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Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora : identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora

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Citation

Atto, N. (2011, October 5). *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora : identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora*. Leiden University Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17919>

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STELLINGEN

behorende bij het proefschrift

HOSTAGES IN THE HOMELAND,
ORPHANS IN THE DIASPORA

IDENTITY DISCOURSES AMONG THE ASSYRIAN/SYRIAC ELITES
IN THE EUROPEAN DIASPORA

te verdedigen op 5 oktober 2011

klokke 16.14 uur

aan de Universiteit Leiden

door Naures Atto

I

The experience of the *Hostages and Orphans Dilemma* among Assyrians/Syriacs strengthens their myth of an ‘imagined homeland’.

II

The perceived successful ‘integration’ of Assyrians/Syriacs into Swedish society can be seen as the result of two factors: the liberal Swedish integration policy and the fact that to a large extent Assyrians/Syriacs have burned their bridges behind them.

III

The difference between *umthonoyutho* at the beginning of the twentieth century and present-day *umthonoyutho* in the Western diaspora is related to the difference in the *nodal points* which have been deployed in the discourses of *umthonoyutho* in these two periods. In the first period ‘unity’ between the different Syriac churches as such was stressed but in the second period the focus shifted to the use of a specific national name.

IV

The absence of institutionalized cross-denominational leadership among Assyrians/Syriacs is one of the main sources of the antagonistic orientation of identity discourses and internal conflicts at the present day.

V

Discourse theory transcends the explanatory deficiencies of primordialist and instrumentalist approaches to the study of collective identities. The relational, contextual and processual approach of discourse theory has a stronger explanatory power to define the constitution of and change in identities.

VI

Post-structuralist discourse theory has continued to be overwhelmingly a philosophical theoretical approach. Methodologically it is much less developed and therefore it becomes harder to work with it at an empirical level.

VII

The field of Syriac Studies has remained too traditional in relation to the choice and the use of the sources. Assyrians/Syriacs have mostly been approached as an ancient group of people who used to live in the past. The tendency to ignore the present-day life of this group as a topic for research is therefore a great loss to this field.

VIII

The academic study of smaller migrant groups has been overshadowed by that of larger migrant groups. Although smaller in number, research about small migrant groups can be as fascinating and important as that of larger migrant groups in Western societies.

IX

The recent regime changes and the rise of popular movements in the Middle East has definitely influenced the identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora.

X

Society will profit considerably if it makes better use of the knowledge of anthropologists.

