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## RELIGION, CRIME, AND VIOLENCE

*Simon Cottee*

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion, crime, and violence is one of the most contentious and urgent public issues of our time. Yet it has attracted little sustained attention in criminology, much less a criminological manifesto or school devoted to its study. This chapter aims to fill in some of the gaps focusing on the more controversial aspects of the intersections between religion, crime, and violence.

Drawing on a range of sources from both inside and outside criminology, it explores the following questions: Why is the relationship between religion and violence the object of such fierce controversy? Does religion have a 'true face', as both its detractors and defenders claim? Is religion a force for good in the world, or is it a force for ill? How, historically, has criminology understood religion and its relationship to crime and control? Is religion really about religion, or is it about politics? If religious belief does figure causally in religious violence, how should its role be understood? These are difficult questions, and in order to make them more tractable this chapter

concentrates on one of the most potent and widely debated forms of religious violence in the world today: Islamist-inspired violence. Islam, it is necessary to clarify at the outset, does not have a monopoly over the use of violence in the name of God; indeed all monotheistic religions, including Christianity, have violent pasts that extend into the present (Juergensmeyer 2001). But of all the violent religious actors in the world today, radical Islamism is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent. It is also one of the most vigorously disputed and misunderstood, and thus represents an important case study for analysis.

The chapter is divided into 5-five parts. The first part introduces some key questions at the centere of debates over religion and violence by focusing on a recent and widely disseminated article on the links between the so-called Islamic State or ISIS and its theological beliefs. The article in question—Graeme Wood’s ‘What ISIS Really Wants’, published in *The Atlantic* in March 2015—contended that ISIS is ‘very Islamic’, and that what the group does is intimately and inextricably connected to its foundational religious beliefs. Wood’s article is intensely controversial, and the nature of this controversy is explored throughout the chapter. The second part contextualizes the question of religious violence against the background of the global religious revival. The third part focuses on criminology and its treatment of religion, and

how that treatment reflects a pro-religious bias. The fourth part concentrates on the treatment of religious violence in terrorism studies, using this to help sketch out some methodological suggestions for the criminological study of religious violence. The fifth and final part of the chapter looks at the broader climate of ‘the new religious intolerance’ (Nussbaum 2012) in which current debates over religion, crime, and violence now take place.

## RELIGION, VIOLENCE, AND CONTROVERSY

In March 2015 *The Atlantic* published an article by Graeme Wood, a contributing editor at the magazine and Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. The subject of the article could not have been more topical: ‘What ISIS Really Wants’.

In June the previous year, ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham), also known as Islamic State, ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), or ‘Daesh’ (Hamid and McCants 2014), had seized Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, and in the following months captured large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq, including, notably, Fallujah, Ramadi, and Palmyra (Stern and Berger 2015; Wood 2014; Chulov 2014; Chulov 2015). It had also, by that point, recruited more foreign fighters to its ranks than any other jihadist mobilization in recent history

(Hegghammer 2013), eclipsing its chief competitor Al Qaeda (Watts 2015; Wood 2015; Lister 2016) as the world's preeminent jihadist group (Watts 2015; Wood 2015; Lister 2016).

Wood's article was 10,500 words long, and its tone was sober and scholarly. Despite this, it went viral (Wright 2015). According to the web analytics company Chartbeat (Edmonds 2015), it was the best read digital article of 2015, receiving a total of 100 million minutes of engaged reading time. In the months following its online publication, it attracted approximately 10,000 views a day. On the night of the November 2015 Paris attacks it received an extraordinary 1.9 million views.

The article, in part, served a polemical purpose and was an attempt to refute the view, prevalent in Washington political circles in mid-2014, that ISIS was just a bunch of thugs or psychopaths who

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In December 2015, the Soufan Group (2015) reported that between 27,000 and 31,000 people had travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and other violent extremist groups from at least 86 countries. Around 5,000 are thought to have come from Western Europe, including just over 750 from Britain.

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posed no serious strategic threat to the Middle East or the wider world.<sup>2</sup>

But it was also a serious attempt to explain the nature of the group, its origins, aims, and broader ideological vision.

‘There is a temptation’, Wood (2015) argued, citing Peter Bergen’s (2002) classic study of Al Qaeda *Holy War, Inc.* to think ‘that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns, wearing medieval religious disguise—and make it fit the Islamic State’. This would be a mistake, he insisted. Indeed, ‘much of what the group does looks nonsensical except in light of a sincere, carefully considered commitment to returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse’. Drawing on official ISIS statements and interviews with prominent ISIS supporters, Wood summarized the core of his argument in this way:

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<sup>2</sup> In January 2014 President Barack Obama dismissed ISIS as a ‘JV [junior varsity] team’ of Al Qaeda. ‘The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn’t make them Kobe Bryant’,<sup>2</sup> he told the *New Yorker*’s David Remnick (2014).

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The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam. (Wood 2014, emphasis in original)

‘Muslims can reject the Islamic State; nearly all do’,<sup>2</sup> he added. But: ‘pretending that it isn’t actually a religious, millenarian group, with theology that must be understood to be combatted, has already led the United States to underestimate it and back foolish schemes to counter it.’ He was particularly critical of what he described as ‘a well-intentioned but dishonest campaign to deny the Islamic State’s medieval religious [and specifically Islamic] nature’. ‘Many mainstream Muslim organizations’, he wrote, ‘have gone so far as to say the Islamic State is, in fact, *un-Islamic* (emphases in original)’, a view shared by President Obama, who has denounced ISIS as ‘not Islamic’ (Blake 2014; Killough 2014),<sup>3</sup> and French President François Hollande, who contemptuously

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry went even further, condemning ISIS as ‘apostates’ (Kaplan 2016), a highly charged term of contempt for those who have left the fold of Islam (Cragun and Hammer 2011:

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refers to the group as ‘Daesh’ (Mark 2015).<sup>4</sup> According to Wood, this is flatly ‘preposterous’, given how closely and assiduously the leaders of the Islamic State follow, however selectively, ~~the~~ the Prophetic methodology’ of early Islam. It is also reflective, he suggested, of a deeper ‘Western bias’: namely, that ‘if religious ideology doesn’t matter

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154; Cottee 2015a: 9). ‘Daesh’,<sup>2</sup> he declared, ‘is in fact nothing more than a mixture of killers, of kidnappers, of criminals, of thugs, of adventurers, of smugglers and thieves.’<sup>2</sup> ‘And’,<sup>2</sup> he continued, ‘they are above all apostates, people who have hijacked a great religion and lie about its real meaning and lie about its purpose and deceive people in order to fight for their purposes.’ (Quoted in Taylor 2016) Given that takfirism, the practice of one Muslim declaring another to be an apostate (Hafez 2010), is so controversial within Islam (in many Muslim majority countries the penalty for apostasy is death (Cottee 2015b)), Kerry’s invocation of the term was unwise (Al-Awsat 2014), especially since ISIS itself is a takfirist group (Wood 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘Daesh’ is based on an Arabic acronym al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa’al Sham, which translates as Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (Syria), but is similar to ‘Dahes’ or ‘one who sows discord’ (Martinson 2015).

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much in Washington or Berlin, surely it must be equally irrelevant in Raqqa or Mosul'.

Wood's article attracted not great interest and fierce controversy.

It is not difficult to understand why. ISIS has become notorious for its brutality and violence. Since its dramatic rise to prominence in the summer of 2014, the group has slaughtered thousands of defenceless Iraqi soldiers and Shiite civilians, gunning them into trenches (McCoy 2014, Arango 2014a). It has raped and enslaved hundreds of women (Naili 2014, McDuffee 2014, Human Rights Watch 2014; Callimachi 2015; Callimachi 2016). It has brutalized children by forcing them to watch scenes of horrific cruelty (Bloom 2015; Horgan and Bloom, 2015; Bloom, Horgan, and Winter 2016). It has presided over public crucifixions in its current stronghold of Raqqa, Syria (Abdelaziz 2014). It has coerced boys as young as 14 to carry out suicide missions (Arango 2014b). It has launched a campaign of murderous aggression against gay men (Cowburn 2016). It has stolen and destroyed ancient and irreplaceable artifacts (Jeffries 2015). And it has created a vast library of snuff movies that degrades not only the victims whose deaths they depict, but also the viewers who watch them (Cottee 2014a; Cottee 2016a). To say that all this inhumanity is rooted in, or somehow

connected to, Islam challenges one of the prevailing mantras of polite modern political discourse: namely that Islam is ‘a religion of peace’.<sup>5</sup>

The contention, at the heart of Wood’s article, that ISIS is fundamentally Islamic was strongly challenged by Juan Cole (2015a), who accused Wood of engaging in ‘essentialism’ for failing to recognize that ISIS, far from having an ‘Islamic essence’, is in fact a ‘destructive Muslim cult’, radically at odds with the ideals of Islam as understood and practiced by most Muslims. Indeed, he asserted, ‘the refusal to see ISIL in these terms is just a form of Orientalism, a way of othering the Middle East and marking its culture as inherently

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<sup>5</sup> Even President George W. Bush (2001)—widely reviled across the Muslim world and beyond for launching wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—was adamant, as he put it in a speech just after the 9/11 attacks, that ‘Islam is peace’. ‘These acts of violence against innocents’, he said of the attacks, ‘violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith. And it’s important for my fellow Americans to understand that.’ Following the Pakistani Taliban’s attack on a school in Pakistan in December 2014, the British Prime Minister David Cameron was similarly forthright in his view that it had ‘nothing to do with one of the world’s great religions—Islam, which is a religion of peace. This is a perversion.’

threatening'. Cole (2015b) argued that there is 'a center of gravity to any religion such that observers can tell when something is deviant', concluding, 'Why pretend that we can't judge when modern Muslim movements depart so far from the modern mainstream as to be a cult?'

Mehdi Hasan (2015) was similarly emphatic, discounting religion 'as a useful analytical prism through which to view the rise of ISIS'. By way of substantiation, he summarized the views of terrorism expert Marc Sageman, who he paraphrased as saying that ISIS 'are using religion to advance a political vision, rather than using politics to advance a religious vision'. He also emphasized the decidedly secular enthusiasms of western jihadists, referring to a 2008 classified MI5 briefing note on radicalization, in which it is reported that many are 'religious novices' with 'a high propensity for "drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes"<sup>24</sup>. It is particularly instructive, he observed, that Mohammed Ahmed and Yusuf Sarwar, two British Muslim men who were convicted on terrorism charges in 2014 after travelling to fight in Syria, purchased copies of *Islam for Dummies* and *The Koran for Dummies* from Amazon prior to their departure. 'It cannot be said often enough'<sup>25</sup> Hasan said:

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It isn't the most pious or devout of Muslims who embrace terrorism, or join groups such as ISIS. Nor has a raft of studies and surveys uncovered any evidence of a 'conveyor belt' that turns people of firm faith into purveyors of violence. Religion plays little, if any, role in the radicalisation process---. To claim that ISIS is Islamic is egregiously inaccurate and empirically unsustainable, not to mention insulting to the 1.6 billion non-violent adherents of Islam across the planet.

The controversy surrounding Wood's article on ISIS reflected a larger controversy, first sparked by the 9/11 attacks, over the nature or 'faces' of Islam and, more broadly, the relationship between religion and violence. Is there something inherently violent about extreme or fundamentalist versions of religion (let alone Islam), or is the violence carried out in the name of religion at root politically motivated and thus primarily secular in character? What causal role, if any, do religious doctrines and beliefs play in terrorism? Is religion a force for good in the world or a source of evil? ISIS, because of the vigour and fastidiousness with which it has sought to justify its actions as divinely mandated, has brought these wider questions to the fore.

## THE GLOBAL RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED

Before considering the deeper questions about religion and violence raised by Wood's article, it is important to briefly describe the broader context out of which these questions have emerged. This is the context of the global religious revival. 'Half a century ago',<sup>2</sup> Michael Cook (2014: 443) writes, 'it was widely thought that in the modern world religion was doomed to fade away.' This presumption, or the 'secularization' thesis, is the historical 'process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance' (Wilson 1966: 14; see also Berger 1967: 107).<sup>6</sup> It was a presumption widely shared among a wide spectrum of nineteenth-century thinkers, ranging from Auguste Comte, Herbert Spenser, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ferdinand Tönnies (see Bruce 1992: 170–94; Aldridge 2000; Turner 1992: 102), who all confidently supposed that the development of capitalism would profoundly and inexorably undermine the social and cultural bases of

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<sup>6</sup> Secularization must be distinguished from secularism—the conviction that religion should be a strictly private matter into which the state should not intrude nor vice versa. On the various dimensions of secularization, see Dobbelaere (1981).

traditional religion. C. Wright Mills (1959: 32-33) narrates the thesis like this:

Once the world was filled with the sacred—in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.

This thesis held sway until the latter decades twentieth-century (Norris and Inglehart 2011: 3; Beck 2010: 20), at which point it came under sustained attack. Religion, critics of secularization theory contend, remains a vital aspect of social life across the globe, evidenced, variously, in the enduring popularity of churchgoing in the United States, the emergence of New Age spirituality in Western Europe, the rise in Islamist movements in the Muslim world, and the growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Catholicism in Latin American and Africa. These developments prompted Peter L. Berger (1999: 2), one of the leading exponents of the secularization thesis in the 1960s, to renounce his earlier claims: ‘The world today, with some exceptions’,<sup>2</sup>

he acknowledged, 'is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.' 'This means',<sup>2</sup> Berger concluded, 'that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled "secularization theory" is essentially mistaken.' Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000: 79) were no less categorical: 'After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper "requiescat in pace".' Thus many contemporary social theorists are now apt to speak of a 'postsecular' age, in which 'the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularizing environment must be reckoned with' (Habermas 2005: 26). Olivier Roy (2010), for example, has argued that secularization, far from eradicating religion, has in fact paved the way for its revival, transforming it into a 'decultured', or culturally diluted, set of beliefs, practices, and identities. About the 'return of the religious', Roy writes, 'It does not mean that religious observance has increased, but that it has become more visible, especially with the appearance of "fundamentalist" forms of religious expression, in which the believer refuses to restrict his faith to the private realm but insists on its being recognized as an integral dimension of his public self, believing that religion should govern every aspect of his personal

behavior.’ According to Roy (2005: 3), what is distinctive about new forms of religious expression, whether charismatic Christianity (in all its manifestations), orthodox Judaism, ‘sects’, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Muslim fundamentalism, is that they are *individualistic* (membership is a choice, not necessarily a cultural inheritance), *institutionally weak* (mistrustful of churches and representative authorities), and *anti-intellectual* (unconcerned with theological niceties).

The confidence with which nineteenth-century social theorists supposed that religion would diminish in the modern world was not entirely misplaced: after all, as Cook (2014: 443) points out, in Western Europe, ‘it continues to hold up rather well’ (see also Berger 1999: 9-11). There may be even be a case for suggesting that it has held up elsewhere, too, including, notably, the United States (Bruce 2002). Yet today, as Cook also makes clear, ‘as a generalization about humanity at large, the conjecture is false’. Indeed, he argues, ‘the massive Islamic revival is in itself enough to refute it’. Cook (2014: 444) suggests that there are three dimensions to this revival: private religiosity, the expansion of Islam into conventional politics, and jihadism. The first of these is the most widespread: ‘an increase in religiosity whereby large numbers of people “get religion”, for the most part without any



involvement in political activism or militancy.<sup>7</sup> The second refers to the proliferation of Islamist political parties, whose aspiration is to replace existing political arrangements with an intrinsically Islamic political order. The third is the rise of jihadist groups, whose goals are to defend or recapture territory by means of violence (Pape 2003; 2005), or, as in the case of ISIS, to violently annex and occupy new territory in an effort to create a revolutionary political entity that transcends the bounds of the conventional nation-state—namely, the ‘caliphate’ (Cottee 2016b; Stern and Berger 2015).

It is against this background and particularly the dramatic upsurge in religious violence across the globe in the past twenty years (Juergensmeyer 2001; Juergensmeyer, Griego, and Soboslai 2015; Selengut 2008), that current controversies over the nature and role of religion in contemporary social and political life must be understood. It certainly helps explain the sensitivities and militancy of the so-called ‘new atheist’ critics of religion, for whom the question ‘is there really something rotten at the heart of religion?’ warrants an unequivocal ‘yes’

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<sup>7</sup> For a contrasting view, see Fish (2011: 24-26, 45): ‘Muslims are not dramatically more religious than non-Muslims and are only slightly more religious—if even that—than Christians’.

(Harris 2004; Dawkins 2006). Among the most articulate and ardent of the 'new atheists' is the late Christopher Hitchens, whose polemic *God is Not Great* sought to show that religion not only impedes progress, but, in the words of its subtitle, 'poisons everything' (Hitchens 2007). In a chapter titled 'Religion Kills', Hitchens cites case after case of what he takes to be 'religiously inspired' acts of cruelty, asserting that in many zones of conflict throughout the world 'religion has been an enormous multiplier of tribal suspicion and hatred' (Hitchens 2007: 18, 36). Even when religious believers perform good deeds Hitchens insists that they are acting not out of fidelity to their religious beliefs, but instead to a secular commitment to humanism (2007: 27).

Hitchens' position is acutely problematic from a sociological point of view. First, instead of trying to intellectually make sense of the meaning and centrality of religion in social life and throughout history, Hitchens' chief concern is to morally condemn it. This is not a sound basis on which to say anything insightful about religion and its appeal to millions of people who hold religious beliefs, engage in religious practices, or self-define in religious terms.

Second, the idea that religion is essentially and irredeemably malevolent is so preposterously one-sided and reductive that it cannot be taken fully seriously (Hall 2013: 365–366). Religion and religious

identity, to be sure, have often been the source of violence in the world, but it is not the *only* source: for a great many evils have been perpetrated in the name of secular dogmas, too. (Think, ~~for example g.~~ of Nazi Germany and the ~~H~~olocaust (Goldhagen 1996; Browning 1992), or of the tens of millions who died under Soviet Communism (Conquest 1990, 1999). At the same time, it is an incontestable empirical fact that countless numbers of people have been inspired by their religious beliefs to do good and to stop or ameliorate all manner of injustices (Appleby 2000). Hitchens (2007: 27) is obliged to recognize this, but he refuses to credit religion as the animating motive in these cases, arguing that any good a believer does is ‘a compliment to humanism, not to religion’. Of Martin Luther King, a committed Christian who used the language of the Old Testament and who frequently invoked the theme of the ‘promised land’ to inspire the Civil Rights movement, and who preached non-violence in the struggle against racism, Hitchens says that he was not a ‘real’ Christian: ‘When Dr. King took a stand~~---~~~~...~~ he did so as a profound humanist and nobody could ever use his name to justify oppression or cruelty~~---~~~~...~~ his legacy has very little to do with his professed theology~~---~~~~...~~ In no

real as opposed to nominal sense, then, was he a Christian' (Hitchens 2007: 180, 176).<sup>8</sup> The circularity in this position is obvious. Because he starts with the assumption or conviction that religion is inherently evil Hitchens must rhetorically redefine the good done in the name of religion as not properly religious. He also adopts the same circular logic in his discussion of the atrocities carried out in the name of secular creeds: these, he contends, were, for all intents and purposes, faith-based initiatives, because they were mandated by infallible leaders whose authority was sacred in character.<sup>9</sup>

Third, Hitchens has a tendency to reify religion, characterizing it as a thing in itself, independent of those who practice it and make sense of it. This is sociologically untenable, because it neglects to

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<sup>8</sup> On the intimate relationship between King's religious beliefs and his social activism, see Branch 1989.

<sup>9</sup> This is not unlike the circular logic of early radical criminologists who sought to argue that because 'true' socialism was a perfect model of society and politics, 'actually existing' socialist societies which had yet to usher in this model were not 'really' socialist, and that any pathologies they displayed had their roots in the pathologies of the capitalist societies they had replaced (Downes 1979).

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acknowledge the multiple and complex ways in which people reflexively recreate religion in and through their everyday routine activities or ‘praxis’. This is a particularly important point to stress, given how so much contemporary public discourse on religion, and particularly Islam, reproduces Hitchens’s fundamental methodological error. Consider, for example, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump’s claim that Islam is antithetical to the West, especially America: ‘Islam hates us’, he told CNN host Anderson Cooper, although he did not specify the nature or degree of this apparent hatred, still less contrive to substantiate this claim (Schleifer 2016). Or consider President Barack Obama’s converse assertion that ‘Islam is a religion that preaches peace.’<sup>10</sup> Obama’s view is clearly the more politically responsible, but both exhibit the same reifying impulse, constructing Islam as a thing that somehow possesses its own agency and whose essential moral character is fixed outside of time and space. But, from a sociological perspective, Islam doesn’t *do* anything, and like all religions its meaning is created and recreated by those who practice it.

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<sup>10</sup> See

[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2014/09/28/obama\\_islam\\_is\\_a\\_religion\\_that\\_preaches\\_peace.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2014/09/28/obama_islam_is_a_religion_that_preaches_peace.html). (last accessed 2 April 2016.)

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As Will McCants (2016) nicely expresses it, taking both Trump and Obama to task, ‘Islam neither hates nor preaches—its followers do. Islam is what people make of it, and they have made it many different things.’ According to McCants, ‘Muslims abstain and Muslims drink... Muslims defend and Muslims demolish... Muslims kill and Muslims tolerate... Muslims war and Muslims ally’. And so on. McCants’s point is that Islam encompasses an extraordinarily diverse and contradictory range of actions and practices. There is not one Islam, but a plurality of Islams, and what Islam means is determined not by ‘ancient, immutable scripture’ but by Muslims and their ever-evolving approaches to their faith. ‘Rather than talk about what Islam does and what Islam believes’,<sup>2</sup> McCants argues, ‘politicians should talk about what its followers do and what its followers believe.’

This makes good sociological sense, and applies not just to Islam but to all religions. Religion, from this perspective, is a moral, cultural, and intellectual resource on which people draw and which they use for a variety of private and public purposes. It provides the guiding scripts and rituals for a whole range of social activities (Van Gennep 1960). But it is equally important to recognize that just as religion enables, it also constrains in significant ways, liming the scope of that which is

permissible and hence possible.<sup>11</sup> Moderate Muslims, for example, have sought to question the ruling, accepted across the major schools of Islamic law (Peters and De Vries (1976–7; Friedmann 2003), that the penalty for apostasy is death (Akoy 2011: 274–5). Their hermeneutic efforts have centered on reinterpreting Chapter 2: verse 256 of the Quran (2004: 29)—‘There is no compulsion in religion’—as a doctrine of religious tolerance, instead of a judgment denying the feasibility of coercion in matters of faith (Friedmann 2003: 94).<sup>12</sup> Given that the Quran is emphatic that unrepentant apostates should forever burn in

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<sup>11</sup> This is a characteristic it shares with all social practices: see Giddens 1984.

<sup>12</sup> The entirety of 2: 256 reads: ‘There is no compulsion in religion: *true guidance has become distinct from error*, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break (emphases added).’ Some classical Islamic scholars have taken this to mean that because the truth of Islam is so self-evident no one is in need of being coerced into it; rather, they need only to open their eyes and heart to it (Friedmann 2003: 105).

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hell,<sup>13</sup> it an interpretive stretch to suggest that it is a document of religious freedom.<sup>14</sup> But a case can be made for it. By contrast, it is far more difficult to find in the Quran, still less the hadith (the collected sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), a warrant for same-sex marriage. And it is precisely for this reason that Muslim-majority countries, in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender LGBT rights are systematically withheld,<sup>15</sup> are unlikely to legalize same-sex marriage. (Conversely, it is unlikely that the United States Congress would pass a law mandating the stoning to death of women for marital infidelity,

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<sup>13</sup> 'If any of you revoke your faith and die as disbelievers, your deeds will come to nothing in this world and the Hereafter, and you will be inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain.' (The Quran, 2004, 2: 217: 24) An apostate or disbeliever is someone who renounces their faith (Cottee 2015a: Chapter ch. 2).

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<sup>14</sup> At the time at which the Quran was composed the idea of religious freedom, as it is now conventionally understood in the democratic societies of the West, simply did not exist.

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<sup>15</sup> Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in more than thirty-30 Islamic countries (Cviklová, 2012).

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given the interpretive difficulties of finding a justification for this in the U.S. Constitution.) Like all religions, Islam is malleable, but not indefinitely so. This is Cook (2014: xii):

I have sometimes been tempted to think of a religious heritage as a set of circuits that the politically inclined may or may not choose to switch on or as a menu from which they may or may not choose to make a selection; that is to say, an ancient religion, like a menu, provides its modern adherents with a set of options that do not determine their choices but do constrain them.

In a footnote to this, Cook (2014: xii) adds, by way of qualification, that ‘even this may exaggerate the degree of freedom of choice. Often one should perhaps think rather of a menu dispensed by a waiter anxious to sell the house specials’. ‘I have no great sympathy’, Cook elaborates, ‘with the idea that religious traditions are putty in the hands of exegetes—as if a heritage could successfully be interpreted to mean whatever one wanted and all interpretations were equally plausible to one’s fellow believers.’

This raises a difficult question. Are some religions more malleable for progressive political purposes than others? Or, conversely,

are some religions more malleable for anti-democratic or inhumane purposes? A further question is whether there is something *intrinsically* problematic about religion itself,<sup>16</sup> in that it necessarily embodies an exclusivist outlook that divides the world into believers and non-believers, into an 'us' and 'them' (Juergensmeyer, Griego, and Soboslai 2015: 66; Juergensmeyer 2001: 7)<sup>17</sup> and invokes transcendental values that inhibit compromise (Hoffman 1995: 272–274).

## RELIGION, CRIME, AND CRIMINOLOGY

Criminology is necessarily interested in the boundaries between "them" and "us", between "good" and "evil", how these distinctions are policed, and with what consequences. The discipline is also naturally interested in violence and injustice and how these are legitimated by means of discourses that make judgments about

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<sup>16</sup> See, classically, Girard (1972), who argues that scapegoating—the killing of a 'surrogate victim' standing in for wider evils—is a primordial religious act intended to preserve the sacred from pollution.

<sup>17</sup> 'The seed of religiously motivated violence', writes Beck (2010: 54), 'lies in the universalism of the equality of believers which withholds from non-believers what it promises to believers: dignity for fellow human beings and equality in a world of strangers.'

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categories of persons based on their ethnicity, class, or gender. Yet it remains largely silent on the question of religion and the “them” and “us” master narratives that underpin it and legitimize the many violent acts and injustices carried out in its name. This silence has not gone unnoticed among criminologists. Discussing the neglect of religion in the criminological mainstream, Francis T. Cullen (2012: 151) reports that a raid of his book shelf revealed that out of the 16 titles he selected, including notable classics (Akers 1998; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Sampson and Laub 1993; Lilly, Cullen, and Ball, 2007), not a single reference to religion was to be found in their indices. A scan of the entire back-catalogue of the *British Journal of Criminology*, one of the key institutional sites of academic international criminology, reveals a similar absence. Between July 1960, the month in which the first volume of the *British Journal of Criminology* was published and January 2014, which saw the publication of the first issue of its 54th volume, the crime-religion theme is addressed in just three articles: Junger and Polder (1993), Mahabir (2012), and Hamm (2009).

Jeffery T. Ulmer (2012: 163) echoes Cullen’s lament about the neglect of religion in criminology. ‘Sociologists since Durkheim’, he writes, ‘have recognized that religion is a core element of culture and that it therefore is a powerful potential motivator of and control on

behavior'. Criminology, however, 'has yet to locate religion centrally in the field'. This failing is all the more notable, he observes, given that the study of religion is currently enjoying 'a renewed vitality in sociology and new thinking in psychology'.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that the neglect of religion in criminology is wholesale. On the contrary, there is a sizeable criminological literature on religion as a *crime-reducing* facet of social control. Indeed, Byron R. Johnson and Sung Joon Jang (2012), in a comprehensive review, identify 270 published studies on this theme. These studies invariably construct religion not as a cause of crime, but as an important bulwark against it. Johnson and Jang (2012: 120–1) write:

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We find religion to be a robust variable that tends to be associated with the lowered likelihood of crime or delinquency. Also, the vast majority of studies document the importance of religious influences in protecting youth from harmful outcomes as well as promoting beneficial and prosocial outcomes.

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This recalls the cultural conservatism of William Bennett, John Dilulio, and James Walters's 1996 study *Body Count*, according to which the

root cause of 'predatory street crime' is 'moral poverty' (Bennett *et al.* 1996: 56). Far from being a product of economic deprivation or structural inequalities, crime is a function of bad secular parenting. Like Johnson and Jang, *Body Count* asserts that 'religion is the best and most reliable means we have to reinforce the good' (Bennett *et al.* 1996: 208).

It is beyond the remit of this chapter to assess the validity of Johnson and Jang's contention that religion has 'prosocial effects' as a restraining force against criminal impulses, although it is obviously highly contentious (Cragun 2013: 92–6). But it is necessary to register the one-sidedness of Johnson and Jang's discussion and their failure to address, much less explore, the possibility that in addition to the 'prosocial effects' of religion, religious involvement may also have 'antisocial effects'. In an age in which religious violence and sectarian religious disputes are among the dominant forms conflict worldwide (Juergensmeyer 2001; Stern 2003; Selengut 2008), the sidestepping of this issue is untenable.

Cullen (2012) and Ulmer (2012), who, as we have seen, both regret the neglect of religion in criminology, do not seem overly troubled by such a one-sided account. In fact, they endorse it. For his part, Cullen suggests that 'a criminology of religion' should focus on

the ways in which religion, and specifically a belief in a 'loving God', can help not only to restrain baser impulses but also to cultivate positive emotional predispositions:

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Religion is not strictly about a retributive God who seeks to evoke guilt when His commandments are violated and who threatens Hellfire for transgressions. Religion also is about God's love and about the invitation to spread the good word and to be good. Exploring the impact of faith in a loving God thus appears worthy of further exploration.

(Cullen 2012: 155)

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This is quite extraordinary. Cullen is a professional criminologist, not a theologian, yet here he is stipulating what religion is and what it is not.

'Religion also is about God's love',<sup>2</sup> he claims. This makes the same fundamental methodological error as those who insist that religion is 'really' about God's hate. But, as we have seen, religion is not a fixed entity independent of those who practice it. It is neither about love nor hate. Rather, it is about what believers, within certain bounds, take it to be. Historically, they have taken it to be many things, both loving and hateful.

No less extraordinary is Ulmer's (2012, emphasis in original) claim that religion

is a source of definitions and moral messages that discourage interpersonal violence, stealing, dishonesty, illicit substance use, etc. Religion thus likely involves differential association processes entailing exposure to and internalization of *definitions*—values, attitudes, and beliefs that reject crime and delinquency.

This is less a neutral description of religion than a stark affirmation of it as a social good. It is vulnerable to the rejoinder that, as well as being a source of 'prosocial' definitions, religion can also offer a multitude of commands, prohibitions, and prejudices that legitimize as morally right or necessary a number of inhumane practices and acts (Hitchens 2007; Jones 2008: 44–45, 143). As Albert Bandura (1990: 164) remarks, 'Over the years, much reprehensible and destructive conduct has been perpetrated by ordinary, decent people in the name of religious principles, righteous ideologies, and nationalistic imperatives. Throughout history, countless people have suffered at the hands of self-righteous crusaders bent on stamping out what they consider evil.' Charles Selengut (2008: 2) is more succinct: 'Religion can tell us that it

is ultimately right to love our neighbors, but it can also instruct us that it is our sacred duty to kill them.’

Ronald L. Akers (2010: 1), though sensitive to the inhumane purposes to which religion can be put, reinforces Johnson and Jang’s view that religion, by and large, is a force for good in the world, serving as a restraining moral counter-weight against base and lawless human impulses:

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While religious extremism (as is true for extremism of any type) can provide motivation and support for deviant actions, crime and violence, and religious groups and beliefs can develop in direct opposition to the established and prevailing society and culture, the expectation is that religion generally provides institutional support for conformity to conventional culture. That is, religious beliefs, worship, doctrines, commitment, and activities work against violating the laws and norms of good and civil behavior in society. Certain Christian doctrines, for instance, teach respect and obedience to both government and religious authorities, and if one truly believes such doctrines as “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,”<sup>22</sup> and “love your neighbor as



yourself,<sup>22</sup> it is difficult to bring oneself to cheat, defraud, or do violence against others.<sup>18</sup>

It is instructive to note that when Akers (2010: 4) concedes that there have been cases in which religion has had ‘an anti-social impact’, he describes these as ‘extreme’, suggesting that religion’s ‘pro-social, anti-criminal impact on society’ is the norm. It is also revealing that in the course of making this point Akers refers to the ‘misuse and distortion of religion to justify criminal acts’. This carries the assumption that religion can only justify criminal acts if it is *misapplied* in some way, and that religion is at heart fundamentally pacific. Not only is this a normatively biased reading; it is also unsociological, attributing to religion a ‘true’ face or essence against which it is possible to measure distortions or deviations.

Why have criminologists tended to ignore religion as a possible cause of crime or as an animating emotion in the subjectivity of the offender? There are at least two central reasons for this.

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<sup>18</sup> Akers clearly underestimates the vast scope for denial and cognitive dissonance in human affairs (Cohen 2001), and how the ‘the breastplate of righteousness’ can mask a multitude of sins (Humphreys 1975).

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First, criminology, from its historical beginnings, framed the criminal offender as an essentially secular subject (Cottee 2014b). It was the Italian positivist school, spearheaded by Cesare Lombroso, which laid the foundations for this framing, rejecting outright theological notions of evil and sin as incompatible with its revolutionary scientific ethos (Sparks 1999; Vold *et al.* 2002: 1–17; Beirne 1993). The offender, as Lombroso saw him (this was well before feminist criminology blazed its trail), was genetically abnormal, not fallen, still less possessed of the devil. Correspondingly, he was in need of clinical treatment (Radzinowicz 1966: 53–6), not clerical intervention, still less redemption and forgiveness. Although contemporary criminology has uniformly discarded Lombroso's work and self-reflexively adopted a variety of post-Enlightenment discourses (Nelken 1994), the foundational Lombrosian construction of the offender as a primarily secular subject lives on in its master paradigms as a 'domain assumption' (Gouldner 1970). The brutalized inadequate; the detached egoist; the frustrated social climber; the resentful rejector; the virtuous victim, 'more sinned against than sinning'; the quasi-insurgent; the self-maximizing consumer; the bored thrill seeker: these images of the offender, despite being crude caricatures, capture something important about the broader theoretical narratives to which they belong, and hint at

what few professional criminologists would like to admit: that criminology is as much a morality-play as a science, where the offender, conjured into existence by his criminological creator, strikes a moral pose and invites a judgment (Cottee 2013). Yet it is a field in which the religious believer is conspicuous by his/her absence, and where notions of evil, sin, damnation, sacrifice, salvation, and the soul do not find any footing alongside the more worldly states of deprivation, alienation, strain, stigma, inequality, and injustice.

Second, there is a pro-religious bias in criminology. This has two dimensions: the first is the conviction that religious belief or a community of believers serve as a safeguard against crime and anti-social—and presumably *secular*—tendencies or corruptions. The second is more subtle and harder to capture: a generalized sense that religion is a valuable source of identity, belonging, and meaning, and that linking it to criminality is somehow disrespectful or even demonizing toward religious believers, especially those from minority communities. Few criminologists would confess to harboring any such sense, but a theory or study which blames religion, still less a specific religion, for crime or injustices is unlikely to catch on in criminological circles. This, as Cullen (2012: 153) helpfully suggests, is connected to a broader skepticism among criminologists toward explanations that link culture

and specifically 'bad morals' to crime, 'unless the culture itself is explained by structural disadvantage' —or politics more broadly.

If criminology is to fully engage with religion, it must overcome its historical secularism and recognize the salience of religion in social and political life. It must also adopt a more neutral stance toward the relationship between religion, crime, and control, instead of simply valorizing religion as a mechanism for peace and "pro-social" behavior. Moreover, in keeping with its critical traditions, criminology must acknowledge the role of mainline or allegiant religions in legitimizing the social control of deviants, apostates, heretics and, crucially and notoriously, women (Eltahawy 2015).

## RELIGION, VIOLENCE, AND POLITICS

Like criminology, terrorism studies is a "rendezvous subject" subject (Downes 1988), where scholars from a variety of disciplines pass through and meet to discuss common points of interest. But unlike criminology, terrorism studies has a tradition of vigorous and illuminating debate over the meaning and nature of religious violence. Some six years before the 9/11 attacks, Bruce Hoffman, a leading terrorism studies scholar, argued that 'holy terror' is not like 'secular terror' (1995: 272–273). For the religious terrorist, unlike his/her secular twin, 'violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine

duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative'. The religious terrorist, furthermore, is 'unconstrained by the political, moral or practical constraints that seem to affect other [non-religious] terrorists'. And their mission is not to sway an audience, but to engage in acts of sacrificial violence for the greater glory of a divine god or being: 'Where the secular terrorist sees violence primarily as a means to an end, the religious terrorist tends to view violence as an end in itself.' (1995: 273)

Hoffman's position acquired a particular salience in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Were the perpetrators and their sponsors rational political actors or were they religious fanatics whose purposes did not extend beyond what they felt was a religious duty to punish and avenge the "great Satan" of the United States of America? In his seminal study on suicide bombing, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Robert Pape (2005: 23) took up the former position, arguing that 'the bottom line is that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation.' From a dataset of 315 suicide attacks from 1980 to 2003, Pape concluded that strategic logic, rather than ideology or religion, explains 95 percent of all suicide attacks around the world. They are 'organized, coherent campaigns' to compel a modern democracy to withdraw military forces from a group's domestic

territory. ‘Suicide terrorism’, he wrote, ‘is mainly a strategy to compel democracies to make concessions that will enable a community to achieve self-determination.’ (2005: 92) Referring to Al Qaeda, he acknowledged that religion matters for the group, ‘but mainly in the context of national resistance to foreign occupation’ (2005: 104).

From Pape’s perspective, suicide bombing, far from being a sacramental—and hence a primarily expressive—act, is a political tactic adopted for its expediency. It is horrifying and cheap and, above all, lethal.<sup>19</sup> And, crucially, it is intended for a wider audience—the political elites and citizenry of the occupier. As can be seen, this is a thoroughly and unapologetically secular thesis (Friedman 2016; Cottee 2016b): suicide bombing is an overwhelmingly *political* phenomenon. It is about territory, not religion: ‘Religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.’ (Pape 2005: 2)

Pape’s study provoked vigorous controversy, chiefly because it was taken to suggest that the blame for suicide bombing lies not with religion, but foreign occupations. More specifically, it was read as a

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<sup>19</sup> ‘The main reason that suicide terrorism is growing’, he writes, ‘is that terrorists have learned that it works.’ (2005: 61)

scathing indictment of the 2003 American-led war in Iraq: far from inoculating Iraq from the threat of Al Qaeda and jihadism (Otterman 2003; Milbank and Pincus 2004), the war served as a rallying cry for a new generation of international jihadists and Iraq became the focal point of their activities. In addition to this, Pape's thesis fell right across the fault-line in a wider argument over the nature, meaning, and origins of jihadist militancy. This argument reached fever pitch just after the 9/11 attacks: was Al Qaeda an insurgency against western, and especially American, imperial aggression and overreach or was it simply a murderous religious cult?<sup>20</sup> The rise of ISIS has reignited this debate.

Assaf Moghadam (2008/09: 55) is especially critical of Pape's (2005: 115) characterization of Al Qaeda as 'a coalition of nationalist groups seeking to achieve local change in their home countries, not a truly transnational movement seeking to spread Islam or any other ideology to non-Islamic populations'. Religion, he insists, *contra* Pape, plays a central role in Al Qaeda's ideology and mission. By way of illustration, he quotes from a 2001 statement in which Bin Laden declared, 'This war is fundamentally religious... Under no

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<sup>20</sup> For an overview of the key lines of controversy, see Cottee and Cushman (2008: 1–36).

circumstances should we forget this enmity between us and the infidels. For the enmity is based on creed.' (Moghadam 2008/09: 55). Bruce Hoffman (2006: 82) concurs with Moghadam's overall assessment: 'the religious motive [for Al Qaeda] is overriding'.

Although Pape's study is primarily about suicide bombing and jihadist violence, it also raises deeper questions about the role of religion or ideology in social and political life. This, too, explains why it proved so controversial. According to James W. Jones (2008: 19), Pape's claims 'that religion is primarily a marker of cultural difference and a rhetorical device used by political leaders seem like a rather superficial understanding of the role of religion in human life'.

What would a more solid understanding of that role look like? At a minimum, it would need to take seriously the following three possibilities. First, it must acknowledge that religious belief is not merely an *ex post facto* rationalization for social action, but can serve as a motive in itself, *prompting* action. This type of social action would fall under the category of what Max Weber (1978: 25) calls 'value-rationality', where persons, 'regardless of possible costs to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be



required by duty, honor, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call'.<sup>21</sup> These actions serve not as means to an end, but are ends in themselves, valued for their own sake. They are intrinsically meaningful for the person who undertakes them, and there is often a ritualistic and symbolic aspect to their performance that does not make obvious rational sense to external observers.

It is instructive to note that it is precisely this aspect of suicide bombing—its performative and ritualistic dimension—that Pape's critics take him to task for failing to address. Mark Juergensmeyer (2001: 124), for example, has argued, referring to the 9/11 attacks and other 'dramatic displays of power', that 'these creations of terror' are done not to achieve a strategic goal but to make a symbolic statement'. They are the climactic expression of a 'sacred drama' in which the perpetrators see themselves as heroic figures in a cosmic battle against evil. Suicide bombing, in short, is 'performance violence'. A similar theme runs through Ann Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg's (2005: 72–73) haunting ethnography study of Palestinian suicide bombing.

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Atran (2006: 138) describes these convictions as 'sacred values'. Selengut's preferred terminology (2008: 194) is '~~sacred~~ sacred visions'.

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‘You will never understand anything about the lure of martyrdom’<sup>2,2</sup> they write, ‘until you realize that someone who has decided to take that path as his own sees himself not only as an avenging Ninja, but also as something of a movie star, maybe even a sex symbol—a romantic figure at the very least, larger than life.’ They also make the following observation about the ghosts in Hamas martyrdom videos: ‘These guys knew they’re going to die. Life in the meantime has become unbearable. They just want to get it over with. At the same time, we get the feeling that life has never seemed better to them—so intense, so exuberant, so full of meaning. Perhaps that’s why they keep on smiling.’ (2005: 118) As Juergensmeyer (2001: 190) suggests, for those engaged in a holy struggle ‘there may be something exhilarating, perhaps even rewarding, about the struggle itself’.

Second, a fully serious engagement with religion would need to address its role in legitimizing or concealing self-interest and political power (Fox 2000: 11–17). What looks like religiously-inspired violence may in fact be secularly-inspired violence under a religious cloak. As Charles Selengut (2008: 9) observes, individuals or groups may ‘utilize religious sentiment in order to gain political or economic advantage, to punish a historical rival, or to maintain power over a subordinate group’. This can be seen in the current conflict in Syria,

where ISIS has selectively used Islamic scripture to justify its sectarian killing and state-building project.

Juergensmeyer (2001: xi) has similarly argued that religion is ‘crucial’ for acts of religious violence, in that ‘it gives moral justifications for killing and provides images of cosmic war that allow activists to believe that they are waging spiritual scenarios’. ‘This does not mean that religion causes violence’,<sup>2</sup> he adds, ‘nor does it mean that religious violence cannot, in some cases, be justified by other means. But it does mean that religion often provides the mores and symbols that make possible bloodshed—even catastrophic acts of terrorism.’ In other words, religion, as well as prompting acts of violence and destruction, can also serve as a legitimizing device for these acts, enabling their occurrence by giving them legitimacy. In this sense, religious beliefs and doctrines, selectively mined and interpreted, provide, *contra* Ulmer (2012), ‘a source of definitions and moral messages’ that neutralize (Sykes and Matza 1957) and hence *encourage* ‘interpersonal violence, stealing, dishonesty’ etc.

Third, any serious attempt to address the role of religion in violence must acknowledge the enormous methodological difficulties of assigning political or religious motives to actors whose actions could plausibly be understood as manifesting either. As Stephen Holmes

(2005: 132–133) observes, the problem ‘is not so much that individuals with secretly secular purposes may feign religious goals to burnish their reputations for purity’, but rather that ‘one and the same decision could have been taken for either religious or secular reasons’. This makes it difficult ‘to tell which motive played the dominant role’. By way of example, Holmes says that an Islamic husband, living in Germany, ‘may lock his wife inside the house because he wants to be pious and thinks that female sequestration is what piety demands; but he may also do it to exercise arbitrary power and thereby compensate psychologically for feelings of impotence and passivity that afflict the rest of his miserable life’. According to one account, Islamic beliefs govern his behaviour, whereas according to the other, Islamic beliefs merely provide an acceptable pretext. ‘So how’, Holmes asks, ‘can we decide which account is more persuasive in any particular case?’ Or, as Oliver McTernan (2003: x) inquires, referring directly to the 9/11 attackers:

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Who can claim to understand fully the minds and motives of those young, educated and talented men, all of whom spent the last months of their lives meticulously planning the destruction of themselves and thousands of others? Who can claim with certainty that it was grievance, real or imagined, and not their profoundly held religious beliefs that

motivated their use of commercial aircraft to commit mass murder on the working communities of New York and Washington?

There is no easy answer to this question. What can be certain, however, is that a polemical interest in assigning either a religious or a political motive to violence will do little to advance our interpretive efforts.

Holmes, for his part, after a searching and balanced exploration of the available empirical evidence, concludes that a possible mix of personal frustration, political protest, and religious conviction may have driven Mohammad Atta, the lead hijacker of the 9/11 attacks. The broader significance of Holmes's analysis lies in his methodological approach, which is empirically driven and resistant to any bias either for or against religion.

## CONCLUSION: THE NEW RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

'Anyone who lives in the early twenty-first century and follows the news', Michael Cook (2014: xi) writes, 'will have noticed that ancient religions play a significant part in modern politics'. They will also have noticed how insistently religion has become enmeshed in modern political violence. According to U-S State Department statistics,

religion has been associated with more instances of public violence in the last ~~thirty~~ 30 years than at any time in the last two hundred years (Juergensmeyer, Griego, and Soboslai 2015: 30). Indeed, as Charles Selengut (2008: 2) puts it, 'religious violence is among the most pressing and dangerous issues facing the world community'. It is also one of the most controversial, as the current debate over ISIS with which this chapter began clearly shows.

Martha Nussbaum (2012) has written of a 'new religious intolerance' in western democracies. For example, in Britain, in recent years, there has been an upsurge in religiously-motivated hate crime, mainly targeted at Muslims. According to official statistics (Corcoran, Lader, and Smith 2015: 1), between 2012-13 and 2014-15, there were an estimated 222,000 hate crimes each year for the five monitored strands.<sup>22</sup> Of these, 38,000 were linked to victims' religion.<sup>23</sup> In the majority of cases, the religion in question was Islam (2015: 20). Other

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<sup>22</sup> The five monitored strands are: race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and gender-identity.

<sup>23</sup> According to Police statistics, offences linked to victims' religion increased by 43% ~~per cent~~ in 2014-15. (Corcoran, Lader, and Smith 2015: 5).

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official sources suggest that hate-crimes against Muslims are on the increase. In September 2015 the London Metropolitan Police reported a 70.7 per cent increase in ‘Islamophobic’ offences between July 2014 and July 2015.<sup>24</sup> Given the mounting evidence of significant non-reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes by victims, official statistics may provide an incomplete picture of the scale of anti-Muslim bigotry and hate crime.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A total of 816 offences were recorded in this period, up from 478 for the previous year: <http://news.met.police.uk/news/met-s-response-to-rise-in-islamophobic-hate-crime-in-london-128144> (last accessed 9 April 2016). An Islamophobic offence is defined as ‘any offence which is perceived to be Islamophobic by the victim or any other person, that is intended to impact upon those known or perceived to be Muslim’: [http://www.met.police.uk/crimefigures/textonly\\_month.htm#c41](http://www.met.police.uk/crimefigures/textonly_month.htm#c41) (last accessed 9 April 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> See especially, EU-MIDIS Data in Focus Report 2: Muslims, available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2010/eu-midis-data-focus-report-2-muslims> (last accessed 9 April 2016); and Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010: 12.

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There is a substantial body of research documenting anti-Muslim hate, and the wider culture of suspicion and contempt in which it is rooted. This centres on the much-contested concept of Islamophobia (Halliday 1999), which has been defined by Neil Chakraborti and Irene Zempi (2012: 271) as ‘a fear or hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of “Muslimness”’.<sup>26</sup>

Broadly speaking, there are two key themes running through this research: first, that Islamophobia, however defined, is widespread and growing across western democratic countries; and second, that Islamophobia serves to fuel and legitimize abuses against Muslims, ranging from everyday acts of symbolic degradation to murderous violence. A connected theme is how Islamophobic discourse licenses repressive social control measures against Muslims (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Kundnani 2009). The picture that emerges is that Muslims are victims and that their communities are indeed ‘under siege’ (Zempi 2014: 115). Referring to the criminological literature on British Muslims, Julian Hargreaves (2015: 21) writes, ‘Muslims are frequently

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<sup>26</sup> For a more expansive definition, see the Runnymede Trust (1997) report.



depicted as a population blighted by personal crime victimization distinct in nature and extent from that faced by other minority groups in the United Kingdom’.

This broader context of bigotry and suspicion toward Muslims has made it difficult to speak openly and critically about Islam and its connection to crime and violence, especially for scholars whose progressive politics dissuades them from probing the dark side of what they see as an ‘already embattled minority’ (Buruma 2006: 33; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross 2012). It has also made it difficult to speak about hate crime *within* Muslim communities, and how differences in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and belief, including non-belief, may serve as the focal point for conflict and abuses among Muslims (Cottee 2015a; Butt 2009).

Criminology is of course no stranger to controversy, and Jock Young and his fellow ‘left realists’ did not hesitate to intervene in highly politicized debates over the black crime rate in 1980s, imploring ‘left idealists’ to take street crime seriously (Cottee 2002). Yet there is no comparable willingness among criminologists to wade into the current controversies over religion, violence, and Islam.

Despite Cullen’s (2012: 158) efforts, the idea of a ‘criminology of religion’ still remains undeveloped. ‘Ever since its emergence in the

industrialized, urbanized world of the mid-nineteenth century, criminology', David Garland and Richard Sparks (2000: 189) reflect, 'has been, or has sought to be, a contemporary, timely, worldly subject'. Yet its retreat from religion, or willingness to engage with it only as a 'pro-social' control variable or else as a badge of victimhood, would suggest a more imaginatively cramped and unworldly outlook. This is an invitation for a more open criminological engagement with one of the most important issues of our time.

## SELECTED FURTHER READING

On the relationship between religious violence and the emotions, the following two texts are particularly illuminating: Juergensmeyer's ~~(2001)~~ *Terror in the Mind of God* (2001) and Stern's ~~(2003)~~ *Terror in the Name of God* (2003). On radical Islamic activism, Wiktorowicz's ~~(2005)~~ *Radical Islam Rising* (2005) is superb, fusing rich ethnographic research with social movement theory to provide a compelling account of Islamist radicalization in the West. On ISIS, see, notably, Stern, ~~J.~~ and Berger, ~~J. M.~~'s (2015) *ISIS: The State of Terror* (2015), and Atwan, ~~S. A.~~ (2015) *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (2015). For a balanced account of the role of religion in international politics, see Appleby, ~~S. R. S.~~ (2000) *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* (2000). On the culture of religious violence, see Oliver, ~~A. M.~~ and Steinberg, ~~P.~~'s ~~F.~~

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~~(2005)~~ *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* ~~(2005)~~. For a brilliantly lucid and insightful analysis of Islamic ethics, see Cook, ~~M. S.~~ ~~(2003)~~ *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction* ~~(2003)~~.

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