. Proponents of theory emphasise the need for transferable skills such as critical thinking, analysing and evaluating how media messages are produced and interpreted, the political and economic structure of the media industry, ethical implications, etc. The argument is that without that theoretical and normative context, merely acquiring the technical skills to produce media does not, as it were, produce conscious citizens who are also media consumers and producers.

Other scholars take a more critical view of what they see as "representationalism", i.e. an emphasis on theory-led analysis and written reflections as opposed to making media. Based on his experience teaching high school students, Dezuanni (2017: 17) notes that "I was never convinced a student who could recite a media theory or write a critical reflection about their own media productions

possessed any more agency than a student who mastered media technologies to create compelling work".

This discussion extends to many journalism and media schools in Europe and the United States that tend to separate theory from practice, while others opt for a more blended approach in which theoretical awareness and critical analysis are embedded in practical courses or vice versa.

While the divide between theory and practice is probably exaggerated and, to an extent, artificial, this duality still overlooks a crucial third pillar of media literacy: contextualised facts. By contextualised facts, I mean the in-depth understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural reality in local, national and global communities: history, geography, demography, institutions, personalities, cultural trends, power relations, resources, conflicting interests and agendas. Interdisciplinary knowledge is distinct from media or news theory and from practical media production (Diagram 1). It is not about the process of communication, but rather the substance of what is being communicated. If media literacy has a role as a facilitator of powerful storytelling and an instrument of democracy, then engaging with the content and context of issues is a prerequisite, otherwise there is the danger of trying to solve problems that we hardly understand.

INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE
Content and context of current affairs
Facts, science/data, reality on the ground, other people's lives
Political, social, cultural, economic context
Key players, agendas, interests, resources, background

THEORY
Representation & Meaning
Media Structures & Platforms
Audiences & Users
Critical Thinking
Values & Ethics

PRACTICE
Technical Skills
Learning by doing
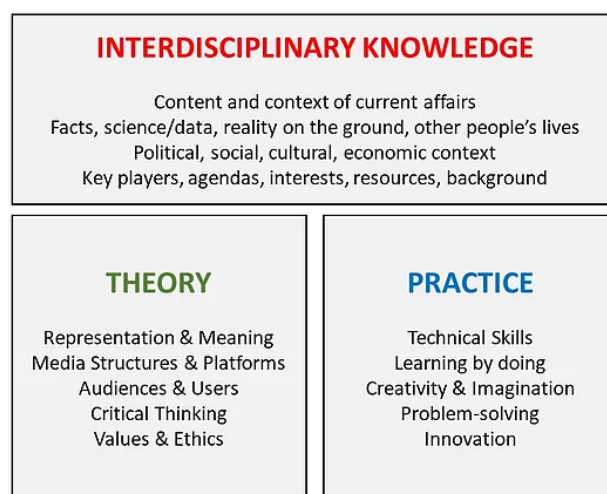Creativity & Imagination
Problem-solving
Innovation

Diagram 1 – Interdisciplinary knowledge as the 'third pillar' of Media Literacy

A good example of this challenge is climate change. Equipping aspiring journalists and media producers to engage with this issue requires at least a basic understanding of, amongst other things: the science of climate change; its geographic and demographic implications (e.g. extreme weather phenomena, migration waves, conflict over resources); the main obstacles to taking effective action, e.g. the political and business interests, arguments and agendas for and against climate action; the geopolitical implications of moving away from fossil fuels (which in itself includes explaining the huge geopolitical importance of oil and natural gas pipelines and how these have been weaponised in international relations); emerging technologies; path dependence and reform failure in governance systems and international organisations; the emotional triggers of public engagement and disengagement; and how environmental NGOs have failed (or succeeded) in understanding those.

These issues and questions fall neither in the 'theory' category of media literacy, nor in the 'practice' one. Yet, how can we expect students to have civic agency and be able to critically engage and utilise media as tools of civic storytelling and participation, without this basic interdisciplinary knowledge? This kind of content- and context-based curriculum requires media literacy to be better integrated with other disciplines (such as history, geography and politics), something which can actually happen through the blending of theory and practice. Di Ricco (2018: 45) points out that "basic knowledge of world geopolitics seems relevant […] in order to understand possible media biases, along with the inclusion of other sources not necessarily journalistic, which could both help give more solid context to international events" and recommends that news literacy curricula incorporate geopolitics and history. Cohen and Joubert (2020: 1) recommend that "scientific training [could] be combined with basic journalistic training […]; learning-by-doing is central to journalists building their capacity in climate reporting training; and mother-tongue delivery of material is critical to the success of such technical training courses"

The following section zeroes in on a particular aspect of global current affairs – security – and demonstrates the significant overlaps between media literacy, youth engagement with global current affairs and contemporary security debates.

Concept 2: Media Literacy and Youth Engagement with Security Debates

The issue of security is a good example of the integral connection between media literacy and global citizenship. Diagram 2 outlines the main overlaps and synergies amongst the three areas. I will briefly examine these in pairs first, before looking at the one thing that they all share, i.e. the core values of democracy and freedom.
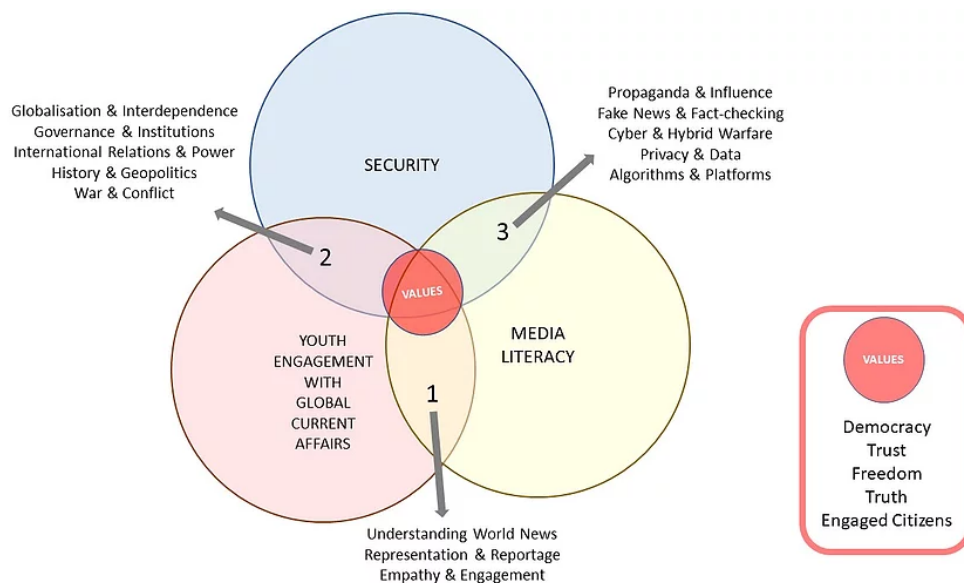

Diagram 2 – Media Literacy, Security and Youth Engagement with Global Current Affairs

In the previous section we looked at the importance of providing students with interdisciplinary knowledge about global current affairs so that they can fulfil their role as empowered and informed citizens and active consumers and producers of media. *Area 1* of Diagram 2 shows the space shared by media literacy and youth engagement with international affairs. Understanding the news, making sense of the world, is a prerequisite to participating in it. Thus, acquiring a basic interdisciplinary knowledge of global issues serves the cause of media literacy, because it enables (for example) readers of foreign reports to critically engage with that reportage and to identify gaps or biases. Equally, the more generic and transferable skills that media and information literacies provide us with – such as a background knowledge of how news is assembled and constructed, as well as being able to identify, collect, assess, curate and produce news stories – serves our understanding of the world.

This is particularly true in the case of international news, where there is much more physical distance between the location of an incident and the reader. News theory has shown that geographical distance often translates to cultural and emotional distance, thus adding barriers to audiences' engagement with global developments that may actually directly impact their lives. Overcoming those barriers to global engagement (and ultimately to global citizenship) must be part of media literacy's mission.

Equally, contemporary security debates are an integral part of global current affairs (*Area 2* of Diagram 2). Security is the essence of society: it is why human beings gather and form organised communities; it is the bare minimum that citizens expect of their government, regardless of the type of regime. Security is also the essence of international relations: it is what states seek; why they form alliances; why they go to war. Making sense of the news – and, even more so, producing or disseminating news – requires at least a basic understanding of the history, theory and laws of war and power politics, deterrence and appeasement, diplomacy and intelligence. It requires engaging

with institutions – national, intergovernmental and non-governmental – and identifying emerging security threats.

As globalisation increases interdependence among states, as well as interactions across the local, national and transnational levels, appreciating the impact of security in our daily life becomes of existential importance. Scholarly discussions around security can sound abstract. Yet, a terrorist attack in a major urban hub, or a nuclear plant exploding because of poor maintenance, or – in fact – a new strain of a coronavirus causing a global lockdown are not abstract. Tracking those links between macro global forces and micro local communities is key to the global current affairs curriculum, and physical security is a prime case of that.

Finally, while security has traditionally been treated (not least by security scholars themselves) as the exclusive domain of elite decision-makers, possibly reflecting another era when massive armies and arsenals were the only major security threat, there is a surprising amount of overlap between contemporary security debates and media literacy (*Area 3* of Diagram 2) – two disciplines that are rarely examined together. Competing stories about power and truth are at their heart.

Propaganda and psychological warfare are obvious examples of the historic intersection between war and journalism or mass communication. That intersection in itself is not a new phenomenon. However, the shift of war from the conventional territorial domain to that of hybrid and asymmetrical threats is placing media literacy at the epicentre of current security debates. As information, data, social media profiles and digital interactions all become weaponised by governments, intelligence services and rogue actors through fake news, disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks, media literacy has emerged as a critical line of physical defence (McDougall et al, 2019).

At the core of all three spaces (media literacy, youth global engagement, and security) are the core values of liberal democracy: freedom - from threats, of expression, and of the press; trust in elected representatives and the institutions of governance; truth, or rather *the pursuit of truth*: a belief that truth matters, that it is of value, and that straying away from the truth detaches us from reality and, therefore, poses a threat to our survival; and, ultimately, a commitment to active citizenship, i.e. the understanding that empowered and engaged citizens have a stake in, and therefore some responsibility for, their own security and for that of their communities.

It is true that security is often framed as having a tense relationship with liberty. The introduction of enhanced powers for homeland security agencies in the wake of 9/11 in the United States and following terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda and ISIS in Europe, created concern about the abuse of state power and control over citizens, the civic liberties and rights of suspects, and the handling of citizens' private data.

The value of security and the threat of terrorism can be used as excuses for all sorts of questionable practices – from the inhumane treatment of suspects to the corrupt outsourcing of vast government contracts to private business interests. Yet, true security and true liberty are not mutually exclusive, and in fact can only exist together. Being free means being safe, including from an abusive state apparatus, but also from others stronger than you, which requires the safety net of the rule of law. Equally, being safe means that you have the freedom to exist without fear. Therefore, the occasional rhetorical misuse and abuse of those concepts by any given government does not alter their fundamental real-life connection.

Having established the need for better integrating interdisciplinary contextual knowledge about global current affairs into the media literacy curriculum, as well as the relevance of security within that framework, the next section outlines our recent work on a co-created documentary as a case study of the approach outlined here.

Project, Methodology and Reflection: The Case of *Deterrence*

Deterrence is a research, pedagogic and practice-based project culminating in the launch, in May 2020, of a feature-length web documentary on the security challenges facing Europe, and on the

past, present, and future role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The project was partly funded by NATO's Public Diplomacy Division as part of the organisation's 70th anniversary activities, although the production team retained editorial independence.

The project had three aims:

- **Pedagogy:** to engage students in media literacy and contemporary security debates through a fusion of theory, practice and interdisciplinary background knowledge, reflecting the approach outlined above; and to enhance students' knowledge about the history, mission and track record of NATO.

- **Research:** to identify the main security challenges facing Europe today, and assess future NATO's role, as well as the challenges currently facing it; to understand youth attitudes towards the concept of security – young people's priorities, feelings and values – as well as their perceptions of NATO; and juxtapose those youth narratives with elite agendas and concerns as articulated by experts and officials.

- **Practice:** to produce an innovative and engaging documentary that will be accessible to a general ('lay') audience of non-experts, by explaining key concepts (such as deterrence, Mutually Assured Destruction and hybrid war) and to identify what works best in terms of engaging youth and non-elite audiences with issues and institutions that are usually perceived as remote or detached from people's daily lives.

The rest of this paper focuses mainly on the first aim (pedagogy), while also briefly reflecting on some key findings with regard to the media literacy aspects of current security debates at NATO (research) and on emerging lessons in terms of the best ways for engaging students with these issues (practice).
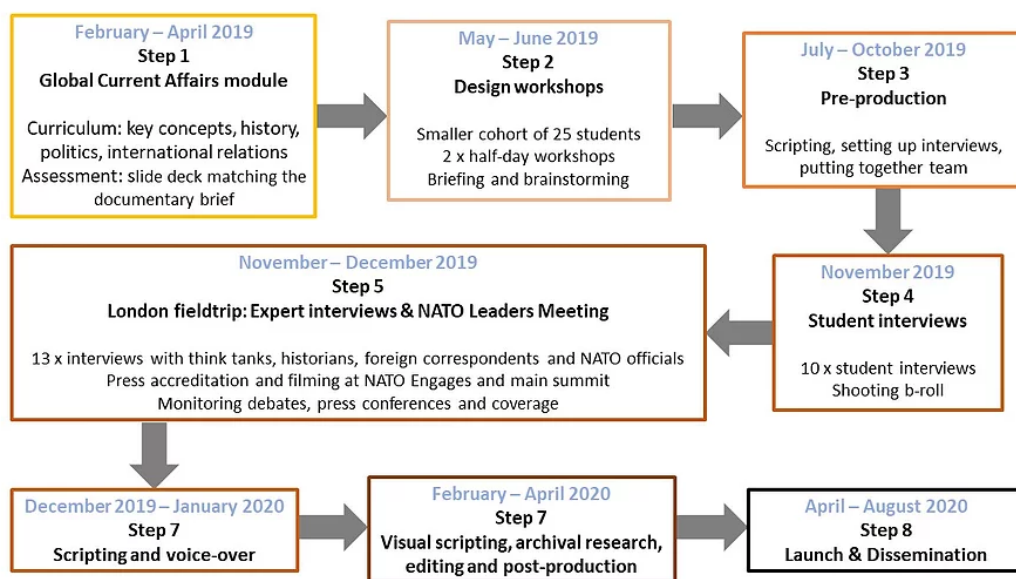

Diagram 3 – The methodology of producing *Deterrence*

The methodology of designing and producing *Deterrence* is summarised in **Diagram 3**. This is by no means the only or the best way to realise such a complex project, and is presented here in the hope that it might inspire or inform other educators who are working on similar projects. It may be tempting to assume that every one of the eight steps was neatly planned and flawlessly executed from start to finish, but as anyone who is involved in creative media production or student co-creation would attest to, that is seldom the case. The process shown in the diagram reflects the reality of what happened as opposed to the original plan. While the basic scaffold of the documentary's narrative structure and student involvement in the project was there from the beginning, the production process developed organically, in response to environmental and logistical factors, as well as to global events and opportunities, such as getting access to film interviews at the 2019 NATO summit.

Step 1 of the project commenced in February 2019. As part of my Global Current Affairs undergraduate course (taken by 130 multimedia journalism, politics, communication and media students), the curriculum provided students with the interdisciplinary background knowledge required to engage with contemporary security debates, including the history of the Cold War and post-Cold War period, basic international relations theory, and a range of emerging security challenges.

As part of the assessment for the module, all students were asked to produce a slide deck on the role of NATO and deterrence using a series of historical case studies, and to reflect on the challenges facing NATO's efforts to engage younger audiences today, thus reflecting the intended content of the documentary itself. Beyond the core intended learning outcomes, the aim of this exercise was for students to create small-scale prototypes of the documentary, and to help identify the smaller group of students who would then join the production team, as the final product itself was an optional co-curricular activity.

Analysis and reflective evaluation

Our post-curricular evaluations through the Padlet survey, the interviews with students, and informal verbal feedback revealed a significant knowledge gap that was successfully tackled through the curriculum. Most, if not all, students did not know what NATO actually is; some were not even familiar with the Cold War. The curriculum provided the background to nuclear deterrence, covered events like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO's controversial campaigns in the Balkans (1990s) and the Middle East (2000s), and the situation in Russia over the last 30 years.

"Before studying Global Current Affairs I knew nothing about NATO, I knew… I'd heard of NATO, I'd heard about it in the news, I probably read a few things, kind of when NATO's name is being littered into news articles, but actually what NATO did or who they were, I had no idea." (NB, Student interviewee).

"I don't think people know literally anything about European security. Even being in a course surrounded by journalism students a lot of people felt like they were learning NATO from scratch and so had to do a lot of groundwork before they actually started our project…" (MH, Student interviewee).

Both the formal curriculum and the co-curricular documentary project demonstrated how Putin's Russia emerged out of that era through the chaos of the 1990s and highlighted the historical continuities between the Cold War and the New Cold War. Being media literate about today's phenomena, such as Russia's fake news campaign, requires understanding why and how that campaign is taking place, i.e. President Putin's agenda and strategy not just today, but over the last 16 years; and the tools (poisonings, kompromat etc) that the Russian security service (FSB) inherited from the KGB.

Step 2. Following the completion of the formal coursework in May 2019, we recruited a smaller cohort of 25 students whose work stood out and who were keen to participate in the co-creation project. We then ran two half-day workshops in which we briefed them about the documentary, gave them an outline of the narrative arch, ran brainstorming sessions, kickstarted the historical and theoretical research, and designed storyboards and mock-ups. While the final documentary was written, directed and produced by the author, the student work contributed to the creative and research process, and it allowed those students who then joined the production team to immerse themselves in the brief.

During the workshops, we also ran a survey of students' perceptions of NATO using Padlet, which allows students to post their responses anonymously and in real time. One of the aims of the Padlet exercises was to encourage students to think as audience members: what would realistically make them interested in a documentary about NATO and European security?

The Padlet survey reinforced something that we have observed time and again over the

years, including in multiple creative workshops at the annual Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change, namely that students struggle to cross the 'fourth wall' and think as audiences, as consumers. When given a creative or entrepreneurial task, students quickly become passionate and invested in an idea or concept and assume that it will be of interest – or make sense – to the audience.

The first step to engaging an audience is empathy, i.e. putting yourself in the shoes of the viewer, asking "Why would anyone be interested in this? Would I be interested in this? What's the point?" and challenging yourself until you have come up with a compelling answer to those questions. The assumptions we make when we start to create something are our blindspot, so they require stepping outside of the self and viewing one's work with a detached perspective. One of the reasons that the brainstorming workshops were useful was that students working in small teams had to pitch their ideas to the other teams. This put them in the role of the audience and forced them to critically approach their own work.

Step 3. Over the summer of 2019, I started developing the script structure; drafted briefs for the student and expert interviews; made arrangements for various elements of production and principal photography; and put together a small team of student production assistants (recruited from the pool of 25 students who had participated in the workshops and given paid contracts), a team of subject experts as external consultants, and a professional crew who were also media production lecturers/demonstrators, therefore allowing us to retain the simultaneous dual pedagogy/production dynamic. Students worked on developing script vignettes and identifying possible libraries of visual material.

While the film's production faced numerous challenges and obstacles – not least a micro budget of £30,000 for a feature-length documentary, a tight original deadline of November 2019 (which was eventually pushed back twice), and a global pandemic that hit us as we moved to post-production and launch – this period actually proved to be the most challenging in the lifecycle of the project. It was the crucial moment in which creative decisions had to be made, about the scope of the production and the nature of our material Was this going to be just a narration over documentary evidence? Would we incorporate interviews? Would there be original footage or just archival and stock footage? Which events and locations would we travel to and whom would we speak to? How could we marry the tight and often conflicting bureaucratic and legal requirements of the external funder and the university's own processes with the needs of the production?

At that same time, students left university and returned home for summer break, so maintaining the student team's engagement and work rhythm became harder. It was also the point when the limitations of students' own work started to show, revealing the fundamental tension between a "democratic" process that is open to all students who wish to participate (i.e. "inclusive pedagogy") and the requirements of artistic excellence, investigative rigour and historical accuracy (what we might call "production integrity").

Filmmaking is a complex process at the best of times. The parameters of this particular project were particularly challenging: the need to cater to a mass audience while combining innovation, experimentation, a youth-oriented narrative and a learning process taking place in parallel; and to achieve professional production values on the budget of an academic project. These are not uncommon tensions; they are faced by most media educators, student journalism outlets, independent filmmakers and participatory media projects (Roig 2013).

In such cases, the key is to find a balance between the pedagogy and the production, and where possible use the latter to inform the former. This means being honest and transparent about the challenges facing the team, i.e. going through that journey with the students as part of the learning process, while maintaining team morale and mutual respect. The problems that we faced during the production of Deterrence were not freakish one-off accidents (even if they seemed and felt so at the time); they are an integral part of any creative media-making process. Being media literate includes a first-hand understanding of those struggles, disappointments, and creative solutions.

Step 4. The first part of filming took place at Bournemouth University (BU) in November 2020 and involved 10 interviews with BU students who had taken the Global Current Affairs class in 2018/19. The interviews lasted roughly 30 minutes and covered a range of topics, including students' perceptions of contemporary security threats facing Europe, and their attitudes towards NATO before and after engaging with the assignment. Students were also given the chance to ask questions and raise concerns that we would then pose to senior NATO officials. Later that month we also shot B-roll sequences of students playing the Cold War game 'Twilight Struggle'.

> *Some of the students interviewed for the documentary were themselves members of the production team. This was perhaps a somewhat unorthodox decision, when viewed from a conventional documentary-making perspective, but it was a conscious one driven by the needs of media literacy pedagogy and research, rather than convenience or lack of interviewees. Allowing those students to assume a variety of roles as part of the same project – learners of the subject matter, co-creators of a narrative product, interviewees whose own replies are scrutinised, framed and edited – gave them a unique first-hand insight into how current affairs narratives are produced. It also enriched the documentary itself.*

Step 5. In late November and December 2019, a team of three faculty and five students travelled to London to carry out filming and interviews with experts – diplomats, journalists, historians, defence consultants – which was a core feature of the documentary. Having received press accreditation, the team covered both the pre-summit NATO Engages conference in central London, and the main NATO Leaders Meeting at Watford. Using the International Media Centre as our base, we observed the proceedings of the main event and attended the press conferences of the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the French President Emmanuel Macron.

Our line-up of interviewees included leading foreign correspondents such as the BBC's Stephen Sackur and the Guardian's Luke Harding; historians and experts such as Alexandra Ashbourne-Walmsley (RUSI) and Ambassador Ian Bond (CER) whose first posting was at the UK joint delegation to NATO in the 1980s; former NATO staff such as Professor Jamie Shea (former Deputy Assistant Secretary General), and Caroline Flynn-MacLeod, Director of the Briefing Programme (1990-1994); defence consultants such as Jamie Black (who also led British Army operations in the 1990s); and current senior NATO officials, such as the Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Amb. Tacan Ildem and the Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, James Appathurai.

NATO's London summit came at a crucial moment, as the organisation celebrated its 70th anniversary while at the same time facing difficult questions of internal cohesion (e.g. budget contributions, the role of the United States in Europe, as well as Turkey's campaign in Syria) and external threats (stance towards Russia and China, and hybrid warfare, among others). Students monitored the news, engaged with the issues, assisted with the filming of the interviews (camera, lights, sound) working both independently, and under the supervision of the professional crew, helped with the transcription of the interview data and technical tasks such as file transfers and back ups. Students also saw their questions and those of their peers being answered by top diplomats and experts.

> *The contrast of students' narratives (especially their perceptions and priorities with regard to security) with those of elite interviewees provided one of the most interesting research findings and points of the documentary. Students talked about security in a holistic way and did not necessarily distinguish between domestic and foreign policy, or between conventional security and emerging areas such as the environment. The young people we interviewed and surveyed put a lot of emphasis on issues such as climate change, the environment and the environmental threats posed by nuclear weapons, yet our expert interviewees admitted that these debates are not generally part of the security agenda:*
>
> *"I've never yet sat in a meeting, of sort of military purposes where, where sustainability has been discussed. Um, and I think, I think because the focus is, is keeping the peace […] the sense of emergency about our climate, I don't think has penetrated the, the thinkers and the planners" (Alexandra Ashbourne-Walmsley).*

An even deeper issue was the question of values, which seemed to drive all of our younger interviewees' attitudes towards NATO, governments and political institutions in general. From our subsequent interviews with experts and NATO officials, it subsequently became clear that this question is very much at the heart of current tensions in fact, of the existential dilemma facing NATO as a whole.

Due to the experimental and co-curricular nature of the project, and the logistical constraints, only a small number of students were able to participate in this part of the project. Still, this was a highly beneficial experience for everyone involved: for the students that did participate, it was a unique chance to take a front-row seat at a major global event; the ambitious blending of hands-on production and engagement with issues such as security and fake news, facilitated the successful fusion of theory, practice and interdisciplinary context. The documentary itself was much better for including young people's voices and perspectives, and as professors we often found ourselves inspired by our students' passion, energy and creativity.

A couple of days before the summit started, as we were filming the interview with Alexandra Ashbourne-Walmsley, a terrorist attack took place at London Bridge, one mile away from our studio. This provided one of the film's main 'action' sequences, as our camera captured the moment the news broke in the room, while police cars with wailing sirens rushed to the crime scene. The event highlighted in the most dramatic way the threat of terrorism, which had been repeatedly raised in student and expert interviews. As with previous steps, the realities of producing something so complex and big in scope on an extremely tight schedule and budget, during a global media/political event that is always fluid and challenging even for seasoned professionals, became part of the learning experience.

Technical problems (e.g. our only microphone breaking down five minutes before a major interview), mistakes (e.g. forgetting to recharge the batteries for the spotlights which caused one of them to switch off during an interview), and luck (e.g. haphazard connections that led to a good interview) were all part of the process. In addition to on-the-spot discussions and decisions, at the end of each day of filming, we reviewed and reflected on the day's events and used those incidents as an opportunity to calibrate and improve our practice and planning for the subsequent days.

Step 6. Following the completion of interviews and filming, I wrote the documentary's script, weaving together key quotes from the interviews and creating a modular structure that allows a viewer to engage either with an introduction and seven stand-alone episodes (or 'chapters') or with the documentary as one coherent narrative. The chapters are designed so they can also be utilised by different target groups. The earlier ones (1-4) are particularly aimed at non-expert audiences, breaking down key concepts and covering the history of NATO and deterrence up to and including the New Cold War, whereas the London Summit and Updating Deterrence chapters (5-6) are more likely to be of interest to stakeholders, already engaged audiences and students. Scripting was followed by the recording of the voice-over narration in mid-January 2020.

Step 7. Having recorded the voice-over, I then created a second script (parallel to the spoken narrative) that included a shot-by-shot description of the visuals – combining our original footage with archival and stock footage that I identified, sourced and/or purchased, as well as original motion graphics that we commissioned from our professional collaborators. Our editor then assembled all that material, edited the film, and sourced, edited and mixed the soundtrack.

The short animations sequences (e.g. **Image 1**) were used to introduce and explain key concepts, such as the security dilemma and Mutually Assured Destruction, and to visualise key events through animated mapping. These segments can be used as stand-alone learning resources by educators, along with 25 short 'take-away' clips cut from the documentary.

Image 1 - *The Security Dilemma* (still from the animation sequence)

The completion of filming in London concluded students' direct involvement in the production process, due to a number of constraints, including legal and budgetary restrictions to further extending students' contracts, and the compressed project timeframe coupled with the need to complete post-production using highly skilled professionals. However, the biggest challenge was the fact that the students, who were now in their final year of studies, were facing their own assignment deadlines and had very limited bandwidth to contribute to the project.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in February 2020 further restricted everyone's time and ability to convene and use those last stages of post-production as a learning and co-creation opportunity. Students were briefed about the film's progress and the different steps of the process all along the way, and drafts of the script and the various cuts were shared so that they could at least get a sense of how the material that they had contributed to was handled. However, we did not have the chance to convene as a group for a formal reflection at the end of the project, although the project lead debriefed with students individually. Such a final debrief session would be a highly recommended step so as to consolidate the lessons from the experience, but also to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

Step 8. Postproduction on Deterrence was completed in early May 2020, and the film was launched online on 7 May to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the end of World War 2 in Europe (VE Day). During late spring and summer of 2020, we collated reading lists and designed lesson plans tailored to each chapter's content that can be downloaded for free from the documentary's website (https://www.deterrencethemovie.com/lesson-plans).


Image 2 - The *Deterrence* poster

The film is divided into an 8-minute introduction/outline (Chapter 0, 'Cold Open', see **Video 1**) and seven episodes (or 'chapters') covering the concept of deterrence (Chapter 1, 'A Credible Threat'), the birth of NATO and nuclear deterrence after World War II and the end of the Cold War (Chapter 2,

'M.A.D.'), the evolution of NATO's mission in a post-Cold War world and the deterioration of relations with Russia (Chapter 3, 'Post Cold War'), Russia's campaign of disinformation and hybrid warfare since the mid-2000s, as well as youth perceptions of NATO (Chapter 4, 'New Cold War'), the December 2019 NATO Leaders' Meeting, including elite debates and youth questions regarding NATO's own future, relations with Russia, budget contributions, and environmental security (Chapter 5, 'The London Summit'), the relevance of deterrence in an age of hybrid and cyber and the future of nuclear weapons (Chapter 6, 'Updating Deterrence') and a concluding reflection on NATO's future role in the 21st century amidst increasing global instability and uncertainty (Chapter 7, 'NATO in the 21st century').

from **Roman Gerodimos**

08:31
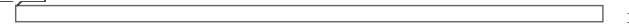
Video 1 - *Deterrence* - Chapter 0: 'Cold Open' – www.deterrencethemovie.com

Media Literacy as the Battlefront of the New Cold War

In addition to the pedagogic and practice-oriented aspects of the project, the research carried out for our documentary confirms the idea that media literacy, storytelling and security are now integrally connected. The nature of warfare is shifting, from territorial conquest and big army mobilisation to psychological operations and political and economic influence in the domestic spheres of societies (this is explored in more detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of *Deterrence*).

During the last few years, Russia has been waging a campaign of political interference, cyberattacks and misinformation across much of Europe and the United States (Gerodimos, Vertegaal and Villa 2017). Some interesting examples include:

- Using Russian-speaking media in European countries to spread fake news stories (such as the alleged rape by immigrants of Lisa, a Russian girl living in Berlin) so as to stir internal strife and hatred within communities

- Weakening the standing of established native media (for example in the Czech Republic) so as to weaken public trust and strengthen the information resistance of Russian-speaking audiences

- Weaponising social media so as to interfere in election campaigns and referenda

- Launching 'character assassination' campaigns against journalists or human rights activists who expose the Russian authorities' activities, such as the attacks on Jessica Aro, a Finish journalist who reported on Russian trolls

- Feeding local news organisations with fake news aimed at weakening public support in intergovernmental organisations, such as the (fake) news story accusing German soldiers stationed in Lithuania of rape, whose goal was to weaken NATO's standing in the Baltics

Perhaps the highest-profile use of fake news as part of such a campaign was following the attack with Novichok, a nerve agent and chemical weapon, against former Russian agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, in March 2018. It has now been established that the attack was carried out by high-ranking officers of Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU (Bellingcat 2018). However, following the attack, Russian-controlled media and Twitter accounts produced and disseminated not one or two but forty-six different theories for the incident, ranging from the most innocent to the most absurd, trying to absolve the Russian authorities of any responsibility. The point of this fake news campaign was not to promote one particular version of the truth, but to make truth irrelevant by sowing confusion and by eroding the credibility of UK authorities.

Therefore, confusion and dissent are key elements of hybrid warfare. Media, including social media, are now the battlefront for hearts and minds in the New Cold War. Organisations such as NATO and the European Union increasingly view media literacy as critical infrastructure for the resilience of civic and political systems.

One important area is disinformation, including misinformation and influence campaigns, fake news and deepfake. According to Paul King, Editor and Programme Officer at NATO, media literacy courses in schools are key to ensuring that the younger generation are equipped to deal with the different waves of incoming disinformation: "It's very easy not to understand the influences that are being imposed on our populations. So, the first thing is understanding the problem. The second thing is to put in place, uh, as many projects, as many programs, as many cooperative schemes as possible, to make sure that we share best practice."

Another key area related to media literacy is cybersecurity, and in particular the use, handling, and safety of citizens' private data, as well as the threat to the websites, reputation and profiles of institutions, organisations and high profile individuals, such as journalists, academics and politicians. King notes that "cybersecurity is clearly a concern for all [NATO] members. Cyber is an area where we have put in place a lot of cooperative programs, particularly with the EU, which has similar concerns, but this is a national responsibility. Countries themselves have to put in place measures which they feel are best for their populations […] The NATO website is attacked multiple times a day. This is not an imaginary threat. We see this up close and personal, but we're able to protect ourselves where we're not a soft target. There are lots of parts of the population who unfortunately are soft targets, and the idea is to increase the resilience of these people so that they aren't so easy to affect in this way."

However, as noted in the documentary, *resilience* – which is about shielding the community against an attack and helping it ameliorate its consequences – is not the same as *deterrence*, which requires a credible strategy of retaliation so as to prevent an attack in the first place. Thus, while media literacy may be able to strengthen civic resilience, it is questionable whether it can, in itself, prevent misinformation and fake news campaigns, especially given that media literacy strategies, tools and curricula tend to be reactive and responsive to specific types of misinformation, as opposed to proactive.

Final Reflections: Media Literacy, Documentary-Making and the Pursuit of Truth

In conclusion, our project reaffirmed the value of faculty/student documentary co-creation as a tool of media literacy education (Ratner and Friesem 2018: 16) and as a great way of combining media literacy with global current affairs through hands-on learning. During the course of this project, we identified a significant knowledge gap about political institutions and international affairs that was successfully tackled through a series of pedagogic and production activities.

In terms of best practice for youth engagement with global current affairs, we found that the most effective techniques included: personalisation (illustrating historical or conceptual phenomena through the personal stories of people affected); grounding stories in physical space (e.g. using the city of Berlin to anchor the story of the Cold War); explaining concepts through simple animations; and splitting the documentary into stand-alone episodes that are more likely to be consumed and shared "in one go".

In terms of co-creation, working with students should not be seen as an "easy" way to produce media or to get cheap or free labour. Pedagogy and student experience should be at the heart of this approach, which requires identifying synergies between education, research, and practice, as well as managing the inevitable tensions between inclusive pedagogy and production integrity. And, while working intensely on repetitive or mundane tasks is part of any project, including for the most senior and established producers, it is important to identify what students can/can't and should/shouldn't do in any given project.

This type of project is also a great way of capturing and amplifying youth civic voice, especially when there is the opportunity to interact with elite audiences. Our project produced a wealth of data (124 slide decks, a Padlet survey, interviews with students and experts, fieldwork notes at NATO conferences and the summit, as well as qualitative feedback from participants), which have brough up valuable insights about young people's security priorities, perceptions of political institutions, and driving values.

Our findings fully support the argument that media literacy and security are increasingly interconnected, including in ways that are not always recognised by elites and decision-makers. One such example is the link between environmental sustainability and security, an issue repeatedly brought up by our younger interviewees. Yet, despite increased emphasis on ecomedia literacy (e.g. López 2014) and on the environmental aspects of security, our elite interviews showed that this has not yet penetrated decision-making circles.

One of the pedagogic and epistemological aims of this project was to make the case for a media literacy curriculum that is not isolated from factual content and interdisciplinary context. Media education should not be delivered in an historical, political or cultural vacuum; it requires a deep understanding of how societies organise themselves, the role of power and hierarchies, and of the subject-specific and interdisciplinary factual background that is vital so as to understand the reality on the ground.

Perhaps more contentiously, we argue that at the heart of media literacy and civic storytelling (as well as global citizenship and security) lie certain core values – freedom, justice, engagement, the pursuit of truth, trust, collaboration – which require at least a basic acceptance of an objective reality, which includes indisputable historical facts, as well as fundamental laws of power and social organisation.

Writing about ecomedia literacy, Thevenin (2020) argues that constructivist and cultural studies traditions emphasising the critical interpretation of media messages "limit the ability for media literacy scholars and educators to adequately prepare the public to conceive of and engage with media's role in ecological issues" and makes a very convincing case for a "speculative realism" framework that attempts to step outside the relativistic universe of subjective human thought.

A similar (though quite different) case could be made for an approach to reality that, while fully immersed and interacting with individual human beings, also exists outside of the individual's mind and engages with collective societies, the geopolitical system and the global community. Media literacy is not just about "analysing" or "making" media. Questions of duty, responsibility, individual and collective identity, and values have to be part of scholarship and curricula.

Our students' narratives about security and organisations such as NATO were completely value-driven. At the same time, liberal democracies, governments, and intergovernmental institutions are facing a crisis of legitimacy and trust. Specific actors within the international system and across countries and media systems are actively working to relativise truth; to make truth less relevant so as to further their interests. Therefore, media literacy might become the link that repairs those broken relationships between citizens and systems, because it provides us with the tools needed to place informed (rather than blind) trust on credible channels of communication.

After all, as Hannah Arendt wrote, "[f]reedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute" (1967). This becomes particularly important in an age of cacophonous pluralism and the structural fragmentation and privatisation of media and communication channels.

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