



## Part II Terror Symbols & Signs

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- The argument in this class is not that “culture makes a terrorist,” but that cultural and religious values—which are often intentionally manipulated by charismatic leaders or strong organizations—can contribute to the **making of terrorists**
- These same set of values, manipulated or interpreted by a different leader or group, by contrast, can also contribute to the **making of pacifists**

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- In this regard, one of the best ways to think of culture (along with its signs, symbols, & icons) as a **meaning-making medium**, which interacts with other forces—political, economic, and social—to influence or shape the behavior of individuals

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- Cultural symbols need to be understood in the context of particular place and within the context of broader social, political and economic forces: *these contextual factors will make the use of cultural symbols more or less possible, more or less effective.*
- These symbols tell us about a group's founding, its ideology, its aims, and methods.

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- In this regard, culture is not purely an independent variable
- At the same time, many culturalists would agree that culture and religion have an autonomous effect insofar as they sometimes provide a necessary or at least authoritative basis for collective action
- *That is, without an appeal to culture, some collective activities might be virtually impossible.*

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- On this point, consider the rise in one particular type of terrorist activity: suicide bombings. *How can this activity be explained or understood without taking into account cultural factors?*



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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- To justify the act of “suicide terrorism,” one of Lebanon’s leading Muslim clerics argued that a *special context* existed in Lebanon and this *special context* made it permissible for Muslims to “explode” themselves in the name of Islam, and to defeat enemies of Islam.
  - In a similar vein, the concept of **Jihad** was redefined to justify and legitimize all sorts of political violence.

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## What Makes a Terrorist?

- **The important point is this:** The “*Islaminization*” of political violence carried out by Hizballah allowed the organization to claim a divine or sanctified role, which, in turn, conferred an obligation on the part of all Muslims to support, or at least not oppose, the actions taken by Hizballah.
- The more successful this process of *Islaminization*, the more powerful Hizballah became.

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## The Usefulness of Signs

- A Sign is something that gives us direction but does not tell us what to think. It does not give us a description.
- Examples? Stop, Restroom, Yield, Green light,
- In other words, signs give *directions* while symbols tell us how we should *feel* about something.

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## Symbols as Experience

- A symbol, on the other hand, tells us what images to look for in our culturally encoded experience in order to determine how we should feel about the thing represented.



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## Examples of Symbols

- Golden Arches,
- Statue of Liberty,
- the scales of justice,
- capitalism,
- democracy,
- apple pie,
- baseball, the Stars and Stripes, the bible,
- lawyer,
- radical,
- liberal,
- human rights,
- Communism,
- Fascism,
- Feminism,
- thief,
- murderer,
- criminal,
- terrorist and terrorism,
- taxes, politician,
- Conservative,
- postmodernism

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## Signs & Symbols Reflect an Ideology

- An ideology is a system of values and beliefs regarding the various institutions and processes of society that is accepted as fact or truth by a group of people.
- An ideology provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and, in doing so, organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable.
- Ideologies help us make **choices** based on **beliefs** and **values** and they **simplify** our complex world.
- So, let's turn to some symbols here for a moment.

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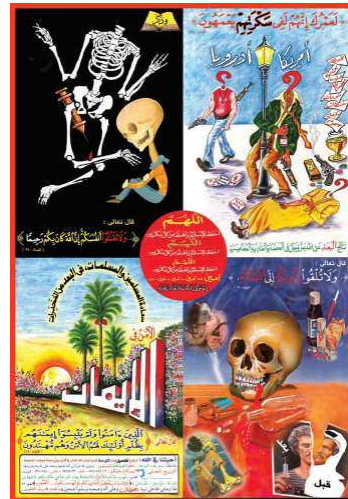
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## Most Symbols by Groups are Relatively “Clean” in Layout



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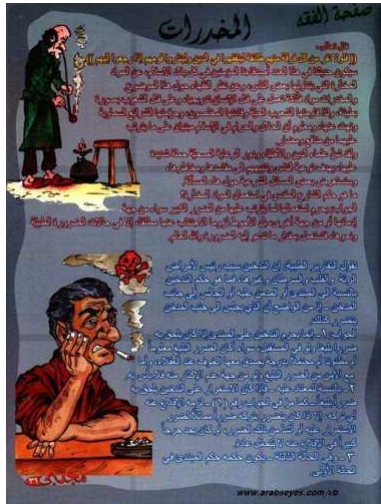
## But Get More Complex, Nuanced



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# With In-Depth Meaning(s)



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