

ATTACK AGAINST HUNGARIAN STATE TELEVISION HEADQUARTERS — THE REALITIES OF THE POLICE OFFICERS



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Abstract: This study presents the results of group-representations of police officers who participated in the 18 September 2006 attack against the Hungarian State Television headquarters. The results of this research highlight the common sense of the police officers involved in the incident. These common senses were created by social construction. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the purpose of comparing the social representation of police officers who took an active role in the protection of the HQ with reserve officers who had not been involved in the situation. The texts were analysed using the sequential-transformative-model. There were both similarities and differences between the social representation components of the two groups concerning the incident.

Keywords: riots; social representations; law enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, a politically motivated mass demonstration happened with police intervention, whose multiple effects, one might say, can still be detected nowadays. The 18 September 2006 event at the HQ of Hungarian State Television and the 23 October 2006 event in the inner part of Budapest caused a great, imminent interest in the whole Hungarian society. In the present study, the incidents at the HQ of the Hungarian State Television were examined from the perspective of police officers who had been commanded to control and desensitise the situation. There were several interpretations and explanations of the incident (e.g. Papp. et al., 2007; Csepeli et al., 2007; Gaudi-Nagy and Horváth, 2007). These reports and the subsequent attitudes follow the logical, paradigmatic form of human thinking based on the relation of cause and effect (Bruner, 1986).

The present study however, took a different approach to examine the incident as it is based on the analysis of the common sense — more particularly, the interviewed persons' perspective

of the events in a manner that Bruner called the method of a narrative way of thinking.

The study presents the *social representations* (e.g. Moscovici, 1984) of the police officers involved in the incidents at the HQ of Hungarian State Television. By examining their representations regarding the aforementioned incident, one can recognise the different explanations of the realities that some examined groups have by exploring the social representations as outputs that exist among the given groups. When the goal of a study is to identify social representations, the different internal and external processes (including memory-related processes) contributing to the development of the issues are deemed irrelevant. Therefore, in a study of social representations like this, the aim of the researcher is not to explore how exactly the subjects can remember the 'real events', but to identify *what their realities are* on a social level and essentially, what kind of the realities constitute their worlds. As the study applied this unique approach in this topic, the results cannot be compared to any other ones stemming from earlier studies.



METHOD

SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 22 police officers, selected through snowball sampling. 14 subjects participated in the 18 September 2006 event (Active group), and 8 subjects were reserve officers who were not actually commanded to the incident (Inactive group). All participants were recruited from the Baranya County Public Order Unit and Traffic Control Officer Corps. Participants were recruited using the snowball method. Because most members of these police units had already known each other, the application of the 'more starting points-method' would have been irrelevant. The subjects in the Active Group and the Inactive Group were recruited from the Baranya County public order unit and traffic control officer corps. All of the subjects were young males.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Semi-structured interview techniques were conducted with the participants. The interview guide was as follows: what happened and why, the self-reflection of the participants, their reflections on the situations, and their reflections on the other participants.

The body of text collected from the research were analysed by the so called sequential-transformative-model (Ehmann, 2002), using thematic analysis techniques (Ehmann, 2002, p. 49) ⁽¹⁾. It means that every textual element having a recognisable content can be identified by a code referring to the very meaning. After coding the thematic units in every interview, non-frequency-analysing techniques (Holsti, 1969) were used to calculate the frequency of those variables. Where it was possible, the partial logical relationships were also coded. Marking allowed the thematic units to be integrated into hierarchical meaning-compositions. Within the transcripts and more specifically within the coded contents, the partial, concept-like hierarchical connections were also coded. In these cases from the lowest, *basic level of codes* through the more abstract, wider groups of elements (groups of codes) there is the level named by *main-codes* — this method represents

symbolically the hierarchy between the identified meanings. So the codes on the top of a *group of codes* representing the whole of a very domain of meaning will be named by main-codes. As a result of this process, it is possible that a given code has significance (it has meaning on social level) on all levels of analysis, or on the contrary, has importance on just two levels or on just one level of them. E.g. a code can be calculated to be important on the code-level, but, at the same time, it is neither a component of a group of codes or of a main-code. It can also happen that a mass of coded meanings is not part of any group of codes but marks directly the borders of a domain of meaning named by a main-code. To discover and analyse as much information as possible from the interviews, attempts were made to find the finest differences between the meanings. This way, plenty of separated content and codes were defined. The method has the risk that when a specified content in the text — and the adopted code, which is basically a 'hypothetic, qualitative data' (Ehmann 2002, p. 48) — appears only in the case of only a few people (so it does not reflect the common opinion in the examined group), then the very hypothesis needs to be rejected. In this case the content represents the individual's mental representation and not the commonly owned element of the reality-construct (so it is not an element of a social representation).

The significance of the codes was identified using mathematical-statistical calculations, by comparing them both to all codes that pertain to a group and to their own groups of codes. The mathematical-statistical data processing of the nominal variables at the different levels of analysis is based on the McNemar test (the relevant level of significance is $p < 0.05 < 0.01$).

RESULTS

Both the elements of the social representations of the Active and Inactive groups of police officers on duty at the HQ of Hungarian State Television and the results comparing the two groups are presented in Table 1 in the appendix (comparisons between groups were made by using chi-squared probe and Fisher exact probe) ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ The interviews of the Active and Inactive groups were recorded by Szedlák Péter.

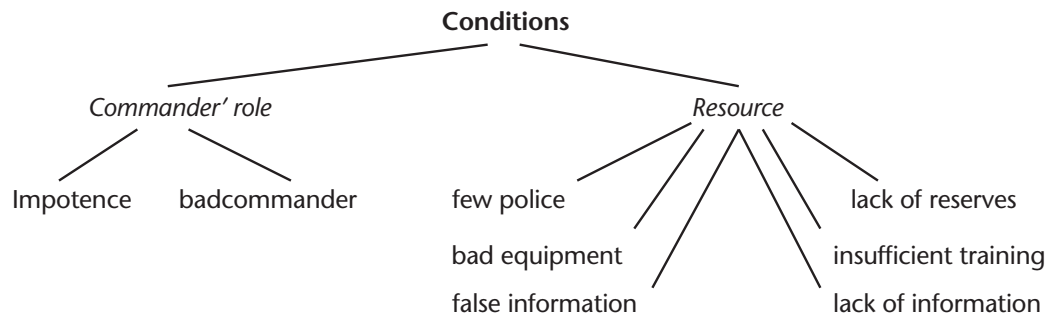
⁽²⁾ The results presented are only smaller parts of a larger study that aimed to process the social representations of the clashes in autumn 2006, in the centre of Budapest. The database was completed in 2012.



The following figures show in a more informative way how different kinds of social representations could be identified pertaining to the groups.

Figure 1. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representation and its hierarchy on 'Conditions'.

ACTIVE



INACTIVE

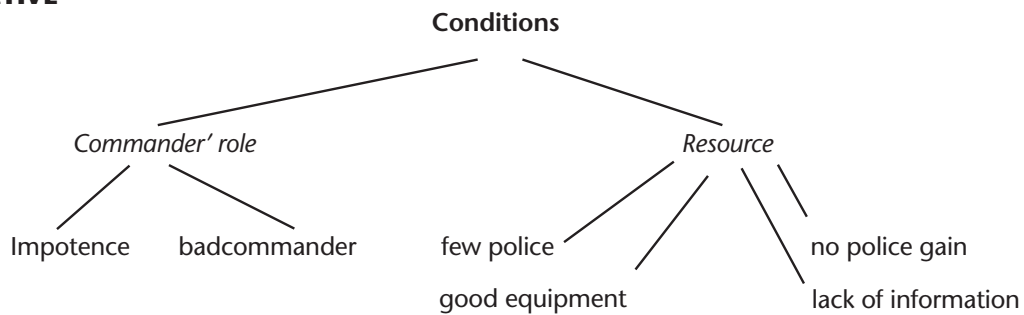
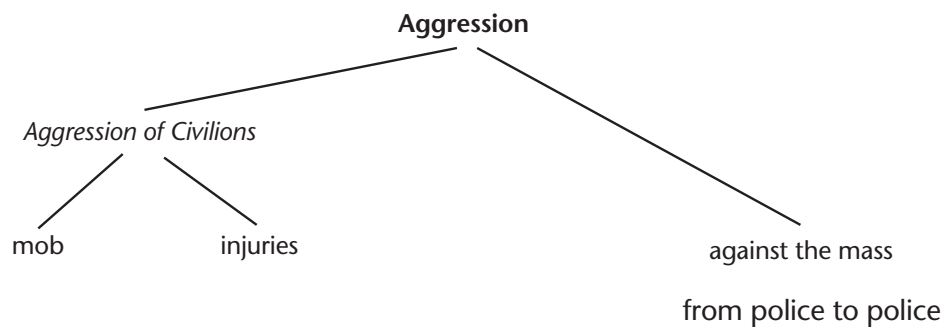


Figure 2. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representation and its hierarchy on 'Aggression'.

ACTIVE



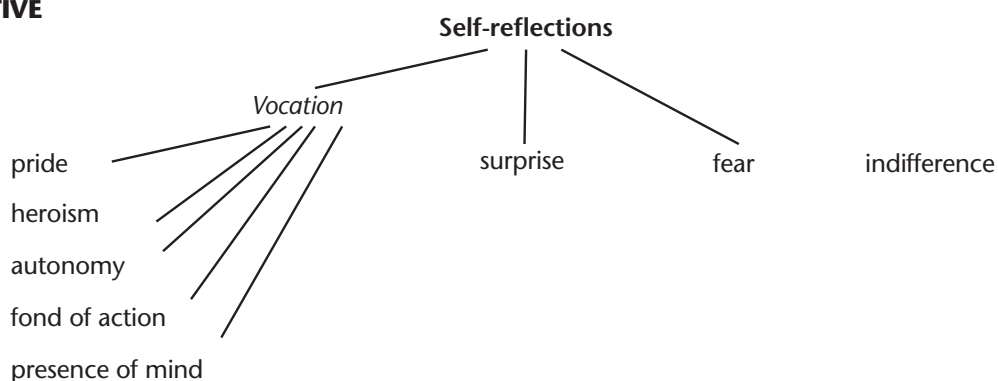
INACTIVE

mob injuries



Figure 3. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representation and its hierarchy on 'Self-reflections'.

ACTIVE



INACTIVE

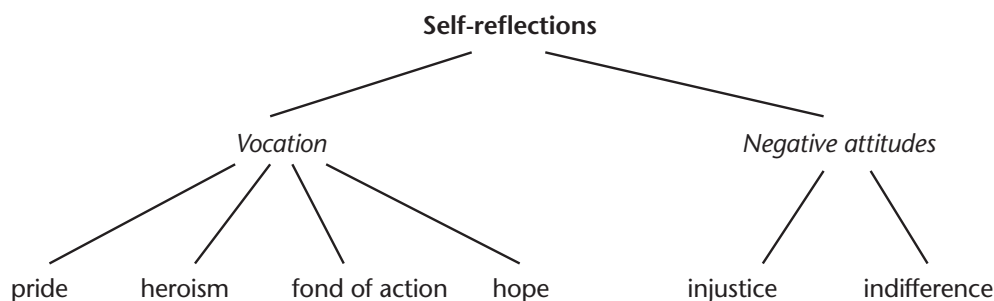
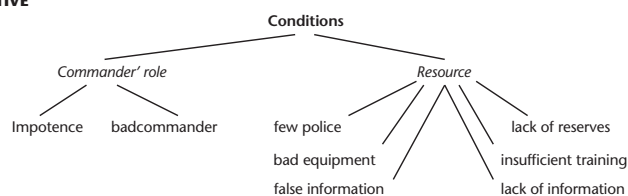
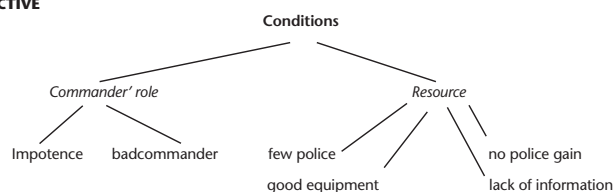


Figure 4. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representation and its hierarchy on 'Solidarity'.

ACTIVE



INACTIVE





DISCUSSION

The elements of social representations were generated by the previously experienced, situational phases. It can be argued, that — partially due to the exposure to an emotionally traumatic experience — a shared and unified interpretation of the underlying processes of the incident did not emerge in either of the groups. From the (police) professional point of view the events were analysed by them alongside the dimensions of stress, its management, the emotions and the self-reflections. The factors that bear importance to them are the attributes of handling the situation and not the reason of the situation. It can be argued that it is the professional way of thinking of a policeman serving in a unit.

Nevertheless, some common broad scopes of the meanings having been identified can be found in both groups. Namely: the elements of the social representations on *conditions* (for doing policing at the scene), on *aggressiveness*, on *solidarity* and finally on *self-reflections*. According to the members of the Active group all the conditions to protect the HQ were missing or were inefficient. In contrast, the Inactive group have constructed exclusively positive beliefs about their equipment.

All members of the Active group represent their own aggression toward the civilians who attacked them. Similarly, they all hold a construct about the wounded police officers as a consequence of the fighting. The members of the Inactive group have no representations at all concerning the aggressive behaviour of their colleagues pertaining to the Active groups.

The theme of solidarity is represented in an ambivalent way among the Active group. On the one hand members of that group have a shared construction about the supportive attitude and behaviour that was expressed toward each other. On the other hand, in sharp contrast with the earlier one the earlier one, they think that they were failed by the Police as an institution during the critical incident.

It is really important to emphasise that despite hostile circumstances, among the subjects of the Active group not all of the civilians who took part in the clashes were regarded as enemies. A significant part of that group has a belief about civilians who helped and supported them,

expressing their feeling of solidarity towards the police. This unexpected fact definitely refutes suggestions that police officers around the world would regard all civilians as enemies, guilty or at least, possibly guilty (Hahn, 1971; Klockars, 1991; Krémer, 1998; Toch, 1973).

Both groups have constructed social representations related to vocation. It is interesting to realise how similar meanings are involved in that social construction. However, there is a significant exception as well: as a component of the representation of their vocation, the Inactive group reflects itself as the depositor of hope to help their colleagues who got in trouble. Unfortunately, they had to remain in their passive, waiting situation throughout the entire action. It could be a likely reason why the members of the Inactive group have constructed a common representation regarding the happenings as unjust.

Comparing the groups to one another is important, but at the same time an understandable difference also comes up: as a component of the social representations on self-reflections the feeling of intense fear can be exclusively found among the members of the Active group.

CONCLUSION

As was apparent from the results, two groups have constructed some different representations that constitute their interpretations relating to what happened around the HQ of Hungarian State Television, how and why. Finally, that shared constructs constitute the partly different realities to the members of both groups. The existence of those realities lines out a definitive aspect of the process of social construction, namely, it basically depends on what kind of social relations the actors are situated in, which in turn, through the perspectives taken, influences the process of giving different meanings and explanations to the events that just seem to be the same (László, 1999).

It is quite interesting to realise how this examined incident influenced the later practice of the Hungarian police officers and the Police when their task was handling another violent mass demonstration. The results will also be presented in relation with that clash occurred later, in a further issue of Bulletin.



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APPENDIX

Table 1. Comparisons between groups.

significance (p < ; p =)	Main code/groups of codes/codes	Frequencies Group Active %	Frequencies Group Inactive %
-	Conditions	100	100
-	<i>Commander's role</i>	100	100
-	impotence	100	100
-	bad commander	86	87,5
	good commander	21	
-	<i>Resources</i>	100	100
	bad equipment	100	
	good equipment		100
	false information	100	
	no police reinforcement		100
not signif.	few police	93	63
not signif.	lack of information	86	100
	lack of reserves	57	
	insufficient training	43	
-	Aggression	100	100
	<i>Aggression of Civilians</i>	100	-
-	mob	100	100
0,01; 0.0096	injuries	100	50
	against the mass	100	
	from police toward police	36	
	Solidarity	100	-
	<i>Solidarity of police officers</i>	100	
	no help by the Police	86	
	<i>Help exists</i>	100	
	help physically	64	
	help psychologically	57	
	civilians' help toward police	36	
	Self-reflections	100	100
	fear	100	
	surprise	43	
	<i>Vocation</i>	93	100
0.01; 0.0201	pride	50	100
	presence of mind	50	
no signif.	heroism	43	63
	autonomy	29	
0.01; 0.01119	fond of action	29	88
	<i>Negative attitudes</i>		100
<i>0.0721</i>	indifference	21	63
-	injustice		75