

Stereotypes of Terrorism and National Identity in Syria

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I. Introduction

Member States of the United Nations have no agreed-upon definition of terrorism. This is due to the fact that one state's "terrorist" is another state's "freedom fighter." Yet, the UN acknowledges that the lack of agreement on a definition of terrorism hinders the organization of effective international measures to counter it (UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2006). After examining the extended debate over terrorism, one can state that "terrorism" is a highly politicized word which is embraced by victims, not by perpetrators. Today, "terrorism" is oriented in two directions: One seeks to demonstrate against oppression within a given state; the other protests against a conventional political order over which the

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Western political elite appears to have dominance. When a state exercises physical forces, including violence, torture and terror, it prefers to characterize its acts as necessary measures to insure order and respect for the law (Nagengast 1994: 145-6). One of the essential features of the modern state is its monopoly of physical force to maintain the social order (Weber 1948: 78). Even a democratic state is able to use extreme methods to secure its political ends, and can set up a surveillance system which requires urgent political mobilization (Giddens 1985: 303). The exercise of this principle is not confined to the given territory of the state. It has been suggested that since the 1980s, Western governments have attempted to expand their influence over financial, military and diplomatic areas in international politics by propagating the idea of combatting “terrorism” (Sluka 2000: 30). In the course of applying this principle to international politics, powerful states tend to determine the terms under which their coalition partners can obtain the means and equipment to remove opposition forces (Stohl 1984: 43-54). Such purposeful acts of violence have produced an international hierarchy in which Western democratic states attempt to maintain their monopolistic rights to protect the world against acknowledged evil. The “war on terrorism” is initiated by the United States and its allies, and aims at neutralizing international terrorist groups, including al-Qa’ida, whilst ensuring that rogue nations no longer support terrorist activities.

The “war on terror” creates punishment categories of people and defines these “terrorists” as social out groups. Yet recent situations suggest that those who are labeled the dangerous “other” in society

might be included within a category of “suspected” terrorists, even though they do not incline to acts of political intimidation. For example, the growing anti-Islamic fervor in Europe has built up a consensus around this category and portrays Muslims as an unassimilable cultural other. As Schiller (2005: 526, 529) points out, this Islamophobia is linked to the goal of solidifying national identity by using the very concept of “immutable difference,” which is based on an historical view of cultural dissimilarities. Furthermore, such an objective increases the ability of the state to control and spy on those among its citizenry outside the culturally homogenous nation, on the grounds that such persons might be inclined towards some form of terrorism. Europeans have experienced the menace of Islam for over a thousand years. As Said (1978: 40) suggests, their knowledge of the Orient is articulated within power relations, and what the Orient (in the present context it implies primarily Muslims and Arabs) means to Westerners is continuously reformulated when faced with different political situations (El-Haj 2005: 545).

Western knowledge of both the Muslim and Arab “others” has become stereotyped, which accelerates their Islamophobic attitudes. Anthropology has exposed stereotypes prevailing within society whilst analyzing the power relations that create these dominant stereotypes leading to collective action in oppressing the political “other.” Yet Tarlo (2005: 14-15) suggests that anthropology has not paid enough attention to the complex social trajectories of stereotypes and their multiple usage, including the acts of creating counter-stereotypes. Muslims, who are identified as the “other,” attempt to transform the subscribed ideological meanings being

attributed to them by Western society. These “others” promote these transformed ideas and the movements stemming from them both inside and outside the West. As American operations in the “War on Terror” contribute to the creation of a consensus around “the other,” in particular around Muslims and Arabs, these tend to acquire a stereotyped image of an unassimilated “other,” who will not support activities establishing a political order initiated by the West. Merging the idea of terrorism into that of the social “other” creates a powerful political discourse which acknowledges the positive nature of a state violence that forges punishment categories of people and maintains boundaries between the West and its potential enemies. This also enforces a consensus among Westerners to de-legitimize specific groups. By contrast, those oppressed “others” display their own critical and rhetorical use of this Western stereotyped image of both Islam and Arabs, and focus attention upon the belief that they should be liberated from Western domination.

This article discusses, first, the process of recapturing the dominant Western understanding of “terrorism” in Britain and, second, explores a process of producing a counter argument against Western stereotyped idea of terrorism in Syria. I will examine these processes by using materials I collected during my residence in the UK and during my anthropological fieldwork between 2002 and 2003 in Aleppo in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian rhetorical presentation suggests that the Western definition of “terrorism” is not the only way of delineating terrorists. By protesting against that state terrorism initiated by the West, Syrians enhance their own national identity.

II. Who are the “terrorists”? A British stereotype

The “war on terrorism” creates punishment categories for both states and people and defines as “terrorists” those considered social outgroups. In Britain, the government exaggerated the terrorist threat in order to justify increasing curbs on civil liberties (MI5 2006). Since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, British Muslims in particular, have felt threatened by the anti-terrorist raids of the police and the constant denigration in the media of their religion and culture (al-Khoei Foundation 2004). Fear and hostility toward the Muslim immigrant population in Britain, especially following the London Underground and bus bombing on 7 July 2005 and the abortive plot to place bombs on transatlantic aeroplanes in July, 2006 — all of which involve British born Muslims — contribute to the demarcation of boundaries between Muslims and the rest of the population. The powerful, such as the media and the state, are involved in producing a stereotype of a terrorist-Muslim nexus. The frequency with which the media conjoin the words “Islamic” and “terrorist” creates an association between Islam and terrorist actions. A typical example is the condemnation of suicide bombings, in which the media focus on fanatic Islamists who attack innocent civilians.

The British media are critical of the ambivalent attitudes taken by the country’s main Muslim organizations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). One example is shown here: Although the MCB claims that “Islam can never justify the evil actions of bombers,” the MCB embraces Islamists, such as Shaykh Yassin,

because he was a renowned Islamic scholar, despite the fact that he was also a leader of Hamas, a Muslim organization, that has conducted a fair number of suicide bombing attacks (BBC News 2005/07/14). Such media reports make British people wary of British Muslims. Ordinary British non-Muslims often say that they are unable to understand Muslims who proclaim those British born Muslims responsible for the London bombings to be, not murderers, but martyrs. The main fear among people in Britain is that the fundamentalists might convert all British Muslims. Ahmed (2006: 962-3) discusses how the British media creates fear over British Muslim. He claims that the British media does not challenge radical right-wing groups, such as the British National Party, but generates racialised and anti-Muslim discourses with very little critical or contextual analysis. The report on the clashes between white youths and South Asian Muslim young men in northern British towns in 2000 is such an example. In hindsight, the media generated near-hysterical discussion on Muslim-asylum seekers who might flood Britain. Such one-sided press debates create public fear over Muslims, and depicted the sense of Otherness and alienate the Muslims.

The media in particular cast Muslims in the UK as socially, culturally, and politically incompatible with the Western community. Other British are skeptical of Muslims who appear to have no intention of becoming assimilated into British society. They see them as not only a physical threat, but also as implanting their own alien culture into their host society. Many non-Muslim British find alien certain types behaviour followed by these Muslim immigrants. For

example, Muslim women who talk to others with fully covered faces seem rude because they hide their identities. Some private elementary schools for Muslim children separate boys from girls. The girls there wear Muslim headscarves. Two elementary schools in the same compound, such as Al-Sadiq School for boys and al-Zahra School for girls in London, which the author visited, are examples of this. Alienation of the Muslim immigrant population from accepted British cultural norms can only enhance the prevailing sentiment of Islamophobia and the fear of the unassimilated “Other,” i.e. Muslims, by British society.

Non-Muslim Britons see Muslim immigrants as threatening internal Others within British society. These immigrants cross national boundaries and challenge conventional British identity by introducing an alien religion and culture. Being afraid of becoming an ostracized “Other,” Muslims express interest in becoming a part of British society. Dabrowska (2001: 4-5) presents statements of Muslim leaders. For example, Mohibur Rahman, president of the Federation of Islamic Societies in Britain, claims that “the wider society must be sympathetic towards the needs of their Muslim citizens; tolerant of their differences; and patient with some of the teething problems this young community is facing.” The Imam of London’s Central Mosque, Shaykh Gamal Solayman says, “Muslims should make an effort to understand British culture and project their image in a way which will be appreciated by the British. Non-Muslims should make allowances for the diversity of cultural backgrounds.” The message conveyed by these statements is that the host society should not discriminate against Muslims due to their

religious and cultural differences. In other words, although many Muslim immigrants still have not obtained enough knowledge to understand the context of the host society's language, society, and culture, the host society must acknowledge and accept the situation and be tolerant of Muslims.

The way in which Muslim leaders portray the British Muslim community makes non-Muslims believe that Muslims have little intention of being absorbed into British society. The al-Khoei Foundation in Britain, which is a Shi'a Muslim charitable organization, attempts to eliminate the gap between Muslims and the rest of the population by encouraging people of other faiths to gain a proper understanding of Islam. The Foundation has taken part in the activities of the UN, WCAR (World Council Against Racism), and the ICC (International Criminal Court) which deal with issues of religious intolerance and crimes. It claims that Islamic law does not condone certain customary practices. It tries to eliminate the attributed image of Muslims as backward, violent and oppressed, because it is afraid that the continuous reproduction of such an image would multiply Islamophobia in Britain. The al-Khoei Foundation addresses the rights of Muslim women, and tries to draw a distinction between cultural practices specific to Muslims and the definition of such practices in Islamic law (United Nations 2003: E/C.N.6/2003/NGO/24). The Foundation claims that Islamic law does not overlook customary practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, and restrictions on women's movement and expression. Such practices, which are continually highlighted in the media, further raise issues of Islamophobia in the UK (e.g.

Halliday, 2004: 7). By introducing moderate Islamic thought, the al-Khoei Foundation attempts to uphold the civil rights of Muslims and addresses the rights of Muslims in international politics. Yet, by emphasizing their distinctive Muslim identity, Muslims differentiate themselves from the rest of the population. This attempt to maintain a Muslim identity contributes to the growth of the Western stereotype of unassimilated Muslims as the “Other.”

The identity of immigrant Muslims has developed through contact with the West, and Muslims are marginalized in Western society. Many of these Muslims are British born or long-term residents. They are *de facto* members of British society because they participate in its social and economic life. Yet because Muslims tend to be identified as the “Other” in society, their legal status as citizens has little effect on their acceptance by the non-Muslim majority.

Spülbeck (1996: 70-3) argues in her study of a marginalized village in the former East Germany, the German Democratic Republic, that consciousness of self emerges in the communication strategies villagers use to deal with outsiders as potential threats. The inhabitants tend to ignore the existence of outsiders and avoid talking about them whilst attempting to keep their distance from them. The gulf between these villagers and the Other is based on their own deep-seated feelings of insecurity. British Muslims, who are relatively isolated and under state surveillance, whilst being portrayed by the media as socially threatening, do not use a strategy of avoidance to confirm their Muslim identity. Similar to Barth’s argument on ethnicity (1969) that develops through contact with the Other, interaction with other groups make many British Muslims

reassert their own distinctive characteristics. Yet their creation of boundaries between themselves and the non-Muslim British population leads to ostracism by British society. Young British-born Muslims visit the world wide web which disseminates information about a so-called “holy war” against America and her allies as well as bomb-making techniques (as revealed by the BBC “London under attack” 2005). Some of them join the insurgencies led by radical Islamists. Others suffer from a public label as “suspected terrorists.”

In international politics, to distinguish between the West and the Muslim world is a necessary tool to promote the “war on terror” and establish a political order dominated by the West. Western democratic states design strategies to combat terrorism which might be based as much on fictitious conflicts as on reality. Islamophobia is an instrument to encourage the fight against terrorism as well as a reassertion of Western identity, even though this is not overtly mentioned. Shadid and van Koningsveld (2002: 175) argue that Muslims in Europe have more frequently fallen victims to violent acts carried out by right-extremist groups, who want to expel the Muslims from their countries. Thus the hostility of the West towards Islam and Muslims, which encompasses racist, xenophobic, and stereotypical elements, voices against Muslims and enhances the felling of so-called Islamic threat to the West. Thus what a terrorist carries with him, his religion, language, dress, place of origin, and ethnicity, become characteristics that specify his negative traits, which are distinct and contrasted with ‘our’ Western positive ones. Those who possess such cultural characteristics — Arabs, Pakistanis (who constitute a large Muslim community in Britain), Afghans,

Iranians, etc. — are identified by non-Muslim Britons as the threatening “Other.” Such anti-propaganda does not consist of strictly religious elements, but claims that these “Others” culture is not compatible with Western one. Thus such “Others” are unable to fit into Western societies.

Simmel’s (1950) argument about the Stranger examines how otherness in society emerges. Simmel suggests that the social distance between the Stranger and the host society, which is defined in the course of their interaction, determines his own position. The Stranger is a member of his society in a broader sense. He is within this society, but not entirely a member of it. Examining Simmel’s idea of otherness within the present context of British Muslims, one can state that they are part of British society since they participate in its social and economic life. These communal aspects which they share with the rest of the British population become de-emphasised when the latter are driven by fear of terrorist attacks. This makes the non-Muslim majority imagine links between terrorists and individual British Muslims, and leads this majority to tar Muslims as a group with the brush of terrorism. In the process of creating this Muslim-terrorist nexus, the grounds for social integration become eroded. Mass media, and ordinary persons equally describe Muslims as distinctive, and thus the idea of the Muslim Other emerges. This subjective operation by the host society further alienates Muslims from British society. The British create the Muslim Other by constructing separate positions for each within society. Yet this marginality of Muslims within the wider society is neither primordial nor directly related to their religion and

immigrant origin. When non-Muslims stress these characteristics as symbolic features of Muslim distinctiveness and alienation, Muslims attempt to eliminate this stereotyped image, and assert themselves as a group within the host society. Yet, this has only resulted in emphasizing their own singularity and distance from their hosts, rather than increasing communal feeling between them.

III. Who are the terrorists?: A Syrian stereotype

The Western construction of Islamophobia and its symbolic identification of Muslims with suspected terrorists marginalize them, and categorize them as a threatening Other. It is not only Muslim immigrants in Britain and Europe whom the West labels as suspected “terrorists,” but also a group of people living in their own homeland. How do they understand the “War on Terrorism”? I shall present a case from Syria, which the U.S. government identifies as part of the “axis of evil.” The following analysis reflects the interpretation given by people during my anthropological fieldwork between 2002 and 2003 in Aleppo, which is the second largest city in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In the Arab world, those who are identified as the “Other” are Israelis. The Syrian regime denounces Israeli operations in Palestine, which they believe to be a land of Arabs, as acts of “terrorism.” By contrast, the Israeli government treats Palestinians as suspected terrorists whilst it describes Palestinian resistance to Israeli operations as acts of “terrorism.” Perthes (2004: 42-55) notes that the Syrian president Bashar al-Asad has tried to use the Arab-Israeli

conflict to enhance his popularity among Syrian citizens, although his own diplomacy worsens Syria's relationship with the West, in particular the U.S. The late president Hafez al-Asad had pursued Syria's contest with Israel as a strategic option and carefully calculated both ideological and pragmatic gains. He presented himself as a stubborn leader of Arab nationalism, in particular since the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and cautiously evaluated Syria's diplomatic role to be both the maintenance of the regional balance of forces and relationships with third parties, such as the U.S. Although Bashar al-Asad continues to pursue his father's policies and a peace settlement with Israel, Bashar's government has also attempted to use regional and international politics to secure domestic interests. The escalation of Israeli-Palestinian violence led his regime to take a hard line against Israel, and support the Palestinian second *intifada* which erupted in September 2000. Moreover, the regime covertly supports Hizballah's anti-Israeli operations. According to Leverett (2005: 117), Bashar seemed to use Hizballah to increase Syria's influence on the Palestinian *intifada*, and attempted to bolster his popular standing as an Arab nationalist leader.

Under the rubric of Arab nationalism, the Syrian government faces no ideological obstacle in supporting Shi'a Muslims and the anti-Israeli operations of Hizballah. For example, Minister of Information Mohsen Bilal states that Syria's national news media should reveal the truth about Israeli and American allegations concerning democracy and human rights. He claims, "the USA and Israel have failed to crush our people who are standing by their President Bashar

al-Assad” (Sana 23 November). Syria has been unsuccessful in seeking to negotiate regional issues with the US whose administration criticizes Syria as terrorist supporters. Thus, the Syrian regime emphasizes Bashar’s popular standing as an Arab nationalist leader and attempts to enhance pan-Arab sentiment among Syrians. In this process, it is important to identify Israelis as non Arab Others, who bring violence to neighbouring countries.

The Syrian government’s policies against terrorism are twofold. Syria shares an interest in fighting international terrorism, whilst distinguishing terrorism from acts of resistance against foreign occupation (Perthes 2004: 49). The regime regards the latter as legitimate. Thus Palestinian resistance against Israeli operations is not a terrorist act. This is a typical example of the UN observation that one state’s “terrorist” is another state’s “freedom fighter” (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime 2006). The Syrian regime also casts doubt on the legitimacy of indiscriminate Israeli attacks against civilians. One such example is a poster displayed at the entrance to the National Museum in Aleppo in 2002, which expresses the Syrian government’s viewpoint. The caption is written in both English and Arabic: “Tell me, Who’s the terrorist? No Further Comments.” A photo is pasted onto the middle of the poster showing a crouched Israeli soldier with a gun threatening two small children, whose unarmed mother tries to shield them. The intent of Syrian officials placing the poster in a place where both foreign and Syrian tourists visit is obvious. They claim that if terrorism means political oppression by force, Israeli targeting of Palestinian civilians is terrorism by definition.

Such a strategy is not a monopoly of the Syrian government. Arab broadcasts on satellite television channels, in particular, query whether the Israeli military operation against Palestinians can be justified. They allocate many hours a day to reporting the situation in Palestine, and a large number of Syrians watch these channels on a daily basis. They show the Israeli military invasion into Palestinian residential quarters: Israeli tanks blocking streets; Israeli helicopters and snipers wreaking destruction on Palestinian houses and religious buildings. Palestinian women and children are seen wailing on the piles of rubble that used to be their homes; and Palestinian men retaliating with woefully inadequate equipment. Syrians spent many hours watching such repeated reports.

Such Arab broadcasting programmes are used to sustain the Syrian government's viewpoint that resistance against foreign occupation is a legitimate act. Both Syrian government and Arab broadcasting pose questions to people in Aleppo about the Israeli government's military operations against the Palestinians: "Are such political operations that crush civilians acceptable from a humanitarian perspective?" During my fieldwork in Aleppo, whoever talked about the Israeli operations told me that this was sin (*haram*), especially when justifying sinful acts. Thus Aleppans respond to the message sent by the media: "If both Western and Israeli operations intimidate a large number of civilians, is this not "terrorism"?" Aleppans believe that the United States supports Israeli operations, which reverberate far beyond attacks on militant Palestinian forces and badly affect the lives of ordinary Palestinians. Yet in fact, the Syrian regime interferes with the peace settlement process for

Israeli-Palestinian conflicts whilst supporting radical Islamists, such as Hizballah. It is usually the elite who spread standardized idioms through the media to solidify popular support for government policies. Theories of nationalism (e.g. Gellner 1983; Anderson 1993) presuppose that the political elite attempts to control ordinary people's views of political issues whilst promoting standardized political idioms which people in the nation share. The Syrian authorities evoke Palestinian issues in the context of world politics, where Israel attempts to control Palestinians under the propaganda of combating "terrorism." The Syrian political elite query whether people can be labeled as "terrorists" when they are merely trying to defend their homeland and protest against the deprivation of their rights. The Syrian authorities object to the state terror that Israel employs aggressively against a powerless community, the Palestinians, using military and political means. The regime tries to promote unity and solidarity among Syrians by protesting against Israeli operations against the Palestinians. Ordinary Syrians must swallow this idea of "terrorism" imposed on them by the authorities. Yet, they do not simply consume the ideas promoted by the regime. They digest it in their own particular way. In the following section, I shall examine how some Syrians present their idea of "terrorism" and attempt to promote solidarity among Syrians.

Aleppans transmute the argument on terrorism, which the Syrian political elite propagate, into that of power relations in international politics. Although ordinary Aleppans support the Syrian government's argument about "terrorism," which is an attempt to refute the Western stereotyped view of terrorism, they reframe Palestinian

issues and declare that the Western allies seek to justify outrageous Israeli actions under the rubric of “combatting terrorism.” This standpoint is also different from that theory which views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of government versus anti-government opposition (“terrorists”) within the framework of the state of Israel (Said 1988: 51-3). Aleppans claim that Israeli operations against the Palestinians are not overtly criticized, because the Western agenda for establishing world order allows Israelis to make Palestinian “terrorists” subject to violent abuses. State violence endorsed by Israel aims at forging boundaries between their Jewish citizens and punishable categories of people, who represent social outgroups who therefore should be denounced as “terrorists.” Israel plays the role of Western agent, and its state terrorism forces Palestinians into a corner over their struggle to establish their own sovereignty.

IV. Syrian protest against “terrorism”

One needs to investigate how the inhabitants of Aleppo elaborate their ideas about state terrorism in the course of their own political activities. Muslims and Christians in Aleppo unite in order to protest against Israeli operations over Palestine. For Aleppans, both Palestine and Syria are Arab nations, whereas Israel is a state of Jews within Arab lands. The ideology of Arab nationalism supports the idea that the Arab nation is an ethnic community. Wars and conflicts are negative ways of interaction between Syrians and Israelis. Syrians, influenced by the regime’s propaganda, have

developed their ethnic identity through conflict with the Other, in their case, Israelis. This has drawn a boundary between these two different ethnic communities. We can examine this process through an analysis of the siege of the Church of the Nativity in 2002.

The media in the United Kingdom reported the thirty-nine day Israeli siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002 as a conflict between Palestinian militants who seized the holy shrine whilst taking civilians and clergymen into custody and the Israeli forces who laid siege to it (e.g. Goldenberg 2002). The British media divided the people in the Church into three specific categories: ordinary civilians, clergymen, and “terrorists.” By contrast, people in Aleppo classified the people in the Church of the Nativity during the siege into three different categories: Armed and unarmed Palestinians; clergymen and nuns; Christians and Muslims. The data presented here was collected in Aleppo through anthropological participant observation during the thirty-nine day siege. Some Aleppans also maintain that people in Bethlehem co-operated to protest against Israeli military occupation. For example, they speak of a determined nun outside the Church of the Nativity who took great risks in going through Israeli lines to feed people inside the church. Aleppans believed that her brave behaviour was due to her readiness to sacrifice herself for the Palestinians, rather than a moral obligation to aid “the suffering.” No one said that she supported “terrorists.” A Sunni Muslim *Shaykh* praised the fraternal relationship between Muslims and Oriental Christians in Bethlehem and their co-operation during the siege. When giving a talk at a conference discussing Palestinian problems held on 6 April 2002 in

the Railway Hall in Aleppo, the *Shaykh* noted the incident of a mosque in Bethlehem, which had been fired upon by Israeli troops during their siege of the Church of the Nativity. He said to the audience: “Who tried to extinguish the fire? — It was the Christians — monks and nuns in the quarter.” The *Shaykh* praised the mutual support between Muslims and Christians in defending and protesting against these Israeli operations. These examples suggest that Aleppans do not make a clear distinction between Palestinian militants and Palestinian civilians or between Muslims and Christians in Bethlehem. Their understanding of who are the terrorists is different from that of the media in the United Kingdom for whom Muslim Palestinian militants, i.e. “terrorists,” took other Palestinians into custody in order to seize the spotlight with violent acts. In contrast, Aleppans blur this distinction between Palestinian gunmen and ordinary Palestinians.¹⁾

As their discussion of Palestinian issues suggests, the inhabitants of Aleppo share the view that patriotism should be distinguished from terrorism. Such a political perspective provides Aleppans with opportunities to co-operate with each other across religious boundaries. Both Muslims and Christians organize events to discuss Palestinian-Israeli conflicts and protest against the Israeli occupation. Aleppans refuse to acknowledge Western stereotypes of terrorism,

1) A Japanese journalist (Doi 2002: 80-1), who stayed at the Palestinian Balada refugee camp near Nablus, also reports that it seems difficult to identify who are the “terrorists.” Palestinian young men, who used to play in the streets, turned up with machine guns and hand grenades, when Israeli tanks surrounding the camp fired. They were able to move freely inside the camp with the support of their families, friends, and neighbours. Doi says that Palestinian armed forces cannot be distinguished from ordinary civilians. Similar to Doi’s argument, the Aleppans argue that Palestinians support one another to defend both themselves and their nation.

which define the Arab-terrorist nexus or label Muslims as potential terrorists. Aleppans, both Christians and Muslims, identify the Israeli siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002 with state terror. The Christians organized a procession to protest against the injustice committed by Israeli military forces. Aleppan Christians whose number is small compared to that of the Muslim population are relatively isolated due to their religious beliefs, which separate them from Muslims. On 26 April 2002, Christians in Aleppo held a demonstration which protested against the Israeli siege of the Church of the Nativity. The Christians used the rhetoric of co-operation against state terrorism, which all Aleppans accepted. By doing so, the Christians were able to obtain support from Muslim leaders in Aleppo, government officials, and higher ranking members of the Ba’th party.

Christians of each denomination constituted a group and joined the procession.²⁾ Young people from the Boy Scout and the Girl Guide movements, which are under the supervision of the Churches, marched along, displaying photos of President Bashar al-Asad and holding the national flags of both Syria and Palestine as well as banners. Clergymen and ordinary Christians carried olive branches and candles to symbolize the “divine light,” which is thought to symbolize the Palestinians’ right to their land and peace there. The representative of Muslim clerics, the director of *Waqf* in Aleppo, shook hands with the Bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and

2) These Christian denominations are composed of the Chalcedonian (Malkites) and non-Chalcedonian (Syrian Orthodox and Nestorian) Churches. Although the division between the two occurred in the Byzantine period (451AD), the Middle Eastern Council of Churches declared that there was no theological differences between them.

joined the procession with other Muslim leaders. Christians greeted them with loud applause.

The remarkable aspect of this demonstration is that the Christians believe that the anecdotes of Biblical history reflect contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Banners clearly present such sentiments. Here are two examples: “O, Bethlehem, you remain under Herod’s tyranny. Today the new Herod slaughters you” and; “In the past, Herod killed children and after some years Pilate came and betrayed innocent Jesus. He washed his hands in order to be innocent of His blood. Pilate said. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood’. Today, the whole world stands like Pilate in its attitude to the Palestinians.”

The first message refers to the biblical story that Herod, King of the Jews, was troubled when the wise men from the East told him about the birth of the King of Jews in Bethlehem. Herod sent a force to Bethlehem, and attempted to kill baby Jesus. He put to death all the male children aged two years and under (Holy Bible, Matthew 2). Christians in Aleppo believe, the Israeli regime attempts to exercise power over Palestinians and kill them as Herod did due to their fear of losing control of Palestine. The phrase appearing on the second banner conveys two different messages: One is that contemporary Palestinians, like the murdered children in Bethlehem and Jesus who had to take refuge in Egypt, are victims of Jewish violence and tyranny. The other criticizes the current international trend that does not see Israeli actions as breaches of its legal obligation, and yields to dominant American power, which is in support of Israel. This attitude is similar to that of Roman Governor Pilate, who gave way to the demand of the multitude and abandoned

his legal obligation to save innocent Jesus (Holy Bible, Matthew 27).

There are several reasons why the Christians in Aleppo use biblical history as a frame of reference to depict how contemporary Jews commit state terrorism. They support the president's rejection of Israeli policy and denunciation of its injustice. In May 2001, President Bashar al-Asad employed rhetoric about Israeli violence and torture to claim that Israelis have tried to destroy the principle of equality of all divine faiths in the same way as did those ancient Jews who betrayed Jesus Christ and tortured Him (Leverett 2005: 125).

For Syrians, Israelis are those "Others" within Arab territory, who potentially threaten them. Triandafyllidou (2001: 10-24) argues that the role played by the Other is not only to activate feelings of a specific group, but also to shape them in a particular way in order to differentiate the group from others. Israelis are not simply outsiders, but are historically and religiously related Others who embody disapproved characteristics. Therefore Syrians must make a clear distinction between themselves and Israelis. By elucidating the similarity between present Israeli terrorist operations and ancient Israelites' violent acts, the Syrian Christians reinforce their feelings of belonging to the Syrian nation and demonstrate their support for the government. This demonstration provides the Christians with a means through which they can work with Aleppan Muslims and government officials. By doing so, they are able to claim that they share interests common to all inhabitants of Aleppo, and show that their own religion and history is relevant to and supportive of the political concerns held by all modern Syrians. Gellner (1987) stresses

that nations are the artefacts of men's convictions, loyalties and solidarities. The concept of "shared culture" overrides the internal differences within a nation in order to emphasise its homogeneity. Thus the procession of Aleppan Christians protesting against Israeli military operations is a political tool that allows them to solidify their position within Syrian society by publicly demonstrating that they share with their fellow Syrians an understanding of their nation's political interest.

Christians attempt to present their religious history as one of fighting against Jews in order to make it clear that they are part of the Syrian national community. They strive to reconstruct Biblical history in order to use it as a resource to legitimize their position in Syrian society by embedding themselves into the wider context of national politics. Christians are deemed religious minorities in the multicultural society of Syria, and each denomination is given limited legislative and judicial authority in the field of personal law. The source of this system is Islamic jurisprudence and Ottoman legislation which has divided Syrian citizens according to their religious denominations (Berger 1997: 117). The government acknowledges Syria's multiculturalism in terms of religion, but does not permit expressions of ethnic diversity. The government strategy to enhance the unity of Syrians and their national identity is to emphasize religious traditions shared by all Syrians. As the present Ba'th regime puts emphasis on its secular identity, religions are regarded as cultures shared by Syrians and therefore, are used as the perfect means to combine Arab nationalism with Syrian regionalism. This Syrian-Arab identity bears a close resemblance to

the view of Michel 'Aflaq, co-founder of the Ba'th, who maintained that Islam is a culture for Arabs rather than a faith. Islam is revealed in the Qur'an, which is written in Arabic and, therefore, embodies Arab values (Seale 1988: 30-31). A Syrian regional identity can thus include the Christian culture of Syria as part of its own cultural configuration. Thus the fact that the president adopts Christian rhetoric in his speech means for the Christians that he acknowledges Christianity as a hallmark of Syria's ancient civilization. Thus Christianity becomes officially certified as a way for Christians to claim their history as part of the shared national history of Syria.

The present regime acknowledges those primordial qualities that stress the bonds shared by all Syrians. Thus Christianity is a Syrian cultural heritage, which Christians share with other Syrians. In fact, Christians have lived in Syria since ancient times. Yet many contemporary Christians in Aleppo have immigrant origins because during the last days of the Ottoman Empire, they were forced to leave their homes, which are now situated in Turkey, due to religious persecution. Insofar as both the political elite and ordinary Syrians acknowledge the cultures of both Muslims and Christians as Syrian, the Otherness of the Christians is not stressed. Yet Syria's own colonial past brings up images of the Otherness of these Christians due to their close religious and social relations with French rulers under the Mandate. For example, some Christians supported the movement for regional autonomy instigated under the French policy of divide-and-rule. Moreover, the Syrian Catholic Archbishop Cardinal Tappouni played a political role as the agent of French authority (Shambrook, 1998: 62, 67, 71-2, 118). Other Christians

served in the French army as soldiers of the *Troupes Spéciales*. The present Muslim population may interpret such historical incidents from the political perspective of today, and believe that since Christians once tried to disrupt Syrian-Arab unity, they again could become collaborators of the West. Such a possible critique, which emphasizes their Otherness in society, would make the Christians' status both physically and socially insecure. This is precisely what concerns Syrian Christians. Thus their participation in the demonstration protesting against Israeli "state terrorism" has two meanings. First, it places the Israelis in the indispensable role of "terrorists." Second, it conceals the Otherness of the Christians in Syrian society by emphasizing the united front of Syrians against Israeli "terrorism." As Simmel (1950) suggests, a feeling of closeness develops, and bonds form when a potential Other, as are Christians in Aleppo, seeks common features of a national and social nature. Developing communal feeling with their Muslim neighbours helps these Christians merge into society and masks their Otherness.

The use of religious anecdotes is another rhetorical strategy through which Christians emphasise their Syrian national identity, and their incorporation into society. According to Genesis (12: 7), God gave Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. Canaan is the area of today's Palestine, Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Both Christians and Muslims in Syria claim that the present population in this area are descendants of Abraham. They uphold the demographic and cultural continuity of its inhabitants and the fraternal relationships among them. Yet Abraham is also regarded as the father of the Jews, i.e. the people of Israel. Jewish tribes who were led by Joseph and

his brothers, grandsons of Isaac who was a son of Abraham, travelled from Canaan to Egypt in c. 1700 BC. They remained there until Moses' Exodus from Egypt (1250-1200 BC). The return of Jewish tribes from Egypt to Palestine, and their conquest of that land, created tensions between the Jews and its inhabitants. Because Jews had split from other descendants of Abraham, and immigrated to Egypt where they remained separated from them for five hundred years, their demographic continuity in Palestine was disrupted. Syrians regard Jews as the Other, since Jews separated themselves from other tribes who continued to live in Canaan.

The return of Jewish tribes to Palestine and their expansion created territorial disputes between Jews and other inhabitants in Canaan. For example, in the time of David, one of the powerful states in southern or central Syria was an Aramean kingdom, Aram Zobah. Its king, Hadadezer, fought against the Jewish king, David (Holy Bible, Samuel 8: 3-8; Chronicles 18: 3-8). Some Syrian intellectuals believe that this Hadadezer organized the anti-Jewish alliance of small Aramean states. The Arameans had developed a united coalition against the Jews 3,000 years ago (Ash-qar 1981: 198). By presenting ancient history in such a way, Syrians confirm that the Jewish return to Palestine had created conflicts between Jews and original inhabitants in Canaan in ancient times. They see a significant historical constant connecting these ancient conflicts and the contemporary ones in Palestine. In both, the returned Jews have created territorial disputes and have attempted to seize power over the region whilst Syrian Arameans as well as modern Syrians have supported the unity of Canaan/Syria-Palestine by waging an anti-

Jewish/anti-Israel campaign.

The current Syrian government's strategy is one of referencing ethno-religious history as anecdote to condemn Israeli state terror and the Israelis' claim to the land of Canaan as its original inhabitants. In November 2000, President Bashar al-Asad asserted in his speech at the Islamic Conference that Israel has attempted to judaize Jerusalem, an Islamic and Christian landmark, built by the Canaanites, an Arab tribe, and a city occupied by Jews for only short periods throughout history (Leverett 2005: 124). People in Aleppo accepted the president's rhetoric and have developed their own argument that Jews in Canaan have been threatening Arabs in both ancient times and the present. Yet they are not entirely strangers in both the religious and historical sense, but are rather the internal "Other." Israelis live in an Arab land and challenge Arab identity with a specific culture, territory and ethnicity, which they claim have been present since ancient times. For inhabitants of Aleppo, Arabs are the original inhabitants of Canaan and thus it is important to organize a united front against Israeli state terror in order to protect the right of Arabs to their land. In this way, history, religious movement, and modern nationalism, can hardly be separated from the argument of terrorism.

V. Conclusion

The anti-terrorism campaign includes a range of measures designed to increase the effectiveness of state authorities in combatting those who pose a threat to the nation and its political

interest. This enables them to exercise power to ensure the safety and security of the public. Political leaders can take unprecedented measures to deal with suspected terrorists. For example, in the case of the United Kingdom, governmental actions to provide citizens with security include power to detain suspected terrorists (MI5 2006). This means of enforcing order is inseparable from relations of power and subordination entailed in the state. In order to protect oneself against the risk of generalized subversion, one justifies the denunciation of suspected terrorists whilst excising them because they are an example of acknowledged evil. Such actions generate a persistent image of terrorists as alienated “Others.” This “otherness” is assigned to particular ethnic and religious groups, such as Arabs and Muslims, who are immigrants and minorities in Western societies. Anti-terrorist operations, carried out by state power, have consequently enhanced anti-Arab feeling and Islamophobia among the grass-roots, which is enhanced by the separation of these stigmatized groups from the rest of the population.

Alexander (2004: 93-4) argues that newcomers must be truly strange for the fear of outsiders to be based on reality. If fear becomes subjective, one can apply categorical polarization in order to assign otherness to a group of newcomers. There is no exact factor which would specify who will be construed as strange and what brings such categorization into play. This hermeneutic study suggests that the cultural interpretation of social structure plays a role in categorizing subjects. What he does not mention is that a group of newcomers, to whom the host community assigns otherness and distinctive features, will seek to display its own singular

characteristics, different from those which the host community has assigned to it. In confronting international “terrorism,” British society has created a Muslim-terrorist nexus, which makes British Muslims the ostracized Other in society. As both immigrants and a religious minority, British Muslims tend to stress their distinctive identity in order to claim rights in society.

Christians in Syria who are also of immigrant origin and a religious minority attempt to maintain communal feeling with the majority by merging themselves into the host community. Although historical memories attribute Otherness to the Christians, they attempt to use the national anti-terrorism campaign to integrate themselves into society. In this process the Christians work together with their Muslim neighbours and enhance Syrian national identity. Furthermore, the Christians attribute Otherness to Israeli Jews, who are not entirely outsiders in terms of ethnic origin, but are immigrants. In the context of current anti-terrorist operations the Christians make a clear distinction between themselves and Israelis, and thus stress the characteristics they share with their fellow Syrians.

Syria’s symbolic identification with “terrorism,” attributed to them by the West, pertains to international politics. Yet the Syrian case suggests that Muslims are not the only group of people who can be labelled as suspected “terrorists.” Other groups whom power holders — media and state — make the target of an anti-terrorist campaign are also ostracized Others whose political rights the rest of the population do not acknowledge. The Syrian government attempts to set up a target to promote its own anti-terrorism

campaign, and claims that Arabs, including both Palestinians and Syrians, are victims of Israeli state terrorism. The West treats Syria as a disease against which it must inoculate itself due to Syria's clandestine support of so-called terrorist groups. The West condemns Syria for its justification of "terrorist" activities which bring violence to neighbouring countries, whilst Syria claims that they are in fact victims of state terrorism and that her own actions legitimately combat this plague.

This claim of victimization is a means to justify Syrian support for the activities of the radical Palestinian resistance and so-called terrorist groups, such as Hizballah, who claim that they are merely combatting Israeli state terrorism and its occupation of Palestine. Such a policy enhances the popularity of the Syrian president, and portrays him as a strong Arab leader. The Syrian government officially identifies Syria as an Arab nation, and the majority of Syrians are Muslims. By protesting against Israeli state terrorism against Arab-Palestinian civilians, ordinary Syrians enhance their ethnic identity as Arabs, who merely seek justice from Israeli Jews. This provides both Christians and Muslims in Aleppo with a foundation for a common enterprise. They share the view that Israeli state terrorism oppresses the Palestinian resistance movement in the guise of a "War on Terror," promoted by the United States and its allies.

The existence of the Israeli Other is an important factor in shaping Syrians' national sentiment. Yet, unlike Muslim immigrants in Europe, Israelis are not entirely ethnically Others for Arab Syrians and Palestinians. One can look at the regional and religious history

of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, each related to the land of Canaan, and find that both Arabs and Jews claim they are original inhabitants of this particular territory. All are descendants of Abraham, and thus their genealogy might identify a shared ethnic origin. Yet, current conflicts between Arabs and Israelis often define them as antagonistic ethnic groups. Syrians do not acknowledge Israelis' particular claim to rights over the land of Israel due to the disruption of both their physical and genealogical continuity in this territory. Thus for Syrians, Israelis emerge as the Other, because their presence as a group in the land, Canaan, which they claim as theirs lacks continuity in both a physical and cultural sense. Aleppans demonstrate a sense of ethnic identity, which comes from differentiating themselves from the Jews, who have taken a role as perpetrators since ancient times and in doing so, have betrayed their fellows. The otherness of Israelis has been strengthened in the context of present political conflicts and has been intensified during the campaign to "combat terrorism." For Syrians, Palestinians are "freedom fighters," whilst, for Israelis, they are "terrorists."

Through state terror, Israel assaults its ancient brethren in Canaan just as British terrorists make their fellow Britons a target of their attacks. Despite the fact that they share a certain common history, Syrians regard Israelis as Others, composing a punishable category of people since they pose a threat to their nation and its political interest. In Britain, the "War on Terror" has placed British Muslims as well into a punishable category of people because government and media have decided that they also pose a threat to their nation and its political interest. Muslim and non-Muslim Britons share little

common history, and Muslims tend to accentuate rather than suppress the differences between the two in order to preserve their peculiar Muslim identity. In a different way then to Syria, Otherness comes to be perpetuated.

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〈주요개념〉 시리아, 테러리즘, 사회적 정체성, 국가주의, 종교

테러리즘의 개념적 획일화와 시리아인 국민 의식의 형성

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현대의 테러리즘은 두 가지 방향으로 향하고 있다. 그것은 첫째, 테러리즘은 국가 내에서 억압된 입장에 놓인 자들의 항의이다. 둘째, 테러리즘은 서양의 정치적 엘리트가 구축하는 세계 질서에 대한 항의행동이다. “테러와의 전쟁”은 아랍인 및 이슬람교도의 획일적인 이미지를 만들어내고, 더 나아가 그들을 “타자”로 지정하고 차별을 촉진시키고 있다. 이들 억압된 “타자”는 항의행동 속에서 획일화된 자신들의 이미지를 부정하기 위해 노력한다.

본 논문은 서양사회에서 널리 알려진 “테러리즘”에 대한 인식을 영국의 사례를 통해 분석한다. 더 나아가 시리아 이람공화국의 도시 알레포(Aleppo)에서 일어난 테러에 대한 항의행동과 거기에서 나타나는 “테러리즘” 개념의 수사적 이용을 고찰한다.

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