One's Terrorist is Another's Blockbuster:
Political Terrorism in American versus European Films

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Political Terrorism: The Sword of Gideon

Political terrorism is carried out for a reason. The reason usually bears political, ideological or social meaning and orientation. In their effort to condemn terrorism, many analysts and policy-makers often neglect the observation that the perpetrators of such deeds always have a goal and a designated target. The ultimate objective is bringing about a political change; the prospective target is whoever stands in the way of change, or is responsible for the deplorable *status quo.* The indiscriminate character of modern terrorism, as opposed to, for example, the selective nature of 19th century terrorism,[1] is explained by the distinction between two types of victims: the innocent, or the immediate one and the ultimate one. The former is the crowd of shoppers in a Mall or passengers on a bus, whereas the latter are the policy makers and the power wielders (Wilkinson 1986). The growing psychological effect of terrorism, improving technologies of violence and seclusion of political leaders have all led to the separation of victims: the more spectacular the defiance, the more favorable the compliance. The government is regarded as miscreant when it does nothing to stave off the threat of terrorism or when it aggravates the plight of those who initiate the challenge to order and stability. Mistrust and de-legitimacy against the system are developed, coupled with an exacting doctrine that provokes the

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[1] For an excellent comparison between ancient, old and modern terrorism see Walter Laqueur (1987).

believers into harsh action. Such action is often translated into political terrorism (Peleg 1997, 2002).

This choice is based on three grounds: 1) terrorism may be indicative of extreme groups who can ideologically justify violence and who are disillusioned of all other channels of expression; 2) Terrorism is one of the most effective ways to shake the *status quo* or to deter the emergence of a state of affairs. Terrorism puts governments on the spot since it defies their capacity to rule. Thus, it compensates the perpetrators for their lack of military might to change their plight. Hence, terrorism makes a force appear much stronger than it really is, as Gideon did with his few warriors against the Midianites; 3) By its nature, terrorism is more easily diffused across borders than any other type of politically oriented violence. Of course, it requires secrecy, commitment, loyalty, confidence, and willingness to scarify oneself for the cause. But these are precisely the traits that might be appealing to disheartened and crestfallen self-proclaimed redeemers.

Becoming a terrorist means joining a group or organization of radical activists, identifying with their goals and means of operation, and accepting their norms, principles and rules of behavior. Most of the time, this transformation means a total rupture of one's previous way of living and the nullification of the self in front of the general conscience of the group. Political extremists who decide to adopt the deed and become terrorists are not assassins but representatives of a vigorous constituency. The attempt to describe them as loners, madmen, psychopaths and sociopaths distorts the fact that many potential political terrorists grow and prosper under the auspice of a protecting identity group, be it ethnic, religious, or national and are stimulated by camaraderie and *esprit-des-corps.* What propels young and idealistic individuals who care about the socio-political situation around them, to try and change the *status-quo* through joining a radical and violent group? Weinberg and Davis

(1989) distinguish between the "push" of psychological attributes of each individual and the "pull" of organizational incentives and temptations that terrorist groups offer their potential recruits. The combination of pushes and pulls is responsible for the final matching of the terrorist organization and its practitioners.

The internal psychological needs of becoming an active terrorist, stem from discontent and disenchantment with the existing state of affairs. A sense of revolt and defiance of materialistic and accepted reality is accompanied by profound contempt for monetary values, luxury items, or the culture of consumption. The worldview of a potential terrorist is deterministic: it is comprised of the good against the bad; the "top-dogs" who oppress the "underdogs" without any intermediate colors or circumstances to mitigate the sharp contrast (Galtung 1971). The potential terrorists are so convinced of their self-righteousness that they are impervious to the suffering and injustice they themselves create on their quest for the perfect society.

Many terrorists do not personally suffer inequality and poverty. On the contrary, they come from middle-class families and tranquil environments. They encounter social injustice when they grow up and leave home, purchase education and become aware of the turbulence around them. Others are not animated so much by concern for justice as by the thrill of the action, the excitement, and the constant danger of being persecuted day and night; psychologists call these individuals stress-seekers (Crenshaw 1986). A similar reason for joining a terrorist group is to escape from boredom or the routine of life. Others are allured by the mystique and the aura of heroism and romanticism surrounding terrorism. They enjoy the sense of power and the advantage of being unexpected, unpredictable, and always initiating. The organization provides an alternative framework or family for the dispossessed youngsters. Being part of a group offers a sense of belonging and an opportunity

for camaraderie, friendship, and participation in a common fate. Such reassuring experiences diminish one's insecurities *vis-a-vis* a hostile environment and bolster one's belief in the righteousness of the route chosen. Social status is also guaranteed when joining a terrorist group, especially where the organization expresses the anguish of a large, persecuted population, as in the cases of the Irish Republican Army and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The young terrorist or "freedom fighter" gains an eternal glory in joining the fight; he achieves martyrdom or sainthood if he perishes in the course of the violent duty.

An interesting distinction of what makes terrorists tick can be made between rational and irrational impetuses to enlist for terrorism (Slann and Schechterman 1987). The rational terrorist is the goal-oriented, pre-meditated activist, who indulges in a cost-benefit calculation of risks and inducements before he decides to operate. The rational terrorist needs material or other tangible incentives in order to become an active member of the militant unit: large salaries, respectable status, and a lavish life-style. Terrorists in this category act more like mercenaries and hired killers than deeply committed idealists. Money and protection can raise the appeal of terrorism: if the risk of being caught is offset by financial compensation or reduced by diplomatic immunity or the safe passage-way through certain territories, then the advantages of the terrorist act overshadow the shortcomings (Olson 1971, chapters 1-2).

On the one hand, rational participation in terrorism is inspired by purposive incentives such as consecrating the deed and glorifying an end, which sanctifies the terrorist act as a necessary means, regardless of its inhumane nature. The greater the dedication, and the sense of fulfillment one gets from becoming a terrorist, the more likely it is that one decides rationally to implement murderous schemes. On the other hand, irrational terrorism is committed by the emotional, spontaneous, radical. Such activists do not possess

a burning commitment or ideology; nor are they impelled by monetary incentives. They are usually moved by whimsical eruptions and outbursts of hatred and vengeance. Sometimes the yearning for esteem and acceptance by peers pushes them to the most despicable atrocities.

These two motivations of terrorism co-exist in many identity groups, which escalate their struggle. The leadership can be perceived as rational because it devises goals, weighs options and makes choices. The rank-and-file may be seen as emotional, driven by religious, ethnic, or patriotic zeal and excited by the companionship of the group. The leaders and adherents complement each other: the former derive their authority to make rational decisions from the devotion of the followers, while the latter gain deference and meaning through the ideology and tasks delegated to them by the leaders.

Terrorists are well aware that they cross an irreversible line in the strategy of the struggle and that gradation is virtually impossible once the ultimate weapon is employed. But they seem to relish the shocking impact of their deeds, and utilize the immediate, short-term success of audacity to abet their staggering spirit. Thus, what characterizes terrorist factions is unfettered ruthlessness and smaller size. Being a factional, close-knitted group, suits the secrecy and efficiency terrorism nurtures upon. To choose terrorism as a mode of practice, one has to invoke passionate convictions in the right of way, and a profound disdain for any potential hindrance. One also has to believe that a better future is possible, even imminent, and that human ability may expedite the pace of improvement. This avid certitude in a cataclysmic redemption, which consecrates any means, is archetypal of messianic thoughts.[2] What makes

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[2] Messianism is not innately and automatically a religious phenomenon. By definition, the major feature of the concept is the all-encompassing apocalyptic, and traumatic change for large populations. In order to be a believer and survive, one must follow the directives and edict of "those who know." It is true that by its nature, religion is more akin to notions such as boundless faith, miraculous circumstances, vast changes,

messianism and terrorism such auspicious bedfellows is explained in what David Rapoport terms "the messianic sanctions for terror" (1988:195).

The assurance in the imminence of salvation and the human role in preparing the ground explain political activism but not necessarily the specific terroristic behavior. The six parameters Rapoport introduces as evidently linking messianism with terrorism begin with the *option to act* upon redemption, rather than tarry in perplexity. Then, the specific cause becomes *conducive to terrorism.* The more coveted the end, the less restraints are imposed on violence, and "wars which threaten the very existence of the belligerent parties will be much more savage than wars for territories or trade" (Rapoport 1987, 34). The third and fourth conditions for messianism to become terroristic pertain to proof: evidence of the believer's faith, and signs of the impending deliverance. They both might foster terrorism because in the first instance zeal and total devotion can be demonstrated through violent persecution of heretics; in the second instance portents of salvation are usually associated with cataclysmic woes. And what better way is there to precipitate apocalyptic revelations than participating in, and spreading such atrocities? Finally, there is the element of human and divine participation. Terrorism as human intervention in the process of redemption is simplified and encouraged by denigrating the infidels. The dehumanization of heretics enables terrorism without remorse. Moreover, if divine intervention is felt, the viciousness of terrorism receives the definitive endorsement of The Almighty and can be pursued without penitence.

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and infallible, divine leadership. However, grand ideologies like Marxism, Maoism, or Nazism were also messianic in nature. They boasted monopoly on the truth; they required limitless loyalty, and they promised a rapid and unprecedented change for the better for those who join. It is, thus, of no wonder that such widely different personas as Vladimir Lenin—the fierce Russian revolutionary, and Sayyid Qutb—the precursor of revived Islamic fundamentalism saw themselves as "vanguards of the revolution."

All the features of political terrorism mentioned above are conspicuously missing from American movies dealing with the phenomenon, while European films accentuate these characteristics and speculate them as the center of their cinematic endeavor. This essay tries to explain the differences between American and European films about terrorism by introducing the concept of political culture as the major source of disparity. In order to do that, I will commence by summarizing the attributes of political terrorism to obviously underline the omissions of one cinematic orientation versus the highlighting of the other. Secondly, I will demonstrate my claims by citing relevant examples of American and European movies that are concerned, primarily or derivatively, with the issue of terrorism. Lastly, I will place my argument within the context of political culture and indicate some basic cultural identity characteristics that keep American and European renditions of political violence so widely separated from each other.

The Composite Profile of Political Terrorism

The subject of terrorism, as shown in contemporary films, is rather unique in its cultural differentiation. Recent trends in the film industry seem to indicate both an American hegemony *and* a two-way flow of influence between the U.S. and Western Europe (Lev 1993). On the one hand, there is a growing evidence of movie-making becoming a bicultural and, even, a multi-cultural art. Bertolucci once described himself as a "French filmmaker, who happens to make film in Italy and the United States" and Godard, in a similar vein, stated that he was "an American filmmaker in exile" (Carcassone and Fieschi 1981). European directors were recruited for American projects and some European "artistic" style of movie making has caught up with some of the young generation of independent American directors. On the other hand, the American cultural influence on the European film industry, especially the French and the German, has long been recognized and documented (Tunstall 1977; Thompson 1985).

Terrorism, however, remains a divider in terms of how filmmakers across the Atlantic understand and interpret it on the screen. In what ways is this divergence discernible? First, it should be noted that relative to the saliency and visibility of political terrorism, today, very few films are being made about the subject. Barring fads and waves of productions regarding calamitous events such as the attack of September 11 (see, for instance the recent *Bad Company* and *The Sum of All Fears*), political terrorism appeared on the silver screen, especially in the U.S., in a dismal amount of opportunities. Trying to figure out why, Laqueur speculates that perhaps terrorism is not such a stimulating topic to moviemakers and "while terrorists certainly make a great deal of noise, the human element involved is not particularly interesting" (1987, 202). Then he suggests that political terrorism might not be a favorite with spectators as well, and that most of those films that were distributed in America ended up being flops. Italian director Emile de Antonio, whose film *underground* (1970) about the Weathermen movement, was shunned by American distributors, had a more blatant explanation to the paucity of political terrorism in the movies: "terrorism simply isn't a popular subject for Hollywood because they don't have the brains to understand the complexity that might make it interesting" (in Laqueur, 1987, 202). There might be another reason though. Violence fills the screen and conflicts are abundant in both American and European films. Terrorism, being a severe manifestation of a violent conflict, is simply too dreary and too depressing to intrigue or entertain viewers. It is shown daily on the television screens in a full disclosure of its ghastliness so that it can hardly be used as a theme for excitement and escapism in a darkened theatre. The plethora of violence and conflict in the movies requires a "buffer zone" of time or space: terrorizing and shooting in the Wild West, in the killing fields of the two world wars and Vietnam or, even, in inter-galaxy hegemonian campaigns, are perfectly fine (and money grossing) but political terrorism is excessively contemporaneous to enjoy.

Nevertheless, films about political terrorism are being made. Directors and producers who pursue this task do it perhaps for interest and education sake rather than pure entertainment. However, to the few who do engage in filming political terrorism, the following characteristics are essential to heed:

1. *Political Terrorism is Purposive and Rational.* It is rational not in the logical-moralistic manner but in the functional-strategic manner, meaning that it determines goals and chooses means, which are conceived as appropriate to obtain those goals. Political terrorism isn't an incomprehensible enterprise, but rather a coherent and concerted effort of resolute perpetrators.

2. *Political Terrorism is Primarily a Political Act.* In addition to being criminal and illegal, it is also an attempt to exert political influence on behalf of people that, in their view, have been neglected. Terrorists as political actors who challenge the *status quo* (Tilly 1978), and who use their weapons as negotiation tactics (Thornton 1964), is a feature of terrorism that is frequently played down.

3. *Political Terrorism is Mostly about Change.* Terrorism is instigated by the inconvenience or fear of an existing, or impending reality. Thus, the professed objective of the extremists is to undermine routine daily life and to thwart expected agendas. Political terrorists are many times visionaries, who aspire for swift and rapid alterations of the human condition (preferably theirs). They abhor mild modifications and reform and inexorably sanctify their means by the cause. There were through history, political terrorists in the name of guarding the *status quo* but they were rare and far

less significant because the State and the powers in charge of social control did it better (Oberschall 1973; Rule 1988).[3]

4. *Political Terrorism is a Form of Political Participation.* Engaging in power and influence and attempting to change the political agenda indicates a set of independent political preferences and a desire to propagate them and enrich others with their advantages. In other words, it means one wants to participate in the decision-making processes and one wants to have a say. Terrorism is therefore, a channel to a direct participation in politics. It is an immoral and obstructive channel but, nevertheless, a viable one.

5. *Political Terrorism is the Weapon of the Weak.* This dictum stems from the ironic reality that the success of the political terrorist ultimately depends on the good will of his victim. The accomplishments of terrorism are not gauged by the number of buses blown away or by the number of airplanes hijacked. It is evaluated by the political change it intended to expedite. Change hinges upon a benevolent governmental response to the terroristic stimulus. When change can be brought about "from below," regardless, or despite government's response, terrorists become revolutionists.

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[3]   Terrorist groups who organized to stave off changes and protect the status quo were sometimes affiliated with their governments but not necessarily. The vendee uprising of peasants in Western France against the revolutionary government in Paris was a local initiative aiming at restoring the monarchy and quelling the radical regime, but they organized because of their own economic and religious interests (Tilly 1978). Similarly, Gush Emunim, the extremist religious group of Jewish settlers in the west Bank organized in order to thwart the prospects of a Middle East peace process. Although they reaffirm the tendency of the Shamir right-wing government at the time, they were not operating in the name of the government (Peleg 1997). Hence, Terrorism in the name of the *status quo* aught to be distinguished from state terrorism, or "terrorism from above," in which the government officially and directly applies means of terrorism to pursue its policies (Arendt 1968).

6. *Political Terrorism Challenges Order and Confronts the Government.* Being against the *status quo* means being against the existing order. On the two poles of the political philosophy spectrum stand order and justice (Bull 1995). Order calls for maintaining and preserving an accessible today; justice dictates the progression toward a better tomorrow. This dichotomy pits not only order and justice in opposing and uncompromising positions, but also challengers (i.e. terrorists) and guardians of the *status quo*--i.e. governments). There is an inherent incompatibility between political terrorists and governments.

7. *Political Terrorism is a Collective Undertaking.* Terrorism is goaded by a *group ethos.* It is the spirit of "all for one and one for all", which prompts such qualities as self-sacrifice, total commitment and unconditional loyalty from the extremists. The members of the terrorist movement, group, or cell[4] encourage and inspire each other. They become a surrogate family for individuals who relinquished their former way of life. Although many terrorist incidents are carried out by single perpetrators, these executors always act for, and are embraced by, a group.

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[4]   Terrorist movements, groups or cells do not merely denote differences in size. There are also ideological considerations here: revolutionaries have always attempted to recruit the masses for their cause in order to tilt the balance of power in the state. Thus, they always wrote and talked about movements even when their followers were few, for incitement purposes, the movement was on. In the 1960's and 1970's, tactics to bring about socio-political change were modified due to repeating failures of attempted revolutions. The idea of urban guerrilla became popular and, with it, the tactic of "the strike in the middle", which was advocated by Guevara and Debrais. Urban guerrilla efforts necessitated smaller units of operations, hence terrorist groups. Finally, terrorist "cells" was an expression that had originated in the anarchist terrorist tradition. The anarchist disdain of structure and hierarchy led its theorists and adherents to conduct activism in small and minimally structured units, hence, terrorist cells (see Brinton 1965; Oberschall 1973; Tarrow 1998).

8. *Political Terrorism is Sustained by Communal Deprivations.* Through group spirit and resolve, the activists rely on their sense of belonging to a community. Whether it is a religious, national, ethnic or class, the solidarity and cohesion that typify many terrorist groups emerge from the feeling that their identity and destiny are invariably linked with their core community.

9. *Political Terrorism is Guided by Ideology.* Terrorists operate with a profound conviction and belief. They adhere to strict precepts that are anchored in a consistent worldview and a fervent ideology. Ideology, with its definite explanation for the ills of the present and its optimistic remedies for the future, supplies the fuel that galvanizes terrorists to pursue their atrocious tasks.

10. *Political Terrorism Espouses a Messianic Aura.* Following Rapoport's ideas, it seems that political terrorists are on a mission to make the world better. Some might perceive them as modern day crusaders, who sacrifice their own fortune for the benefit of others. Their image as people driven by values and steadfastness wins them sympathy and support and, sometimes, provision and sustenance. Terrorists set out to proselyte the public and convince it of their justice (Hoffer, 1951). Constantly, due to the spectacular nature of their deeds, they enjoy a captive audience (Heymann, 1998).

Ultimately, political terrorism is more complex than it was initially given credit for. The above attributes illustrate a composite profile that should be studied carefully if this phenomenon is to be countered effectively. These characteristics of political terrorism can be realized in different ways and their consequences diversely appreciated. As we shall see in our next section, American and European attempts to come to grips with political terrorism in the

cinema indeed took on dissimilar paths of reading and analysis. But these paths were not variably chosen: they stemmed from profound cultural attitudes and beliefs.

Political Terrorism in the Movies: The Atlantic Divide

Four European and four American films are used to stress our point. The former include *The German Sisters* (distributed in the U.S. as *Marianne and Juliane*, 1981*)* by Margarethe von Trotta, *The Tunnel* (1979) by Gillo Pontecorvo*, Nada* (1974) by Claud Chabrol and *State of Siege* (1972) by Costa-Gavras. The latter include *Black Sunday* (1977) by John Frankenheimer, *Executive Decision* (1996) by Stuart Baird, *Arlington Road* (1999) by Mark Pellington and *Fight Club* (1999) by David Fincher. The European films were chosen in an attempt to grasp a wide variety of terrorist groups in order to demonstrate that a European attitude to political terrorism exists across countries and cultures. Thus, the films analyzed are about groups as diverse as the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof) from West Germany, the Basque group ETA, the fictional Nada (modeled after the French group Action Direct) and the Uruguayan Tupamaros. The American selections were easier to sort out: there were simply not many to chose from. If we set aside the mockery movies about political terrorism, in which caricatures of evildoers are being used to lionize ludicrous heroism of a modern Superman (Arnold Schwarzenegger in *True Lies*, or Bruce Willis in the *Diehard* series, or a bunch of less successful others), we are really left with very few films about political terrorism coming from Hollywood.

The weight given in Europe to political terrorism as a current topic for the cinema is exemplified in the directors who chose the issue as a project: Pontecorvo, Chabrol, Cota-Gavras and von Trotta are all highly respected and successful masters of the craft. Their attention and obligation to political terrorism as a subject worthy of cinematic expression indicate that this is not a topic to be taken lightly and for profit purposes only. In contrast to the European

directors, their American counterparts are less famous and lack the critical weight for a decisive and non-conformist assertion in their works. One is a veteran, who never really broke through the first echelon of moviemakers (Frankenheimer), another is a promising youngster, who still struggles for recognition (Fincher) and the other two are relatively unknown (Pellington and Baird). With such lack of a cinematic authority or directorial charisma, no breakthrough viewpoints and no daring experimentations concerning political terrorism were to be anticipated.

They are apparent, however, in our European examples. The first to be discussed here is Margarethe von Trotta's *The Marianne and Juliane.* This is an incredible true story of two sisters, one a journalist, the other a terrorist. These characters are based on one of the leaders of Baader-Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and her sister Christiane. The film depicts in retrospect, from Marianne's mysterious death in prison, the differing personalities of the two sisters and the maturation of their respective political awareness. The film stresses the determination of Marianne in choosing her combatant way of life. Although psychological motivations for her behavior are painstakingly traced from childhood through adolescence, still, her ultimate opting for terrorism is portrayed in rational-strategic terms. She set goals for herself, and decides on terrorism as the ample vehicle to realize them. Marianne is "an articulate, action-oriented idealist who endorses violence and who is deeply affected by the Vietnam War, Third World issues and her country's Nazi past" (Linville 1998, 87). She regards herself as a political actor and her trial as a political trial, which is orchestrated to silence her critique of German politics.

Von Trotta suggests several times in her movie the symmetry between the acts of the convicted terrorists and the acts of the German State in tracking them down, and then, imprisoning and torturing them. By invoking Hannah Arendt distinction of terrorism from below and terrorism from above (1968), the director

blurs the simplistic division of good and bad and implicates the government in power abuse. Marianne is isolated in prison in terrible conditions, and when her sister pays her a visit, the prison guards never leave them a moment of privacy. This scene is reminiscent of the kind of sadistic voyeurism of Nazi surveillance, back in the Germany's shadowy past. Despite the affection and sadness the film expresses for Marianne's destiny (and toward all the people in her life, including her sister and only child), it is not an automatic avowal of the plight of the deprived. The message is more intricate and balanced. Marianne's activities are neither glorified nor condoned. Alternative political stances toward violence are presented (particularly through the eyes of Juliane, the sister), and the complexity of each political choice is demonstrated by the dire contrast between ideological enthusiasm and the agony of personal suffering.

Marianne's tenacity and staunch belief in her mission is revealed several times in the film, for example, when she prefers her ideological commitment to her family—"I have no time to mourn", she chillingly admits to her sister when Juliane notifies her of her husband's suicide). Her relations with her fellow activists are only briefly shown but enough to reflect their unity and common destiny. In some tender moment in the film, Marianne's group mates assume the role of her actual family and she prepares coffee for them. In such mundane behavior, the plot allows a peek at lives of terrorists as human beings.

In Pontecorvo's *The Tunnel*, the protagonists are four members of the notorious ETA, the Basque movement that uses terrorist tactics to win independence from Spain. The plot focuses on the December 20, 1975 assassination of Carrero Blanco, Spain's Prime Minister and General Franco's right hand man. It took three years to set the project in motion and, then, just before shooting, Aldo Moro, the Italian parliamentary leader and former prime minister was kidnapped and later executed by the Red Brigades. Thus, the film assumed a whole different meaning than Pontecorvo had initially intended. The

beginning was changed. The film opens in 1978 (the year the film was made and Moro was killed) with a failed terrorist attack, in which one of the attackers is mortally injured. Thus by his deathbed, flashbacks take us back five years to witness the same guy with his colleagues preparing for the Carrero Blanco assignment. The arrangements are meticulously and scrupulously shown.

Similarly to the director's previous works and, especially, his masterpiece *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), many scenes could have easily been mistaken for footage from the six o'clock news. The documentary, slow-paced nature of his filmmaking style rendered Pontecorvo's work with a credibility and silent bravura. The film underscores the group's camaraderie, their sense of common fate, their political arguments and discussions and their mutual encouragement of each other. The original version of the script was very sympathetic to the four protagonists. They were described as martyrs, who salvage Spain from a dictatorial future by eliminating the successor of Franco. Thus, the ETA activists operate on behalf of all the Spaniards and their deed is a political deed based on the ideology of freedom and democratization for Spain and the Basques in particular. When the initial plan of kidnapping Blanco in order to negotiate the release of fellow activists from jail is discarded due to heavy security, an alternate plan of killing him is raised. The film demonstrates the qualms and reservations the members of the cell bring up and how they debate their tactic in a rational and educated manner. Blanco is depicted as the enemy of democracy and his execution as a necessary act to salvage the country. When the political discussion is done, "it almost appears that the final decision for assassination was an either-or-choice, the death of the Prime-Minister or the continuation of oppression" (Michalczyk 1986, 206).

But the gruesome assassination of Aldo Moro changed the atmosphere around the film. Pontecorvo could not, or would not, have demonstrated an unfettered sympathy for Basque political terrorism while in his own country the

public mood had drastically swayed against the extremists. Thus, the ending of the film marks the death of the terrorist and symbolizes the futility of his way, while his remaining friends gather around his bed to silently denounce his legacy. Nevertheless, the director carefully displays the complexity and subjectivism of political terrorism. The severity of the deed is stipulated by circumstances and on the consequences of not doing it: what would be the alternative for liberty and justice? And what would be the moral implications of political terrorism as problem solving?

Pontecorvo deals with these intricate issues, seriously and gracefully. He lets the spectators understand the grievances of the Basque people, and then ushers us into the world of young idealists adamant about their ideology and way of life but, still, reluctant to partake in unjustified violence. The State, as in *Marianne and Juliane,* is a malevolent force, which is represented by the likes of Franco and Blanco. *The Tunnel* is dark all right, but at least at the end, Pontecorvo offers us a shimmering light. Claud Chabrol's Nada is one of the prominent director's less known films. It might be the gloomy, pessimistic feeling of the movie or its utter despondency that berated it. Albeit, Chabrol's bold account of a terroristic group losing its way is a powerful illustration of idealism running amok. The plot tells the story of an anarchist terrorist cell whose members kidnap and later kill the American ambassador to France. As von Trotta and Pontecorvo, Chabrol passionately observes the human side of the group: he focuses on their internal relations, their mutual admiration and respect to each other, their bonding under severe tension and on a constant verge of imminent death, and on their dedication to the cause until the very end. The rationale for their act is being clearly explicated by the group charismatic leader, the revolutionary Dias. As in the previous examples, the activists do not see themselves as terrorists, and certainly not as criminals. They carry out justice in an unjust, capitalistic and coercive world, as they claim in the movie. The

narrative suggests that the protagonists had no choice but to operate violently because all other venues of political participation that expresses total rejection of existing norms and values, were blocked.

The victim of the terrorist act, the American ambassador, is apprehended in a Parisian brothel as a symbol of the authorities' decadence and decay. The French security forces are portrayed as an inconsiderate, bloodthirsty lot, who would do anything to please the Americans and improve their own personal record of success. Chabrol goes farther than the other directors in presenting the symmetry between terrorist violence and state violence. In fact, he lays bare the allegation that police brutality and eagerness for retaliation ignited the violent eruption at the cataclysmic ending of the film. The terrorists are tracked down in their secluded hideout (somebody betrayed them), and as the security forces close in on the trapped gang, a barrage of bullets is hailed on the house instantly killing most of the hunted. When the last survivor realizes that the police had not come to bargain, he kills the hostage and then miraculously escapes.

The injured leader, Dias reaches a safe place, and before he set out on his final mission and his assured destruction, he tapes his own eulogy, which is basically his credo and his (and Chabrol's?) indictment of the contemporary sociopolitical system. "State terrorism and insurgent terrorism are one and the same," Dias professes. "Obviously, the State abhors political terrorism but it prefers terrorism to revolution…Between revolution and death, the State chose the latter, and it hopes everybody else will do the same." (Nada 1981, my translation from the original French). Nada is certainly a clear statement by its creator regarding the intransigence of the authorities. But, at the same time, Chabrol is careful enough not to extol terrorism. In this movie, terrorists are bewildered and angry idealists who want to change their society but do not quite understand how to materialize their urgency. Chabrol laments the Promethean

efforts of the change-seekers while palpably pinpointing their nemesis, the forces of Law and Order, as the real hindrance for a better and more humane society.

Costa-Gavras has made a name for himself as an avowed and courageous political filmmaker. He had taken on a score of politically sensitive topics and created memorable cinematic triumphs such as *Z* (1969) and *The Confession* (1970). But with the third installment of this trilogy, *State of Siege* (1973), the Greek-born director seemed to have embarked on his most challenging and riskiest topic yet: American intervention in South America. Considering the fact that the United States had virtually dominated the global film distribution market, this was a gutsy move indeed. But being "the director most responsible for launching and popularizing the contemporary genre [of political films]…and being a cinematic pioneer…" (Michalczyk 1984), Costa-Gavras fulfilled his mission in earnest.

State of Siege is the true story of an American official from the Agency for International Development (AID), who is kidnapped and eventually killed by the Uruguayan terrorist group the Tupamaros. The official, Philip Santore (Dan Mitrione in reality) is suspected to have been a covered CIA agent meddling in the internal affairs of the host country. The film describes the ordeal of his imprisonment and the detrimental consequences of political and diplomatic intrigues and power plays. The gist of the film is not the immorality of kidnapping and incarceration but the wickedness of American involvement with Latin America, to which Santore has fallen victim. The young members of the terrorist group are perceived as political warriors, embattling a mightier and more ruthless enemy, the United States. Their option of capturing a not-so-innocent civilian is a forlorn one; though doomed and damned, they just want to raise global conscience to their excruciating distress.

Political terrorism in this movie is captured as a political participation motivated by a *dependencia* ideology and a formidable sense of justice. The

Tupamaros are invariably seen in modestly heroic middle shots and they are constantly romanticized and sentimentalized. However, Costa-Gavras is too experienced and too crafted to manufacture a sheer propaganda movie. Thus, he casts his favorite star, the credible and amiable Yves Montand in the role of Santore. Montand "gives Santore more gravity, dignity, lucidity and moral stature than any mere police chief…would ever dream of demanding" (Sarris 1978, 69). Furthermore, in those scenes when Santore is chatting with his captures in a dim Montevideo cellar, the discussion evolved is marked by the ambivalence and complexity of the situation. Overall, Costa-Gavras does not justify the killing of the hostage at the end. His effort is more to explore and disclose the motivation of rational and intellectual activists for such violence. Consequently, he rationalizes the deed by underscoring American obstinacy and unyieldingness toward, what he deems, as justified claims. His achievement in *State of Siege* encouraged him to return to that theme a decade later in *Missing* (1982).

The American selections of movies about political terrorism hardly touch any of the features discussed. Although being completely dissimilar, all of them together are remarkably different from their European counter-parts. This stark divergence can be summarized in four points: the classification of the genre, the depiction of the terrorists, the motivation for terrorism and the consequences of the act (see table 1). The American films concerning political terrorism are categorized as action and adventure movies. This is how they are conceived, marketed and then consumed by the cinema viewers. Any sign of political significance or relevance is erased by the approach of the film industry and the no-reference attitude of the establishment. The necessity to promote a political movie, albeit without provoking the average American viewer to meditate and reassess his or her political values and priorities, produces a classification distortion. *Executive Decision* (1996) was termed "an action and suspense movie"

without ever mentioning what kind of action is depicted (terrorism and counter-terrorism) and why the suspense (whether terrorism is aborted or not). *Arlington Road* (1999) was distributed as a "suspense thriller," whereas *Fight Club* (1999) was simply marketed as drama. It is true that David Fincher's film exploits political terrorism only as background ploy but the drama is derived from that setting, and not from the main character's eccentricities. *Black Sunday* (1977), which depicts a classic political terrorism caper, was sold to the American public as a special effects action movie. This point becomes striking, remembering that all four European films above were distributed as *political* dramas.

Table 1: Summarizing Differences in Terrorism Movies

Classification of Genre	Action, Suspense, Adventure	Political Drama
Depiction of Terrorists	Uni-dimensional, Caricatures	Complex, Multifarious
Motivations for Terrorism	Hatred, Revenge, Greed, Boredom	Ideology, despair
Consequences of Terrorism	Punishment, Death (to be rejoiced)	Punishment, Death (to be contemplated)

In all four American selections the terrorists are demonized, some ferociously and some ridiculously. In *Black Sunday* Bruce Dern and Martha Keller are viciously determined terrorists shooting their way towards their objective: exploding a gigantic blimp over the Orange Bowl. They express no hesitation and no penitence, as is expected from cold-blooded terrorists. Similarly, David Suchet, as the leader of the terrorists attacking the Jumbo-Jet plane over Washington DC is a calculated sadist, who has no qualms crushing the airliner with 400 passengers including himself and his mates into the Capital. He is depicted as a sardonic zealot with no regard to human lives, only to the sacred

cause. This simplistic uni-dimensionality of terrorists recurs in most American movies. *Arlington Road* and *Fight Club* wish to reach beyond such over-simplification but they ultimately fall prey to other traps. The former illustrates extremist couple Tim Robbins and Joan Cusack as demented subversives, while the latter describes the anarchists bombers around Edward Norton/Brad Pitt as a bunch of regimented ludicrous juveniles. Such caricatures or stigmata are not to be found in the protagonists of the European films. The characters are more multifaceted and more interesting. The focus is on what makes them tick and not only on how they operate. The script devotes a lot of reel time to the terrorists' background, childhood, adolescence and social environment.

Grievances and hardships are given special attention in order to explicate their illegitimate behavior. The tormented childhood of Marianne, the agonizing resolution of the Basques, the utopian nihilism of Dias and hopeless commitment of the Tupamarus are given weight in those films. None of this effort is noticeable in the American examples. It is considered extraneous and distracting to the action and suspense. Motivations of terrorists are taken for granted: hatred, revenge, money, power. They are the definitive evil and are up to no good. Their goals are also very familiar: disturbing stability and order, terrorizing the population, demanding ransom or committing a spectacular suicide.

So what else is new? The consequences for the perpetrators of violence are relentless: most of them die. They are over-powered by the preponderance of the State and the predominance of order. There is a strict moral linearity between crime and punishment in both cinematic traditions. But as the American celebrates it, the European silently condones it and the more daring bemoan it. Pellington's *Arlington Road* is a rare exception: terrorism vanquishes. But this turn, it might be suspected, was not an ear for sufferings and pain but, rather, an eye for a twisted plot and a jolting surprise at the end.

When inspecting the four American examples more closely, it seems that they do not entirely rule out rationality as a guiding mechanism for terrorists. Indeed, the Goodyear blimp pilot, the plane hijacker, the neighbor bomber and the charismatic anarchist all had their own perverse logic. They knew what their goals were and they meticulously adopted their means to achieve those ends. But it is *terrorists' rationality*, which, according to the American moviemakers' message, is outrageous and wicked. This point is reiterated by emphasizing the lunatic fanaticism of Bruce Dern before he devastates the blimp, the inexorable madness of David Suchet when he realizes the actual catastrophe of his plan, or the menacing frantic expression upon Tim Robbins' face when his evil scheme is almost exposed. The terrorism in *Fight Club* is too suffused in hallucinations and delusions to merit it with rationality. The goals and means are there, but they are fragments of a sick and hapless imagination.

The terrorists depicted in the American films are not considered political actors and their activities are not translated as political participation. Defining their acts as political might have imparted the terrorists with legitimacy and dignity, a much undesired outcome for the filmmakers and their respective audiences. In all four examples, terrorism is shown to be an aberration, an interference with the normal, on-going (American) way of life. Whether it is the neighborly political science professor of *Arlington Road*, or the aspiring senator who happened to be on board the hijacked 747 in *Executive Decision*, or the unsuspecting spectators at the Orange Bowl in *Black Sunday*, or the yuppie insomniac of *Fight Club,* they are all vulnerable to the disruption of terrorism. The yearning for change, so aptly demonstrated in the European films, is portrayed here as a damaging rupture to the solidity and permanence of home, country and Super Bowl. There is no reference or surmising that terrorism is a weapon of the weak in any of the American films. No opportunity is allowed for empathizing with the "bad guys." None of the terrorists are illustrated as feeble

or ineffectual. On the contrary, they all seem confident and assertive until their very demise. No reason for viewer compassion is supplied, nor any stimulus to appreciate or to become familiar with the root cause of terrorism. There is some indication given as to group and community, perhaps an allusion that those militants on the plane, in the blimp, in the black ninja suits represent some deprived population or some injustice inflicted by the West and the U.S. But these hints remain shadowy and their validity obscure. *Arlington Road* and *Fight Club* mention no aggrieved constituencies at all (except some passing and unconvincing reference to the alienated modern society), while in *Executive Decision* and *Black Sunday* terrorism is undertaken in the name of afflicted Arabs and Muslims. But this has an adverse affect: instead of acquainting their audience with germane feelings of fear and animosity of Arabs and Muslims, and confer political terrorism with meaning, these movies stereotype and scorn those populations.

How to account for these outstanding cinematic differences in treating the same issue of political terrorism? If we adopt a statement by one scholar of political terrorism, that "terrorism with an authentically popular base is never a purely political phenomenon" (Tololyan 1987, 219), then we can complement it by saying that political terrorism is grounded in culture, and so is the attitude it begets. Culture, perceived as the relationship between shared values and social relations (Chai and Wildavsky 1994), is therefore a prism through which, stances, mind-sets and behaviors are determined and employed. Film-directors work in, and are inspired by, their cultural environment. The movies that they make are cultural artifacts. The ideas and visions they utilize in their dexterity reflect cultural belonging and a firm sense of collective identity. If this is the case, then our attempt to anchor disparities in American and European ventures at political terrorism in film within their respective cultural heritage should be a propitious undertaking.

The American and European Traditions: Separate but Equal

It can be argued, of course, that my selection of directors has been arbitrary and intentional. Movie *personas* like Costa-Gavras or Pontecorvo are prone to make radical political films because of their ideological beliefs, regardless of any cultural background. Also in the same vein, it can be said that novice American directors such as Pellington or Baird would take up any project offered to them just to embellish their resume, and, therefore, their view of political terrorism is transient and hinges more upon scripts and studio directives than upon ideological commitment. But then, on the first hand, where does this radicalism come from? And why is it, that the vast majority of European prominent filmmakers from various countries, who choose political terrorism as their topic, end up advocating similar positions? And on the second hand, why are nonconformist scripts about political terrorism in American movies so uncommon? And why do movie moguls issue such instructions regarding terrorism movies in the first place? Such reservations have plagued cultural theory since its inception. If attitudes and actions vary by culture, how can cultural analysis keep off the vicious circle of relativism? Is culture, as socially constructing needs, aspirations and behaviors, implying that there is no way to decide among competing claims or truths? Well, not exactly. As Lockhart and Franzwa (1994) put it: "cultural theory is a theory of *constrained relativism*" (original italics). The world is indeed socially constructed but not without limitations. Cultural stimuli are constantly molded by the common experience of people.

"Culture is a prism, not a prison", Ellis (1993) aptly concludes. Since it is a joint experience of people, who live near one another and traverse together through the flux of life, and because culture by definition is about *shared* values and beliefs, then relativism is bounded. But can American and European cultures be treated as cohesive and solid units to be compared? Are there any mutually

cultural features, which encompass all members of these two vast collectivities? This is a valid concern, which can be answered both methodically and historically. It was Alexis de Tocqueville, the keen observer of the American society in the 19th century, who observed the following: General ideas do not bear witness to the power of human intelligence but, rather, to its inadequacy for there are no beings exactly alike in nature, no identical facts, no laws which can be applied indiscriminately in the same way to several objects at once (1969).

This incapacity to perceive the fullest variety of human existence leaves the analyst with a choice to either relinquish inquiry all together or to generalize. Generalization is best conducted by typologies and taxonomies. They are indeed "a prerequisite to explication, explanation and evaluation" (Dryzek 1987) and "…without [them] there can be no generalizations" (Douglas 1982). Consequently, I will use cultural theory typologies to sort out the differences between American and European traditions. These differences can be historically elucidated. They originated in the divergent patterns of constructing the collective identity in each continent. Being discrete and unique, the two cultures established themselves as distinctive civilizations in the modern age. They began to develop along dissimilar outlines of what Eisenstadt and Giessen (1995) call "different cultural programs of modernity." These different paths pertain to many sociopolitical aspects of human lives: "[T]hey were closely focused on the relations between the utopian and the civil components in the construction of modern politics; between 'revolutionary' and 'normal' politics, or between the general will and the will of all; between civil society and the state, between individualism and collectivity…different conceptions of authority and of its accountability and different modes of protest and of political activity (Eisenstadt 1998).

Accordingly, it was found that European development was characterized by an amalgamation of a myriad of small entities, which through perpetual

vying for ascendancy, managed to inductively build a primordial affiliation and mutual affinity. This accommodation was a result of multiple interests and viewpoints realizing that the only way to survive is through coexistence, tolerance and reciprocal understanding. Such an arrangement yielded cultural and political pluralism as the most sensible incubator to cultivate a burgeoning civilization. The evolving structural pluralism permitted a firm impingement of periphery and sub-centers on territorial centers; which in turn undermined a possibility of an omnipotent center; and consequently, fostered the promise of an-open-for-all contest for authority and leadership. Different bases of legitimacy--political, religious, economic, ethnic, lingual, and geographical among others--justified their bid for prominence by symbolic and ideological measures. The importance of symbolism is utilized especially in the context of mobilization and recruitment of masses for political objectives (Edelman 1971; Kerztner 1988). This trait imprinted the European tradition with a "high degree of symbolic and ideological articulation of the political struggle and of movements of protest" (Eisenstadt 1998, 143). Political disputation on contending worldviews became part-and-parcel of the European *Gestalt*, as increasing levels of structural differentiation became an emblematic cornerstone of the developing system.

The American collective identity was developing, in a large extent, as an antithesis to the European scenario. The North America settlers were religious Puritans, fleeing from persecutions in order to create a new sociopolitical order. In contrast to the inductive
"from-the-bottom-up" endeavor of Europeans to unite, the Puritan founders of the American tradition labored on an uncontaminated society to be built "from-the-top-down" and to be presented as an exemplary human association for next generations. Theirs was a messianic enterprise, which utterly negated the mundane, day-to-day adaptation and habituation process that had fashioned the

European experience. But at the same time, the American budding civilization was strongly affected by the Lockean vision of individualism and the equality of man as a divine creation. This egalitarian individualism, coupled with a Protestant-Calvinist ethos of hard work and achievement and with a religious messianic orientation produced, what some scholars termed, a distinct *civil religion* in America (Huntington 1981). Whereas the European struggle for power and dominance necessitated formal hierarchy, formal religion and differentiated arenas of influence (namely "state," "society," and "religion") legitimized and supported by status symbolism and ritual, in the American case the opposite development had occurred. Rejection of symbolic validity of hierarchy and authority due to a pre-ordained egalitarianism and denial of the "state" as an autonomic power wielder became central. Because all men are innately equal, it was believed, all individuals, regardless of their group affiliation are equally entitled of accessing the center. Thus, proximity to the political center was not an issue to be settled by ideological confrontations and strife.

Consequently, awareness of political protest and direct participation in the American culture has been relatively weak. There was no concept of a state as an arena to be conquered: the people were the state, and the state was the people.[5] After establishing that historical patterns of development facilitate the analysis and comparison of American and European cultures as plausibly cohesive, it is productive to use cultural theory and locate our comparison within a theoretical typology commonly known as group-grid analysis (Douglas, 1982).

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[5] This difference in concept is reflected in the constitutions of The United States, Italy and France. The American constitution starts with the intention of the People to form a *more perfect Union*, while the French constitution (the updated one, of the fifth republic from 1958) opens up with the French people proclaiming their attachment to their *national sovereignty*. The Italian constitution of December 1947 begins with the first article entitled *Form of State* and the character of such an entity. Exceptional in this regard is the German constitution (The Basic Law of Government) promulgated in May 1949 and amended by the Unification Treaty of 1990. The concept of state or statehood does not appear in the preamble or the first sections.

This typology offers four basic forms of social groupings or solidarities: *hierarchical*, *egalitarian*, *individualistic* and *fatalistic*. These are created by the various combinations of the two dimensions of group, the extent to which one sees herself as a member of a group, and grid, the degree that one's behavior is constrained by rules (Coyle and Ellis 1994; Thompson, Grendstad and Selle 1999). The group factor also pertains to how defined the boundaries of the collective are, while grid indicates the level of regulation to which an individual is subjected. Accordingly, a hierarchical culture designates a way of life whereby group boundaries are firm and social control is assertive; an egalitarian culture connotes solid group involvement and minimal prescriptions from above; individualism means that group's boundaries are provisional and regulations are intolerable; finally, fatalism is composed of heavy regulation and exclusion from the group (see table 2) (Douglas 1982). These, of course, are archetypes and real cases are bound to consist of various combinations of the ideal types.

Table 2: Group-Grid Analysis of Socio-cultural Groupings

GROUP

LOW GRID	Individualistic	Egalitarian
HIGH GRID	Fatalistic Low	Hierarchic High

The American culture is more akin to a blend of the *individualistic-egalitarian* type. This idea is not necessarily an oxymoron when carefully examined. The individualistic social context is very typical of the American ethos. It is profoundly grounded in puritan and Calvinist traditions of hard work and self-sufficiency. Americans rarely identify themselves with a social class or tie their destiny with any collective gatherings. They are staunch believers in personal achievement and the potential of human self-advancement. They abhor dependency and suspect reliance on others. They cherish liberty mainly in its

negative form, to use Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction--*freedom from*, as opposed to *freedom to*, which means privacy and space to oneself (1958). Thus, the average American does not identify herself as part of a group but tries to establish a unique persona (the now globally-diffused American practice of brandishing a resume, or a *curriculum vitae,* everywhere one goes can attest to this).

Additionally, the American spirit eschews infringements on its liberty, as consistent demands for minimal government and occasional outbursts against federal taxation and regulations can indicate. Still, the American society is highly egalitarian. It has a long-standing admiration for equality in the Lockean tradition. But equality does not inexorably mean togetherness and does not spell solidarity. It pertains more to the sameness of human beings in their mortality and in the "divine touch" within them (Locke 1988). This kind of egalitarianism is naturally understood and does not require consciousness-raising. It is not socially construed or stipulated, and hence, should not be used as a justification for any political struggle or social agitation. In any case, both of these social arrangements, individualism and egalitarianism, are low on grid. This is not due to any intrinsic American recklessness or lawlessness, but rather a deep-rooted penchant toward self-regulation and self-discipline.

The European case is also an interesting hybrid, namely a *hierarchical-egalitarian* one. Owing to the incessant power conflicts and fighting for dominance, hierarchy had become an agreeable mechanism to instill order and stability. The European culture erected firm and exclusive boundaries around it *vis-à-vis* other cultures. But in order to protect its inimitability, the ruling elites inflicted severe regulative constraints and imposed highly stratified roles on their communities. Thus, bureaucracies of civil service, religious officialdoms and administrative procedures were rapidly spread throughout the European civilization. Simultaneously with the inequality of hierarchy, trends of parity and impartiality had evolved along class, ethnicity, race and gender lines. Again,

due to constant challenging of the political center by the peripheries and other sub-centers jockeying for supremacy, patterns of solidarity and commonality grew to maximize the potency of rebelliousness. The European ethos was not nurtured on a comforting sense of overarching messianism, which generated self-confidence and trust in the collective. The harshness of persistent rivalries and unrelenting contention necessitated the constant build-up of awareness, the foundation of associations and the formation of alliances to persevere. This was an active, combative egalitarianism, and not the sort that was taken for granted, as in the American model. If the latter stemmed from the idea of uniformity, the former symbolized the idea of unity.

Political Terrorism within Cultural Theory

Specific types of attitudes and orientations can be derived from this broad cultural classification. I will concentrate only on the characteristics that are found relevant to the assessment and evaluation of political terrorism and its depiction in the cinema. Accordingly, this section elaborates on four major traits deduced from the larger cultural model of each case. On the one hand, the American thirst for personal achievement and success, staunch individualism and self-reliance, belief in moralism and humanitarianism, and the spirit conformity and uniformity. On the other hand, the European quest for collective accomplishment and well-being, sense of solidarity and cooperation, stress on realism and secular existence, and the promotion of divergence and plurality.

The image of the "self made man" and the respect it commended, is distinctly American. Although other cultures promote excellence and proficiency, the American one has had "…a tendency to identify standards of personal excellence with competitive occupational achievement" (Williams 1951, 390). Thus, the emphasis on accomplishment has, gradually, shifted into highlighting success, that is, reverence for results and rewards more than on effort and investment. This development, admonished Williams, is dangerous

because "if success alone becomes an overriding interest, the logical…outcome is a nihilistic orientation in which power is deified" (Williams 1951, 392). This urge for achievement and success propels the obsession of activity, of keeping oneself busy and of constantly doing something, as Harold Laski, one of the keenest observers of American culture, noted: "few Americans find it easy to be happy unless they are doing something" (1948, 5). Political terrorists, according to this view, are captured as failures, as non-achievers, who "didn't make it" in their careers, disappointed their family and friends and thus, tried to redeem themselves through some kind of a spectacular success. American political assassins, a variant of political terrorism, such as Czolgosz, Zangara, and Oswald were depicted that way (Lentz 2002). Similarly, Edward Norton is the apathetic and inert insurance employee who turns to a subversive terrorism out of boredom and disgust in *Fight Club*. The underlined moral might be that had he been thriving at work, he would not have become a terrorist.

None of the terrorists in the European films is shown to be a social miscreant. On the contrary, some of them, like Marianne in *Marianne and Juliane*, even excelled in their jobs in their "previous lives." But this fact only accentuates the sacrifice the activists take upon themselves: they forego their personal career for what they deem as the welfare of others. This altruistic theme is absent from the American films though it can be assumed that the hijackers in *Black Sunday* and *Executive Decision* also deserted their profession to avail themselves to terrorism. However, from the American view, they were always delinquent psychopaths that could not have had any decent vocation from the beginning. The European leaning toward collective accomplishment and well-being also runs counter to American passionate individualism and self-help or, as Emile Durkheim so suitably described, "the cult of individual personality" (1951). A product of a distinctive past and a Puritan-Calvinist nature, individualism is quintessentially American. However, this is not an individuality of nihilism and

escapism, which sheds societal obligations and evades responsibilities. This is individualism of autonomy in the mode of Thoreau and Whitman; the kind that liberates from arbitrary norms and capricious regulations. It is, also, an individuality of equality, as Elizabeth Stanton wrote:

> The point I wish plainly to bring before you on this occasion is the individuality of each human soul; our Protestant idea, the right of individual conscience and judgment; our republican idea, individual citizenship (Hollinger and Caper 1989, 59).

Individuality in the American context, therefore, is a social virtue. It is not a contradiction, as Williams explains: "the development of individual personality is a shared value rather than a collective end in a group or social system (1951, 35). This totally negates the group spirit of terrorism. The survivability of the terrorist cell depends on the close-knit group, its fidelity, faithfulness and secrecy. For a culture that sanctifies self-reliance, dependency is detrimental. It restricts human capacity and enslaves the soul. Thus, *Executive Decision* and *Black Sunday* show terrorist groups as robot-like: professional and lifeless. In *Arlington Road* and *Fight Club* they are illustrated as a bunch of homicidal weirdoes. The Musketeer spirit of "all for one and one for all" is cultivated in the European setting. Solidarity and bonding are articulated in a scrupulous manner. The comrades preparing for their assignment in *The Tunnel*, the kidnappers heartening each other while watching over their hostage in *State of Siege*, or the fugitives, bracing one another in their hideout in *Nada* are all examples of the European heritage of team spirit and mutual caring.

Foreign observers of Americanism from De Tocqueville to Myrdal have noticed the tendency to grasp the world in moral terms. Again, a legacy of Puritanism, strict ethical code of conduct typifies the "average American" as thinking in simple dichotomies of right and wrong, just and unjust or believers and heretics. There is a systematic set of precepts to test human performance,

which inflict a "moral overstrain" and produces in Americans the belief and aspiration "to something much higher than its plane of actual life" (Myrdal 1944). This aura of religious visionary goes back to Bella's civil religion and the American missionary role in the world. The significance of moralism and decency as an internal unifier and as a beacon to other nations is captured in Henry Luce's "The American Century" (1941) and in Walter Lippman's "America as Destiny" (1943). In his little but widely-read book, Lippmann states that "America's emerging role in the world was to heal the old schism between East and West in a new universalizing mission of culture and faith" (as quoted in Slater 1999). The American fixation with religion was modeled according to the creed of the forefathers who thought of themselves as "God's chosen people" and of their country as "the promised land" and "the new Jerusalem" (Peters 1996).[6] As such, they are entrusted with a saintly mission: to spread compassion and humanitarianism amongst the human race. This belief has had profound impact on American foreign policy, economic strategies, educational planning, religious preaching and, especially, on American philanthropy in the 20th century (Bell, 1999). Williams (1951) called this the "humanitarian mores" of America, portraying it as: "[an] emphasis upon any type of disinterested concern and helpfulness, including personal kindness, aid and comfort, spontaneous aid in mass disasters, as well as more impersonal patterns of organized philanthropy."

In light of such charitable self-assigned image and role, terrorists and their secular, tenacious pursuit of particular change for the better through violent means is inexcusable. They foil with missionary grand design by attempting to expedite salvation and realize it in fallible, godless comportment. Terrorists in all

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[6] John Steinbeck remarkably dispelled this allegory in his convincing and disillusioning *America and Americans.* He demonstrates the tensions and animosities between veterans and newcomers in the real "the shining city on the hill."

the American films mentioned are depicted as insolent or mystified cynics, with a distorted missionary zeal. The real missionaries, with the correct vision and propensity to heal the world and rid it from pestilent threats are the heroic counter-terrorist forces who prevail at movie's end.[7] The European approach is less ambitious. There was never a single common faith in European history, nor was there a mythical connection to the past that might have preserved a sense of common duty and global mission (Hoffmann and Kitromilides, 1981). Frequent social changes and crises have eroded any European self-imagery of saviors of mankind. Their political vision was a realistic one of a perpetual struggle for power and influence (Tilly, 1978; Tilly et al., 1975), in which violence plays an occasional, but indispensable, role. Thus, political terrorists are not automatically treated as fiends or evil spirits but they are, for better or worse, politically and realistically analyzed.

The American proclivity toward conformity and uniformity is well documented (cf. Rapson, 1967; Susman, 1984; Wilkinson, 1992). Those blessed foreign observers that have illuminated the comparative dimension between American and European cultures are useful once again. De Tocqueville (1971) linked the predisposition to think alike to the possibility of "the tyranny of the majority" in the United States. For him, individualism was, actually, a form of hide-bound conformism, which led to political apathy (Kroes 1996) and to the

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[7] The humanitarian tendency can be perceived as a severe contrast to the previous quality of individualism, and indeed it is. These two characteristics have long been grappling each other in the American mentality, as Parrington noted so many years ago:

> At the beginning of our national existence two rival philosophies contended for supremacy in America: the Humanitarian philosophy of the French Enlightenment, based on the conception of human perfectibility and postulating as its objective an equalitarian democracy… and the English philosophy of *laissez faire*, based on the universality of the acquisitive instinct… (1930).

But this contradiction is not counter-productive. On the contrary, it is through controversies and debates that national characters are built and sustained. Culture is a dynamic entity, which must be constantly recharged and rejuvenated.

"complete leveling and flattening of the political and cultural landscape." Muller-Freienfels (1929) was more flagrant when he wrote: "Distance, uniqueness and originality are European values, which are foreign to the American. His values are the very reverse of this: adherence to type, agreement, similarity." The European emphasis is on diversity and multiplicity of behavior patterns and moral codes. Their history of careful and gradual co-adjustment inherited that quality to them. In an interesting booklet published in 2000 by the European Commission titled "How Europeans See Themselves," public opinion surveys regarding values, attitudes and future directions of Europeans clearly reflected a wide variety of responses, not even along national and geographical lines (European Commission, 2000). The homorganic beginning of the United State, a small unified group of people setting the foundations of a new nation, coupled with strong disciplinarian and authoritarian Puritan conduct, bequeathed conformism onto the American people.

Conformity is linked to order, stability and consensus, which are coveted features of Americanism. This can be perceived as the general orientation of the American society. An early critic of these traits noted that "order is seen to rest on 'effective' political institutions, which may or may not be formally democratic in character…order is imposed from above on the mass" (O'Brien, 1972). Order, stability and consensus have become the cornerstone of American domestic and foreign policy. It also denotes the preoccupation with law and regularities and the reverence for efficiency. A World Bank annual report asserted that "ventral to economic and social development is not a *democratic* state but an *effective* state" (original italics) and, then, went on to explicate that an effective state "…establishes law and order; maintains a non-distortionary policy environment, including macroeconomic stability; invests in social services and infrastructure; protects the vulnerable; and protects the environment" (1997, 4-6). This is also reflected in Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology* (1962) and Fukuyama's *End of History*

(1992), that celebrates political consensus or agreement on fundamentals, and predicts an eventual demise of the "currently prevailing politics and often violence." This worldview is repulsed by political terrorism, which is the ultimate expression of dissent. Moreover, political terrorism is perceived as a threat to the prospect of tranquility granted by the premises of order, stability and consensus. It is an audacious defiance, which might unnerve the entire sociopolitical setting based on obedience and control (Leeman 1991; Heymann 1998).

The European attitude toward political terrorism is more benign and less hysterical: it views terrorism in more than just one way, for example, seeing it as a path of political bargaining and persuasion (Thornton 1964; McClenon 1988). More broadly, this can, also, be understood as the old debate of order versus justice (Bull 1995). The American culture advocates more of the former, whereas its European counter-part supports more of the latter. In other words, the American films pursued and persecuted the terrorists in the name of law and orderliness while the European movies afforded them more profundity in the name of validity and fairness. Even though they are punished, their demise is not rejoiced; it is reserved and wistful, as if almost lamenting the waste and worthlessness of human lives, of victims and perpetrators alike.

In summation, the differences in relation to the features of political terrorism have, now, become apparent: purposefulness and rationality do not serve the American view of terrorism as pathological disease of twisted minds but it reaffirms the European understanding of political terrorism as planned and orchestrated. Similarly, terrorism as a political concept, allowing for participation in decision-making under extreme circumstances is unacceptable in American eyes because politics pertain to the normative and legal rules of the game (Lasswell 1958; Sartori 1970). The European definition of politics is broader, and assumes all attempts to affect power distribution within a political system

(Minogue 1995). The idea of change, although not undesirable to Americans, is nevertheless bounded in scope and intensity lest "the boat might be rocked." The European inclination is more toward the necessity and urgency of change rather than its size or impact. What renders change problematic in the American perspective, is the invalidation of order and the defiance of government. This is not a quandary to the European logic: for them, order was created to be challenged, and governments must bear contestation. Ideology is not a favorable term in the American political vocabulary and political terrorism is even more condemned when stimulated by ideologists. Missionary tasks and visions of progress are exalted because they are beneficial and propitious whereas ideologies are destructive and seditious. The European worldview finds messianic visions impracticable and improbable, while ideology is identified as a viable tool to mobilize the aggrieved. The American culture denounces terrorism as acts of frantic and rootless individuals, thereby ignoring the community, ethnic, or national origins of these activities as sources of sustenance. The European approach, as was shown, underlines the group-character of terrorism. However, terrorism is still the weapon of the meek, which can never really win. Terrorists can hardly fit the American cinematic depiction of them as fearsome and, almost, indestructible. But as long as this is what it takes to concoct a hit movie, they would still be depicted as bad as they come.

From Film Making to Decision Making?

This paper elaborated on the differences between American and European perspectives toward political terrorism as they were shown on the silver screen. The dissimilarities were attributed to the cultural heritage of each tradition and to the disparate historical circumstances that generated them. I did not attempt to encapsulate all facets of American and European ethical legacies. This is surely an overbearing task for this paper. It was merely an effort to account for a particular phenomenon, political terrorism in film, through cultural lenses.

Consequently, some heuristic conclusions were drawn regarding how both traditions perceive terrorism in the cultural realm of movie making. Tables 3 and 4 summarize the findings:

Table 3: Cultural Differences between the Two Traditions

Traits	**American**	**European**
Achievement	Personal Success	Collective Accomplishment
Individualism/Collectivism	Distinctiveness, Privacy	Solidarity, Cooperation
Moral Code	Missionary, Religious Philanthropy	Political Ideology, Realism, Secularism
Orientation	Conformity, Consensus, Order	Divergence, Plurality, Justice

Table 4: Political Terrorism through Cultural Lenses

Political Terrorism as	**American Tradition**	**European Tradition**
Rational	Pathological, Erratic	Planned, Purposeful
Political Participation	Illegal, Unacceptable	Legitimate, Understood
Instrument of Change	Radical, Destabilizing	Necessary, Effective
Confronting Government	Defiance, Disobedience	Challenge, Contestation
Symbolic Significance	Destructive, Immoral	Ideological, Meaningful
Social Context	Sparse, Non-Representative	Group Support
Political Strength	Ominous, Threatening	Weapon of the Weak

Feature films are but one venue for expressing cultural attitudes and understandings. But culture permeates every other walk-of-life including education, work and politics. Consequently, it might be assumed that the current perplexity and discomfiture with regard to understanding and reacting to political terrorism are due to cultural handicaps. Hopefully, if some of the insights offered here are found appropriate outside the world of celluloid, the menace of political terrorism would loom a little dimmer.

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