

**Current Issues in Religion and
Politics I**

Edited by Mario I. Aguilar

**Terrorist Reporting in the Swedish
Media: Reinforcing an
Oriental/Occidental Division?**

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**Working Papers of the Centre for the Study of Religion and
Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK**

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Introduction to Current Issues in Religion and Politics 1

Mario I. Aguilar

Preface

This series of papers under the title of Current Issues in Religion and Politics aims at presenting original research conducted at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews. Papers edited and published have been prepared in the context of epistemological and contextual studies of religion and politics within specific contexts of the 21st century and constitute work in progress. All research works falls within one or more of the models of religion and politics articulated within the next paragraphs.

Paper 1 ‘Terrorist Reporting in the Swedish Media: Reinforcing an Oriental/Occidental Division?’ was prepared by Therese Rudebeck during an internship at the CSRP in 2011. The paper is of importance because it highlights the political assumptions of terrorism in Sweden by the media fuelled by some political quarters such as the *Sverigedemokraterna* (Swedish Democrats, SD). Within this paper Rudebeck argues that the terrorist attacks on Stockholm on 11 December 2010 brought as a result a worrying assumption that terrorists were Islamists associated with foreign refugees living in Sweden and that the openness of Sweden towards foreigners and asylum seekers constituted a risk to all Swedish citizens.

Rudebeck uses the categories proposed by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* in order to suggest that uninformed quarters fuelled by the

Swedish media were making a distinction between a political stabled Europe (the Occident) and a world of terrorism arising out of Muslim immigration from troubled countries in the Middle East (the Orient).¹

This research paper continues previous research conducted at the CSRP by Alissa Jones Nelson and makes available Swedish sources to an English-speaking audience within an ‘empirical model’ for the study of religion and politics.²

Preliminary Considerations and Theoretical Issues regarding Contemporary Research in Religion and Politics³

Research on Religion and Politics: there is a need to move further from the common assumption that either research on religion and politics is exciting or interesting (academic colleagues) or that religion has nothing to do with politics (taxi driver). The constitutional model of the U.K. where the monarch is both the head of state and the head of the established church tells us otherwise.

Research in Context: research on religion and politics requires a social context, with the stress on the social because it is within social groups and communities that narratives and normative statements about rules, be they religious or political

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003, 25th anniversary edition.

² Alissa Jones Nelson, ‘Job in Dialogue with Edward Said: Contrapuntal Hermeneutics, Pedagogical Development and a New Approach to Biblical Interpretation’, Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2009 published as *Edward Said, Contrapuntal Hermeneutics and the Book of Job: Power, Subjectivity and Responsibility in Biblical Interpretation*, London: Equinox, 2011.

³ Some of these ideas have been taken from Mario I. Aguilar, ‘Models of Religion and Politics’, paper presented to the seminar of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) on 5 October 2006.

take place (I refer here to the ongoing work within the School of International Relations on 'rules', 'force' and other topics).⁴ As I have already stated in my 2002 work research in theology and religious studies have more to do with each other than what is usually acknowledged.⁵ Theology as a human narrative about God centres itself on the existence of the divine while religious studies or the study of religion in general examines the human manifestations of that divine existence as understood by human communities that shape their lives with rules, rites and celebrations that express the presence and action of God in the world.

Diverse Contexts: Normative forms of theology reflect a particular social context that varies and Christian communities have to mediate their own community rules with those of political systems and other social groups. It is interesting if not amusing that after 9/11 a clear interest in Islam has provided the ever increasing possibility of diversity on the face of religious fundamentalism and the growth of religious fervour among faith communities following Islam in the East as well as in the West. Among those responses: the U.K. advocated in 2006 a model of cultural diversity in which faith communities are very much part of the nation-building of political architects; France instead banned religious symbols in public places as to show respect and inclusiveness to all; Canada authorised the formation of sharia courts; the United States rallied faith communities under a rhetoric of nationalism and war.

⁴ Mario I. Aguilar, 'Truth Commissions and Rules: Justice and Peace', in Anthony F. Lang Jr. and Amanda Russell Beattie (eds.), *War, Torture and Terrorism: Rethinking the Rules of International Security*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 162-173.

⁵ Mario I. Aguilar, *Current Issues on Theology and Religion in Latin America and Africa*. Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

Research as interpretive project: any research in religion and politics requires the possibility that there is a limitation to the interpretation of data, there is a hermeneutical aim rather than a cognitive one, and there is a diversity of opinions rather than a normative/objective one. The myth of ‘objectivity’ in the study of religion disappears.⁶

Research as a multi-disciplinary effort: several disciplines look at the same social or divine reality with different methodological assumptions and academic tools. While there is the need for specificity and disciplinary ‘correctness’ there is also the need for multi-disciplinary conversations recognising at all time that perspectives would be different and that disciplinary assessments are limited but not limiting.

Models in the Study of Religion and Politics

The Use of Models.- Models are heuristic devices, tropes, that allow researchers to speak and connect. Models do not dictate social action; however help researchers to communicate ideas about social action. They provide a language across disciplines that sometime connect disciplinary languages, other times transcend disciplinary languages. Models have been used mainly in the social sciences, however lately also within biblical studies through the so-called socio-scientific approaches to the biblical text.⁷

⁶ Mario I. Aguilar, ‘Introduction’ in *Current Issues on Theology and Religion in Latin America and Africa*. Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

Models ad intra.- These models suggest a specificity for theology and political science in which a single disciplinary methodology is assumed. A theological model presumes for example that theology and its predicaments assess social facts and social groups from a more normative ecclesial paradigm; a political science model presumes that political science has certain paradigms that are non negotiable to be tested in context. These ad intra models are usually found in the faith communities that have to ‘negotiate’ social action with others and in doing so rely on given canonical paradigms. Ad intra models look from the inside to the outside be it from a canonical standpoint or from an individual existentialist paradigm. The ‘we’ and ‘I’ are predominant modes of existence and subsequently of research.

Models ad extra.- These models suggest a change in mode of existence and ‘they’ becomes a predominant mode of existence. In terms of a Durkheimian world research on religion and politics remains a ‘social fact’ and issues of ‘organic solidarity’ and cultural difference a *modus vivendi*. The researcher focuses on a subject of research and while there is never the possibility of objective truths and singular paradigms given and accepted the subject of research is ‘out there’. That location of the subject provides a stronger possibility of multi-disciplinary research. The self-reflexivity does not disappear but the possibility increases of a dialogical conversation between partners in research.

⁷ See for example Philip Esler and Ronald Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009.

Research Output.- Within the use of models is important not to unify research results, a danger that arises out of team work and common reports. Instead, the single disciplinary of a multi-disciplinary approach requires research statements that include common outcomes and diverse singular outcomes that could be contradictory at times. The quality of the output lies on the ongoing multi-disciplinary discussion rather than in the common, unified and agreed conclusions.

Examples of Models of Research

Choice model: The researcher makes a choice if to include religion or politics within a larger social grouping in society. A theologian would include religion as a factor within research in society while it could be that an economist or an anthropologist decides to leave out questions about faith communities or religious organisations within a larger study of a social group. For example, the latest book by Tomás Moulian, *Socialismo del siglo XXI: La quinta vía* omits any mention of the contribution of religion within a future theoretical shaping of a socialist society in Latin America but acknowledges that among the few contributions by social groups in shaping Latin American society comes from the Christian communities.⁸

Necessity model: The researcher expresses social needs within contemporary research, thus takes whatever has been outlines in the aims and objectives of the

⁸ Tomás Moulian, *Socialismo del siglo XXI: La quinta vía*. Santiago: LOM, 2000.

research project without room for changes in language and object of research. This is a more scientific model that sometimes relies more on statistics and numerical data than on heuristic devices to express diversity, change and anomalies.

Normative model: The researcher assumes given canonical paradigms and assesses social action ad intra outlining the usefulness of data related to those canons rather than the possibility of opening new frontiers within research. This model not only operates within the faith communities but also remains part of the normative academic ancestry where those who have studied under a particular school of thought take their own paradigms and assesses social difference in relation to norms of what is possible and what is not possible.

Empirical model: The interpretation of data remains secondary to the data and the outcomes remain unified without expressing statistical misconceptions or disagreements.

Theological model: The centrality of the divine remains a characteristic of this model. Theological narratives and canonical expressions of authority guide the research and implant data with a guided hermeneutical reading.

Neo-structural model: The structures of the mind or of society are explored and connected in a manner worth of Claude Levi-Strauss but without assuming

universal conclusions of method or shape.⁹ This model remains structuralist but with a human face and certainly trying to avoid any accusations of orientalism.

Constitutive model: An inclusive model that allows a central place for religion and politics within the research project and asks questions of one and the other.

Regulatory model: A model that combines the constitutive with the possibility of policy making within contemporary society. Within this model research aims at providing recommendations on religion and politics within society.

Selective model: Within this model the researcher selects to include, or to ignore, religion and politics and bases its research outcomes within a faith community or a social governing body.

Substantive model: The researcher interprets change from the point of view of the unchangeable within society and provides possibilities of change and diversity as the less favoured outcomes within research.

⁹ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Terrorist Reporting in the Swedish Media: Reinforcing an Oriental/Occidental Division?

**An Analysis of how the media in Sweden frames
terrorism as an exclusive Islamic phenomenon**

Therese Rudebeck

Introduction

After 9/11, academia, policymakers and media found a revived interest in religious extremism, especially terrorism driven by Islamist fundamentalism. Despite research indicating that the majority of terrorist attacks executed in Europe were performed by national separatists rather than Islamists (Stiernstedt, 2011), the media still frame terrorism in 'Huntingtonian' terms as a dichotomised battle between Islam and the West. This paper will specifically examine how the media in Sweden, particularly newspapers, frames terrorism by mirroring the rhetoric of Said's Orientalism by portraying terrorism as a phenomenon belonging to the Orient rather than the Occident.

This process of 'Othering' will be illustrated through empirical evidence from Swedish newspapers, predominantly discussing the terrorist attack in Stockholm on December 11, 2010. However, some emphasis will also be put on 9/11, as this event profoundly changed how terrorism is interpreted and the rhetoric of the media in discussing this phenomenon. Furthermore, this essay will theoretically discuss this through the concept of framing as well as ideas put

forward by Huntington and Said. Thus, through a combination of theory and practice this work aims to demonstrate that newspapers in Sweden use stereotypes of the 'oriental other' in order to frame terrorism as a problem belonging to the 'rest' rather than the 'West'

This paper will be divided into four main sections. The first section of this paper will provide working definitions of some of the complex terms that will be used frequently throughout this essay. Although terrorism is a central term, it does not lie within the scope of this essay to provide an all-encompassing definition of the concept. It is undoubtedly one of the most debated terms within the social sciences, and it is thus not possible to do this particular discussion justice. However, a brief overview will be provided in order to give a working definition for the analysis of this paper.

The second section of this paper is of a rather descriptive nature, giving figures and facts of the growing trends in secularisation, migration and xenophobia in Sweden which consequently have resulted in growing trends in social segregation. These figures will later deepen the understanding of how the media can successfully separate an entire social group and label it 'terrorist' as the foundation of fear and 'othering' is already in place.

The third part of this paper will empirically examine material from three dominant Swedish newspapers to display how Orientalist language is used.

The fourth part will outline the major theoretical frameworks including framing as a phenomenon within media, Orientalism and the 'Clash of Civilisations.'

Working Definitions

Since many of the terms used in this essay are of a challenging nature, it is necessary to provide working definitions to avoid confusion and misunderstanding, starting with what according to Spencer is “one of the most disputed terms in the social sciences” (2006:2): terrorism. Terrorism –and the terrorist –has puzzled many scholars throughout the years. Despite numerous attempts no universal definition has been reached since most definitions are based upon a moral bias claiming that ‘one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.’ This cliché is bound to create a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ where the former represents the righteous and the latter the terrorist. Furthermore, apart from having a moral dimension, the term terrorism is also “fundamentally and inherently political” (Hoffman, 2006:2); and, “labelling actions as ‘terrorism’ promotes condemnation of the actors, a definition may reflect ideological or political bias” (Gibbs, 1989:329).

The label ‘terrorist’ is not something that groups voluntarily adopt but rather it is given to them by others. Since it is subjective, if “one party can successfully attach the label *terrorist* to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint” (Jenkins, 1980:1). The label ‘terrorist’ is hard to lose so that “from that point on, everything this group does, whether intended to produce terror or not, is henceforth called terrorism...Eventually *all* similar acts by other groups also come to be called terrorism” (Jenkins, 1980:2). Naturally, this dilutes a possible understanding to an even greater extent.

Although it is possible to examine terrorism objectively in an academic context, this essay will embrace the fact that when it comes to the media, what is or isn't terrorism is judged in the eyes of the beholder. According to Jurgensmeyers, only the beholders can judge terrorism (2003:5) since one of the main components is to evoke terror and this can only be subjectively judged. Although not being the most academically appealing definition, it is most useful when discussing the role of the media, since, despite living in an age of infinite independent information, all information provided to us will follow someone else's political or personal agenda and will have been judged and possibly rephrased before it reaches us.

The second central term that deserves attention is the 'Other,' a term already mentioned in this introduction. In order to explain this concept, it is necessary to contextualise it within post-colonialism. Although the era of colonialism has been erased from the physical map, it is still present in the minds of people and it needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with the present reality. According to Hardt and Negri, this mental postcolonial process undergoes two stages. In a first stage, the differences between the coloniser and the colonised needs to be radicalised. The colonised becomes the 'Other,' thus representing the absolute opposite to everything the coloniser believes it represents. In a second stage, the coloniser's positive view of itself is strengthened through limited contact with the 'Other,' reassuring itself that the border is still intact. According to these scholars, all modern thinking revolves around this dyadic struggle (in Knutagård and Scaramuzzino, 2005:57).

According to Hall, stereotypes are an excellent tool to preserve the colonial hierarchy. He writes that

“Stereotyping ... is part of the maintenance of a social and symbolic order ... It sets up a symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them” (Hall, 1997:258 in *ibid*).

According to Edward Said, the process of ‘Othering’ is performed by the dichotomisation of the world into the Orient and the Occident where the former represents the Other and the latter the West. The creation of this discursive Other actively justifies Western dominance and fear, especially since it is constantly reinforced in linguistic terms. Whereas the Occident is described as rational, the Orient is portrayed as the complete opposite:

“The terrorist has, somehow, become the extreme Other. The Orient’s weapon towards the West. The stereotype terrorist is today the extreme image of everything the Orient is said to represent. He or she drives the Orient’s irrationality, religiousness, fundamentalism, ignorance and barbarism to the edge” (Knutagård and Scaramuzzino, 2005:90).

Through this stereotyping language, it is possible to preserve the invisible colonial hierarchy in our present reality.

Relevant Trends in Sweden

In order to understand how it is possible for the media to create the image of the Oriental Terrorist Other, it is necessary to have some background knowledge of the current situation in Swedish society as this will help to understand why Sweden is particularly receptive to this rhetoric. Although many factors may be part of the explanation, this paper will focus on three interlinked components: an increased secularization of Swedish society, a drastic increase in immigration from countries such as Iraq and a rapid growth of a xenophobic political party, the 'Swedish Democrats' (SD).

It is a fact that Europe currently experiences a trend of secularisation and Sweden is no exception. Multiple scholars refer to Sweden as "one of the most secularised countries in the world" (Andersson, 2000:1). When the traditional significance of religion starts to become reduced, cultural conflict may arise when an expanding proportion of immigrants settle in the country with new religious practices which to a lesser extent are secularised. Since the year 2000, Sweden has been one of five countries in Europe accepting a larger number of immigrants which in relation to its original population of about nine million constitute a significant number.

The majority of these immigrants to Sweden have been Muslims. Thus, in 2007 Sweden received one in two Iraqi asylum seeker in Europe (Migrationsverket, 2010:5). Due to this vast number, integration has in many

cases failed. The country has become segregated and divided into different socio-economic spheres, often corresponding to ethnicity. Most commonly, new immigrants have ended up in areas which are characterised by a low socio-economic status. This phenomenon, together with the way in which the Swedish media has been portraying the subject of immigration, has created a change in attitudes and a change in the social climate of Sweden (Songur and Englund, 2006: 85).

This change has also been aided by the propaganda spread by various xenophobic political parties, often actively spreading Islamophobia. The most successful of these parties has been *Sverigedemokraterna* (Swedish Democrats, SD). In the 2010 elections, they became the sixth largest party with 5,70 % of all votes (Valmyndigheten, 2010). Like many other political parties with similar beliefs, they blame the domestic problems on the Other, one that often is described as the fundamentalist Muslim, thus mirroring media's stereotyping. Members of SD claim that "the irresponsible Swedish immigration politics has given rise to segregation, criminality and raised oppositions. The multi-cultural society is a serious threat towards the unity and the stability which is the foundation for Swedish welfare" (Sverigedemokraterna, 2011). Considering all of these facts, it is easier to understand why the media can successfully implement the view of the terrorist as the Other. Secular Swedish society is constantly fed with propaganda blaming Muslim immigrants for destroying the Swedish welfare, blaming those who are already geographically segregated within Sweden. Thus, the step to further segregate them as in the Orient is a small one.

The Media in Sweden: 9/11 and the Stockholm Attack

This paper will now turn to explore factual data. This section will contain two parts. Firstly, the tragedy of 9/11 will be briefly discussed as this event has had an impact on the changed rhetoric of terrorism in media. Secondly, the way that the media portrayed the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2010 will be analysed in detail. According to Knutagård and Scaramuzzino (2005), Sweden is following an international trend in the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the media as associated with violence. Between 1991 and 1995, 85% of all public media material dealing with Islam was put it in a violent context. Terrorism was the second most common theme after war and constituted 25% of all media written material. The World Trade Centre in the heart of New York City was, if anything, a symbol for the success and modernization of the West and the Two Towers hosted 50,000 working spaces and were visited each day by 200,000 tourists. In less than 70 minutes, both of these towers were tumbled down into ruins while the world was watching through the lens of media (Nordström, 2002: 14 in *ibid*).

The image of terrorism that most people hold today is that of two airplanes flying straight into these towers causing massive material destruction and thousands of human casualties. Since the twin towers carried such high symbolic value, this terrorist attack has come to reinforce the dichotomist terms in which we frame terrorism today. When Osama Bin Laden claimed that “Every Muslim should rush to defend his religion” and further that “these incidents divided the entire world into two regions -one of faith where there is no hypocrisy and another of infidelity, from which we hope God will protect us” (Bin Laden, 2001) he came to fulfil Huntington’s predictions in rhetorical terms. Through this symbolic

action and specific rhetoric, the world became framed in a binary opposition. Less than a year after this event, Sweden passed a new terrorist law which followed the guidelines of the European Union. It is unclear whether these new guidelines came as a direct response to the letter sent by George W. Bush to the EU-commission shortly after 9/11. Further, Sweden has officially supported the 'war on terror' initiated by the United States (Knutagård and Scaramuzzino, 2005:8).

Different studies have demonstrated that global events such as 9/11 have had a negative impact on the local context. Larsson suggests that "Muslims living in Sweden have been held responsible for the terror attacks and have become guilty by association" (2006:10). Additionally, Songur and Englund claim that 9/11 has caused the stigmatisation of all Muslims as terrorists (2006:87). The impact of 9/11 is clearly visible in the reporting of the terrorist attack that occurred in Stockholm on the 11th of December 2010 at 4:50 pm in the heart of the city (DN101211). First, a car exploded and then a few minutes later Taimour Abdulwahab, identified as the man behind the bombings, blew himself up among people doing their Christmas shopping. Only two other people were injured and he only death was Taimour Abdulwahab himself. Although it was not the first attack that was carried out in Sweden, it was the first one in a long period of time being the first attack carried out by a suicide bomber. Most importantly, it shattered the illusion that "fundamentalism and suicide bombers are problems which do not concern us Swedes" (DN101213).

In the following section I will highlight three areas of the media reporting in which the stereotyped dichotomising becomes especially visible.

A. All Muslims and Muslim countries are presented as a connected homogenous entity

In order to maintain the image of the Oriental ‘Other’ this ‘Other’ needs to be moulded into one homogenous group. Thus, the media commonly refer to the ‘Muslim world’ as one large entity despite its vast size and diversity. Further, and unlike many Christian countries in the West Muslim countries tend to be defined solely in terms of their religion. Whereas many Christian countries can be given a variety of labels, Muslim countries are often exclusively defined as Muslim. Other characteristics are often overlooked in order to maintain a stereotypical simplistic view. Furthermore, when it comes to terrorism, Muslim states are never seen as isolated but are seen as connected in networks. After the attack in Stockholm, the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO) concluded that there were approximately 200 Islamist extremists in Sweden, of which 80 % are interconnected through friendship relations. Consequently, the article in which this information was published had the title “Violent Islamists in all of Sweden” (SvD101216).

B. The world is polarised –the values of the West are promoted and opposed to the Orient

The essence of creating the Other is to clearly distinguish ‘Us’ from ‘Them’. The media reporting after the Stockholm attack portrayed the event as a threat from outside aimed to harm an open democratic society hence implying that the

terrorist is not only threatening Sweden, but all the values upon which the West is founded. In an interview for *Dagens Nyheter*, Jimmy Åkesson, head of SD stated: “terrorism is of course a threat from the outside. It is an external threat, not only aimed at our openness, but also aimed towards our western humanism and the values our society is founded upon” (Stiernstedt, DN110126). In his speech after the attack, Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Swedish Prime Minister, claimed that the attack was a “threat aimed at our open society” (Olsson, AB101212). As discussed above, the Swedish media tends to simplify the world by portraying Muslim countries as one uniformed entity. This holds true for the Western world as well, but if the ‘Muslim world’ is described as fundamentalist, closed, traditional and religious, the West is portrayed as its complete opposite, most commonly as open and democratic. In an article published shortly after the bombing, the author claimed that the best way to demonstrate support for the “openness of Swedish society” was to continue to live as usual thus treating “Christmas shopping as a democratic act” (Malmrud, EX101213).

C. Stereotypical rhetoric is used to describe the ‘Muslim terrorist’

Stereotyping is one of the most powerful tools that the Swedish media uses in order to distinguish ‘Them’ from ‘Us’. In the Swedish media the stereotype of the ‘Muslim man’ is frequently used in order to portray the terrorist. This stereotypical person is fundamentally different from a ‘modern western citizen,’ both in terms of values and looks. Regarding Taimour Abdulwahab, the man identified as the suicide bomber in Stockholm, *Aftonbladet* writes that “up until

2001, he was a normal Swedish guy” (Nordström, AB101214). In this statement is implied that no ‘normal’ Swedish person could ever do what Taimour Abdulwahab did, that he is different. *Aftonbladet* further writes that although Abdulwahab never had been interested in religion before, after his stay in the UK he was changed: “When he came back, he had let his beard grow and he was very serious. He talked about religion and Afghanistan” (*ibid*). In this article, it was mentioned that the ultimate sign of his transformation was that he had named his son Osama, which despite being a common name in Muslim countries, was interpreted as a sign to honour the, now dead, al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In addition to feeding the readers with a religious and violent stereotype, the Swedish media also portrayed him as a traditional man: “He often talked about getting a second wife but I thought he was joking. I told him that one does not do this these days, that it is illegal and medieval” (Berglund, Dawod Ek, Hjertén, AB101214). All of these characteristics (abnormal, religious, political, traditional and even the beard) are all part of how media in Sweden as well as many other Western countries chose to portray the terrorist Other in order to make it an external threat, something which does not belong and cannot originate at home. All of the above characteristics also correspond to how the Occident usually portrays the Orient. It can be concluded that the portrayal of terrorists in the media reinforces our perception of the Orient and vice versa. These two socially constructed stereotypes feed into each other.

Theoretical Framework

So far, this essay has had a substantial focus on the theories of Said and Huntington. This focus will shift in order to explore the theory of framing in media before returning once again to Said, Huntington and how these theories are reflected in this study of the Swedish media.

All information which is provided to us by the media is second-hand information meaning that someone has received the information and has selected what part of the information to pass on. Whoever receives the information has an enormous power when deciding what to pass on and, most importantly, *how* to pass it on. Parsa (2010) argues that the microscopic image which is passed on is the stereotypical image which is culturally specific. Some argue that the general public is not capable of receiving the entire picture, as they will lose interest and find it confusing. This can have political consequences since most media, although supposedly independent, often has a certain political agenda. If this agenda controls what information the public receives, the effect is that “our attitudes are constantly shifting as the international/national political agenda changes over time” (Parsa, 2010: 3).

In the media, it is possible to use an extended metaphor which “functions like a matrix or conceptual framework which provides a constant source of reference for a particular kind of discourse” (Carendel, 2005:16). This is commonly referred to as framing. This paper has throughout tried to demonstrate that in the case of terrorist reporting in Sweden, the media uses an Orientalist, Islamist frame. Gamson and Modigliani define a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a

connection among them. The frames suggest what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (1987:143 in Druckman 2001:227). The primary reason for framing something is that it has the capacity to “frame a question or a problem in a certain way so that the attitudes of citizens are influenced in a distinct direction” (Parsa, 2010:4). This concept of framing can aid the understanding of how the media in practice succeeds to portray the stereotype in the way they do.

Returning now once more to Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* it is important to start with the assumption that “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either” (Said, 2003:4). Orientalism then is:

A way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also...one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (Ibid: 1-2).

In many ways, it would be impossible to define the West as the Occident unless it had its Oriental counterpart. If there was no non-European entity, there would be no collective notion uniting Europe. These two socially constructed regions are interdependent of each other’s existence. Nonetheless, it is not a relationship of mutual complement but instead, the “relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex

hegemony” (*ibid*: 5). This domination is reflected in the “hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (*ibid*: 7). With the influence of the media there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed, hence, forcing information into “more and more standardised molds” (*ibid*: 26). As claimed previously, the terrorist stereotype today is the extreme image of everything the Orient is said to represent and is seen as the Orient’s weapon towards the West. Through the nexus of knowledge and power, the Orient is obliterated into a human being (*Ibid*: 27). This imagined human being with all its attached labels is per definition the antithesis of western values and cannot belong or originate in this western world. As a result, the constructed Muslim terrorist has no place in the West except as its ultimate enemy. Through framing the problem of terrorism in this way it is thus possible to alienate terrorism as a phenomenon which is not occurring at home. In the West, according to western media there are only freedom fighters.

One of the most controversial theories of modern times is the one articulated by Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’. It is impossible to write a paper dealing with terrorism as an Islamic phenomenon without touching upon Huntington’s theories. According to him, post-cold war and “global politics began to be reconfigured along cultural lines” (Huntington, 1996:19) since “cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people” (*ibid*: 20). Many different characteristics can define a civilisation but the most important is religion (*ibid*). Huntington claims that “as the West attempts to assert its values and protect its interest ... Islamic societies attempt to expand their own economic and

military power to resist and to ‘balance’ against the West” (ibid: 29). Huntington’s most controversial argument is that a global war involving the core states of the world’s major civilisations is possible, although improbable and in this case it will most likely involve “Muslims one side and non-Muslims on the other” (ibid:312). According to Qureshi and Sells, the clash theory is a seemingly elegant way to redefine the cold-war paradigm. They write:

Rather than having to construct a new paradigm, the clash theorists could simply redefine the East of the cold war as the older Orientalist East, as Islam and/or Confucianism...The same West (defined as individualistic, enterprising, egalitarian, peaceable, and tolerant) is pitted against an East now embodied by Islam and characterized as fundamentalist, reactionary, terrorist, static, and oppressive of women”
(p. 12).

Said highlights what in many scholars’ belief is the fundamental flaw of Huntington’s theory: “the posing of constructed and conflictual categories as if they were descriptions of objective reality” (in Qureshi and Sells, 17). When we build the framework of Us versus Them, we pretend that the distinction is natural, whereas in fact, the framework separating us is belligerent and constructed. However, in the words of Said, if the identities that we have created for Us and for Them “are constructed and inherently conflictual, then the claim of a clash of civilization is true, in the philosophically trivial sense of tautology: generalized identities that have been constructed in opposition to one another are in opposition

to one another” (ibid:27). Thus, to tie this back to the issue of the Muslim terrorist, it is not strange that he (as the terrorist is often stereotyped as a man) is seen as opposing everything that the West is supposedly standing for and they are socially constructed as each other’s fundamental opposite.

Conclusions

This essay does not by any means wish to undermine terrorism as a growing problem which needs to be addressed; rather, it aims to highlight the flaws in its representation. With the type of reporting which is undertaken today, it is no wonder that there is a false public consensus that a terrorist is “a young Muslim man” (DN110125) and that “most terrorists tend to be Muslims” (DN110126). After the bombings in Stockholm in December 2010, the press conformed to almost every existing stereotype to portray the terrorist and the event as detached and abnormal to Swedish society as possible. At the broadest level, the ‘Muslim World’ was clustered together as one connected homogeneous entity, a cluster that opposed to everything what Swedish society believes itself to stand for and the values it is said to represent, such as democracy, modernity and openness. At an individual level, the man who performed the bombings was constructed as a personification of all values attached to the Orient: irrational, religious, abnormal and traditional.

With the current trends seen in Sweden reflecting growing immigration and xenophobia as a result of failed integration, it is understandable how this society can be receptive towards this type of rhetoric. Moreover, with the Swedish media using ‘framing’ in order to shape public opinion in a certain direction, it is

hard to fight against these misrepresentations. Returning to the posed research question, this essay has argued that the media in Sweden is reinforcing a discursive Oriental/Occidental division. However, it is vital to remember that these categories are not neutral; they are constructed as counterparts of each other. Thus, as Said claims, things can be true in the most trivial philosophical sense: if the media in Sweden constructs Islamic terrorism as its ultimate enemy opposed to its own constructed identity, then this Islamic terrorism will inevitably be its ultimate threat. However, if acknowledging that these are simply discursive constructions, it is always possible to reframe these issues and move away from an over-simplistic and factually false dichotomisation.

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