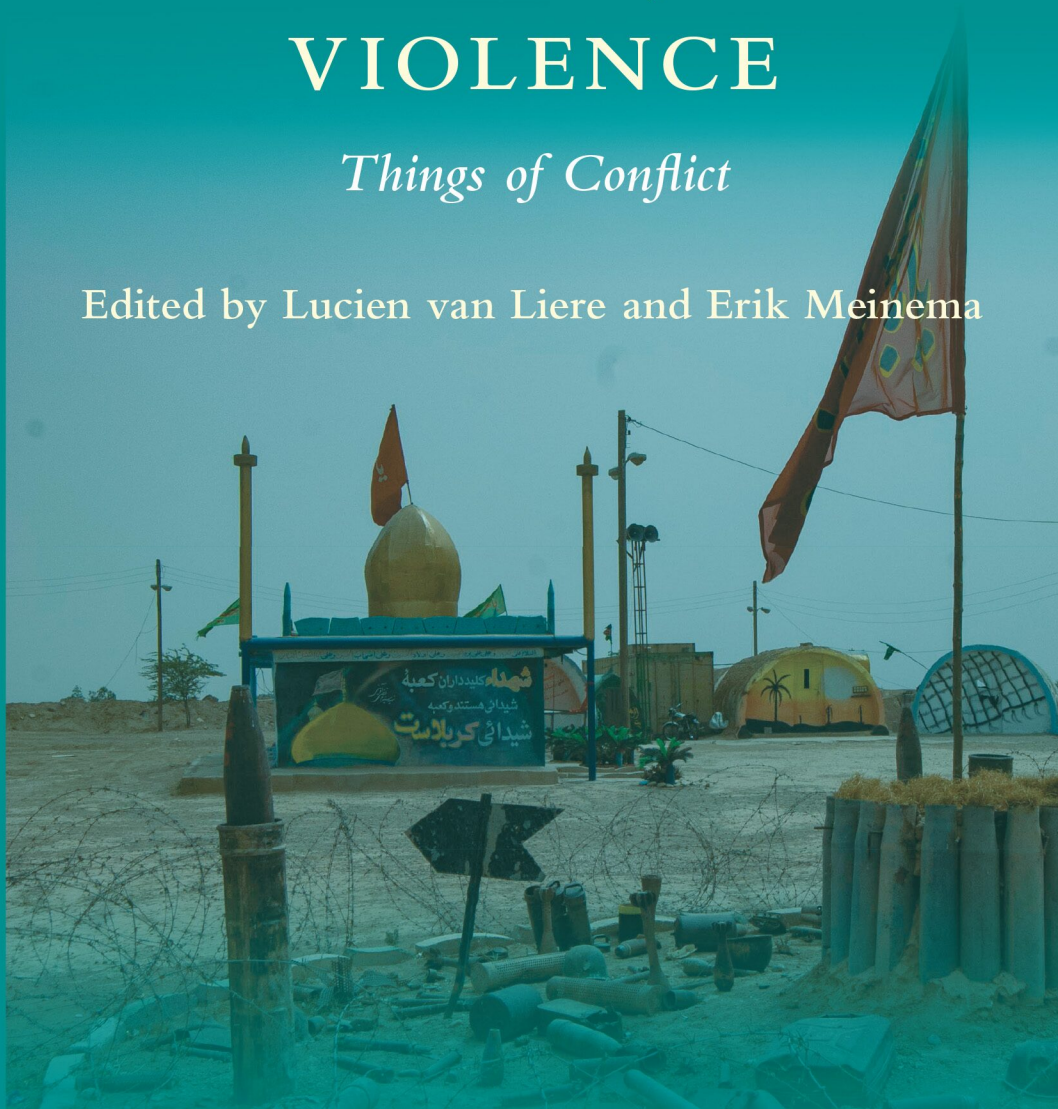
SUPPLEMENTS TO METHOD & THEORY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

MATERIAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND VIOLENCE

Things of Conflict

Edited by Lucien van Liere and Erik Meinema



BRILL

Material Perspectives on Religion, Conflict, and Violence

Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion

VOLUME 19

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/smtr*

Material Perspectives on Religion, Conflict, and Violence

Things of Conflict

Edited by

Lucien van Liere
Erik Meinema

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: The picture shows Sharhani, a border post between Iran and Iraq. This area witnessed one of heaviest confrontations during the war between these countries. Nearly five hundred unclaimed remains of combatants were found in this area. Volunteers try to match the bones, form a body, and package them. The body-sets are kept in the shrine we see in the picture, waiting for an appropriate political moment for propaganda in favor of the Islamic Republic. But the incomplete bodies are kept in the two concrete bunkers which are very spooky because it is just filled with the stack of human bones. The volunteers also collect all rusty military equipment to keep the militarized feeling alive. Photographer: Younes Saramifar.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022028520

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2214-3270
ISBN 978-90-04-51747-9 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-52379-1 (e-book)

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

While this book was being reviewed, war broke out in Eastern Europe. At first, images and videos of destroyed buildings, dead soldiers, people hiding in basements, and people on the move to Poland, Moldavia, and other countries, were spread by press agencies and on social media. In the European Union, discussions immediately broke out about security and armaments. Stories of grief and despair, but also of bravery and courage were widely shared. After the war grew a few weeks old, even grimmer pictures and videos reached the world; images of totally devastated residential areas, battered churches, bodies of handcuffed people lying scattered in the streets of Bucha, mass graves. The images reminded us of Aleppo, Grozny, Kabul, Mosul, Saada.

Studying religion, materiality, and conflict, it is impossible to avoid the deep historical, religious, and material dimensions of this conflict. The Russian war on Ukraine has been understood by analysts and Russia-scholars as a response to Russia's uncertain times as a 'great power' (*derzhavnost*) that started in the 1990s. Being a great power is an important part of Russia's public narrative and symbolic political tradition. It is how the Russian regime views the role of 'Russia' in the world, a narrative with often strong religious and nostalgic overtones, but also with a strong focus on threats from the outside and inside. It is also a narrative that draws heavily on Russia's perception of its own role as Europe's savior in defeating Nazi Germany. Justifications of this war are often loaded with references to this grand narrative. This becomes clear in phrases on genocide that would be committed by Ukrainian Nazis against Russian-speaking civilians in the Donbas. The Russian Orthodox Church shares this narrative. Patriarch Kirill endorses the war and called Russia's military efforts an "active manifestation of evangelical love for neighbors". The perception of this war as 'holy' evokes memories of the blessings of bombs destined for Syria and Crimea by Orthodox priests, a dimension that fuses religion, violence, and materiality (see the work of Dmitri Adamsky). The opening of the main church of the Russian Armed Forces in a military theme park in Moscow in June 2020 – in khaki colors and filled with weaponry and mosaics depicting battles from Russia's history – further underlines how the Russian Orthodox Church has come to play a vital role in militant Russian nationalism. This dimension becomes tangible in the war in Ukraine. Two days before the invasion, President Vladimir Putin spoke of Ukraine as "an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space". The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the Moscow-based Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2018 and perspectives on Kievan Rus, may all play a role in efforts to claim Ukraine as

part of such a space. In this context, the many reports on missiles targeting religious sites, like the Orthodox Volnovakha Temple, the St Michael's Cathedral in Mariupol, or Uman, a site sacred to Hasidic Jews, are striking. Spaces, buildings, holy sites, weapons, and other 'things of conflict' all play an important role in understanding the religious dimensions of this violence. Without an effort to understand this war in its narrative, religious, and material dimensions, this conflict becomes an incomprehensible strife for power.

This volume was envisioned after we organized a seminar on religion, conflict, and materiality at Utrecht University in November 2019. The seminar was supported by the 'Religious Matters in an Entangled World' program led by Birgit Meyer, which is gratefully acknowledged. We are extremely thankful to Birgit for her very constructive support throughout this project. We are also thankful to Rashida Alhassan Addum-Atta, Joseph Fosu-Akrah, Murtala Ibrahim, Kauthar Khamis, Brian Larkin, Martijn Oosterbaan, Kirsten Smeets, Srdjan Sremac, and Juliana Tesija for their valuable contributions to this seminar. They are at the source of this project and helped develop our thoughts and ideas.

We wish to thank the authors who contributed chapters to this book for drawing out such fascinating theoretical and methodological entry points to understand the role of material religion in conflict and violence. While developing this book, we received helpful comments and suggestions during a research colloquium with staff and students from the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University, in which our introductory chapter was discussed. We also significantly benefitted from feedback given by Benjamin Kirby on our introductory chapter, and from the keen and cooperative suggestions from the anonymous reviewer(s) on this book. We are also grateful to the University Library of Utrecht University, Paul Ziche as our director of research, and the 'Religious Matters in an Entangled World' program of Birgit Meyer for providing financial contributions which allowed us to publish this book open access. While submitting our manuscript to Brill, Tessa Schild has been a great source of professional and constructive support. Last but not least, we are very indebted to Bernadette van den Berg for her fantastic help in streamlining the references and bibliographies of this work. All mistakes of course remain entirely our own.

Lucien van Liere and Erik Meinema
April 2022

Notes on Contributors

Christoph Baumgartner
is associate professor of Ethics at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University. His main research areas include political philosophy of religious diversity, freedom of religion, toleration, political secularism, democracy, citizenship in post-migrant societies, environmental ethics, and ethics of climate change.

Erik Meinema
is a lecturer in religious studies at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University. His research focuses on religious diversity, youth, and political secularism in East Africa. He is a member of the research group Religious Matters in an Entangled World that is led by Birgit Meyer and has conducted his Ph.D. research on the coexistence between Christians, Muslims, and followers of indigenous African religious traditions in the coastal region of Kenya. He has published peer-reviewed articles in journals such as *Religion, Africa*, and the *Journal of Religion in Africa*.

Birgit Meyer
is professor of religious studies at Utrecht University. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, she studies religion from a material and postcolonial angle, seeking to synthesize grounded fieldwork and theoretical reflection in a multidisciplinary setting. Her research is driven by an urge to make sense of the shifting place and role of religion in our time, and to show that scholarly work in the field of religion is of eminent concern to understand the shape of our world in the early 21st century. Characteristic of her work is her engagement with the corporeal, material, and political-aesthetic dimensions of religion from an anthropological perspective. Visual culture and religious images and objects play a central role in her work. Awarded with the 'Academy professor prize' and the 'Spinoza prize' in 2015, Meyer initiated the comprehensive research programme Religious Matters in an Entangled World (www.religiousmatters.nl) which she currently is conducting.

Daan F. Oostveen
is a philosopher and a scholar of religion working at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University. His Ph.D. on multiple religious belonging was awarded by the Faculty of Religion and Theology at VU Amsterdam. For this research, he spent a year as a

research fellow at the People's University of China in Beijing to study contemporary Chinese religious diversity in 2018. He is a founding member of the *New European Humanities in the 21st Century Network* (neh21.net), and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Future Humanities*. His research interests include the new humanities, comparative religion, and posthumanism.

Younes Saramifar
is assistant professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Free University Amsterdam. As an anthropologist, he focuses on material expressions of religion at the intersection of humans and other than humans in conflict ridden regions. He has done ethnographical research in various conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia. He has published on the culture of martyrdom, Iranian revolutionary youth, and the materiality of combat. He has recently published *Hope, Messiah and troubles of messianic futures in Iran: exploring martyrdom and politics of hope amongst the Iranian revolutionary youth* in the British *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.

Joram Tarusarira
is an assistant professor of religion, conflict and peacebuilding at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His research focuses on religion, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, reconciliation and religion, and climate induced conflicts.

Margaretha A. van Es
works as an assistant professor of religious studies at Utrecht University. She has conducted research on anti-Muslim sentiments in Europe for over ten years. Her monograph *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background: The Stigma of Being Oppressed* was published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2016. She has published articles in international journals such as *Religion*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, *Religions*, and *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*. Her current research focuses on the emergence of trendy, alcohol-free halal restaurants in Rotterdam through the lens of cosmopolitanism and belonging.

Lucien van Liere
is associate professor of religion at the Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University. He has worked as a lecturer at Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta (2000–2007). His focus is on the wide socio-cultural context in which violence is committed and justified. He studies how religious beliefs impact the course of conflicts by using methods such as frame analysis, discourse analysis, and material

analysis. He uses relational models and network analysis to understand how violence is related to communal ideas about equality, authority, and justice. His further research interest includes the secular state, discourses on martyrdom, and nostalgia. Together with Martha Frederiks he is chief editor of *Exchange*.

Tammy Wilks
is a doctoral candidate in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Cape Town. Her research examines the practices and discourses that religious communities in Nairobi perform and narrate to claim belonging to the city.

CHAPTER 1

Material Religion, Conflict, and Violence

Lucien van Liere and Erik Meinema

This volume explores relations between materiality, conflict, and religion. Although connections between religion and materiality, and between conflict and religion are currently widely studied in academia, the intersection between religion, conflict, *and* materiality remains underexplored. This is, as we will show in this introduction, not surprising. Scholarly understandings of conflict are often focused on political, historical, and socio-psychological models that tend to obscure how perspectives on materiality may contribute to efforts to comprehend conflict. We seek to foreground relations between materiality, conflict, and violence by using insights from different academic fields like religious studies, conflict studies, and anthropology. Doing so, we argue, creates possibilities to understand how things matter in religion-related conflict, what they do, and how they contribute to how people understand the causes, dynamics, and effects of violent conflict. As such, this volume addresses the following key questions: How do *religious actors* engage and mobilize 'things' to physically and symbolically position themselves in conflict situations? What role do sensational experiences of *violence* have in religion-related violent conflict and in processes of reconciliation? How do things mediate '*presence*' of divinity/ies, spirits, powers within conflict situations? And finally: how do things contribute to religious infrastructures that play a role in violence and conflict dynamics?

Building on insights developed in different academic fields, particularly the so-called 'material turn' in religious studies, and research on the role of religion in violent conflict, this introduction sets the stage for the development of conceptual and methodological directions in the study of religion-related violent conflict. Specifically, we aim to discuss the questions introduced above by focusing on two ways in which the intersection between materiality, religion, and (violent) conflict can be understood, namely (1) how conflicts arise around specific things that symbolize what particular religious communities hold 'dear' and 'special' and/or that mediate divine presence, and (2) how 'religious infrastructures' – understood as the material arrangements on which (religious) practices of particular religious communities depend – are shaped by, and simultaneously affect conflict and violence.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004523791_002

In this introductory chapter, we will first highlight how this volume builds on insights developed within research on religion and conflict on the one hand, and on the 'material turn' in religious studies on the other, and explain how this volume contributes to these two different fields of research. Second, we clarify how materiality provides a productive methodological entry point to the study of conflict and violence. Third, we explain how certain objects can function as 'things of conflict' in diverse settings that are characterized by (violent) conflict. And finally, we further specify and explain two ways in which the role of material religion in (violent) conflict can be understood.

1 Things Missing

In this volume, we take inspiration from the two different academic fields we mentioned above: material religion and conflict studies. These research fields strongly intertwine notions from different disciplines from the humanities and social sciences. Still, these fields rarely explicitly engage with one another (see also Van Liere 2020b). Conflict studies often uses specialized analytical terms to focus on (discourses of) violence, exclusion and marginalization, identity-formations, authority structures, and – most conspicuously – conflict actors such as states, institutions, and insurgent groups. Although some studies highlight the roles that religion plays in conflict settings, these studies less often focus on the materiality of both (violent) conflict *and* religion. By contrast, the 'material turn' within religious studies has produced only few studies that include some reflections on the relation between materiality, religion, and violence (Oosterbaan 2005; Larkin 2014; Ibrahim 2017; Fallon 2017).

Studies of conflict that include 'religion' are scattered across many disciplines. Paul Powers (2021) distinguishes between maximalist and minimalist perspectives (21–40) on the role of religion in conflict and violence. 'Maximalist' studies take religion as a source of world-views legitimating violence. Often, certain doctrinal and social traits ascribed to religion are identified and used to explain why intolerance and violence are justified within religious traditions. For example, Regina Schwartz's classic and popular study on monotheism (1997) in which monotheism is held responsible for the sharp distinction between true and false religion (Schwartz 1997),[1] Mark Juergensmeyer's

1 See also Walter and Assmann 2005; Assmann 2008, 106–27; Assmann 2009; Sloterdijk 2009; Beck 2010, 44; Chirot 2012, 4–5.

influential studies on 'cosmic warfare' (2000; 2018; 2020) and Hector Avalos's elaboration on religions as sources of unnecessary scarcities that are based on illusory criteria (2013) share a robust focus on religious practices of intolerance and violence as resulting from essential religious traits. Outside the scholarly fields that focus on religion, researchers sometimes understand religion on the basis of modernist or secularist aversions and stress the anti-individualist authoritative traits and moral dualism that supposedly characterize religion (see for example Galtung 1994; Volkan 2004, 48–9; Fiske and Rai 2015, 50–7, 89–91, 107–31).

By contrast, minimalist approaches nuance the role of religion by arguing that most violence is not about religion but about preservation, socio-political and economic interests, or historical trauma. For example, in a landmark study William Cavanaugh (2009) argues that discourses on 'religious violence' in the West often contain sharp ideas about the distinction between religion and the secular state which leads to an overemphasis on violence perpetrated by 'religious' actors that is legitimized by particular religious beliefs, and an ignorance of state violence or nationalist violence as sources responsible for massive slaughter (see also Palaver, Rudolph and Regensburger 2016). Others approach the role of religion in violent conflict not by nuancing the impact of religious ideas and motives on conflict practices, but by pointing out that religion 'adds to' rather than 'causes' conflict. For example, Stuart Wright contends that it is important "to understand how religion can effectively fuel violence and exacerbate hostilities by invoking divine imprimatur on what are essentially ethnic, tribal, or political conflicts" (Wright, 2009, 17). Other approaches take their entry point not so much in religion or politics but in global and local contexts to understand how world-views, politics, social relations, and established symbolic registers work and how they contribute to conflict and violence (Appleby 2000; Wellman and Tokuna 2004; Wellman 2007). In 2006, religion scholars Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres published a volume on (religious) memorializations of violence linked to sites like Auschwitz, Medjugorje, and Ground Zero. Although the book contains fascinating case-studies, the focus is predominantly on religion, politics, and memory. What 'sites', and things related to these sites precisely contribute to religious modes of the memorialization of conflict is hardly addressed and needs to be explored more deeply.

The enormous increase of terrorism studies (often with vague understandings of religion, see Gunning and Jackson 2011; Francis 2016; Nanninga 2017) has at least partly dominated scholarly conversations in the last two decades, leading to diminished attention for more general studies on religion and conflict. As a result, topics such as radical belief, radicalization, religious militia,

jihadi groups, and human rights violations have become leading.[2] One significant line in these studies is the attention for authority structures. In such studies, some scholars trace a lineage of violence back to scriptural sources and authoritative hermeneutical traditions to explain current practices of believers. The term 'fundamentalism', which held a central place in scholarly and public debates at the beginning of this century, was predominantly built around such notions of scriptural authority, religious ideas and doctrine, and leadership in uncertain secular times (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003, 23–89; Bruce 2008; Herriot 2009, 148–51; Juergensmeyer 2008, 17–38). In most of these studies, materiality is only considered by implication. If things are addressed, it is because they are attacked, destroyed, or erected *because of* socio-religious tensions or traumatic pasts. Materiality rarely has a place in the analysis of religious conflict, fundamentalism, and terrorism. More often, transcendent themes such as 'cosmic war', the central theme in Mark Juergensmeyer's analyses (2008; 2018; 2020), an ontological dualism between good and evil (Ellens 2007) or the afterlife as (material) reward (Hoffman 2002, 33) are used in relation to peoples' willingness to commit violence under circumstances they consider as unjust or unreal. No doubt, these can be valuable perspectives, but they are also rather mentalistic approaches that understand religious identities one-sidedly formed by as theologized mindsets of religious traditions constructed around specific ideas and symbols and responding to current (political) topics that are perceived as threats.

In studies on genocide, attention for religion is predominantly focused on the reification of religion-based group differences, the content of beliefs (theologies), texts, or on the role of religious institutions (see for example the volume edited by Jacobs 2009). This special attention for religion in genocidal contexts as a cause or motive runs the danger of isolating, decontextualizing, and even reifying 'religion' as a causal element of mass death, but also of losing track of the complex discursive and material structures of genocide. Some detailed studies on genocide as complex case-studies, however, pay more attention to the complexity of religion as worldview, resonance, and community. Alexander Hinton's study on the cultural and religious dimensions of the Cambodian genocide (2005), for example, offers an interesting perspective on a genocidal infrastructure that resonates with Buddhist beliefs, patronage structures, and cultural models of social organization and revenge.

2 For a critical discussion of the ways in which a binary distinction between 'moderate' and 'radical' Muslims currently informs popular and policy-oriented understandings of Islam, see Van Es, Ter Laan, and Meinema 2021. For a critical assessment of the development of terrorism studies in the US, see Mills and Miller 2017.

In a similar vein, Vlekoslav Perica's detailed study (2002) on the role of religion and nationalism in Yugoslavia and during the Balkan War has keen interest in the impact of entanglements of discourses and religious identity on religious difference and geographical places like burial sites and mass graves (110, 118, 120, 152–4). But here too, the material dimensions of violence are addressed only by implication and a theoretical or methodological approach to study the role of things in conflict situations is not explicitly articulated. The materiality of weapons, death, or the dead body as trophy (see Larson 2014), the visual hierarchy of clothes, the impact of the destruction of religious symbols, the architecture and structure of concentration and destruction camps, but also the material visualization of group reifications, the erection and ritualized memorizations of mass violence in post-conflict situations, are all subjects that should be taken into account while studying genocide and genocidal structures. Breann Fallon's study on the 'fetishization' of the machete during the genocide in Rwanda (2017; 2020) may count as an exception and offers an interesting fresh material approach (see below).

2 Looking for Things

We thus see that a thorough analysis of materiality is often missing in the study of religion-related conflict. The study of *material religion*, by contrast, concentrates deeply on the role of materiality in the ways humans construct social relations and experience a 'beyond' or 'the divine'. Material religion scholars have studied the intimate interplay between materiality and meaning, often criticizing mentalistic interpretations of religion as situated in some "inner self" (Meyer 2015; Keller and Rubinstein 2017). A material religion approach takes "sensational operations of human bodies" and human interactions with various material media as the starting point for understanding religion (Plate 2014, 8; Meyer 2011). This means that smell, touch, vision, sound, all contribute to people's understanding of the world and to how people understand themselves and transcendental realities through sensed things. Birgit Meyer writes about "sensational forms" which she describes as "fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes" (Meyer 2011, 29–30). These forms are part of organized networks in which people act and through which people have a sense of community and a sense of immediacy. Form, Meyer asserts, is related to content, meaning, substance, and does not stand in opposition to it, because ideas and experiences are always mediated through material forms. Mate-

riality thus forms an important methodological entry point to study social life, because the construction of a sense of community always relies on the relations between physical human bodies, social practices, memories, and particular things. In the context of religion, sensational forms are complex socio-material hybrids that mediate ideas, presences, aesthetics, emotions, and epistemologies of immediacy. The term 'material form' combines form and senses in a non-duality of subject and thing. This means that the Kantian divide between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, the subjectivity of the 'I think' and the subjugation of what is thought to the categorical forms of the thinking subject is challenged by perspectives that focus on the interplay between form, senses, and content.

From this view, some studies on material religion have also focused on the ways in which objects may become 'things of conflict' in settings that are characterized by plurality. For example, in the edited volume *Taking Offense – Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*, Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Annemarie Korte (2018) explore how tensions and conflicts may arise around purportedly offensive images, which reveal conflicting sensibilities, value systems, and visual regimes of religious and non-religious groups in diverse societies. In other words, in diverse settings, particular images or visual performances may be considered offensive by one group, because they feature images or objects which usually play a different role – as cherished or rejected things – in the sensational forms of other (religious) groups (see also Van Es 2020). Thus, conflicts around allegedly offensive images often arise in socially and religiously diverse settings, in which various groups of people have different normative understandings about the ways in which people should relate to particular images or objects, or how images and objects can or should play a role in the mediation of divine 'presence'.

Scholars within the 'material turn' of religious studies, however, have less often focused on the materiality of violence *itself* and its impact on (religious) communities, on the ways in which religions manifest themselves materially in settings that are characterized by (violent) conflict, or on changing material infrastructures as a result of (violent) conflict. This may be the case, because various religious studies scholars who study religiously diverse settings, some with an emphasis on material religion, have warned that a focus on peace and conflict in religiously diverse settings may lead to one-dimensional analyses (Soares 2016, 676; Janson and Meyer 2016, 616). In studies with such a focus, 'peace' and 'conflict' are often used as uncritical terms which indicate differences *between* different religious groups, and which take religious boundaries for granted. Since this is indeed a weakness of some research on religion and conflict, we agree with this warning and argue that it is important to study how

religious boundaries are constantly drawn, contested, and negotiated within settings that are characterized by (memories of) conflict and violence. To do so, we feel that it is important to closely study the *material* aspects of religion and (violent) conflict in relation to which contestations around religious boundaries arise, because the ways in which social formations are 'imagined' (Anderson 2016) must become materialized through media in order to become tangible and experienced as 'real' (Meyer 2009). Before we will further reflect on different ways in which religion 'matters' in (violent) conflict, we will therefore explain why we think it is important to study conflict and violence from a material perspective.

3 Violence and Things

As argued above, the question of how materiality relates to conflict is not clearly addressed in most academic literature. Within conflict studies, conflicts are often understood in line with what Chris Mitchell formulated in 1981 as "any situation in which two or more 'parties' (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals" (17). Indeed, conflict is often understood as goal-oriented, and this might also be one of the reasons why materiality is not in the center of conflict-research as goals are often defined in non-material terms like justice, representation, inclusion, or recognition. Another reason why materiality is neglected in the study of conflict and violence might be related to sociological and philosophical perspectives on so-called epistemic, symbolic, and discursive violence. These understandings of violence as indirect and *nonphysical* have dominated academic discussions since the late 1960s when wide definitions of violence entered the academic arena of social sciences based on the writings of scholars such as Johan Galtung who introduced the term 'structural violence' (1969). Since the 1970s, the Bourdieuan concept of 'symbolic violence' gained popularity. With this term, Pierre Bourdieu coined a form of nonphysical violence that is always inherent to power differentials and exercised through often unconsciously accepted norms, relations, and duties. The term 'symbolic violence' has contributed deeply to the conflation of understandings of violence, power, discourse, and structure. Bourdieu's ideas had and still have a significant impact on racism studies, gender studies, and media studies. In these views, violence is often addressed without explicit consideration of materiality. These developments, although very important, have led to a blurring of conflict, power, representation, and violence. Nowadays, the term 'violence' is often used in such a broad manner across different disciplines within the

humanities, the social sciences, and in the media, that it is difficult to grasp its meaning (see Yates and Eckstrandt 2011, 1). Especially in studies working from post-structural perspectives, violence is understood in such a wide way that it loses especially its *material* significance and settles in human thinking, speaking, acting as an ever-present reality. Such views have understood violence not as a human possibility but rather as an omnipresent human reality (see Alexander 2012, 31–97). These understandings do not go without consequences. As Diane Enns (2012) has shown, these wide interpretations of violence have a deep and significant impact on how people understand and experience victimhood.

Taking this tradition seriously, Michel De Certeau discusses the interplay between discourse and violence and points to an important topic that interests us while writing about material religion and (violent) conflict. Whichever way we define violence, De Certeau claims, every definition "is inscribed in the place from which I speak of it" (De Certeau 1997, 29). The "place" in or by which one speaks and defines 'violence' is subject to one's standpoint and positionality (see also Talal Asad's comments on definitions as related to the interest of those doing the defining, Asad 2012, 37). De Certeau's focus is here on discourse and points to the impossibility to analyze and define violence without politicking it. However, such definitions also grant scholars the possibility not only to speak, but also to study the material aspects of the *place* from which she or he speaks, as a site. In *Religion and Violence*, Hent de Vries asks in a similar vein if we do "know, then, precisely where violence comes from, where it begins, resides, or ends, and what (or whom), exactly, it is directed at? Is it a (…) 'fact of life', even of 'spiritual life'?" The episteme of violence, whether to justify or speak against it, is always charged with the potentiality of (justifying) violence itself. De Vries asks rhetorically and almost ironically whether the silent individual gesture or the utopian end-state of nonviolence is the opposite of violence, and whether nonviolence is really nonviolent, "in the strict sense of the word?" (De Vries 2002, 137). While De Certeau, De Vries, and many other scholars (like Beatrice Hanssen 2000, Slavoj Žižek 2008, or Judith Butler 2007) discuss predominantly this intimacy of discourse and violence and – as a result – explore the vague and ever-shifting definitions and boundaries of violence, the question of conflict and violence related to objects, matter, things in networks and infrastructures is hardly addressed. Matter is often seen as part of discursive epistemologies and thus as always part of a wide socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious context. As a result, things run the danger to become liquid and fade into the background of conflictual discursive regimes. Things become vague, bodies become a category (or become mere statistics about casualties), sounds soft, and contrast, colors, shapes less important. At this point we need to clarify how we conceptualize

conflict and violence within this volume. We use the term 'violence' in a narrow sense to describe an infliction of physical harm that is directed against bodies and/or material objects. We use 'conflict' as a wider term, to describe any situation in which ideal social relations, as they are imagined by different social actors, are consciously or unconsciously disturbed (see below).

It is our conviction that more emphasis on the materiality of conflict situations, conflict dynamics, and conflict effects, could contribute to a sharper analysis of how, when, and why conflict turns violent. This means that the analysis of conflict situations should consider social relations that are shaped by 'sensational forms', geographical sites and material environments, the presence and places of objects such as weapons, buildings, and material resources such as food or oil, histories that are memorized through monuments and (ritualized) story-telling on sites, and media that transmit particular imageries of violated bodies and buildings. We will therefore discuss various scholarly works that provide us with ideas on how the role of materiality in conflict situations may be understood and point into directions that lead us on a track of a scholarly approach to religion-related conflict that takes materiality into account.

Recent quantitative research has contributed to questions of conflict moderating the overrepresentations of 'identity' in conflict studies and asking more attention for accidental circumstances and social relations based on data gathered from conflict zones (see Berman et al. 2018). We think that this focus on accidental circumstances and direct social loyalties (see also Kippenberg 2012) provides possibilities to include a material perspective in the analysis of religion and (violent) conflicts. Stathis N. Kalyvas' study *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006) and Randall Collins' influential micro-analysis of violence (Collins 2008; 2015) provide methodological entry points to pay attention to micro-dynamic features and accidental circumstances that contribute to eruptions of violence. These studies do not give analytical weight to explanatory terms in the analysis of conflict like 'ideology', 'religion', and even some well-established definitions of what 'violence' should be. Kalyvas argues that "the habitually cited causes of group division (e.g., ideological, social, or ethnic polarization) often fail to account for the actual dynamics of violence" (2006, 5). Collins' micro-sociological research in turn directs our attention even sharper to the circumstances and social dynamics that characterize conflict situations, in order to understand how people interact *physically* during (violent) conflict. His research has yielded valuable insights into the impact of the positions of bodies, faces, and sites on erupting social tensions becoming violent. Collins' analysis shows how the human senses experience the realities of violent conflict; how bodies behave and what people (think they) see. He understands violence and conflict as strongly ritualized human interac-

tions around situational effervescence and asymmetric emotional relations between victim(s) and perpetrator(s). Based on this view, which has impacted social science analyses of violence (Weenink 2014; Weininger, Lareau, and Lizardo 2019), Collins denies the idea that humans are naturally prone to violence and criticizes the wide definitions discussed above. Similarly, Max Bergholz' much appraised case-study *Violence as a Generative Force* (2016) on eruptions of violence in the Kulen-Vakuf region (Bosnia) in 1941, is, as we see it, an exploration of how particular material and social circumstances impact how and why people commit violence. Bergholz shows how eruptions of violence are not so much the result of identity-constructions and deep ethnic or religious cleavages, but rather the result of complex social dynamics, accidental events, the use of alcohol, narratives, gossip, leadership, geography, confrontations with burial sites, and so on. He concludes his book by showing how violence creates, or at least 'hardens' identities instead of the other way around.

These foci on conflict dynamics do not take boundaries between groups for granted and criticize understandings of violent conflict as the result of (religious, ethnic or other) boundaries. As such, these studies help us to sharpen our focus on the social and material circumstances in which conflict arises and is played out. These studies have certainly not yet become mainstream in the study of *religious* conflict. An exception is Ziya Meral's study on religion and violence. He emphasizes the importance of analyzing conflict dynamics when he argues that religious identities are "often shaped by exposure to violence" (Meral 2018, 21) instead of the other way around. From these authors, we learn that 'religion' is not a generic category to explain violence, and that we should not prioritize the role of religion above political and economic circumstances per se. Although these studies do not discuss religion separately, they contribute highly to analyses of religion-related conflict and should be considered when studying the role of religion in conflict situations. Besides having sensibility for the circumstances in which (violent) conflict occurs, what is striking in these studies is that they all point to the role of materiality in constructing the dynamics of conflict without explicitly reflecting on materiality as an analytical term or tool. Still, these studies provide possibilities to pay more attention to materiality as part of conflict dynamics. For example, Bergholz points out how exhumations in Kulen Vakuf in 1941 triggered feelings of revenge and new episodes of violence which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Muslim and Croat men, women, and children. Not the feelings of being different, having a threatened identity, or being excluded, but material characteristics such as the exhumation and presence of dead bodies of acquaintances and relatives determined the course of the conflict.

Another branch of research that we deem important for creating possibilities to include materiality in the analysis of religion-related conflict are studies on the visuality of conflict and the mediatization of violence. For example, Meral asks attention for the role of media and shows how the spread of violence, in contexts such as Nigeria and Egypt, is for a substantial part related to the broadcasting of visuals, allegations, and rumors about violence (Meral, 21, 79; see also Sampson 2012, 123–4; Spyer 2002; Stewart and Strathern 2004; van Liere 2020b). The notion that mediatization of violence impacts understandings of enmity, encouraging hatred and revenge, has been part and parcel of propaganda machines throughout the 20st century (see Keen 1988). More recently, and especially since 9/11 and the accelerated development of the world wide web, a substantial amount of literature has seen the light discussing relations between the ways in which people understand conflict and visual media (Žarkov 2008; Marsden and Savigny 2009; Tulloch and Blood 2012; Bräuchler 2013; Nanninga 2019). Although the direct impact of modern media visualities on human aggression is disputed (Freedman 2013), there is little doubt that the epistemology of human conflict is influenced by visual media, as has for example clearly been shown by the rise of islamophobia in the wake of 9/11, or by the impact of online films about the Syrian war on mostly young Muslims (Vacca 2020; Valentini, Lorusso, and Stephan 2020). Seeing mediated destruction, and watching mediated suffering and violence, contributes to how people understand conflict situations. Fragile and violated human bodies are often part of visual strategies to raise awareness or evoke particular interpretations of violence. If medialized violence is related to religious symbols and to actors, both as perpetrators or as victims, identity formations are often along religious lines, whether in conflict situations or online (Van Liere 2020a).

These insights in the material dynamics of conflict and digital media direct our attention to complex microsocial relations, material environments, and the depiction of violence instead of deep divisions of religious and political identities (see Kalyvas 14–15). This drives us away from easy frames of religious conflict and violence as predominantly issues of power, authority, or texts. Instead, our attention should be on compound circumstances and accidental situations, on discourses (speeches, gossip, rumor) that are mediated via material means, in the sense that various media always have a particular material presence (in the form of photographs, phones, internet connections, etc.). Understood in this sense, performances, specific acts, and indeed visualities such as pictures, images, and videos contribute to how people grasp and imagine conflicts and violence, and act in an intermingled network that often blends social identities. Indeed, from this perspective, 'identities', are often

results of conflict rather than causes of conflict. Consequently, we believe that it is productive to study conflicts and violence from a material perspective because it helps us to analyze how conflict dynamics are shaped by accidental circumstances, microsocial interactions, and the visual mediation of violence.

Our contribution to this field is that things can be conflict triggers, conflict enhancers, conflict relaxers, and conflict changers. Of course, we do not want to neglect or bluntly deny the importance of discourse and how language can stereotype or stigmatize, create tensions between people and groups, or (re)create discursive imageries of pasts and presents. Many scholarly studies have been written on this subject already. The point we want to make is that violent conflict can be understood more fully by comprehending how matters become 'things of conflict' and function in conflict settings. This means that we need to understand what things 'do', why and when. To this topic we will turn in the next section.

4 Religion and (Violent) Conflict: A Network Approach

How can materiality be a point of access to understand conflict and violence in which religion plays a role? We understand a 'thing' as an actual entity that can enter relationships through practices of seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and, as such, as an important part of vibrant and complex social and material networks that, in co-action with human actors, discourses and practices, establishes specific situations that may or may not involve tension, conflict, and/or violence. Also, more than the term *object*, which is often invoked in relation to 'subject-object' binaries and defines objects primarily in terms of their use and utility, a *thing* refers to what is excessive in objects in ways that go beyond the realm of rationality and utility (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 16). Understood in this sense, things contain a "force as a sensuous presence or metaphysical presence" (Brown 2001, 5). A thing may break through its 'objectness' and disturbs the Kantian subject-object binary by not being subjugated to a subjective epistemology but by having an overwhelming power of its own. Things belong to the material infrastructure of social life and play an important role in the construction of social networks. With 'networks' we understand heterogeneous clusters of actions, things, and discourse, that constantly create specific social situations, dynamics, and practices. These networks are not necessarily limited to social groups and value-systems although this might be the case. As a result, actions, and thus also acts of conflict, are always embedded and must be situated within such complex networks.

Reasoning from a network analysis in terrorism studies, Charles Tilly has criticized dispositional approaches that "fix on orientations of actors that precede and presumably cause action" (Tilly 2005, 19). Such studies on terrorism reduce conflict to the individual's worldview and try to identify biographical points of radicalization without giving much attention to the complexity of networks. To put it bluntly: many governmental and scholarly understandings of terrorists try to inscribe individual practices into wide metanarratives of 'terrorism'. Tilly proposes relational perspectives that "take interactions among social sites as their starting points" (2005, 19) and understand the characteristics of these sites as the results of interactions. This emphasis on social networks can be taken widely as related to a complex variety of communications, connections, relations, but also narratives, circumstances, and social nodes of meaning-(re)construction. In short, as phrased by A. Abbott, actions, not actors are "the primitives of the social process" (Abbott 2007, 7, see also Collins 2008). This view, that stands in a Durkheimian tradition, has a sharp focus on circumstances and asks how conflict actors define and position themselves and are defined and positioned through actions and networks in which these actions are deemed meaningful.

This network-perspective provides possibilities to include perspectives on materiality as an essential part of conflict-analysis. Jacob Stump and Priya Dixit (2013) for example point to 'sites' as integral parts of networks. They usefully define sites as places where human actions occur that are symbolically, materially, and informationally linked. A network is a "set of sites connected by ongoing relations" (143). As the boundaries of networks are often blurred, making sense of (conflict) situations becomes a complex and ongoing process related to changing circumstances while 'identity' pertains directly to an intermingled process of defining "who 'I' and 'we' are in relation to some other site or set of sites" (148). This focus on networks thus includes the analysis of interrelated socio-material sites. The question that is important for us now is what things 'do' in conflict-situations, how things are positioned on these sites (also digitally), how they are constructed as 'talked about' topics of social concern and attention, and become symbolic forms foregrounded by, and affecting social relations, and how they inform and contribute to conflict dynamics. As we are interested in things of conflict and religion, we must ask how things are positioned, perceived, narrated in networks that include religion, and how religion contributes to these positionings, perceptions, sensations, and narrations. In our view, things can become 'things of conflict' if they discursively (through narration, gossip, texts, media), materially (as sites, places, on people, as human bodies), and sensationally (when they overwhelm, comfort, or provoke anger and fear) disturb social relationships. We understand 'disturbed' in the

sense that the expectations people have and the virtuous models they practice and feel as 'right' to mark these expectations (see below), are troubled.[3]

Before we will further clarify the role of religion in networks in which 'things of conflict' figure, it is important to further develop a perspective on how things of conflict work, what they 'do', and when they 'do' something. As we discussed above, we understand things as integrated into complex networks, as charged by, and charging social relationships. Most networks in our context of study are at the same time local, global, social, cultural, religious, and material. In this sense, we defined a 'thing of conflict' as an essential part of vibrant networks that, in co-action with discourses and practices, contribute to conflict situations (see above). A thing is never alone, never 'equal' to other things as if we could establish a category of things (despite the economic reproduction of some things on a large scale) and identify the meaning of things. Although we could understand things as actualized multiplicities, as hybrids, or as Deleuzian assemblages, for our subject the materiality of a thing in its socio-historical context, its complex representation of what it is to some but not to others, its being in or out of place, its fragile or powerful appearance, and the way it medializes and is medialized are important elements to understand how a 'thing' relates to conflict. Indeed, while we underscore the importance of analyzing the discursive dimensions of conflict, we also emphasize that a perspective on religion-related conflict that does not show how discourse and materiality are entangled, or that neglects the analysis of things in particular contexts and infrastructures is too narrow and runs the danger of overlooking certain aspects of conflict and violence. Thus, things may be special, but they are not alone. They do have "social lives" (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) as they are moved, cherished, venerated, destroyed. They have an agency as they stare back, provoke, and evoke feelings of (un)ease or (un)security like certain clothes, a separatist flag, a holy book, food, a building. Earlier in this chapter we wrote that anything could become a thing of conflict. To understand this, it is important to see things as implicated in social networks. Things can be gendered, religionized, ideologized, and may function differently in the "aesthetic formations" (Meyer 2009, see below) of different

3 We are aware that 'social relationships' can be taken wide and must also include non-human relationships, relations with and between living organisms such as plants, animals, viruses, and also between surroundings and molecular systems and orderings. From this perspective, some scholars have argued that matter "becomes" rather than "is" (Coole and Frost 2010; Keller and Rubinstein 2017). Our focus in this volume is on relations between humans and things. The dynamic interplay between matter, religion, and (violent) conflict almost per definition rejects the idea that a 'thing' is static.

groups of people. They always raise possibilities of being disputed, displaced, or forgotten as social relations alter. Thus, while things may play vital roles in social networks, we feel that it is important not to over-emphasize the agency of things, since, in our view, the agency of a thing ultimately depends on the social network in which they are embedded, and its relations to "people, animals, plants, places, and other things, for its existence and its functioning" (Latory 2018, 25).

Things of conflict may be special things that may be owned and put at special places but can also break into the social (symbolic or physical) space of communities and become disputed or even feared. Things of conflict are so to say charged with the moral views of communities, which may reshuffle communications and mark an exceedance of expectations regarding social relations. A thing of conflict disrupts these expectations, establishes, or affirms anxious perspectives. Inspired by scholarship within material religion, we propose a sharp focus on how people interact, how they behave, what they wear, eat, and how places and spots are amalgamated with processes of inclusion and exclusion. For us, the question becomes imperious of how, when, and why various things like clothes, food, places, machines, structures, statues, weapons, photographs, paintings, (are used to) negotiate social relationships. How do 'things' become meaningful within communities and signify how communities relate to 'others' and to themselves? How are these things charged with meaning that mark these social relations? When do things mirror, look back, and affect? How does discursive attention, the arrangement of things at places, and social projection create a 'thing of conflict' out of matter? To get some grip on this subject we need to relate things closely to the imageries, histories, and practices of communities to understand when and how things become contested, charged with meaning, and play a role in the construction of conflict positions.

5 Becoming a Thing of Conflict

David Morgan argues that members of communities need "symbolic forms such as songs, dance, images, and food to allow them to participate in something that is larger both spatially and temporally than their immediate environment" (Morgan 2005, 59). Writing about the relation between things and communities, Birgit Meyer (2009) stresses how a sense of community is not simply imagined in the minds of its members, but closely connected to aesthetic formations, a term which she coined to point to the ways in which communities are performed, mediated, and sensationally experienced. This

means that things are part of networks that negotiate social relations, but also that particular things may play highly diverse roles within the aesthetic formations of different groups that live together in plural configurations. Social relations are determined by what people expect from each other, by the norms and values that are normally met, and by practices and rituals that sustain and recreate these expectations. Conflict disturbs so to say these relations people have with others within and outside their communities and networks.

At this point, the 'virtuous violence theory' developed by Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai can be helpful. This theory argues that people live together in complex relationships that are structured according to several relational models such as equality, proportionality (such as fair distribution), hierarchy, and unity. These models determine what is considered to be right and wrong in the relationships that are established within and between different social groups. They define what is normally expected in social relations. What different groups of people consider to be moral and immoral behavior is determined by their (implicit) perspectives on these models. Fiske and Rai define morality as those intentions, motivations, evaluations, and emotions that are active in realizing ideal models of social relationships in a culturally meaningful way (Fiske and Rai 2015, 135). So, most social actions that people perform are moral and related to these models. Morality in this sense can be understood as an attempt to realize ideal relationships that underline the coherence and consistency of the community and the relations between different groups of people. How 'we' interact with others, what 'we' can expect from each other and from others, and how 'we' assess and give meaning to our own actions towards others, are aspects that are inherent to moral frames. Violent conflict emerges from social relationships, Fiske and Rai assert, and can best be understood as an effort to 'restore' or 'regulate' these relationships (273–4). At the same time, moral frames are formed by these expectations and practices. Our daily lives are structured through ritual chains that are embedded in social expectations and are often (although not always) focused on conflict prevention.

The ritual dimension of the quotidian is convincingly stressed by Collins (in line with Erving Goffman) who has argued that social interaction is determined by ritualized gestures and practices that create social energy and dynamics. In Collins' view, content, value, belief and conviction are determined by ritual chains and float on the social energy by and through which people communicate and add value to situations (Collins 2004, 75–88). These rituals are material through and through; people adapt how they act, move, and touch to what others do. They share things (from sacred objects like the hostess to food shared during religious celebrations), move things, appreciate

things together (like clothes, music), exchange things, or relate themselves to objects in ways that are deemed appropriate within particular material settings (such as a mosque). Things are often at the heart of social relations and mediate, and are mediated by, these relations. Conflicts and violence may not only arise because of efforts to restore ideal social relations between various (groups of) people, but also to restore ways in which people interact with specific things (which for example should be treated with respect or avoided). Because things are at the heart of social relations, the damaging or destruction of things can also communicate perspectives on social relations. In a compelling study, Andrew Herscher reflects on the role of architecture and the meaning of its destruction during the 1998–99 conflict between Serbia and the Kosovo Liberation Army. Herscher argues that the destruction of architecture that took place in Kosovo must be understood as an important form of social inscription and cultural production (Herscher 2010). Targeting architecture in conflict zones is a form of political violence that (re)forms agencies, determines heritage, and contains views on social relations between different groups. However, things also play an important role in restoring social relationships, like gifts, money, places, or food (see Tarusarira, this volume) while unexpected rearrangements of things in relation to human bodies in the public space can be understood as efforts to challenge stereotypes (see Van Es, this volume).

Things of conflict thus pertain to the interrelatedness of social networks and material infrastructures. Through this interrelatedness, ordinary objects may become 'things of conflict', for example when people interact with objects in ways that do not match the sensibilities or expectations of others. Things and what is done to things can breach what is commonly expected and disturb ideal relationships, like bulldozers that are sent by the government to break down parts of a neighborhood and destroy people's livelihood, sunglasses put on the head of a Buddha statue, the portrait of a political leader in a monastery, a nationalist flag, etc. Things can suggest structures of inclusion and exclusion and raise political or religious quarrel. In these examples, some of them discussed in this volume, things of conflict disrupt the ritualized forms of what is normally expected and may become symbols of unease and conflict.

Thus, a focus on how things of conflict function within social networks helps us to understand more deeply how conflicts emerge and develop. Indeed, things are entangled with the complexity of actions, perceptions, practices, beliefs, emotions, and discourses. Materiality however often remains 'unseen' in the analysis of religion-related conflict (and in conflict studies more generally). Therefore, we opt for a more complete understanding of religion-related conflict by including materiality as part of conflict networks.

In this section, we wrote about the complicated contexts in and through which objects become 'things of conflict' which provoke unease, tension, disruption. In the next section, we dive deeper into this subject and identify two different ways to approach 'things of conflict'.

6 Religion and (Violent) Conflict: A Material Approach

How can we approach the intersection between religion, conflict, and materiality? First, building on existing scholarly work within the 'material turn' within religious studies, we take inspiration from scholarly literature on 'iconoclasm', which focuses on conflicts that arise around particular objects within the context of religious practice, which are thought to mediate the presence of the divine or something 'beyond'. In this volume, we seek to expand the interpretation of iconoclasm to conflicts around objects that evoke an idea and experience of particular religious groups or communities. Secondly, taking inspiration from the recently developed 'infrastructural approach' to religion and the study of religion in urban settings, we focus on the wider material arrangements on which religious communities and practices rely. Such a perspective on religious matters not only allows us to theorize how objects are a part of the material infrastructures of religious networks and may become 'things of conflict' as outlined above, but also to reflect on the ways in which religions manifest themselves materially in settings characterized by (violent) conflict.

6.1 *Iconoclasm and Idolatry: Conflicts around 'Iconic' Objects*

The study of material religion and conflict often pertains to conflicts that arise around objects that are thought to mediate a divine presence or access a transcendental 'beyond'. Such conflicts have often been studied through a focus on iconoclasm, both within religious studies and within the fields of visual arts and visual semiotics. The term 'iconoclast' (from the Greek *eikon* – image, and *klastes* – breaking) appeared in literature for the first time in 1595 (Noyes 2013, 3) and is used for episodes of 'image breaking' especially in Christian and Islamic histories (although the word does not exist in Arabic). The term has long been reserved for 'iconoclast' movements in the 8th and 9th centuries and during the 16th century Protestant revolutions in Western Europe. Gradually, the term 'eikon', James Noyes writes, covered 'idol', 'image', and 'icon'. These conflated meanings make Noyes conclude that the term iconoclasm refers to an "attack on or destruction of an object, be it a statue, a painting, a tomb, a building, or a natural object like a tree that is believed to have some kind of

spiritual power of sacred significance, and which is 'worshipped' in the place of the 'true' God" (Noyes 2013, 3–4). This understanding of iconoclasm reveals how people in diverse settings may have conflicting 'semiotic ideologies', or different understandings of the role that particular objects play in mediating divine presence (cf. Keane 2009; Meyer and Stordalen 2019). Throughout various histories of Christianity, for example, indigenous religious traditions have been accused of 'idolatry', and the objects that figure in indigenous religious practices dismissed as human-made idols (Latour and Weibel 2002; Meyer 2019).[4] In such settings, iconoclastic violence may be directed towards these idols that are, in the eyes of those who perform the iconoclasm, falsely worshipped in the place of the 'true' God.

In a similar fashion, the concept of 'fetishism' also points to conflicting understandings about (the value of) human relations with things and their attitudes towards objects (Latory 2018, 31; Ellen 1998, 219). In European languages, the term is often used to refer to 'a scandalous materiality' in which people mistakenly imbue objects with power and agency (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 14). Like the term 'idolatry', the concept of fetishism spread to non-European contexts through missionization and colonization, where it was used by European observers to denote religious ideas and practices which were deemed to be dark, backward, and primitive (Meyer 2019, 88–9; see also Chidester 1996; Keane 2009). As such, concepts such as 'idolatry' and 'fetishism' informed theories of socio-evolutionary difference between Europeans and subjected populations in ways that legitimized and supported colonialism, which not rarely was enforced with violence (Latory 2018; Chidester 1996).

Lately however, the term has received fresh attention from scholars who are aware of this painful history but use the term critically to denote a thing or concept that exercises power, manipulates, or draw people into actions. For example, Bruno Latour (2010) has reflected on ideas of difference and (power-)relations that were and still are inherent to the term 'fetish'. By proposing the term 'factish' as an alternative for 'fetish', he reshuffles the modernist division between 'facts' as 'truths' and 'fetishes' as 'beliefs' in order to save the power of the fetish and the objectivity of facts. Alternatively, Roy Ellen has written about the conflation of ideas with 'objects' through which the object (a thing or concept) becomes spirited by the idea (of for example an ideology, a religion, a conviction) (Ellen 1998, 221). This has been critically adopted by Breann

4 Islamic movements may similarly dismiss things that figure in indigenous religious practices as idolatry (*shirk*), see for example: Kresse 2018.

Fallon (2017; 2020) who has written a keen study on the machete as a fetishized object during the Rwandese genocide. In our view, these scholarly works provide interesting possibilities to further reflect on the roles of 'things of conflict' as sensational forms, and on the social relations and power relations in which these things are embedded.[5]

Critical studies into the genealogy and politics of terms such as iconoclasm, idolatry, and fetishism provide important avenues to theorize the relation between materiality, religion, and conflict. The chapters in this volume, however, mostly do not focus on conflicts around different material ways to mediate divine presence or to access a transcendent realm. It is vital for our argument not to confine 'things' that effect and affect religious relations to sacred objects with iconic reputations, but to extend the interpretation to objects that evoke the idea and experience of the (religious) community. Thus understood, we think that particular things function in such ways that they are vested with iconic powers, in the sense that they occupy a special place in the collective memories, understandings, and experiences of religious communities. Jeffrey Alexander writes that the iconic is first of all a social experience, not a form of communication: "To be iconically conscious is to understand without knowing (…). It is to understand by feeling, by contact, by 'the evidence of the senses', rather than the mind" (Alexander 2008, 782). Iconic things have a symbolic power that consist of the experience of the actors who connect and reconnect within a dynamic web of meaning. "Actors", Dominik Bartmanski and Alexander contend, "have iconic consciousness when they experience material objects, not only understanding them cognitively or evaluating them morally but also feeling their sensual, aesthetic force" (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 1; see Qin and Song 2020 on the power of Buddhist symbols). Objects may thus become 'things of conflict' not only because people have conflicting views about ways to mediate divine presence, but also because particular objects play 'iconic' roles in the collective understandings of the social relations that characterize particular societies or religious groups. Examples may range from a synagogue that is surrounded by a 'ring of peace' organized by Muslims to mark their inclusion within Norwegian society (Van Es, this volume), or discussions about the ways national calendars include or exclude particular religious groups (Baumgartner, this volume), to photographs that are used in specific settings to shock, convince, and strengthen social ties (van Liere, this volume) or the houses, schools,

5 Also, in our view, these approaches of 'fetishization' could benefit and be enriched by taking microsociological perspectives on derailment into account as discussed by Collins (2008; 2015) and Weenink (2014).

and religious buildings on which the religious life of Nubian Muslims in the diverse neighborhood of Kibera in Kenya depends (Wilks, this volume). In cases where such objects would be (violently) destroyed, altered, or threatened, iconoclasms are not so much about the destruction of things that are falsely worshipped in place of any true God, but rather understood as an attack on the social relations and sensational experiences that are cherished by certain groups of people. The destruction of an object is at the same time a reshuffling of relations and can create violent responses from people who feel the iconic power of objects even more so at the moment of their destruction or demolition. Iconoclasm is not only about the Gods; it is about resettling human relationships.[6]

6.2 *Conflicts around Religious Infrastructures*

As indicated previously, we find it important not to confine a material analysis of religion-related conflict to objects that play a role in mediating divine presence or in the experience of a transcendental realm. Things are embedded in social relations, made important by actions, rituals, memories, and discourses, while actions, rituals, memories, and discourses imbue materiality. Disturbances of social relations ripple through their material dimensions. To further develop a focused theoretical perspective on the ways in which religion 'matters' in (violent) conflict, we take inspiration from the recently developed 'infrastructural' approach to the study of religion (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020). Drawing on the material turn within religious studies, the study of 'religious infrastructures' aims to direct attention towards the (socio)material arrangements that act as enabling conditions for religious practices and the communal lives of religious groups. Here, an 'infrastructure' is conceptualized as the relations between people, objects, technologies, ideas, regulations, and capacities which are gathered in shifting configurations and circulated across space (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020). Similar to our conceptualization of 'networks' (see above), the concept of 'religious infrastructure' thus points to the complex relations and arrangements between (human) agency, things, and semiotics, although the concept of 'religious infrastructure' more narrowly points to material, technological, and semiotic arrangements that sustain religious practice and communal life.

6 An unexplored but related field is the material imagination of iconic things that appears in and around conflict situations in the forms of visions and dreams. In a short overview of narratives collected after the Ambon civil war (1999–2002) it was striking that iconic things like Bibles, churches, and church bells regularly played a strong protecting role in post-conflict narratives (van Liere and van Dis 2018).

This understanding highlights how religious practices and communal life are entangled with material arrangements which are not commonly coded as 'religious', and how religious practices and these wider material arrangements may affect one another. Thus, where the material turn within religious studies has often focused on the ways in which objects mediate religious experiences, the concept of 'religious infrastructure' more broadly focuses on the ways in which specific material arrangements enable or restrict religious life. Examples range from the funding streams behind evangelization campaigns to work-free days necessary to celebrate religious holidays; from market stalls that benefit from the proximity of mosques, to the provision of health care, education, or other social services by religious groups or organizations. In this sense, the study of religious infrastructures is also closely related to the study of religion in urban settings, in which scholars have studied how religions spatially inscribe themselves into cities through places of worship or living pious lives in particular neighborhoods (Oosterbaan 2005; Knott 2008; Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016), how secular governments have managed the physical presence of various religious groups in diverse societies (Verkaaik and Tamimi Arab 2013; Burchardt 2021), or even how religious 'matters' such as church buildings are re-evaluated and valued as 'cultural heritage' within secularized societies such as the Netherlands (Meyer 2019).

In our view, this focus on the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life rely is relevant for the study of (violent) conflict, not in the last place because infrastructures are also deeply political (Larkin 2008; Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020; Wilks, this volume). They are not neutral conduits of people, objects, ideas, or resources. Instead, they provide and foreclose various possibilities for action and feeling through material and relational arrangements, which can both strengthen or reduce social bonds, tensions, and socio-spatial patterns of inequality. From this perspective, it becomes clear that conflicts can arise in settings that are characterized by religious plurality, in which different religious groups with divergent infrastructural capacities may compete for limited space, resources, or political power. Also, conflicts may arise in political constellations that are characterized by a form of political secularism, in which states seek to protect the equal rights and freedom of religion of different religious groups. In such settings, tensions may occur that result from unequal infrastructural access of various religious communities to resources, livelihoods, or political opportunities, or of the varying possibilities different religious groups have to engage in religious practices within particular material arrangements (Baumgartner, this volume).

Furthermore, religious infrastructures can tremendously be affected by conflict or violence, which may damage or destroy the material arrangements

on which religious practices depend, while religious infrastructures may also adapt themselves accordingly. Episodes of tension, conflict, or violence (in past, presence, or potential future) may inscribe themselves into geographical landscapes and cities and affect the physical organization of religious practice and communal life (Stockmans and Büscher 2017; Bou Akar 2018; Wilks, this volume). The presence of (potential) violence or conflict may also affect the ways in which different religious groups live together in plural configurations (Buckley-Zistel 2006; 2008; Larkin 2014; Kirby, Sibanda and Charway 2021), for example through the physical separation of Muslim and Christian communities in different neighborhoods (Van Klinken 2001; Ostien 2009; Bou Akar 2018). At the same time, religious infrastructures may (be forced to) adapt to the presence of tension, conflict, or violence. Religious groups may physically prepare themselves for the possibility of violence in settings characterized by mistrust and tension, in ways that increase the likelihood that actual violence may occur (Spyer 2002). Religious groups may also offer necessary health care or relief in conflict settings, offering recipients of aid an infrastructure on which their survival depends, which may simultaneously tie them more closely to particular religious authorities or groups (Meinema 2020). In other situations, conflicts and violence may force people to flee from warn-torn areas, presenting them – as well as those who stay behind – with material challenges to sustain communal ties and religious practices (Meyer and Van der Veer 2021; Wilks, this volume). Finally, the occurrence of violent conflicts may also inspire acts of solidarity or attempts to restore peace, for example by symbolically marking and protecting the buildings in which the religious practices of a community that is threatened take place (Van Es, this volume; Tarusarira, this volume).

Thus, in our view, the attention to religious infrastructure relates well to the network approach we discussed above and the attention for local contexts and accidental circumstances as co-determining social tensions. A focus on religious infrastructure furthermore opens two important avenues to study how religion matters in situations of (violent) conflict. First, it directs our attention to the ways in which conflicts can occur around the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life depend. This includes situations in which different religious groups compete for resources, space, or opportunities, as well as conflicts that arise around particular infrastructural inequalities between different religious groups (Baumgartner, this volume). In such situations, particular objects which are not necessarily coded as religious may become 'things of conflict', because they play crucial roles in the material arrangements on which religious practice and the flourishing of particular religious communities rely (Wilks, this volume). Second, a focus on religious

infrastructures makes us attentive to the ways in which the occurrence of conflict and/or violence may affect the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life depend. Here, the question is how the infrastructural possibilities and limitations of particular religious groups are affected, influenced, and adjusted in situations that are characterized by tensions, conflict, and/or violence (Van Es, this volume; Meinema, this volume).

7 Approaching Material Religion, Conflict, and Violence

As stated, this volume discusses the interface between materiality, violence, and religion from a perspective that focuses on social micro-dynamics, circumstances, networks, and religious infrastructures. The things of conflict discussed are not necessarily 'religious things' that connect religious practitioners to sacred or spiritual entities. Instead, as we have emphasized, a thing of conflict can be anything that is part of religious infrastructures and contributes to understandings of social networks. It can be something that may suddenly attract attention and become important, that may open up deep memories and fears of exclusion and mediate complex histories, but that may also be 'just there', something that becomes meaningful and negotiates power struggles, provides comfort, or points to the presence of social groups who are understood as 'others'. This multilayered approach to religion, materiality, conflict, and violence is addressed in the chapters of this volume.

Younes Saramifar proposes a specific focus on how to access things of conflict. In his thought-provoking chapter, he rejects the idea that objects should be accessed as representing or signifying religious ideas, feelings, or doctrines. In the process of unpacking acts of killing, things are 'partners' rather than significations of human relations. Using Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, Saramifar describes how things gather around religion, relate to religion, shape religiosity, help believers to believe, but without becoming religious things. Using his fieldnotes which he took during his participant observation in combat zones among Shia combatants fighting the Islamic State of Iraq between 2015 to 2018, he shows how things of conflict such as weapons, collaborate with combatants in such ways that they can make sense of their lives under tense circumstances. Stressing 'objectness', he acknowledges how humans attempt to access things of conflict based on their potentials and accidental features. Saramifar believes that this emphasis helps to gain a better understanding of – what he calls – people's socialization *in* violence. Thus, religions and ideologies should not be overemphasized in analyzing violent conflict, but attention should be given to how objects shape specific situations

during combat. Concentrating on the presence and presentation of a rifle for example may help to comprehend how humans relate to what they do and why they do it. Violence, so to say, is a specific entanglement as it always takes place in specific situations charged with things, actions, and relations.

Daan Oostveen explores how the religious traditions of Buddhism and Islam within the People's Republic of China (PRC) are approached in radically different ways, even though both religions are legally recognized in China. Through a comparison of the material politics of the Chinese state towards these two religious traditions, Oostveen analyses how Buddhist groups have been supported by the government to develop large infrastructural projects, while the religious infrastructures that support Islamic worship and practice have increasingly been closed or put under surveillance. As poignant examples, Oostveen describes how on the one hand, the PRC has developed internment camps and surveillance practices which significantly undermine Islamic worship and practice of the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang province of China, while on the other hand, the PRC has developed several state-funded 'Buddhist universities' which formally train Buddhist officials of the Buddhist Union of China. Through this analysis, Oostveen shows how despite the PRC's adoption of a more permissive stance towards religions since the opening and reform era, the PRC continues to hold tight control over the religious infrastructures of different religious communities in China. This demonstrates how the PRC not only aims to regulate religious views, but also directly impacts the material forms through which followers of different religious traditions express themselves within the PRC.

In a similar vein, but from a bottom-up perspective, Tammy Wilks shows how state violence becomes intimate, emotive, and embodied. In 2018, bulldozers demolished houses, schools, and communal places of religious groups to start a new project to construct a bypass-road through the heart of Kibera, Kenya. In a sensitive study based on participant observations and interviews, Wilks studies what this meant for the physical and material landscape of the neighborhood in relation to religious and interreligious life. She understands the bypass as a symbol of state violence that fundamentally reshuffled the way Nubian Muslims in Kibera related to their past, present, and future. Since land, buildings and homes were demolished, the existential and religious places of people became endangered. Wilks traces the consequences of state violence in the biography of Bibi Jaina, a Nubian Muslim lady in her sixties whose life intertwines with the Kiberan land. For her, as for many Nubians, property holds significant religious and moral meanings as *barakat* and sustains a religiosity that relates Nubians to their past and their futures. Wilks describes this as "performing property", a mediation of *barakat* through property, which

contributes to the sensitivity that Kiberans belong to this land and the other way around. Land, property, and the burial site mediates Bibi Jaina's connection to the Nubian community's past, present, and future which informs her understanding of being a Nubian Muslim. Thus, the demolishing of materiality by the bulldozers does not only destroy Bibi Jaina's property, but also affects her performance as a Nubian Muslim, her being-there as related to her past, present, and future. Through this argument, Wilks shows how religious practices and wider material arrangements of property and land are connected, and that the destruction of these wider arrangements may significantly impact the social and religious practice of particular communities.

Discussions about official temporal religious forms, in particular Good Friday as silent public holiday, and disputes on the introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany, is the topic of Christoph Baumgartner's contribution. He shows how these discussions contain political aspects that relate to views on how democratic societies are and should be committed to political equality and social inclusion. Taking from Marian Burchardt that religions actively shape urban morphology and appearances through symbols and architectural languages, Baumgartner points to an uneven material presence of different religions in current societies. This, he argues, is politically significant because it includes and excludes possibilities of different groups of people to relate to the place they live and work. This becomes particularly important if these religious forms are not only materially visible but also taken by the state as characteristics of national culture or as significant for politics and society at large. These *official* religious forms, as Baumgartner refers to them, run the danger of becoming things of conflict in circumstances of rapid social change (increasingly secularized and religiously pluralized societies), when political-discursive fortifications of culture block the times that are being out of joint. Taking the recognition of Good Friday as silent public holiday in Bavaria, Germany as a case, Baumgartner traces the conflicts arising around this holiday and shows how temporal forms can be charged with significant ethical and political dimensions. This way, in contexts of social change, temporal forms are about perspectives on political inclusion and exclusion.

Based on extensive ethnographic research, the chapter by Erik Meinema explores how the circulation of discourses about witchcraft and terrorism politicizes and shapes the ways in which various religious groups materially manifest themselves in the urban environment of the coastal Kenyan town of Malindi. He explores how discourses on witchcraft and terrorism, which occasionally intersect in complex and ambivalent ways, both provide a way of speaking about hidden enemies: both witches and terrorists are thought to covertly plot violence that threatens to disrupt social relations from within.

Furthermore, as state actors attempt to expose these hidden enemies, they may formulate suspicions that particular people or groups covertly involve themselves in witchcraft or terrorism. In response, people aim to evade being linked to these vices by avoiding particular material religious forms that are commonly associated with 'witches' and 'terrorists'. As a result, the circulation of discourses about witchcraft and terrorism sets in motion complex dynamics of revelation and concealment which shape the material ways in which various religious groups express themselves in Malindi. Furthermore, these dynamics often impact Christians, Muslims, and so-called 'Traditionalists' in divergent ways, since terrorism is often primarily associated with Islam, and witchcraft with indigenous African religious traditions. Based on this analysis, the chapter demonstrates how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism privilege the public expression of Christianity in Malindi, since Christianity is only rarely associated with witchcraft or terrorism.

In his chapter, Lucien van Liere explores how photographs and videos of suffering human bodies are invoked to shock, appeal and move, and how they shape particular understandings of violence and conflict. Van Liere argues that the ways in which people see images of conflict are often tied to long-standing trajectories of picturing and viewing human suffering and violence, as well as particular epistemological stances towards the knowledge that images of conflict are thought to reveal. Building on these arguments, Van Liere maintains that contemporary Western perspectives on suffering human bodies in humanitarian and conflict photography are often indebted to religious iconography and the historic repertoires of meaningful human suffering that are connected to it. Through such an analysis, Van Liere shows how photographs may become 'things of conflict', in the sense that they invoke an 'iconic consciousness' that is deeply rooted in cultural-religious trajectories, which often suggest simplifying understandings and binary perspectives on violence and conflict. In this way, Van Liere demonstrates how images of pain and suffering are charged with religious meanings that clearly separate meaningful suffering from atrocious violence, and innocent victims from violent perpetrators.

The focus on materiality is not only a valuable approach to study violent conflict but also to study attempts to achieve peace and reconciliation in situations characterized by (violent) conflict. Margaretha van Es studies the materiality of an organized interreligious public performance in Oslo, where predominantly young Muslims organized a 'Ring of Peace' around a synagogue as a response to violent incidents against Jews. The event was covered by many media, many photographs appeared on news-sites and on the internet, and the happening was heavily discussed in Norway. During the event, place,

body-relations, and buildings became important descriptors of perspectives on the avoidance of violence and the fight against antisemitism. As she connects these material things, it becomes clear that the Ring of Peace in Oslo was a ritual in which imaginations of interfaith solidarity and peaceful coexistence were embodied and played out. Views on religious mediation (Birgit Meyer) and affective economies (Sara Ahmed) help Van Es to ask how sensory experiences, materiality, and affects work to enact an imagination of peaceful coexistence and interfaith solidarity. Affects align people with each other and with communities, but also create an outline of a common threat. This way, fear and hate can result from views on what 'we are not'. Strong emotions materialize in how things are ordered and put into relation to each other. This way, materiality helps to understand particular imaginations of a (religious or national) community and how communities are made and remade in relation to threat and violent conflict.

In an argumentative chapter, Joram Tarusarira thinks through the consequences of the 'material turn' in security studies for views on the role of religions in violent conflict. He argues that the claim that violence is inherent in the beliefs and doctrines of religious traditions is not very fruitful for understanding and resolving conflict. Using well-known cases of religion-related violence from the field of conflict studies like the Hezbollah attacks in 2006, the uprising of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka until 2009, and the destruction of the Sikh Golden Temple in Armistar in 1984, he shows how land, place, and commemorations matter in how people understand and relate to violence. If materiality and visuality play such a great role in violent conflicts, it should also play an important role in processes of conflict-resolution and reconciliation. Tarusarira makes a convincing plea for bringing in more substantial knowledge of how things matter to people involved in restoration and reconciliation processes. As material objects and bodies are the primary location and targets of violent conflict, these should also play an important role in restoring and healing social relations.

In her afterword, Birgit Meyer reflects on the theoretical and methodological implications of the approaches for the study of religion, materiality, conflict and violence as proposed in this volume. She offers a theoretical reflection on the agency of 'things of conflict', and argues that in her view, "matter always exists in excess of what humans can apprehend of it". Subsequently, Meyer offers five methodological lessons that can be drawn from this volume and describes ways for further research.

References

Abbott, A. 2007. "Mechanisms and Relations." *Sociologica* 2 (2): 1–22.

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2008. "Iconic Consciousness. The Material Feeling of Meaning." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 782–94.

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2012. *Trauma. A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.

Almond, Gabriel A., R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan. 2003. *Strong Religion. The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 2016. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun (ed.). 1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appleby, R. Scott. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Asad, Talal. 2012. "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics." In *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi, 36–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Assmann, Jan. 2009. *The Price of Monotheism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Avalos, Hector. 2005. *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip055/2004029984.html.

Bartmanski, Dominik, and Jeffrey C. Alexander. 2012. "Introduction, Materiality and Meaning in Social Life: Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology." In *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmanski and Bernhard Giesen, page numbers, 1–14. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beck, Ulrich. 2010. *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*. Cambridge: Malden: Polity Press.

Beekers, Daan, and Pooyan Tamimi Arab. 2016. "Dreams of an Iconic Mosque: Spatial and Temporal Entanglements of a Converted Church in Amsterdam." *Material Religion* 12 (2): 137–164. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1172760.

Bergholz, Max. 2016. *Violence as a Generative Force. Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Berman, Eli, Joseph H. Felter, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Vestal Mcintyre. 2018. *Small Wars, Big Data: The Information Revolution in Modern Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bou Akar, Hiba. 2018. *For the War yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bräuchler, Birgit. 2013. *Cyberidentities at War: The Moluccan Conflict on the Internet*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Brown, Bill. 2001. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28 (1): 1–22.

Bruce, Steve. 2008. *Fundamentalism*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Buckley-Zistel, Susanne. 2006. "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda." *The Journal of the International African Institute* 76 (2): 131–150.

Buckley-Zistel, Susanne. 2008. "We are Pretending Peace: Local Memory and the Absence of Social Transformation and Reconciliation in Rwanda." In *After Genocide, Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond*, edited by Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, 153–71. London: Hurst Publishers.

Burchardt, Marian. 2021. *Regulating Difference. Religious Diversity and Nationhood in the Secular West*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2007. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cavanaugh, William T. 2009. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chidester, David. 1996. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia.

Chirot, Daniel. 2012. *Contentious Identities: Ethnic, Religious, and Nationalist Conflicts in Today's World*. London and New York: Routledge.

Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Collins, Randall. 2015. "Emotional Dynamics of Violent Situations." In *Framing Excessive Violence. Discourse and Dynamics*, edited by Daniel Ziegler, Marco Gerster and Steffan Krämer, 17–36. Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan.

Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost. 2010. "Introducing the New Materialisms." In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, 1–44. Durham: Duke University Press.

De Certeau, Michel. 1997 [1974]. *Culture in the Plural*. Translated by Tom Conley. London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

De Vries, Hent, 2002. *Religion and Violence, Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*, Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Ellen, Roy. 1998. "Fetishism" *Man, New Series*, 23 (2): 213–235.

Ellens, J. Harold, ed. 2007. *The Destructive Power of Religion. Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. London: Praeger.

Enns, Diane. 2012. *The Violence of Victimhood*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Fallon, Breann. 2017. "The Fetishization Effect: The Manipulation Power of the Machete in the Rwandan Genocide." *Implicit Religion* 20 (4): 319–33.

Fallon, Breann. 2020. *The Role of Fetishisation in Genocide: Considering genocide propulsion via a religious studies methodology*. PhD. University of Sydney.

Fiske, Alan Page, and Tage Shakti Rai. 2015. *Virtuous Violence. Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Francis, Matthew D. M. 2016. "Why the 'Sacred' Is a Better Resource Than 'Religion' for Understanding Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28 (5): 912–27. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.976625.

Freedman, Jonathan L. 2013. *Media Violence and Its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Fuji, Lee Ann. 2009. *Killing Neighbours. Webs of Violence in Rwanda*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Galtung, Johan. 1969. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3): 167–191.

Galtung, Johan. 1994. "Are There Therapies for Bad Cosmologies?" *Medicine and War* 10 (3): 170–82.

Gunning, Jeroen, and Richard Jackson. 2011. "What's so 'religious' about 'religious terrorism'?" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4 (3): 369–388. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.623405.

Herriot, Peter. 2009. *Religious Fundamentalism. Global, Local and Personal*. London and New York: Routledge.

Herscher, Andrew. 2010. *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict. Cultural Memory in the Present*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Hinton, Alexander Laban. *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Hoelzchen, Yanti, and Benjamin Kirby. 2020. "Introduction: Conceptualising Religious Infrastructures." *Conceptualising Religious Infrastructures*. Conference Frobenius Institute, Goethe University, Frankfurt, 24 September.

Hoffman, Bruce. 2002. "The Emergence of the New Terrorism." In *The New Terrorism. Anatomy, Trends and Counter-Strategies*, edited by Andrew Tan and Kumar Ramakrishna, 30–49. Singapore: Eastern University Press.

Ibrahim, Murtala. 2017. "Sensational Piety: Practices of Mediation in Christ Embassy and NASFAT." PhD diss., Utrecht University.

Jacobs, Steven Leonard. 2009. "Introduction: Genocide in the Name of God: Thoughts on Religion and Genocide." *In Confronting Genocide: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, edited by Steven Leonard Jacobs. Lanham, Boulder etc.: Lexington Books.

Janson, Marloes, and Birgit Meyer. 2016. "Introduction: Towards a Framework for the Study of Christian-Muslim Encounters in Africa." *Africa* 86 (4): 615–19.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2008. *Global Rebellion. Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*. Berkeley, Los Angelos, London: University of California Press.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2018. "How Cosmic War Ends: The Case of Isis." *Numen* 65 (2–3): 125–40. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341491.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2020. *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keen, Sam. 1988. *Faces of the Enemy. Reflections on the Hostile Imagination*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Keller, Catherine, and Mary-Jane Rubinstein. 2017. "Introduction: Tangled Matters." In *Entangled Worlds. Religion, Science, and New Materialisms*, edited by Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubinstein, 1–20. New York: Fordham University Press.

King, Frances E. 2010. *Material Religion and Popular Culture*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.

Kippenberg, Hans. 2011. *Violence as Worship. Religious Wars in the Age of Globalization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kirby, Benjamin, Francis Sibanda and Fred Charway. 2021. "Disarming the Xenophobic Everyday: Muslim Migrants and the Horizons of Urban Mutuality in Durban." *Africa* 91 (2): 296–316.

Knott, Kim. 2008. "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion." *Religion Compass* 2 (6): 1102–1116.

Kopytoff, Igor. 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 64–92. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kresse, Kai. 2018. *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience*. Indiana University Press.

Kruse, Christiane, Birgit Meyer and Annemarie Korte, eds. 2018. *Taking Offense. Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Larkin, Brian. 2008. *Signal and Noise: Media Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Larkin, Brian. 2014. "Techniques of Inattention: The Mediality of Loudspeakers in Nigeria." *Anthropology Quarterly* 87 (4): 989–1015.

Larson, Frances. 2014. *Severed. A History of Heads Lost and Heads Found*. London: Granta.

Latory, J. Morand. 2018. *The Fetish Revisited. Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2010. *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Latour, Bruno, Peter Weibel. 2002. *Iconoclash*. Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe. Karlsruhe: ZKM.

Marsden, Lee, and Heather Savigny. 2009. *Media, Religion and Conflict*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Meinema, Erik. 2020. "'Idle Minds' and 'Empty Stomachs': Youth, Violence, and Religious Diversity in Coastal Kenya." *Africa* 90 (5): 890–913.

Meral, Ziya. 2018. *How Violence Shapes Religion. Belief and Conflict in the Middle East and Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, Birgit. 2009. "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations. Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding." In *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion, and the Senses*, edited by Birgit Meyer, 1–28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Meyer, Birgit. 2011. "Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium." *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 19 (1): 23–39. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00137.x.

Meyer, Birgit. 2015. "Picturing the Invisible Visual Culture and the Study of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 27: 333–360.

Meyer, Birgit 2019. "Idolatry Beyond the Second Commandment: Conflicting Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen." In *Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Contested Desires*, edited by Birgit Meyer and Terje Stordalen, 77–96. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.

Meyer, Birgit, and Dick Houtman. 2012. "Material Religion – How Things Matter." In *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, edited by Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, 1–23. New York: Fordham University Press.

Meyer, Birgit, and Terje Stordalen. 2019. "Introduction: Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam." In *Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Contested Desires*, edited by Birgit Meyer and Terje Stordalen, 1–18. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.

Meyer, Birgit and Peter van der Veer. 2021. *Refugees and Religion. Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories*. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.

Mills, Tom, and David Miller. 2017. "Religion, Radicalization and the Causes of Terrorism." In The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism, edited by James R. Lewis, 46–68. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, Chris R. 1981. *The Structure of International Conflict*, London: MacMillan Press.

Nanninga, Pieter. 2017. "The Role of Religion in Al-Qaeda's Violence." In The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism, edited by James R. Lewis, 158–171. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nanninga, Pieter. 2019. *Branding a Caliphate in Decline: The Islamic State's Video Output (2015–2018)*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Noyes, James. 2016. *The Politics of Iconoclasm. Religion, Violence, and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

Oosterbaan, Martijn. 2005. "Mass Mediating the Spiritual Battle: Pentecostal Appropriations of Mass Mediated Violence in Rio de Janeiro." *Material Religion* 1 (3): 358–385. Doi: https://doi.org/10.2752/174322005778054087.

Ostien, Philip. 2009. "Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria. Muslim-Christian Relations in Africa." Online publication, available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1456372.

Palaver, Wolfgang, Harriet Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger. 2016. *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate.

Perica, Vjekoslav. 2002. *Balkan Idols. Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Plate, S. Brent. 2014. *A History of Religion in 5 1/2 Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to its Senses*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Powers, Paul R. 2021. *Religion and Violence. A Religious Studies Approach*. London, New York: Routledge.

Qin, Zhenzhen, and Yao Song. 2020. "The Sacred Power of Beauty: Examining the Perceptual Effect of Buddhist Symbols on Happiness and Life Satisfaction in China." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (7). Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072551.

Schwartz, Regina M. 1997. *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. London, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Sloterdijk, Peter. 2009. *God's Zeal, The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*. Translated by Wieland Hoban. Maiden, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Soares, Benjamin. 2016. "Reflections on Muslim-Christian Encounters in West Africa." *Africa* 86 (4): 673–97.

Spyer, Patricia. 2002. "Fire Without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon's Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of the Imagination." *Source: Indonesia* 74: 21–36.

Stewart, Pamela J., and Andrew Strathern. 2004. *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stier, Oren Baruch, and J. Shawn Landres, eds. 2006. *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Stockmans, J., and K. Büscher. 2017. "A Spatial Reading of Urban Political-Religious Conflict: Contested Urban Landscapes in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 55 (1): 79–104.

Stump, Jacob L. and Priya Dixit. 2013. *Critical Terrorism Studies. An Introduction to Research Methods*. New York: Routledge.

Tilly, Charles. 2005. "Terror as Strategy and Relational Process." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46 (1–2): 11–32.

Tulloch, John, and R. Warwick Blood. 2012. *Icons of War and Terror. Media Images in the Age of International Risk*. London, New York: Routledge.

Vacca, John R, ed. 2020. *Online Terrorist Propaganda, Recruitment and Radicalization*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315170251.

Valentini, Daniele, Anna Maria Lorusso, and Achim Stephan. 2020. "Onlife Extremism: Dynamic Integration of Digital and Physical Spaces in Radicalization." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11: 524–24. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00524.

Van Es, Margaretha A. 2020. "Roasting a Pig in Front of a Mosque: How Pork Matters in Pegida's Anti-Islam Protest in Eindhoven." *Religions* 11 (7): 359. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070359.

Van Es, Margaretha, Nina ter Laan, and Erik Meinema. 2021. "Beyond 'Radical' versus 'Moderate'? New Perspectives on the Politics of Moderation in Muslim Majority and Muslim Minority Settings." *Religion* 51 (2): 161–168. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2021.186561.

Van Klinken, Gerry. 2001. "The Maluku Wars: Bringing Society Back In." *Indonesia* 71 (71): 1–26.

Van Liere, Lucien, and Elizabeth van Dis. 2018. "Post-War Reflections on the Ambon War: Causes, Justifications and Miracles in Christian and Muslim Narratives." *Exchange* 47 (4): 372–399. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341500.

Van Liere, Lucien. 2020a. "The Image of Violence and the Study of Material Religion, an Introduction." *Religions* 11 (7). Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070370.

Van Liere, Lucien. 2020b. "Conquering Rome. Constructing a Global Christianity in the Face of Terror: A Case Study into the Representations of the Beheading of Twenty-One Migrant Workers in January 2015." In *World Christianity, Methodological Considerations*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorotyya Nagy, 204–224. Leiden: Brill. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444867_011.

Verkaaik, Oskar, and Pooyan Tamimi Arab. 2017. "Managing Mosques in The Netherlands: Constitutional versus Culturalist Secularism." In *Secularisms in a Postsecular Age? Religiosities and Subjectivities in Comparative Perspective*, edited by José Mapril, Ruy Blanes, Emerson Giumbelli, and Erin K. Wilson, 169–86. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Volkan, Vamik D. 2004. *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror*. Charlottesville, Va.: Pitchstone Pub.

Walter, Peter, und Jan Assmann. 2005. *Das Gewaltpotential Des Monotheismus Und Der Dreieine Gott*. Quaestiones Disputatae, 216. Freiburg: Herder.

Weenink, Don. 2014. "Frenzied Attacks. a Micro-Sociological Analysis of the Emotional Dynamics of Extreme Youth Violence: Frenzied Attacks." *The British Journal of Sociology* 65 (3): 411–33. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12088.

Weininger, Elliot B, Annette Lareau, and Omar Lizardo, eds. 2019. *Ritual, Emotion, Violence. Studies on the Micro-Sociology of Randall Collins*. New York, London: Routledge.

Wellman, James K. 2007. *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence Across Time and Tradition*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & amp; Littlefield.

Wellman, James K, and Kyoko Tokuno. 2004. "Is Religious Violence Inevitable?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (3): 291–96.

Wright, Stuart. 2009. "Martyrs and Martial Imagery. Exploring the Volatile Link Between Warfare Frames and Religious Violence." In *Dying for Faith. Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World*, edited by Madawi al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin. London: I.B. Tauris.

Yates, Christopher, and Nathan Eckstrand. 2011. *Philosophy and the Return of Violence: Studies from This Widening Gyre*. London and New York: Continuum.

Žarkov, Dubravka. 2008. *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

CHAPTER 2

Accessing Things of Conflicts

Poking Anthropology with Guns, Martyrdom, and Religion

Younes Saramifar

> "The K14 sniper rifle slipped from his lap and fell on the floor when he reached for the teacup. He smiled at the rifle, ignoring me. He pointed his finger at the rifle in warning "don't misbehave", then he affectionately said: "Just look at him, it feels like a gun, she acts with the grace of a lady, but he shoots with the clarity of a thinking man. No one would take it as a Korean." (Fieldnotes 2018)

⁘

1 Introduction

I never chased things of conflicts, but they would stand in my face and announce themselves. I would ask about violence, blood, mayhem, cats and dogs, chaos, God, fear, corpses, and all things 'fun' in the battle fronts. However, combatants and things of conflict responded differently by reappearing in conversations and during ethnographic encounters to shape my analysis. Things of conflict are not only guns, mortars, bullets, and every other weaponry. There are other, lesser named partners such as dog tags, uniforms, domesticated animals, food, identification cards, images, sounds, electrical wires, and rubbles who contribute to the theatres of war and combats. The contributions and partnerships of objects/things/stuff/abiotic entities[1] and animals for humans could take studies of conflicts and religiously shaped political violence to a different ground where conflicts are not only understood

1 I refrain from entering the debates on what term is suitable for abiotic elements and material expressions of social life. Such debates will not take material culture, materiality and material religion studies any further therefore, I use objects/things/stuff/abiotic entities interchangeably.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004523791_003

as ideological clashes and wars of ideas but also as individuated engagements with acts of killing.

Objects are methodological partners to unpack acts of killing which should not merely be described through the filter of signification and the symbolic pronouncement of worldviews. Tracing objects or things of conflict are my methodological assistants into understanding militant subjectivities, processes of socialization *in* violence and acts of killing in combat. Here, I argue that exploring material expressions of conflicts (read: things of conflict) demands answering questions of what the object is *in* itself, where the object-in-itself is located and how objects become simultaneously sticky and alluring. I especially critique anthropological approaches such as Victor Turner's and his epigones that reduce objects to sets of meanings, functions, and attributes, either located in-between matter and reality or in some liminal realm. I avoid the incessant attention to meanings, meaning making and representations because they reduce objects to boundaries presumed by humans rather than finding out how they make larger realities of conflicts and of religious experiences. Hence, I step forward to find a fresh location for the so-called in-between that upends dualities and dichotomies without compromising on how human and nonhuman relate, how they co-constitute realities and become religious through meanings and representations.

I develop my argument through speculative realism and Graham Harman's brand of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) (2011, see also Ellen 1988) to explain what I call an anthropology of access.[2] My anthropology of access is inspired by speculative realism and its associated thoughts that pursue the emergence of reality without prioritizing human perceptions and meaning-making systems over everything else. Furthermore, thinking along the lines of speculative realism dismisses the social construction of reality within the relationship between thinking and being. It encourages to critique anthropological approaches that propose in-betweenness and liminality as sufficient analytical modes to upset dualities, taxonomies, and categories. However, I don't advocate a return to dualities or categorizations. Instead, I suggest that current anthropological debates misidentify where to locate this in-betweenness as they saturate it in representation and symbolic referentiality. I will highlight nuances of in-betweenness by way of emphasizing material expressions of life. The things of conflict are my methodological entries to demonstrate

2 An anthropology of access explains how infrastructures of social life are accessed by moving beyond the means that provide access to the infrastructures. Instead, it questions the modes of access and traces conditions that emerge from entangled asymmetric network through bodies, objects and performative subjectivities.

that things are not only mediative, mediants, or relational (see Morgan 2008; Meyer 2011; Appadurai 2015). My anthropology of access traces the autonomy of things and their independence from the human mind by asking what modes of accessing things are, instead of only exploring means of accessing things and reducing things to ideas that materialize. This shift from means of access to modes of access de-thrones the human perspective and contributes to a better understanding of what sustains the interests of nonstate armed actors in militancy. Additionally, this shift in our analytical perspective guides us to think differently about the obsessive attention of the anthropology of religion and religious studies for meaning-making practices and representations crafted by humans (see Lambek 2008; Assmann 2008; Bauman 2015). This article pays attention to religion without centering religiosity, religious practices, and religion. Instead, I follow how things gather around religion without becoming religious. In other words, I follow how things of conflict *relate* to religion, shape religiosity, and collaborate with believers. This is an intentional academic choice, namely, to talk about religion without engaging with religion explicitly. It allows me to highlight nonhuman partners in religiously framed political violent conflicts without subduing nonhumans to doctrinal interpretations imposed by humans.

I organize my arguments in three sections. In the first section I discuss conflict cosmologies, the allure and stickiness of things of conflict in the context of West Asia and translocal Shia militant networks. I highlight conflict cosmologies as relational attempts by which combatants craft to classify, to make sense of and lose the grip of structurally prescribed imposed meanings. For example, how commanders and field manuals describe what a weapon is or what it means to fight in the name of God. Conflict cosmologies transgress structures and doctrines and show how individual combatants find different perspectives on their compliance with religious ideas in combat. Thus, I explain how in-betweenness and subject-object relationships operate in combat zones. The first section shares fieldwork stories, object-subject relationships, and the emergence of conflict cosmologies *through* objects. In the second section I explore the limits of in-betweenness and liminality in anthropology and its neighboring disciplines as well as how according to OOO the *real* object is always in-between. I describe a cycle that consists of a four-fold trajectory that shapes conflict cosmologies and demonstrates collaborations of things of conflict and combatants. Based on this multi-fold trajectory, I will arrive at the question of the object in-itself and contrast it with the representation of objects to highlight the limits of anthropological approaches to in-between and liminality. I stress that many anthropologists have always found in-betweenness and liminality from a location saturated in representa-

tions, correlations, and relations (see Turner 1987; Ingold 1986; Zerubavel 2003; Scott 2009; Stroller 2007) and therefore, objects of anthropologists (things such as books, guns, statues, totems, cars, etc. and concepts such as cultures, languages, memory, society, God, etc.) are subdued to the human access. Third, I elaborate further on the in-betweenness of objects without subduing it to the social construction/becoming of things, mediation, and humans. These three sections build an anthropology of access to reveal how social actors access God, life, ideologies, and how all that configures their religious worldviews.

2 Conflict Cosmologies and Militant Subjectivities

West Asia, particularly Iraq, and Central Asia, especially Afghanistan, have been the scene of incessant conflicts. American forces and their European allies engaged intensively in Iraq since 2003 and Afghanistan since 2001. The conflict and fall of Saddam Hussain in Iraq since 2003 and the partial defeat and ongoing activities of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 2001 have caused sectarian riots, armed conflicts, and mobilization of militias from across the region. The armed militias usually belong either to the Sunni faction of Islam or to Shia groups and ethnic minorities that are aligned with the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the recent conflicts in Iraq and Syria, Iran-supported militias especially stress that their goal is to protect the holy sites and Shia shrines against ISIS which has threatened to destroy them. I have conducted research among the Shia nonstate armed combatants since 2007 and I especially focus on nonideological/nonreligious elements of conflict such as the materiality of combat, material expressions of violence, and pain and pleasure despite the explicit ideological rhetoric. These nonideological/nonreligious elements are linked to combat experiences that exceed motivations of combatants, but they sustain combatants' commitments to political Islam and armed actions. My focus on materiality and material expressions demonstrates combatants' modes of access to their crafted militant subjectivities and I investigate how objects intervene into the access-process, how they "erupt into enjoyment" (Harman 2009) and influence human actors during conflicts.

My stories of things of conflict and their workings are based on participant observation in combat zones between 2015 to 2018 among Shia combatants engaged in Iraq and Syria against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). My ethnography of acts of killing is part of my larger project that follows translocal networks of Shia militancy with support of the Einstein Foundation,

Germany.[3] I have developed an academic relationship with militants who have become my long-term interlocutors since my doctoral studies (see Saramifar 2018). Unfortunately, these academic relationships would fall short due to the fall or martyrdom of the combatants who I spoke. But the stream of volunteers or recruits never stopped since conflicts never rest in the Middle East and Central Asia. I focus on volunteer combatants who enlisted for deployment without any expectation for financial compensation, spoils of war, or other possible benefits. The rise of ISIS, fall of Mosul in Iraq in June 2014, and the occupation of some strategic areas in Syria by ISIS brought about a wave of mobilization of able-bodied Shia men who joined the fight. Most Shia fighters responded to the call of Ayatollah Sistani, the highest Shia authority in Iraq (Saramifar 2019). They were a mixture of different nationalities organized under the banner of *Hashd ul Sha'bi* in Iraq or *Defa' ul Vatani* in Syria. These volunteers came from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. They were trained mostly by personnel of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or by representatives of the Hezbollah resistance movement in Iraq or Iran. The volunteer combatants usually function at the level of foot soldier, gunnery sergeant, transport and logistic personnel, and sometimes reconnaissance forces due to their familiarity with topographies and local terrains. The training was not the first encounter of these volunteers with weapons. The stories about their lives were good examples of socialization *in* violence. Consequently, things of conflict were familiar objects of their lives and there were instances in which the volunteers joined combat with their own weapons.

The volunteers received some initial fast-tracked trainings in order to fight most effectively in battlefields. Their training was combined with ideological courses that would explain the ongoing conflicts through a religious lens. These courses were beyond the usual propaganda rhetoric that encouraged the Muslim populous to see the war against ISIS as the battle to protect the holy shrines located in Iraq and Syria. The combatants learned about the fundamentals of being a Muslim man and accepting social responsibilities such as sacrifice, armed resistance, constructing their respective countries

3 My fieldwork techniques and combat zone ethnography comprise direct participant observation which means I travel along combatants to various conflict areas or I spend considerable time in training camps. I access these areas due to my Shia Iranian background and growing up in neighborhoods where most young men were absorbed into the revolutionary guard. My years of research and maintaining friendships have allowed me to enter into these areas for research if I accept to hand over my telecommunication and any other electronic devices.

and contributing to the Islamic community as prescribed by the Shia religious leadership. The ideological training focused on mystical and metaphysical interpretations of political Islam and encouraged combatants to see their political struggles and religiosity through an individually shaped communion with the sacred. The trainings that were infused by sacrality provided a language, an articulation, and a set of terminologies for Shia combatants to speak about their religious worldviews. They were encouraged to write letters, diaries and short notes to themselves, their families and notable religious leadership during the training. This was an exercise in articulating thoughts and emotions and not defying the existing telecommunication technologies while contacting families and others as none of the combatants to my knowledge posted their handwritten letters. But almost all of them preserved the writings which became a conversation-opener for me whenever I would see the combatants scribbling after the enemy's fire or when the commanders' shouting subsided for a day. Sometimes the combatants shared their poetry and prose with me, and we discussed their ideas and daily experiences during the trainings and battlefields. I refer to these writings and their subsequent conducts in trainings and combat operations to explain how things of conflict shape conflict cosmologies.

3 Where and What Is a Thing of Conflict? In-itself or in-between?

When is a gun just a gun? Is a dog-tag only just a piece of metal to identify fallen combatants and when does it indicate different realities of combat? Where are things of conflict in a warring ecology? Are they just relating to other things of conflict and to humans in a network? Are they nothing beyond their relationships? Where is the location of an object in the fourfold trajectory that builds conflict cosmologies? Is it the object in-itself or it is the representation of objects that combatants are engaged with? The object in-itself, for me and 000, is not only the debate of inaccessible and seducing entities that never reveal themselves to humans. I rather argue that objects hold an autonomous reality and agentive assertion regardless of the human mind. The objects are not only mediative (see Meyer 2011), medians (see Appadurai 2015) or relational (see Morgan 2008) but they also maintain an autonomy that remains independent of human minds and socialities. Quentin Meillassoux (2010), another pioneer of Speculative Realism, believes that thinking and being cannot be considered apart from each other when objects are approached. Therefore, every existence is subdued to human thought processes and postulations. In other words, weapons hold an object-

ness that is integral to conflict cosmologies but the objectness remains also real and existing regardless of the weapon-user who establishes a relationship with it. Therefore, understanding objects/things/stuff/abiotic entities should not start from their socially produced representation but from their objectness. By doing so, objects are not subdued to how humans access them but rather objects are acknowledged for how they shape attempts to access realities according to their possibilities and accidental features. Graham Harman and his brand of OOO entertain the discussion of the object in-itself by asking from which possible points relationships with objects begin, where the real object is precisely located and why the relationship flows from subject to object and not the other way around. Harman (2012) gives the example of Sir Arthur Edington, the British astrophysicist known for his observations of a solar eclipse in 1919. Harman quotes Edington's reflections about a table: "I have settled down to the task of writing (…) and have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. Two tables! Yes, there are duplicates of every object about me – two tables, two chairs, two pens". Harman explains further: "the two tables in question are the familiar table of everyday life and [then the second one which is, YS] the same table as described by physics" (5) and he asserts the "real table is in fact lying between these two others (…) the third table cannot be reduced to downward the scientific one (…) but simply that the table has an enormous *reality* over and above its causal components" (7, emphasis in original). Harman does not deny the physio-chemical existence of the table to push for the table as an everyday object that is socially constructed, but he stresses that "just as we cannot reduce the table downward to electric charges rushing through empty space, we also cannot reduce it upward to its theoretical, practical, or causal effects on humans or anything else" (10). Harman strives to locate the real table *between* the two extremes that reduce an object either to its objectness or to its social constructed materiality. It is this in-betweenness that matters to my argument because anthropology has often mistaken the location of the in-between by assuming that correlations or relations between the two extremes are the in-between.

The in-between and constructed reality in anthropology, regardless of the niche and domain, have always been the place where perceived qualities, moods, representations, and the socially constructed objects meet (see Berger and Luckmann 1966; Searle 1997). Both the conceptual and existential reality of the in-between are subdued to how they are accessed by humans. Even design anthropology which includes the formal qualities of an object or a craft more than other niches and domains prioritizes human access. From the side of design anthropology, Yoko Akama (2015) suggests borrowing from *Ma*, a Japanese philosophy that focuses on co-creation, becoming-with and

in-between, to trace how immersion in betweenness provides the possibility of 'becoming together'. She shares her ethnographic anecdote from the testing of a newly designed meeting enclosure. The people in her story are sitting and lingering for 20 minutes in the enclosure. Then they would write about reimagining the space of the enclosure. In other words, how the enclosure made them feel, experience, and imagine. She writes that "the meeting enclosure emanates its own atmosphere, (…) Here, we see the participants carry 'anticipatory affects' with them to this place, already primed by their experiences of the past" (270). Akama proposes to see the designed enclosure in-between the subject-object encounter because her in-between starts from representations and imaginaries. Therefore, the object in-itself is overlooked. The users' experiences of the past, ideas, feelings, desires, and needs meet the meeting enclosure as a bundle of qualities appearing to users. The users access the meeting enclosure in the form of a totality that evokes certain anticipatory affects that happen in-between. The object has no details, withholds qualities and possibilities of objectness in Akama's observation because the object is nothing except its representations. This is because the in-between according to Akama begins with an incorrect address that displays "a merging of distinctions – a grayness in-between black and white – and implies a relational sensitivity" (263). Her address of in-between points to where unicorns go to pasture, and humans remain the king of everything to perpetuate the fairytale of modernity. Akama's merging distinctions offer no emergence but rather it remains a transitional period, a lingering state that repeats representations and socially constructed notions in a loop of poetic appropriation. The social actor takes, mystifies, consumes, and discards in the in-between designed for her. The loop constantly repeats itself, but at least with some poetic gentility.

Mislocating the in-between and limiting it to some form of transitional process and action goes back at least to Victor Turner who highlighted liminality, betwixt and in-between since his *The Ritual Processes* (1969, see also 1987). He explains:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony. As such, their ambiguous and intermediate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. (94)

The in-between, accordingly, becomes the hazy location where there are far lesser fixities and the body of law, customs, and assigned definitions loosen

up because social actors experience rites of passage. Turner explains liminality and in-betweenness as an anthropological location where a transition occurs. For instance, the neophyte has a liminal experience due to adulthood rites of passage. The neophyte already exists socially prior to the rites of passage but he is yet to be recognized materially and corporeally. Whatever is happening in the liminal location, proposed by Turner, happens due to representational qualities. Bodies, flesh, and things that are symbolic, meaning-emanating, and transitional. There is no in-itself, no objectness or corporeality in such a realm that contributes to the in-between or to the eventual outcome of the transition. Bjørn Thomassen (2009) expands Turner's work and elaborates on "dimensions of liminality" (16) which relate to "subjects, temporality and spatiality" (16). The material dimension is overlooked by Thomassen who emphasizes a revitalization of Turner's classical contributions to anthropology.

I apply the liminality theory on the training period of combatants to show its limitations for understanding conflict cosmologies. Volunteer combatants experience a liminal period, rites of passage, during their trainings to be prepared for the battle fronts. Of course, the training imposes the disciplining of their bodies and the 'hardening' processes resemble rituals. Additionally, if I agree with Turner, in "the liminal phases of rituals, one often finds a simplification, even elimination, of social structure" (1969, 167), which applies to the training camps or the battle fronts where inflicting violence is legitimized. However, there is still no possibility to account for how things of conflict such as weaponry or uniforms shape the rites of passage beyond self-fashioning (Greenblatt 2012) and symbolic meaning-making. Objects are suffocated partners of this in-between because every aspect and corner of the in-betweenness and liminal existence begins from human-centered representations, adulterated utilitarian perceptions and human consumption.

Paul Stroller (2004) and Robert Pelton (1980), both oddly white European ethnographers and anthropologists of Africa, apply Turner's liminality and in-betweenness to discuss life and death. Stoller (2004) discusses a cancer patient's remission and Pelton reflects on tricksters in West Africa to describe how social complexities reveal the inadequacy of the life and death duality. However, the liminality, in transition and somewhere in-between, does not take them far enough from the life and death duality because their description of things, sociality and social actors, remains attached to either life or death without showing how they are integrated into one another. Pelton celebrates the trickster because he carves out from death and adds to life, but Pelton does not notice that the trickster does not see anything called death but simply finds living as a continuum that expands. Returning to the things of conflict, they can highlight how death and life are entangled. Siawoush, a

volunteer combatant who I met in Syria, was an explicit example of a dead-man-walking who integrated death/afterlife into life. During his deployment in Syria for the liberation of Aleppo in 2016, he was assigned to logistics and transport based on his personal request, love of long drives, KRAZ (Ukrainian military transport vehicle) and Winston cigarettes. Drivers often could break the rules and smoke on duty while carrying explosives. Smoking while carrying loads of explosives has a high risk of explosion but some drivers smoke to exhibit valor, machoism, and risk-taking skills. I became familiar with him. The unit commander recorded on his mobile how Siawoush ignored the intensive fire and bombardment that was going on while he was transporting ammunition between two lines of levees. He would load the vehicle, fire a cigarette and drive through. Siawoush stood out because at that moment he was not obliged to transport the ammunition. Every other driver was commanded to stand down because of the intense enemy fire. The 'top-brass' had already given up on those fighting on the levees. Siawoush reflected: "I could not wait for the mayhem to end and then transporting dead bodies. I knew I am dead every time I sat in the car. I would see that my life would depart my body as I drove. I would deliver ammunitions and I could see my rebirth. I was reborn 12 times that day". Siawoush lives now happily with his family on a farm away from the chaotic cities and always recalls his combat experience with smiles. The last time when I interviewed him, he said: "we have got it wrong because life is not defined against death. There is nothing except life before and after and even in-between" (Fieldnotes 2019).

Death/after life/abiotic existence is integral to the organic life in conflict cosmologies and there is no liminality or in-betweenness. I am challenging the base of betwixt, in-betweenness, and liminality from its classic formulation in anthropology to highlight how speculative realism can contribute to anthropology by questioning not means of access but modes of access. The current assumptions of in-betweenness and liminality look at the means of access by focusing on meanings, symbols, and rituals rather than modes of access along nonhuman elements and entities. The in-betweenness is not accessed by humans or embodied through merging with objects, events, or concepts, but it is the realm where abiotic existence seduces and takes away humans/subjects to the shadowy dark side. The in-betweenness is the location of nonrepresentation where a thing in-itself, based on its features, capacities, qualities, and regardless of its relationships, produces emergent entities and representations. Anthropology has taken this emergent product as the in-between rather than the actual in-between which precedes it. Therefore, I critique anthropological approaches that mislocate the in-betweenness.

4 Conflict What? What of Conflicts?

I define conflict cosmology as an attempt by individuals and social actors engaged with combat to classify, to make sense of, and lose the grip of structurally prescribed imposed meanings. Conflict cosmologies are structurally transgressive and portray how individuals craft different perspectives about their compliance with religious notions and theological inspirations that intensively subsume them in combats. Jawad, a volunteer combatant who was killed in Syria, was one of the first combatants who opened this cosmology to me. He was a 32-year-old mathematician from a middle-class family in Iran and was employed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He was rejected for the official deployment because of the non-military profile of his job within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He requested his unpaid leave and enlisted for deployment as a volunteer. During his training, he became aware of my interest in Shia combatants' writings and handed me what he called a *del-neveshte* (a text written from heart). His sentences were telling:

> I salute you my weapon who has become a partner in serving justice; salutation at the weapon's barrel that suffered the heat of gun powder and still resisted with strength; (…) salutation to my weapon's fixed stock that its hardness taught me how to step into the righteous path and don't see my goals hazy and opaque; (…) salutation to the weapon that I learned from it the gravity of being-human whenever I held the weapon's grip with my left hand and aligned it 30 degrees to my body. (Fieldnotes, 2017)

He crafted ways of seeing the world by way of his weapon. He explains how ways of weapon-handling teach him how to see the world religiously. Every corner and curve of his weapon instructs his religiosity and the 'righteous path' where he becomes closer to God, serves justice, and possibly becomes a martyr. He explained later that a "weapon is not a tool, but he could be your teacher. You must allow him otherwise he will deny you". To put it differently, the martyr of my example crafted his conflict cosmology through his weapon, a nonhuman partner. His weapon, "the teacher", does not operate as a symbol that signifies a set of meanings, but the weapon collaborates with its user to postulate notions that resemble meanings in the warring ecology which emerges from the entangled representations, historically situated imaginaries, culturally operated meanings, geopolitical necessities, and the warmongering of political actors that shape the everyday of combatants. The weapon becomes the guiding principle, and the user complies with its object-

ness and ergonomics to access an ultimate militant subjectivity. For instance, Jawad salutes the weapon's fixed stock (the weapon's wooden handle that buttresses over the user's shoulder) because most lesser trained and inexperienced combatants intensely push the fixed stock to their clavicle. The pain from the pressure causes more adrenaline discharge, combatants remain vigilant, sharp, and see more clearly through the weapon's optic-mount while looking at the target with one eye shut. It is the ergonomics of the weapon, its shape, its material composition or, in other words, its objectness that the user complies with, which creates an opportunity to perform better. The user's compliance to the weapon's objectness is experienced via pain and the sensation of operating the thing because the compliance makes accuracy in acts of killing possible. However, the user takes the language of sacrality by seeing himself in the righteous path and masks brutality with poetry to articulate his relationship with the weapon and tilt the direction of his conflict cosmology towards Makkah.

I noticed Jawad had added in smaller handwritings at the bottom of the page "but, it is the *ayneeye vujūd* (the mirror of existence) which is the *true* instructor who bestows kindness and vibrancy to this *mohit* (ecology)" (Fieldnotes 2017). He completes his letter to the weapon by hinting at the larger vibrance and shimmering presence that shapes the ecology of life. He borrows the idea of *vujūd* from Farsi poetry and Iranian mysticism to imply all in all how the weapon expands his ontic existence but also that there is a larger element that allows him to be subsumed, comply, and collaborate with the weapon. The combatant enacts his agentive capacity in compliance and not necessarily compliance to God but compliance to a matter-reality existence and sensation that dominate the conflict cosmology that becomes manifest in the object-subject relationship. Therefore, I stress that the lethal object/thing of conflict is in this case not a signifier that empowers the combatant, but something that collaborates to make sense of life in the midst of blood and mayhem (see also Warnier 2001).

The conflict cosmologies and emergence from militant subjectivities are shaped by weapon-combatant relationships. They facilitate the allure and speculative reality of a weapon. A weapon, like any other object, becomes alluring as it is turned into a ghostly power exceeding any of its lists of properties. The allure of a weapon is its withdrawal from symbolic interactions and representations, and operates as an "independent reality while somehow communicating through proximity" (Harman 2009, 30). This allure and emergence of a weapon's speculative reality comes in a four-fold trajectory: (1) authenticity and authentication, (2) rituals and performance, (3) self-actualization, and (4) compliance and embrace of unreason. I return to my fieldnotes to explain this four-fold trajectory.

Every combatant interacts with things of conflict to establish, justify, identify, and sense himself as a militant. Simply put, combatants attempt to authenticate themselves as militants in the eyes of God, themselves, and the militias. This allows them to access the very subjectivity that they imagine or desire to perform. Naser, a 25-year-old Afghan-Iraqi volunteer, laughed at his friends who are revolutionary social media activists, who were posting politically charged content on Instagram and Twitter. He was born in an impoverished neighborhood in Damascus and hailed from a refugee family. His mother was an Afghan Hazara refugee and his father an Iraqi refugee who ran to Syria, away from Saddam's Shia persecution. Naser often got comments about how to be a revolutionary while he was hooked to Instagram:

> One cannot be a fighter by just wanting and wishing it. People need to come, pick up the gun, get sweaty, get heat rashes and burned skins on their thighs, their testes become swollen from running in heat, hate the saggy uniform, get angry at the food and many other things to become a combatant. (Fieldnotes 2017)

Naser listed things of conflicts including the heat and climate to authenticate his militant subjectivity. The authentication was not limited to the weaponry and lethal objects; the imagery was also involved in the configuration of militant subjectivities. The volunteer combatants would often visit photography studios and request three-quarter portraits of themselves. They would frame their portraits and leave it with their families or friends as keepsake before their deployment. The framed portrait was the implicit indication that the combatant would like this portrait to be installed above his burial ground in case of martyrdom.

During the 1980s, the three-quarter portrait was the formal style for photographs required during the bureaucratic enlistment procedures for joining Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988). Almost all volunteers who enlisted used such portraits in their administrative files. The IRGC preferred this style to distinguish itself in manner of visual representation from the Defense Forces that were seen as a pre-revolution legacy of the last king.[4] Iranian Defense Forces would require a passport style portrait with no smile, beard, and glasses. The three-quarter portraits were later used on the coffins and burial grounds of martyred volunteers

4 1979 witnessed a large-scale Islamic revolution in Iran and consequently the last monarch was deposed. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last coronated king, committed immense resources to modernize Iranian defense forces which was institutionalized by his father. These forces were accused of loyalty to the king and impiety after the revolution.

since the government handled burial procedures of martyrs. Families had very little say in how the burial ceremony was conducted. A simple bureaucratic step inadvertently shaped how martyrs and Iranian martyrs-yet-to-come were imagined and represented. The three-quarter portrait became known as the martyr portrait and combatants until today continue to leave their three-quarter portraits behind to appear like all the martyrs before them. The economy (read: circulation) of a specific object, the framed image, which is posed for, purchased, prepared, and left behind by the combatants, then preserved by families while the combatants are still alive and fighting at the fronts, *authenticates* militant subjectivities for none except for the combatants themselves. The framed image turns the fighter into a possible martyr, a holy warrior, a sacred persona and a dead-man-walking. But it does not confirm his militancy to others, only to himself. It shows how he chooses to see himself. He proves his performance to himself through the objects he leaves behind. The representational/symbolic qualities of the image prove to others that the man in the photo is a militant. However, the process of taking the photo, framing it, and leaving it behind authenticates the militancy of a militant to himself. He announces nothing representational to others except the news that 'by the way, I may die and please put this on my grave. See you on the other side'.

The framed three-quarter portrait becomes a thing of conflict which collaborates in militant formations beyond the fighter's training and disciplines enforced by the military structure. The objective/material components of conflict cosmologies that are postulated by combatants, facilitate militant subjectivities, and smoothen the warring ecology. Therefore, conflict cosmologies contain the speculative realities of things, and they operate as an arena for the emergence of object-subject collaboration and militant subjectivities. The material culture approaches cannot account for this collaboration because these remain limited to the representational qualities of objects and to what objects mean to human users without asking how objects lend hands to this representation (e.g., see Sillar 1996; Burbick 2006; Miller 2009; Vivienne and Burgess 2013). The human-centered and anthropocentric approach to matter and materiality neglects to ask where the representation of an object flows from.

Beyond authentication, the process of forming familiarity, intimacy, collaboration, and attaining an object happens for combatants in forms of rituals and performances. These rituals and performances are accounts of what Harman articulates as "somehow communicating through proximity" (Harman 2009, 30). At the second fold of the trajectory referred to above, the allure emerges from processes by which an object and a subject make contact. These processes become rituals for subjects (humans) as if the object-subject

union can create something anew out of them. For instance, Navid Rahmani, a 23-year-old volunteer combatant from a very wealthy family in the Eastern region of Iran, cried for days when I handed him his graphically manipulated three-quarter portrait. He put the image in front of him after his prayers and repented by chanting *la ellah ella ant sobhanak eeni kont u men al zalemin* (there is no God except the God, praise upon you, the God, as I have been an oppressor [to myself]). He had specially asked me to turn his photo into a painting via software manipulation, so I felt guilty every time I saw him in tears. Day by day he became quieter and kept his teary rituals. Finally, he spoke to me again the day before his martyrdom:

> I trespassed God's limit when I asked you for the photo. I have always been told that I look like my martyred father and I had nothing except his painted three-quarter portrait. I saw myself in him when you worked on my photo. It was like I could see my own ghost and my own funeral. It felt as if I forced God's hand to make me a martyr, so I repent to become a worthy one.

He saw his father in the manipulated image, but he sensed his own martyred self in the photo as well. There was an immense resemblance between the son and his father. However, he did not cry for his father nor feared his own death. He accessed the reality which the image emanated and crafted a ritual. This reality depended on the independent reality that was evoked by the image with special features and material qualities. The image became affective and imposing when it appeared like a painting via software manipulation and a photoshop filter that reworks photos to be like paintings with brush strokes. It did rewind the time for him, back to the days of the Iran-Iraq war when martyrs' paintings were ornamented around the cities and children of martyrs could often see their father's face on the wall. But they were not only their fathers anymore, but martyrs of the nation.

The third fold that configures the speculative realities within conflict cosmologies is self-actualization. Abraham Maslow (1943) suggested that the highest aim of life is to fulfill one's unique potential and he named this fulfillment process "self-actualization" (see also Krem, Kenrick, and Neel 2017). Self-actualization in conflict cosmologies is the definitive step towards death, sacrifice, and it embodies dead-man-walking. The combatants see/imagine/foresee/predict/dream/fabulate their martyrdom. The objects are partners of their vision of death and dying. Brigadier Nazarnejad who had passed away a few years after the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq (1988) narrated in his memoir the story of his friend who did not want to be recognized as a martyr. His

friend, Asghar, yearned for martyrdom but he feared that all the fuss and recognition that he may get after his death could pollute the purity of his intention. Asghar was worried that how he could be treated after his death could affect his intentions while he was alive. Therefore, Asghar threw away his identification dog tag before the start of a military operation so that his corpse could not be identified and he would remain anonymous, declared missing in action, and never be labeled a martyr. Asghar believed that true martyrdom is the dissolution in the love of Allah and anonymity in sacrifice. Therefore, he refused the future recognition by the society. Asghar self-actualized through *absence* of an object, his dog-tag, denying its material proximity and the ritual of disposing it before the operation allowed him to become fully what he desired to be.

Finally, the fourth fold that completes the formation of conflict cosmologies is compliance and the embrace of unreason. This fold fully depends on the other three and it proceeds from previous folds. Their entanglement produces the "embrace of unreason" (van de Port 1998). The combatant complies with violence, with the demands of things of conflict, God, commanders, and everything else which accordingly brings about the embrace of unreason. The compliance is not a mode of docility and submission by force but rather an agentive mode that one accepts to comply with. There is an active decision-making process to comply with the religious/Islamic framework that shapes political violence, to comply with the command to fight in the name of God and things of conflict that take part in combatants' decision-making. The fourth fold is based on combatants' immersion in a mode of reality that cannot be accounted for by anything except serendipity, spontaneity, and acts that are nothing except nonrepresentational performances. For instance, sound and sonic elements are other objects in conflict cosmologies that exemplify the fourth fold. I met a number of combatants who remained indifferent toward the swirling, whooshing sounds of bullets or whistles of shooting mortars, RPGs and other flying explosives. I would hear a mortar and jump on the ground to cover myself and get up dusty every time. Then, I would see how they have continued to walk serenely ahead. They were sometimes right to walk ahead since they could calculate the distance between themselves and the source of the sound due to their experience. However, they wouldn't take cover because they believed they would not hear the sound of the bullets, rockets or mortars that were destined for them. I noticed this when Reza, a 53-year-old volunteer died. He was a grocer who had volunteered and enlisted to fight in the Iran-Iraq war where he became familiar with armed battles. He returned to his shop after the war and again enlisted to fight against ISIS in Iraq. He was positioned as the gunnery sergeant of a crew-served weapons unit. He was responsible for shooting rockets, but that day he could not con-

tinue because an enemy mortar targeted his rocket launcher. He explained passionately "I heard it, *pedar-sag* mortar (the mortar who is fathered by a dog) was coming and falling on my head, so I just took my life and ran". Everyone laughed at his animated storytelling but then he added "it was not my bullet otherwise I would never hear it". The sharp seasoned veteran could recognize the weapons from their discharge sound and his skill helped him to survive through a decade of high intensity combat. However, his bullet came a few days later. He decided to carry water to various trenches and distribute snacks to other combatants while waiting for a new rocket launcher. He carried water from trench to trench while there was an intensive fire over the units. He constantly declared "don't worry, I can protect myself by listening". He survived most of the day, but he was shot by a stray bullet and he said to the friend who carried his wounded body "I heard everything except the one intended for me".

Reza submitted to the conditions of the battle fronts and complied with the conflict cosmology by putting aside his survival instincts. He was not suicidal, inexperienced, or in a rush to give up life. He embraced unreason, the fourth fold of the trajectory, and immersed in a reality that is neither life as civilians know it, nor death as those who don't believe in the armed action may assume. The sonic atmosphere and sounds of bullets shaped his reality within the conflict cosmology of the battlefronts. There is no way to account for how combatants measure reality except by stepping in the speculative realm and investigate how things become speculative. What kind of human and nonhuman interactions produce the shadowy realm of speculative realities? This is why Graham Harman stresses on unknowability, infinite depth, and the "marvelous plurality of concrete objects" (Harman 2009, 156). He situates this speculative mode of existence/existing at the edges of unknowability and acknowledges the "withdrawal of objects into a shadowy subterranean realm that supports our conscious activity" (Harman 2011, 37). Harman campaigns to put objects at the equal footing with subjects. He defends the agentive existence of objects by defining the allure of objects based on their withdrawal, unknowability, and their inaccessibility to be fully experienced by humans. In other words, objects withhold their full existence from humans. This in turn presents an allure and slipperiness of objects in their relationships with humans. I broaden the allure and add to Harman's suggestion an emphasis that the objects seduce and take away subjects along themselves into the shadowy world where a speculative reality becomes pervasive. In other words, the infinite depth of objects, crafting special intimacy and cosmologies through/along them are not manifestations of a speculative reality. Rather, everything becomes speculative when objects have sucked subjects to an "irreducible dark side" (Morton 2011,

156). This addition does not defy the object centered approaches of OOO by making objects dependent to human perspectives but rather it stresses object-qualities to take over subjects and make subjects depend on them regardless of how subjects perceive objects. The four-fold trajectory – authentication to rituals and performance to self-actualization, then immersion in compliance, and embrace of unreason – define the progress through which lives of objects become tensile (see Saramifar 2018), dark, seducing, protean and eventually speculative. It is from this point that I would like to return to the question of the object in-itself.

5 So Where Are Things Finally?

Overlooking the object in-itself and the speculative reality of things results in considering the socially constructed reality and representation of objects as the in-between. Consequently, the objectness of abiotic entities is lost, their contribution to social processes remains unacknowledged and everything is subdued to human access. This misstep removes matter from materiality and either undermines or overmines objects, to use Harman's terms (2011). On the one hand, limiting objects to a bundle of qualities both in appearances and meanings overmines objects to a transcendental depth. Furthermore, over-spreading objects to the sum of their relationships, as Actor Network Theory does, undermines them into a shallow depth. Therefore, objects are lost at two levels: first, their inaccessibility and unknowability remain neglected. The question of how subjects arrive at outer limits of objects' inaccessibility and form sociality around the absentee objects remain underexplored. Second, the accidental features and ergonomic characteristics of objects that shape users' cosmologies remain unnoticed. I share my last story here to highlight how tracing objectness of things of conflict exposes the configuration of militant subjectivities. Naser, who I mentioned earlier, was assigned to a surface-to-surface missile unit that fired wire guided missiles. He explained his task as flying kites:

> I always could imagine myself as if flying a kite. I press the trigger, look at the guidance control screen and I see the missile flying like a paper-kite smoothly. But it seems as if I am floating, I can feel my weightlessness. I can sense the rush into the air when the missile is released. Sometimes, I even remember my sparrow. I used to have a sparrow to which I tied a string and then let it fly till far, but I could guide it by pulling the string, exactly the way I give a signal to the missile through the wire. (Fieldnotes 2017)

Naser's description seems like the anticipatory affect discussed by Akama (2015, see above). However, there is more into his story than memories transposed into object-subject relationships. His memories aren't triggered just because the rocket is wire-guided and resembled to him the line of a kite, or the rope tied to the sparrow's foot. The missile causes a body to shake; it moves the air around the shooter, blocking the shooter's ears and temporarily slowing his breathing. The shooter is highly focused on guiding the missile and filled with adrenaline during combat. He ignores the temporary discomfort and continues his task. The air shift and impact of missile-discharge, which blocks air in his ears and the oxygen in his body due to shallow breathing, bring about the sensation of weightlessness while the air in his blocked ears feels like wind blowing. The objectness of the weapon facilitates and shapes the anticipatory affect, and not its symbolic potency and memories. I don't deny the symbolic potency, but I emphasize that it proceeds from objectness. Naser did not know any of these technical details and the impact on his body. He accessed the weapon from the edge of its inaccessibility and unknowability. He would probably craft a different articulation if he would be aware of details, like Jawad who articulated his relationship with the weapon according to its objectness and ergonomic details.

These stories are not fascinating tales. They are not explored to entertain or merely theorize about objects. However, analyzing them through OOO and speculative realism allows for a better insight into socialization *in* violence and its workings without overestimating ideologies and religions. The act of killing includes objects. Recognizing their roles would assist in finding solutions to widen the gap between lethal objects and human users. These stories and theorizing attempts suggest that prohibiting guns or restrict regulations on accessing firearms are not sufficient solutions. Rather, the process of socialization in violence where relationships with lethal objects solidify, even their absence, needs to be broken. Additionally, socialization *in* violence and armed resistance does not recognize faith, ideologies, or religions. There are other dimensions such as material expressions that sustain motivations and interests in combat, militancy, and the act of killing.

References

Akama, Yoko. 2015. "Being Awake to Ma: Designing in Between-ness as a Way of Becoming Wit." *CoDesign* 11 (3–4): 262–274.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2015. "Mediants, Materiality, Normativity." *Public Culture* 27 (2): 221–237.

Assmann, Jan. 2008. "Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)translatability." In *Religion beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries, 139–149. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bauman, Whitney. 2015. "Religion, Ecology, and the Planetary Other: Opening Spaces for Difference." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83 (4): 1005–1023.

Bella, Robert. 1968. "Meaning and Modernization." *Religious Studies* 4 (1): 37–45.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.

Burbick, Joan. 2006. *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy*. New York: The New Press.

Ellen, Roy. 1988. "Fetishism" *Man* 23 (2): 213–235.

Greenblatt, Stephen. 1980. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Harman, Graham. 2009. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. Melbourne: Re.Press.

Harman, Graham. 2011. *The Quadruple Object*. Ropley, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing.

Harman, Graham. 2012. "The Third Table." In *Documenta: 100 Notes-100 Thoughts*, edited by Katrin Sauerländer. Ostfildern, Germany: Documenta.

Ingold, Tim. 1986. *Evolution and Social life*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kohn, Abigail A. 2005. *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Krems, Jaimie Arona, Douglas T. Kenrick, and Rebecca Neel. 2017. "Individual Perceptions of Self- Actualization: What Functional Motives Are Linked to Fulfilling One's Full Potential?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43 (9): 1337–1352.

Lambek, Michael. 2008. "Provincializing God? Provocation from an Anthropology of Religion." In *Religion Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries, 120–138. New York: Fordham University Press.

Maslow, Abraham H. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50 (4): 370–396.

Meillassoux, Quentin, 2010. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. London: Continuum.

Meyer, Brigit. 2011. "Medium." *Material Religion* 7 (1): 58–64.

Miller, Daniel. 2009, *Stuff*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Morgan, David. 2008. "The Materiality of Cultural Construction." *Material Religion* 4 (2): 228–229.

Morton, Timothy. 2011. "Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Bbject-Oriented Ontology." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19 (2): 163–90.

Nazarnejad, Hassan. 2011. *Baba Nazar*. Tehran: Sureh Mehr.

Pelton, Robert. 1980. *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, US: University of California.

Saramifar, Younes. 2018. "Objects, Object-Ness, and Shadows of Meanings: Carving Prayer Beads and Exploring Their Materiality Alongside a Khaksari Sufi Murshid." *Material Religion* 14 (3): 368–388.

Saramifar, Younes. 2018. "Enchanted by the AK-47: Contingency of Body and The Weapon among Hezbollah Militants." *Journal of Material Culture*, 23 (3): 83–99.

Saramifar, Younes. 2019. "Pursuing the Allure of Combat: An Ethnography of Violence amongst Iraqi Shi'i Combatants Fighting ISIS." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12 (2): 210–227.

Scott, Susie. 2009. *Making Sense of Everyday Life*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

Searle, John. 1997. *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: Free Press.

Sillar, Bill. 1996. "The Dead and the Drying: Techniques for Transforming People and Things in the Andes." *Journal of Material Cultures* 1 (3): 259–289.

Stroller, Paul. 2004. *Stranger in the Village of the Sick: A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery, and Healing*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Thomassen, Bjørn 2009. *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between*. London: Routledge.

Turner, Victor. 1987. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage." In *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, edited by Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little, 3–20. Illinois: Open Court.

Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process*: *Structure and Anti-structure*. New York: Routledge.

Van de Port, Mattijs. 1998. *Gypsies, Wars, and Other Instances of the Wild: Civilisation and Its Discontents in a Serbian Town*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Vivienne, Sonja and Jean Burgess. 2013. "The Remediation of the pPersonal Photograph and the Politics of Self-Representation in Digital Storytelling." *Journal of Material Culture* 18 (3): 279–298.

Warnier, Jean Pierre. 2001. "A Praxeological Approach to Subjectivation in a Material World." *Journal of Material Culture* 6 (1): 5–24.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2003. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Illinois: Chicago University Press.

CHAPTER 3

Material Politics, Violence, and Religion

A Comparative Study of Islam and Buddhism in the People's Republic of China

Daan F. Oostveen

1 Introduction

In China there are five official or "legal" religions according to a classification scheme which is introduced in the early 20th century (Goossaert 2005): "Catholicism", "Protestantism", "Buddhism", "Daoism", and "Islam". The concept of 'religion' (宗教 *zōng jiào*) was adopted from the Japanese word for it. Of those five religions, only one finds its origins in China, namely Daoism. This veil of legal equality hides that the dealing of the PRC[1] government with these religions is very different. While 'Buddhism' as a socio-religious structure benefits most from this classification, it has become abundantly clear that 'Islam' is more and more becoming a target for the authorities. This however should not be understood as a failure to recognize that Buddhism too, especially in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, has suffered from state control and religious persecution.

I align myself with a group of scholars that is critical on what is called the 'world religions paradigm' (cf. Hedges 2017; Masuzawa 2012) in which religious diversity is primarily studied from the perspective of supposedly enclosed, immutable systems of belief. In my earlier work, I have proposed to look at religion more as a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Braidotti 2011), as interconnected cultural structures rather than various 'traditions' (Oostveen 2019, 2020). In the case of China, this becomes especially important: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the socialist PRC are not only nominally atheist, but also have a history of religious persecution, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Whereas a sanctified class of 'religions' might be an innocent though flawed tool of classification for a scholar, in the hands of a repressive government the stakes become much higher.

1 I avoid referring to the PRC as 'China'. By doing this, I do not want to delegitimize the regime of the CCP on the Mainland territories of China, but I do want to emphasize its contingent nature. And, also, we should not forget that the Republic of China ('Taiwan') still officially makes the claim of being the sole representative authority of 'China' as well.

In the PRC, religious politics has taken the shape of material politics. In this article, I employ the terms or concepts 'Islam' and 'Buddhism' explicitly as embedded in the discursive framework of the 'Chinese Dream', and show how this 'comes to matter'. This means that I study these terms through the lens of the PRC authorities as constructed entities to both encapsulate and control them. This way they borrow from the world religions paradigm in order to outwardly promote an image of religious tolerance and freedom, while simultaneously fully employing the disciplining potential of the world religions paradigm. Since, however, the world religions paradigm emphasizes religions as 'systems of faith', religious communities do have possibilities to avoid certain forms of control, by developing material infrastructures that cannot be grasped by the bureaucratic state. Let me define rhizomatic religion as the 'naturally', non-official occurring social phenomena we as scholars have learned to call 'religious' in their horizontal, interconnected, expressions. This includes 'folk religion', Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as well as the culturally embedded practice of ancestor worship, and shamanism, next to the diversity of religious expressions which are commonly clustered as part of the 'world religions'. This definition is partly self-referential: I believe no definition of religion can escape the fact that religion is always also a contingent discursive reality. 'Religion' as a concept could be understood as a 'hauntology' (Derrida 1994) – a discursive ghost that we are unable to discard completely. Rhizomatic religion refers to localized material assemblages and events, with cultural references to other such events in order to establish imagined worlds, as well as relationships with those worlds. While religious studies have often focused on texts and beliefs as primary loci of interest, the approach to religion as rhizomatic is emphasizing the material reality and dimension of religious phenomena. Chinese religion, both rhizomatic religion in China as well as state-sanctioned religion, expresses itself by means of its edifices: religious temples construct cities and environments. Monasteries and Buddhist schools can emerge as publicly funded institutions, which connect networks of official religion and give it its legitimacy. But monasteries can also emerge as shanty towns on the outskirts of the developed Han Chinese world (Oostveen 2020a). The best example of the repression of Islam in China is the material politics towards the allowed external appearance of mosques in the public space. And, of course, the infamous re-education camps of Xinjiang emerge as the dark side of anti-religious material culture.

Currently, the PRC is in the process of consciously reimagining its view on its place in the world and projecting this vision on the rest of the world. 'Xi Jinping Thought' – or 'Xiism' – is the most poignant example of this. My aim is to show how the PRC attempts to gain cultural hegemony over the religious

diversity in China, in order to incorporate it under this new worldview. Chinese religions, Protestantism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Buddhism are renegotiated under Xiism, which becomes a sort of "civil religion" in China (cf. Bellah 1967), similar to Maoism before. The PRC attempts this by gaining control over the religious infrastructure in China and defining how this infrastructure encodes religious realities.

2 Religion in China

In this article, I compare the material politics towards Buddhism and towards Islam in the contemporary PRC. To understand the relative positions of these two 'religions' in Chinese society, I would first look at their history. Buddhists arrived in China for the first time in the 1st century CE (Zürcher 1959) and were able to have a lasting influence on its culture. The teaching of Buddha (佛教 *fó jiào*) became regarded in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) as one of the 'Three Teachings' of China, together with the teaching of the classics (儒教 *rú jiào* – normally understood as 'Confucianism') and the teaching of the Way (道教 *dào jiào* – or 'Daoism').[2] Islam arrived in China only a few centuries later but might not have gone through the same process of nativization that makes outside observers think of Islam as 'Chinese' in the same way as Western observers think of Buddhism as 'Chinese'. Given the long history of Islam in China however and considering the transformation it underwent in a way that did generate a form of native Chinese Islam, this should be considered as unjustified. Nevertheless, we also must take it as a discursive fact that 'Islam' has at the same time remained 'foreign' to Chinese culture, at least in how it is perceived both by Chinese observers as well as Western, while 'Buddhism' has not.

Another important element of the self-understanding of Chinese cultural diversity is the concept of '*mín zú*' 民族, or 'minorities'. According to this ethnologic 'dogma', the 'Chinese nation' is constituted of 56 different ethnic groups. The largest of these groups are the Han Chinese (about 91%), while the 55 other '*mín zú*' make up the rest. Religion is to an extent legitimized by the Chinese government as part of the culture of these Chinese minorities. The cultural diversity of the Chinese should, under the guidance of socialism,

2 The earliest differentiation between the three teachings could be attested to the Buddhist monk Huiyuan (334–416 CE). By the time of the Tang dynasty, this differentiation was firmly entrenched in the Chinese mind (Oostveen 2020b).

be protected and defended. It is therefore, for example, that Tibetan culture is both repressed and supported: the PRC does not understand Tibetans as inferior to Chinese, because they *are* Chinese. Therefore, Tibetan Buddhism is also to be 'protected', be it not under the guidance of the Dalai Lama.

The *mín zú* analysis becomes also important when we will consider Islam. Uyghurs and Hui are seen as two of these 55 minorities. In the case of the Hui, we could argue that this group is predominantly defined by their Muslimness, despite being ethnically close to the Han Chinese. In the case of the Uyghur, their ethnic affiliation appears closer to Turkic people of central Asia (Gladney 2003).[3] But it is the *mín zú* framework which subsumes them under the cultural construct of the Chinese nation. Islam, in their case, is not which sets them apart as another *mín zú* (as is the case with the Hui) but is a cultural trait in the same way as Inner Mongolians are (Vajrayana) Buddhists.

The study of contemporary religion in China, and the study of Islam *a forteriori*, has over the past decades increasingly become a locus of an epistemological rift between Western 'critique' of PRC policy in Hui and Uyghur territories in China, and the 'Chinese perspective', which has generally retreated from studying Islam in China (unofficially making it a 'sensitive topic'). While earlier there might have been more overlapping interests between Western and Chinese scholars in studying religion in China, today the political assumptions behind such research are increasingly diverging. Scholars of religion in China are more and more confronted with the dilemma to what extent they take position. On the one hand, there is a trend to defend PRC policies in Uyghur Xinjiang or denying the existence of genocidal policies. The 'Cross Cultural Human Rights Centre', for example, proposes an alternative framework of human rights, which are not influenced by 'Western misunderstandings' of China (Hampden et al. 2021).[4] The underlying discourse is that human rights are defined by a Western biased negative view on China, and that by developing 'cross cultural human rights', in which we acquire understanding of the Chinese point of view, we will understand that the policies in Xinjiang are actually strengthening human rights, instead of undermining it. At the other end of the spectrum, some scholars completely identify with the rising anti-

3 I would like to thank my student IJsbrandt van Liere for bringing this article to my attention.

4 While I was writing this article, the "Cross Cultural Human Rights Centre" at the Free University of Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) came under attack from public indignation, after an investigation of the NOS (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting) showed that the center had been financed directly by the Chinese government for years. This was particularly embarrassing given the Xinjiang genocide negationist remarks of some of the members of this center. VU Amsterdam decided to dismantle the center after the public outcry.

China sentiment (Normile 2019). I believe that it is important to speak out, also as a scholar, if atrocities are committed by the Chinese government. One important pitfall to avoid, however, is to pit China against the West as two culturally different realms. In Western countries, China is often seen as a mystic Other, a question-mark, and/or as a threat. On the other hand, in China there is a strong tendency of reification of 'the West' (which includes everything which is not China) in strict opposition to China. I believe these oppositional thought structures are not helpful. In the same way as I believe we should differentiate between China and the PRC, we should also acknowledge that 'the PRC' should neither be exempt from criticism, nor being perceived as an evil threat that should be resisted at all costs. There exists a thin line between Sinophilia and Sinophobia.

The study of 'Buddhism' had for a long time been more immune to such dilemmas, though my sources in China indicate that even here self-censorship by critical Chinese academics is on the rise, with PRC-aligned minds filling the void that is left behind, or even just leaving scholarship of Chinese religion – critical or otherwise – altogether.[5] This strategy to subtly direct intellectuals to self-censorship has been metaphorically described as the PRC being an "anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier" (Osnos 2014). The 'anaconda' does not move if it does not have to, and the tacit message is that you are free to make your own assessments. But if it must, the anaconda will strike ferociously. The deterrent force of this strategy goes well beyond the individual's self-censoring towards speaking out on the (in)famous 'three T's': Tibet, Tiananmen, and Taiwan. The unofficial list of 'sensitive topics' is something any intellectual or artist knows without a need to name them explicitly. The psychological violence of the anaconda is incredibly effective.

But more than psychological violence to control religious infrastructures, the Chinese authorities also exercise a form of material violence, albeit structural violence (Galtung 1969). With structural violence here I mean social forces of the Chinese authorities, and how they – by means of material interventions – harm religious groups and produce and perpetuate inequality and injustice. Not only do they control which religious buildings are allowed, as part of local urban planning policies, but the Chinese authorities also initiate religious architectural projects on their own, including mosques, Buddhist

5 It would be unwise to reveal my sources, since active persecution of scholars with dissenting perspectives is on the rise. Self-censorship has always been a way of scholarship in Chinese academia. The unwritten 'list' of topics to be avoided is steadily growing, however. No-one in China would be as insane to critically study the governments Xinjiang policy. But now, scholars even decide to self-censor on relatively innocent research on Buddhism.

academies and Tibetan temples. At the more vicious end of the spectrum, the Chinese authorities have also developed an incredibly extensive network of 're-education camps' in the Xinjiang province to incarcerate and brainwash large proportions of the Uyghur population. Any critique of violence cannot avoid the normative dimension the concept of violence inevitably entails. Simply put, there is a near universal agreement that violence is something 'bad', which should be avoided. Before we establish any theory of violence to apply to violence in religion in China, we should realize this simple fact, since it directs our perception. When we identify any actor as 'violent' (whether Buddhist monks, the CCP, or Uyghur separatists), this immediately implies a value judgment. It might be best to suspend these value judgments as long as possible in order to describe the factual (material) situation more accurately.

3 A Critique of Violence

When we discuss religion only from the perspective of world religions and ideology, we often miss the real-world material politics at play. In the case of China, these material politics concerning religion are both an expression of CCP ideology as well as a form of structural violence (Galtung 1969). This structural violence is exercised by the Chinese state in the form of material politics and is targeted both at Buddhism and Islam. Though the aim is similar – fitting these 'religions' in the fold of interests of the Chinese state – its methods are different.

Over the recent years and since the rise of Xi Jinping, a new political ideology has taken shape in the PRC, which attempts to be a fusion of Maoism-Leninism, the economic and cultural vision of Deng Xiaoping, and the future looking new Maoist authoritarianism of Xi Jinping himself, with the increased adoption of native Chinese cultural elements, such as Confucianism.[6] This new ideology, which the Chinese call 'Xi Jinping Thought', and which I will refer to as Xiism, is now being taught at the major universities in the PRC, such as Beijing University, Qinghua University, and the People's University in philosophy departments. Xiism is the leading ideology of the CCP, which is seen as vanguard of the great proletarian revolution. It is fast becoming the leading "civil religion" (Bellah 1967) in the PRC today. The CCP has about 90 million members. The CCP is nominally atheistic, and members of the CCP cannot

6 Deng Xiaoping called this euphemistically 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics.' With Xi Jinping, the indebtedness to Confucian ethics becomes even more explicit.

have formal affiliations to any of the 'religions'. In the view of the PRC, China is comprised of 56 ethnic groups (民族 *mín zú*), of which the Han Chinese are the largest group. As mentioned above, the 'Chinese people' are comprised of all these minorities, and include for example the Uyghurs, the Tibetans and the Inner Mongolians. 'Religions' are seen as belonging to people and certain religions might predominate in certain minorities (such as Buddhism amongst Tibetans and Inner Mongolians, and Islam under Uyghurs and Hui). Note that this does not exclude ethnic minorities to be members of the CCP, quite the contrary, though this must imply that they do not identify openly with any religion.

In order to better understand how structural state violence functions, and how state ideology can express itself in material politics, we can review the analysis of violence by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin has attempted to give an interpretation of violence in his famous essay *Kritik der Gewalt* (Critique of Violence) from 1921. In this complex though highly influential essay he has tried to merge the proletarian violence of Marxism and the idea of Messianic justice in Judaism which understands justice as something which is always at an infinite horizon (Benjamin [1921] 1965; Oostveen 2008). The starting point of his essay questions the relation between violence, law, and justice. The justification of violence is based on whether this violence is a means to a just end or an unjust end – very similar to the Dalai Lama's evaluation of the ethical legitimacy of self-immolation of Tibetan Buddhist monks, which I will discuss later. Within this he distinguishes between 'Natural Law' and 'Positive Law'; in Natural Law, the justification of violence is based solely on the justification of its ends; in Positive Law, the justification of violence is based on the perpetuation of the law. He writes: "violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law" (Benjamin [1921] 2004, 239). Benjamin goes on to further differentiate between *mythical violence*, which is the law-preserving violence which is used instrumentally within a legal framework and the so-called *divine violence* which is predicated on pure justice, is revolutionary and law-destroying. Note that both forms legitimate violence as means to a just end, with the difference that the first functions to maintain the legal framework, while the second aims at overthrowing this order, and is therefore inherently perceived as a threat by actors within the system.

Benjamin's analysis can be applied to the current religious policy and ideological aims of the PRC. On a fundamental level, the only goal of the PRC has become to keep the CCP in power in China. To that goal, it must rely to the law-preserving force of mythical violence. The ideology of Xiism is the overarching myth to the PRC today and to which all social, cultural, economic, and religious factors are subsumed (Xi 2018; Bishop 2019). Xi Jinping redesigned

the CCP ideology, the 'myth' of China, to the idea of the 'Chinese Dream' as an alternative to the American Dream. The 'Chinese Dream' implies a "moderately prosperous society in all aspects" (Peters 2019; Garrick and Bennett 2018): the alleviation of poverty and a stable middle-income existence for all Chinese people; and "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Peters 2019): the communist party is the guiding entity of a socialist state, which is defined by Chinese (traditional) culture, including Chinese religions (Buddhism, Daoism, but also Islam – all the five official religions). Especially in the case of Buddhism, and then in particular what came to be called 'Chinese Buddhism' (汉传佛教 *hàn chuán fó jiào*), there is a parallel movement of societal interest and growth on the one hand, and subsummation under this Xiism on the other hand. Buddhism can most easily be understood as one of those 'Chinese characteristics' Deng used to talk about. Furthermore, Buddhist monasteries have been extremely flexible and creative in offering an alternative lifestyle to the new urban middle and upper middle classes. The biggest monasteries outside of Beijing, for example, offer Chinese city-dwellers a weekend off in a green environment in the mountains, with relatively clean air, vegetarian (vegan) monastic food, and an opportunity to pay off spiritual depths.[7]

4 The Buddhist Revival

Religion in China has made a significant comeback in China after the cultural revolution (Johnson 2017). 'Buddhism' has benefited mostly from the post-1976 policy of controlled religious tolerance by the PRC government (Laliberté 2019). It is sufficiently foreign – as a non-native religion – but also sufficiently organized to enable a boom in followers, and sufficiently Chinese not to raise too much concern for undermining state stability either. 'Buddhism' in China is organized under the PRC controlled Buddhist Association of China (BAC). The BAC is a government institution which is aimed at 'governing' Buddhism within the legal framework of the PRC. Any Buddhist temple, group or organization must register with the BAC in order not to be marked as an illegal religious sect.[8] The BAC in turn falls under the State Administration of Reli-

7 There exists also a thin line between spiritual development and repressive tolerance.

8 Fenggang Yang (2006) has famously distinguished 'red', 'black', and 'gray' markets of religion in China. 'Religious sects' in the understanding of the PRC's official ideology, are part of the 'black' or illegal 'marketplace' of religions and should be and are actively persecuted. Most famously, the crackdown on the Falun Gong sect has been particularly ferocious (cf. Palmer 2010).

gious Affairs (SARA), which in turn falls under the State Council of the People's Republic in China. Though empirical studies on religious affiliation in China are notoriously unreliable, rough estimates put the number of self-identified Buddhists at about 100 million, up to 200 million when we include people with a loose affiliation, interest, or some form of practice in these numbers (Wenzel-Teuber 2012).

The most striking expression of material violence in Buddhism in the PRC we have seen in the dozens of cases of self-immolations by Tibetan monks (Jerryson 2018) against the repression of Tibetans or as a form of activism for political independence. Several scholars have pointed out that Buddhism, despite its pacifist image, has produced many instances of violence, both in terms of social repression of minority groups in countries where the religion is dominant, as well as full wars (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010). These acts of impotence are similarly an expression of 'divine violence' in Benjamin's terms and are therefore a particular nuisance for the Chinese government. The Dalai Lama has said that the question of the moral permissibility of these suicides depends on the motivation or intention of the actor.

While Tibetan Buddhism has undergone a period of revival over the past decades, the Chinese government has introduced aggressive policies targeted at monastic life and Tibetan culture aimed to curb the political impact of this religious revival (Shmushko 2022). Though the control on Tibetan Buddhism is most obvious (cf. Oostveen 2020a; Powers 2016), the PRC has mostly stepped up in establishing a full control on Han Buddhism as well. For the past decades, the BAC has engaged in centralizing Buddhist Academies in the Han Buddhism tradition throughout the country, as a policy under direct control of the PRC government. Ji Zhi lists over 50 of such academies established between the early 80s and today (Zhi 2019). By establishing the Buddhist Academies at key symbolic locations, the PRC authorities make a strong claim towards encapsulating rhizomatic Buddhisms into the fold of the interests of the PRC. The control of the government on religion, justified by the societal mythology of Xiism, is therefore explicitly established by the setup of vast investments in religious infrastructures: temples, academies, but also by establishing high-speed rail networks to the most contested territories of the PRC: Tibet and Xinjiang, while being aware that some of these rail lines will never be able to operate at a profit. These religious policies of material investments capitalize on the rhizomatic networks of religion that have re-emerged after the end of the cultural revolution. By investing in both the care and the development of religious infrastructure, the government plays the role of an unavoidable Maecenas of Chinese religion.

5 Islam under Pressure

The encapsulation of Buddhism within the PRC by means of exercising a 'mythical violence' must be understood in the context of an inherent understanding of Buddhism as a 'Chinese religion'. Though, as we will see, the tactics of material encapsulation by means of mythical violence is the same with Islam in China (Gladney 2009), a fundamental difference here is that Islam has historically been conceptualized as a 'foreign' religion.

'Islam' has been present in China[9] as early as the seventh century, when it established a significant presence under influence of the silk roads in Xi'an, which exists until this day. Under the relatively short but influential Mongolian rule of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), the relatively tolerant religious policy of China extended even more explicitly beyond the boundaries of Chinese religions (Three Teachings) to Christianity and Islam (Murata 2013). The Uyghurs are a Turkish-Muslim minority in the far West of China, in the vast and scarcely populated Xinjiang region, which incorporates the ancient silk roads as well as the Taklamakan desert.

'Islam' has become a contested topic in China in the past decade, especially because of several Uyghur terrorist attacks, aimed at independence of Xinjiang as East-Turkestan. In 2013, five people were killed, and 38 people injured on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The attack was claimed by Uyghur militants. An Islamic group inflicted over a hundred casualties in a knife attack on a police station in Xinjiang in July 2014. In December 2016 again an Islamic group drove a car with a bomb in the government headquarters in Karakax county and killed two people by knife stabbing. The three militants were killed. In February 2017, five were stabbed to death in a residential compound in Pishan – the three militants were killed as well (Shan 2018). In line with Benjamin, we could call these revolutionary attacks forms of 'divine violence', which aim to overthrow the current political order and establish a new one.

Spooked that these attacks are invigorated by and embedded in international Islamist terrorism, the PRC decided to launch the 'Strike Hard Campaign

9 Historically, territories which constitute 'China' have shifted quite a bit. Generally, we could distinguish between the heartland of Han China – which roughly coincides with the diamond shape between present-day Beijing to the North, Shanghai to the East, Guangzhou to the South and Chengdu to the West – and those areas outside of that triangle: Taiwan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Xinjiang etc. which have from time to time be under control of a Chinese dynasty. Again, this differentiation of no means serves to delegitimize the claim of the PRC – the current 'dynasty' – on those territories per se, but to show how Han Chinese culture and 'other' Chinese cultures can and should be distinguished.

against Violent Terrorism' in 2014 (Human Rights Watch 2021). Also, the discourse on 'violent extremism' of Islam also proves very useful to legitimize a large-scale infrastructure of oppression of the Uyghur population. The most striking feature of this campaign has been the establishment of dozens of 're-education camps' throughout the province, in which a large group of the adult population is assumed to be held indefinitely. The Netherlands, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium and other countries have called the PRC's practices in Xinjiang "genocide" under the definition of international law, while other countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which rely more heavily on trade with China have so far been reluctant to follow suit (Wright 2021).

The reports on these camps, as well as the scale of the repression, are extremely hard to gauge independently. For the most, we must rely on witness reports of Uyghurs who have fled both the camps and China to places like Kazakhstan and the West (such as the report by Khatchadourian 2021). In addition to these witness reports, we can rely on the satellite images that show us the emergence of a vast network of 'reeducation' facilities or concentration camps throughout Xinjiang. After an initial period in which the Chinese authorities denied the existence of these camps, they have now changed course by acknowledging these facilities exist and explain them as "vocational training centers" (Raza 2019). The Chinese myth of Xiism and the Chinese Dream expresses itself in the mythical violence that appears through the establishment of repressive infrastructures.

6 Conclusion

Both 'Buddhism' and 'Islam' have come under pressure by the Chinese government in recent years. The ethno-cultural repression of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, however, shows that this pressure is not the same for every religious organization. Chinese Buddhists and Hui Muslims face different challenges than Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims. The categorization of 'religions' (宗教 *zōng jiào*) on the one hand and the categorization of 'minorities' (民族 *mín zú*) on the other hand have enabled the Chinese government to repress when needed and incorporate when expedient.

The PRC represents an order of law under the ideology of Xiism, which can use the full force of the state apparatus and the People's Liberation Army. It employs what Benjamin has called a mythical violence, based on the monopoly of violence that sovereign states have in the international global order. This mythical violence is law-preserving and violence is used as a means to

this. The 'world religions paradigm' serves the PRC to 'divide and conquer' rhizomatic religion – Buddhist, or Islamic, or otherwise – present in China. The PRC explicitly recognizes 'religions' including their societal value, incorporates them institutionally under SARA, and is then able to exercise continuous control over them to fit within the framework of the Chinese Dream. This is done not only by cultural control, but also by developing and investing in a communist-sanctioned religious infrastructure of Buddhist schools, temples, 'vocational training camps', high-speed rail links to regions of religious interest, but also by targeted demolition of religious sites that are unwelcome. Various Islamic and Buddhist groups or individuals violently challenge this *Pax Sinica*. They have employed attempts at divine violence, to overthrow the order of law, by violent attacks in the case of Islamic Uyghurs and by self-immolations by Tibetan Buddhist monks. The campaigns of the PRC authorities to crush these uprisings have been ferocious. The extended infrastructural network of 'vocational training camps' which has been set up, has the explicit purpose to repress Uyghur culture. Various states have condemned these practices even as genocidal.

In the case of Hui Islam and Chinese Buddhism, the response has not been this brutal. But the PRC does repress the religious expression in Hui-majority territories more and more, and the control of the state on Chinese Buddhism is arguably part of a continuous campaign of incorporation. Here, the mythical violence of the PRC is felt as a form of structural state violence.

References

Bellah, Robert N. 1967. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus* 96 (1): 1–21.

Benjamin, Walter. 1965. *Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Benjamin, Walter, Michael W. Jennings, and Marcus Paul Bullock. 2004. *Selected Writings*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bishop, Bill. 2019. "Engineers of the Soul: Ideology in Xi Jinping's China by John Garnaut." *Sinocism* (blog), January 17, 2019. https://sinocism.com/p/engineers-of-the-soul-ideology-in?s=r. Accessed: 12-10-2021.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2011. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1994. "Spectres of Marx." *New Left Review* 205: 31–58.

Galtung, Johan. 1969. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3): 167–91.

Garrick, John and Yan Chang Bennett. 2018. "Xi Jinping Thought: Realisation of the Chinese Dream of Rejuvenation?" *China Perspectives* 2018 (1–2): 99–105.

Gladney, Dru C. 2003. "China's Minorities: The Case of Xinjiang and the Uyghur People." UN Commission on Human Rights.

Gladney, Dru C. 2009. "Islam in China: State Policing and Identity Politics." In *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, edited by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, 451–478. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goossaert, Vincent. 2005. "The Concept of Religion in China and the West." *Diogenes* 52 (1): 13–20.

Hampden-Turner, Charles, Peter J. Peverelli, and Alfons Trompenaars. 2021. *Has China Devised a Superior Path to Wealth Creation? the Role of Secular Values*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher.

Hedges, Paul. 2017. "Multiple Religious Belonging after Religion: Theorising Strategic Religious Participation in a Shared Religious Landscape as a Chinese Model." *Open Theology* 3 (1): 48–72.

Human Rights Watch. 2021. "'Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots': China's Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims." https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting. Accessed 28-11-2021.

Jerryson, Michael, and Mark Juergensmeyer. 2010. *Buddhist Warfare*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jerryson, Michael. 2018. "Buddhism, War, and Violence." In *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, edited by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields, 453–478. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Ian. 2017. *The Souls of China: the Return of Religion After Mao*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Khatchadourian, Raffi. 2021. "Surviving the Crackdown in Xinjiang." *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2021. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/12/surviving-the-crackdown-in-xinjiang. Accessed 10-12-2021.

Laliberté, André. 2019. "Buddhism under Jiang, Hu, and Xi: The Politics of Incorporation." In *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, edited by Gareth Fisher Ji Zhi, and André Laliberté, 21–44. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2012. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. London: University of Chicago Press.

Murata, Sachiko. 2013. "Muslim Approaches to Religious Diversity in China." In *Religious Diversity in Chinese thought*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Normile, Dennis. "China's Scientists Alarmed, Bewildered by Growing Anti-Chinese Sentiment in the United States." *Scienceinsider*, 31 July 2019. https://www.science.org/content/article/china-s-scientists-alarmed-bewildered-growing-anti-chinese-sentiment-united-states. Accessed 12-03-2021.

Oostveen, Daan F. 2008. *Het Andere Geweld. Een studie op de kruispunten van Jacques Derrida en Emmanuel Lévinas*. Master's Thesis, Ghent University.

Oostveen, Daan F. 2019. "Religious Belonging in the East Asian Context: An Exploration of Rhizomatic Belonging." *Religions* 10 (182).

Oostveen, Daan F. 2020a. "Rhizomatic Religion and Material Destruction in Kham Tibet: The Case of Yachen Gar." *Religions* 11 (10).

Oostveen, Daan F. 2020b. *Hermeneutical Explorations of Multiple Religious Belonging*. PhD Diss., VU Amsterdam.

Osnos, Evan. 2014. *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York: Farrar, Graus and Giroux.

Palmer, David A. 2010. *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Peters, Michael A. 2019. *The Chinese Dream: Educating the Future: An Educational Philosophy and Theory Chinese Educational Philosophy Reader*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge.

Powers, John. 2016. *The Buddha Party. How the People's Republic of China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

Raza, Zainab. 2019. "China's 'Political Re-Education' Camps of Xinjiang's Uyghur Muslims." *Asian Affairs* 50 (4): 488–501.

Shan, Wei and Ryan Ho. 2018. "Islam in China: Current Conditions and State Policies." *East Asian Policy* 10 (4): 103–15.

Shmushko, Kai. 2022. "Enchanted Commodities or Cultural Elements? Lay Han Practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and the 'Living Hall' Model (Shenghuo guan 生活馆)." *Review of Religion in Chinese Society* (forthcoming).

Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina. 2012. "People's Republic of China: Religions and Churches Statistical Overview 2011." *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* 2 (3): 29–54.

Wright, Stephen. 2021. "U.S. Allies Diverge Over Labeling China's Treatment of Uyghurs as Genocide." *Wall Street Journal*, 5 May 2021. https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-allies-diverge-over-labeling-chinas-treatment-of-uyghurs-as-genocide-11620207782. Accessed 12-03-2021.

Xi Jinping. 2018. *Xi Jinping: the Governance of China*. Shanghai: Shanghai Book Traders.

Yang, Fenggang. 2006. "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China." *The Sociological Quarterly* 47: 93–122.

Zhe, Ji. 2019. "Schooling Dharma Teachers: The Buddhist Academy System and Sangha Education." In *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, edited by Gareth Fisher, Ji Zhe, and André Laliberté, 171–209. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.

Zürcher, Erik. 1959. *The Buddhist Conquest of China*. 3rd ed., edited by Barend J. Ter Haar. Leiden: Brill.

CHAPTER 4

Bypassing the Bulldozer

The Materiality of State Violence on Religion in Kibera, Nairobi

Tammy Wilks

1 Introduction[1]

It was before dawn on 23 July 2018 when the residents of Kibera were awoken by uproar and commotion; bulldozers had arrived in their neighborhood. As family members and neighbors helped each other to the nearest road for safety, a retinue of bulldozers began to file in Kibera and mow down any structure in its path. Prevented by police officers from salvaging their belongings, Kiberans watched helplessly from the sidelines as their homes, businesses, schools, and places of worship were razed to ruins. By ten o'clock that morning, approximately 30,000 residents of Kibera – the oldest and most diverse neighborhood of Nairobi – were left homeless, destitute, and religiously adrift (BBC News 2018; Golla 2018; Mwanza 2018). The bulldozing resumed construction of a bypass road designed to ease Nairobi's notorious traffic congestion. The bypass road is intended to run through the heart of Kibera and for the first time, connect the two roads that historically bordered this neighborhood: Ngong Road to the north, and Lang'ata Road in the south. In this respect, although numerous demolitions have occurred in Kibera, the demolition which occurred on the 23rd of July 2018 was unprecedented as it fundamentally reconfigured the physical and material landscape of the neighborhood that constituted the material conditions for religious and interreligious life in Kibera.

In this chapter I examine the bypass road in Kibera as a symbol of state violence. I define state violence as the material, symbolic, and affective techniques that states deploy to render itself real in society and to render society legible (Aretxaga 2001, 2003). An examination of state violence, however,

1 This chapter draws on fieldwork conducted in Kibera in 2019. Fieldwork was made possible thanks to the Andrew W. Mellon Archie Mafeje Critical Decolonial Humanities Scholarship, University of Cape Town and the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, South Africa.

requires a definition of 'the state'. I follow the position of political anthropologists that the state is materialized not only through public works or the rules and regulations which later outline how the public makes use of – in the case of this chapter – the bypass road. The state is further manifested in society as a 'feeling state' of emotions, sentiments, and fears which emanate from, and together with the material and procedural qualities, renders the state an entity and plausible reality to those living there (Aretxaga 1999, 52; see also Wedeen 2003, 608). In this respect, as the state is simultaneously produced by and produces a reality of material effects and immaterial affects and the myriad of techniques used by the state to enact violence can similarly create a kind of 'plu-reality' to borrow van Alphen's word (2012), whereby individuals experience state violence as enduring, elusive, and encompassing.

What makes the bypass road in Kibera noteworthy, as this chapter will show, is that Kiberans who were affected by the raze in July 2018 describe their experiences of state violence in temporally entangled ways. The bulldozing evoked both dense social histories and intensified present worries about how Kiberans have and remain forced to find ways to 'bypass the bulldozer' that is, to negotiate their land insecurity in Kenya. In this chapter, I explore these nonlinear and materially affective ways of experiencing state violence through the religious life of a Kiberan woman whom I refer to as Bibi Jaina.[2] Bibi Jaina (b. 1952) identifies as Nubian Muslim and traces her lineage to the first Nubian community who settled in Kibera as early as 1904. On the morning of the raze, Bibi Jaina lost several properties that she inherited from her paternal grandfather, a loss that has rendered her grandchildren possibly the first generation of propertyless Nubians in Kibera. Furthermore, in the hours following the bulldozing, Bibi Jaina witnessed her neighbors reclaim the ruins of her razed property, an act that may have radically reconfigured the material differences between Nubian and non-Nubian religious communities in Kibera.

By unpacking the challenges that Bibi Jaina faces to deal with her loss and rebuild her property, her experience and life history offers three important contributions for thinking about why and how religion matters for understanding state violence in Kibera and its effects. First, Bibi Jaina's life history illuminates how the religiosity of Nubians in Kibera was formed and remains dependent on the material conditions provided to them by the Kenyan state of the day. This material dependency highlights what is at stake for the Nubian community when land is revoked, and property destroyed by the state and

2 In the interests of confidentiality, all names in this chapter are pseudonyms. Bibi is a Swahili word for 'grandmother' and is commonly used to refer to senior women.

complicates how we understand state violence as both structural and personal. Second, the ways in which the raze destabilized Bibi Jaina's tenure and claim to land exposes a longer history of the Nubian community's struggle to obtain land rights in Kibera and political belonging to Kenya. In this respect, the circuits of material construction of the bypass road, and destruction of Bibi Jaina's property, evoke and are entangled in this longstanding struggle for recognition. Third, both the destruction of Bibi Jaina's property and the suspension on the construction of the bypass road creates blockages in the intergenerational transfer of property to her descendants, property that represents what it means to be Nubian in Kibera. I argue that taking seriously why property for Bibi Jaina sustains her religiosity and Nubian lineage may illuminate how and why religious matters – in this chapter, property and land – matter for understanding the nature of land conflict in Kibera. The final section of this chapter examines why and how deferment of the bypass road complicates the mediation of Nubian religiosity, materially and temporally.

2 Roads as Ethnographies of State Violence

To examine roads as a symbol of state violence, we need to understand how scholars contend the function and meaning of roads in the state. On the one hand there is an exceptionally large body of literature which situates roads as sites where the state manifests itself to society and as objects used to achieve spatial order in, and legibility of society (Campbell 2012; Fairhead 1992; Jourde 2005; Scott 1998). For scholars who contribute to this literature, roads are valid ethnographic sites to observe the everyday ways in which people encounter the state, whether by obeying the rules of the road or by entering toll gates. The second body of literature examines how ordinary people 'make' and emplace the road and the state long after construction is finalized (Ciabarri 2017; Scott 1998). For these scholars, roads are the materiality of state-society negotiations and contestations and their meaning and function in society continues to change over time, which means that roads remain unfinished projects (Bize 2017; Cupers and Meier 2020; Lamont 2017).

In Kenya, however, roads mark both the presence and the absence of the state in society. Roads can 'enchant' the viewer into believing that the Kenyan state has invested in the progress of the nation when such public works remain geographically uneven between the city, the coast, and the countryside, for instance (Blunt 2019; Melnick 2018; see also Larkin 2013).[3] Additionally, road-

3 I thank Erik Meinema for bringing this point to my attention.

works in Kenya often emerge from and conceal histories of colonial violence which endures in the post-independent era through nefarious bilateral state agreements or patrimonialism between local elites and political officials, both of which exclude ordinary people in making decisions about land use in Kenya (Blunt 2019; Klopp 2012; Kimari 2017, 2020; Manji 2014). In this respect, roads represent not only the material form of the state in society, but also a lasting materiality of the violent choices and actions taken by the state past and present to enact the road; choices and actions that societies are forced to live with long after the road has been implemented.

Taking a material approach to religion,[4] these violent choices and actions that the colonial and post-independent governments have made which includes human settlement and displacement, land appropriation, cartographical erasure, slum clearance initiatives and urban development projects, have affected the religious lives of Kiberans and interreligious life in Kibera in ways that may contribute to new understandings of the interrelationship between materiality, religion, and violence.

3 Making Inroads to Religion

Established in 1904, less than five years after Nairobi was declared the new capital of the British East Africa Protectorate, Kibera is as old as the city itself. The area of land that became Kibera was annexed from the Kikuyu, Maasai, and Dorobo communities to provide a military base for soldiers of the King's African Rifles (K.A.R). The K.A.R was a multi-battalion unit of African soldiers often forcibly conscripted from the various British territories in East Africa. The regiment of soldiers who settled in Kibera were classified by the British as 'Soudanese' or 'Nubian'. Although 'Nubian' may conjure associations to the Nuba Mountains in present-day Sudan, those claim this identity and on whom this identity was placed, have origins in various geographies (Sarre 2018, 141). Still, what these soldiers bound together was that their long military service and conversion to Islam meant that they either could not, or would not, return home. In this respect, Kibera was formed as 'a home of last resort' for the first Nubian soldiers and their families; a refuge from persecution back home but also as non-locals to Kenya, a place of ambiguous belonging nonetheless (Elfversson and Höglund 2018).

4 Meyer et al. (2010, 209–210) defines the material approach to religion as the study of material forms and practices through which religions are manifested, coexist, and conflict in pluralised settings.

FIGURE 4.1 An enhanced section of the Key Plan of Nairobi Township 1916–1923

In 1918, the colonial government officially gazetted 4,198 acres "situated south of the Ngong Road" as a "Military Reserve" (*The Official Gazette of the East African Protectorate*, Notice No. 686, July 10, 1918. 577). The Nubian soldiers named this area 'Kibra,' a Kinubi word for 'forest' or 'wilderness.' The social career[5] of the bypass road in Kibera can similarly be traced to this period of translocal human displacement and settlement from the 'forest'. Formed as two parallel lines inked on the Key Plan of Nairobi Township Plan of 1916–1923, the bypass road is designed as an entryway into Kibera from the south and demarcates two areas: the residential premises of K.A.R to the east, and to the west, a golf course, K.A.R shooting range and K.A.R cemetery (*The Key Plan of Nairobi Township* 1916–1923, MPGG 1/101/2, The National Archives of the United Kingdom). Although the Plan does not appear to link the unnamed road entering Kibera from the south to Ngong Road in the north, a large swath of land perpendicular to these border roads is left blank, nonetheless.

Throughout its rule of Kenya, the British colonial government did not extend the road that led into Kibera. However, the residents of Kibera – who over time comprised both Nubian and non-Nubian identifying people – slowly occupied the 'empty' space on the Plan, space they indeed may not have

5 The 'social career' of material objects is a term used by Meyer et al. (2010, 209).

known was plotted this way. Furthermore, the colonial government did not foresee – as they later confessed – that Kibera would provide later Nubian descendants with the material conditions to gradually emplace themselves and cultivate a distinct urban religiosity (Kenya Land Commission. 1934. *Evidence and Memorandum*. Vol. I. H.M.S.O. 1158–1161). Since settling in Kibera, the Nubian community had formed a Council of Elders who negotiated with the colonial state, built mosques, madrassas, and private housing for their community, and argued that burying their dead had transformed Kibera into an ancestral home for Nubians (KLC Evidence and Memorandum, 1160–1; Parsons 1997, 104). This incremental process of religious instantiation through building sacred spaces and burying their dead, anchored Nubians' claim to Kibera and produced for later generations, an indigenous ontology of oneness with the land as conveyed in the 1948 phrase: "Kibra is in our blood" (Parsons 1997, 112).[6] Thus, as each generation of Nubians buried their dead in Kibera, Kibera in turn sustained them, a process that reinforced their claim to Kibera and to autochthony. The point is not to suggest that the Plan authorized then, or should also be used as the material basis to authorize now to whom or for what means the 'empty' land was assigned. Indeed, the ways in which the residents of Kibera took up space in the neighborhood during this time forces us to rethink the extent to which colonial cartography, as a form of state violence, impeded on their ability to do so. Rather, this brief historical overview highlights the interlocking forms of state violence that ties the act of mapping empty space inextricably to the physical displacement and settlement of peoples in and across the British territories. In this way, we may also begin to comprehend the unstable grounds on which the Nubian community in Kibera emplaced, and over time expanded their religion on land that was appropriated by the colonial state and to which the Nubian community unfortunately held no title deed and where unbeknownst to them, a road was planned. Bearing this history in mind allows us to understand what is at stake for the religiosity of this community should the state (re)claim the land. This urges us to pay attention to the claims that Nubian identifying people make during periods of land insecurity to preserve their religiosity and way of life.

4 A Bilateral Bypass

When Kenya achieved independence in 1963, the Nubian community lost not only their occupation as soldiers and their military pension but also their

6 I thank the anonymous reviewer who highlighted this point.

'detribalized' status, a status that barely secured their residency in Kibera during colonialism but nonetheless provided Nubians with a degree of autonomy in Kibera. The new Kenyan Republic under President Jomo Kenyatta regarded the detribalized status as incongruent to its nation building project that based citizenship on, and distributed land according to ethnicity (Moskowitz 2019). This position, which remains today, renders Nubians in post-independent Kenya stateless persons until they are formally vetted by the state and further rejects the community's claim to Kibera as their homeland, given that Nubians are discounted as an indigenous ethnic community in Kenya (Adam 2009, 19–20; Balaton-Chrimes 2013, 339–340).[7] As a final move to secure land, the Kenyan state declared Kibera public land in 1969 and commenced an extensive housing development project that resulted in the displacement of several Nubian families and the destruction of their property (The Nubian Community in Kenya v. The State of Kenya 2010, 16–21).

For Nubian families, property[8] holds significant religious meaning. This does not mean that Nubians believe property to derive from or house the transcendent. Rather, property is imbibed with histories, memories, and practices that Nubians consider crucial to their religiosity and which gets performed by owning and attending to one's property. For instance, when the housing development project in Kibera was underway, the municipality of Nairobi granted Nubians priority to rent municipal housing which Nubian women rejected on account that the design of these homes neither represented the architectural aesthetics of the Nubian people nor accommodated the traditional needs of a Nubian family by including a *shamba*[9] (Parsons 1997, 121). Additionally, those families whose homes were not demolished were nonetheless compelled to develop their *shamba* into rental properties to compensate for the loss of colonial military income and veteran pension and to support their unemployed children who could not obtain documentation to enter the labor market. The transformation of shamba into rental space proved briefly lucrative given the burgeoning demand in housing in Nairobi following the rural migration of Kenyans after independence. However, the loss of a family shamba eroded the longstanding cultural practices of herding and farming in the Nubian community, removed many families' reliance on livestock as a form of capital in times of need and effaced the material culture of Nubian aesthetics (Amis 1984, 1988;

7 For scholarship on the vetting that Kenyan Nubians must undergo, see Balaton-Chrimes (2015).

8 In line with how Nubian-identifying participants in my research describe property, I mean a compound of houses and a shamba on a plot of land.

9 Swahili term for a cultivated plot of land.

Clark 1978). Taking seriously the religious and cultural significance that property holds for Nubians brings into sharp relief how the loss and destruction of property bears on their religiosity.

At the same time, a new regime of illegal land appropriation by the state was underway in Kibera. Particularly under Daniel arap Moi's presidency (1978–2002), political officials were found to bestow land deeds to Christian clergymen in Kibera in exchange for electoral votes (Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal/Irregular Allocation of Public Land, 2003). The bypass road in Kibera was also revived in this period of land appropriation. In 1988 a feasibility test conducted by the Kenyan government and the Government of Japan determined that a bypass or "New Link Road" as suggested in the Report, is an effective solution to traffic congestion. However, details about when construction would commence and what would become of the residents who currently inhabited Kibera were absent from the Report (Republic of Kenya Ministry of Transport and Communication 1988. *The Nairobi Bypass Construction Project Feasibility Test Final Report*. Vol. 2. Section 3a, V-25). Alongside this dense network patrimonialism, the uncertainty of the future on account of the bypass road caused Nubian and non-Nubian Kiberans to turn on each in violent ways as each party believed the other to be more land secure. During this period of violent conflict, many Nubian homes were burnt which further exacerbated the community's loss of property and livelihoods.[10]

The violent conflict between Nubians and their non-Nubian and predominantly Christian neighbors, especially how the media reported this conflict, obscured the role of the state and of state violence despite local, international, and academic calls to examine land grabbing and forced evictions as forms of state violence (Amnesty International Report 2009, Kenya; Klopp 2000). But demonstrating how state violence operates and holding the state accountable proved difficult for many Kiberans during President Mwai Kibaki's administration (2002–2013). President Kibaki passed three major infrastructural and social initiatives – UN-Habitat Kenya Slum Upgrading Program (2004), the Kenya Vision 2030 (2008), and the Nairobi Metro 2030 Strategy (2008) – which collectively promoted roadworks in Kibera and other development projects as opportunities to work with bilateral states and non-governmental organizations to develop the lives and livelihoods of Kiberans. Under the guise of slum upgrading, these projects initiated a series of routine unannounced and

10 The well-known and publicized violent conflict that took place in Kibera during Moi's presidency occurred in October 1995 (Los Angeles Times, 17 October 1995; Reuters, 16 October 1995).

uncompensated demolitions across neighborhoods in Nairobi. In 2003, construction for the bypass recommenced yet again in Kibera which resulted in the destruction of 400 structures and another few hundred structures in 2004 (Vasagar 2004). The District Officer later confessed that the razes were an attempt by the state to free up land for a bypass road that would join Lang'ata Road to Ngong Road (Bodewes 2005, 174–176).

In 2015 a few Kiberans reported that their dwellings were marked overnight with an 'X' in red paint, presumably earmarked for demolition or eviction (Dixon 2015). As reports of this occurrence increased in the neighborhood, so too did rumors emerge and circulate that the symbol marked the homes of people from a distinct ethnic or religious community which meant that neighbors were working with the state to 'rid' Kibera of particular groups of people (Kahura 2018). These rumors and suspicions were further heightened in 2017 when President Uhuru Kenyatta bestowed the Kenyan Nubian Council of Elders with a community title deed to 288 acres of land in Kibera (*The Kenya Gazette*, 7 May 2018, Chapter Four). Why would the Kenyan government bestow prime land in Nairobi to a religious community whom it continues to classify as 'stateless'?

As this section has shown, this question can be addressed by returning to two concomitant points. First, the post-independent state is both strategically constituted by, and colludes with a network of local elites, states, and non-governmental organizations to secure control of land to the detriment of its citizens and non-citizen population alike. On the other hand, Nubian property owners have experienced throughout the post-independent era, the destruction of their property through state-sponsored urban development projects and through interreligious conflict in their neighborhood. These facts may have, according to opinions relayed to me by Nubians and non-Nubian Kiberans alike, compelled the Kenyan Nubian Council of Elders to issue their support to President Kenyatta by way of electoral votes in exchange for land tenure. However, the title deed granted to the Kenyan Nubian Council of Elders was communal and did not therefore preclude individual Nubian property owners like Bibi Jaina from the raze in July 2018 (see also Sarre 2018). Instead, it shows that the politics and poetics of land in Kenya is determined by 'big men'; a consortium of foreign organizations, Kenyan politicians, elders, and religious clergy that consolidate and maintain political power over land in Kenya (Blunt 2019; de Smedt 2009). As the next section will show, Bibi Jaina's story offers a unique and personal account of how ordinary Nubian property owners operate outside 'big men politics' to protect her property, property she considers a part of her religiosity, identity, and lineage, as a Nubian Muslim.

5 Bulldozing for Bypasses

On that morning of 23 July 2018, when the bulldozers tore through Kibera, Bibi Jaina recalls that she and her ninety-four-year-old mother had just finished their prayers and were preparing breakfast when her grandson, Abdul, informed them that bulldozers were presently destroying structures in Kibera where the family's property is located.[11] None of the eight family members with whom Bibi Jaina lives heard the demolitions occurring at the time. In fact, Abdul was notified of the raze via a text message sent by one of the tenants and his close friend, Hakim, that bulldozers were razing schools, homes, and places of worship indiscriminately. Upon notifying his grand- and great grand- mothers of the news, Abdul left home to assist Hakim and the other tenants who rented from his grandmother. Although it felt much longer, Abdul returned two hours later with grave news; the ten one-bedroom dwellings that Bibi Jaina inherited from her grandfather were all demolished.

I was introduced to Bibi Jaina by Hakim, my research assistant. Hakim and his brother rented one of the ten houses from Bibi Jaina for several years before they became subsequently homeless on the morning of the raze. When his brother left a week later to seek employment in the agricultural town of Nakuru, Hakim found himself without family in Kibera and Bibi Jaina 'adopted' him as her grandson. Opening her home as a place of belonging and safety to Hakim was part of being Nubian, according to Bibi Jaina; that is, to welcome and provide shelter to all Muslims in their time of need. Bibi Jaina was born and raised in Kibera. Although the eldest daughter amongst five siblings, Bibi Jaina explains that her parents did not want her to become "a traditional Nubian housewife" and insisted that she would receive a secular education before marriage. When Bibi Jaina began primary school in 1961, she was amongst the first cohort of Nubian girls in Kibera to enter and complete a secular education in English. After high school, Bibi Jaina was trained as a nurse and advanced to midwifery. She retired in 1998 to care for her husband who passed away in 2000.

Because Bibi Jaina is the eldest daughter to her parents, the sole caregiver to her elderly mother, and the only sibling in her family who lives permanently in Kibera, the family granted her custodianship of the property around 2002, according to her recollection, with the agreement that the property be bequeathed to the next generation, including Bibi Jaina's grandsons. The rents generated funded her mother's medication, the grandchildren's school fees,

11 Interview, February 2019.

and daily living expenses. As I came to understand and indeed what interested me about Bibi Jaina's claim and her story overall, is how she described property as more than a source of much-needed revenue. Like most Nubian identifying people who agreed to participate in my research, Bibi Jaina maintains that the descendants of the K.A.R soldiers are the rightful owners of land in Kibera. During our conversations, Bibi Jaina would exhume photographs of her paternal grandfather and father from between the pages of dusty books. One photograph depicts her grandfather bearing a stern expression, dressed handsomely in his military attire, and standing erect in his *shamba*. In another photograph, Bibi Jaina's father is dressed similarly in his military uniform but positioned in an empty courtyard enclosed by four squat mud and wattle dwellings. These four dwellings are where Bibi Jaina and her family lives and the only property that remains of her inheritance.

Bibi Jaina stressed that property is *barakat* (blessing) whereby Nubians inherit not only the physical property from their forebearers, but also the moral practice that allows Nubians to attend every day to a "worldly thing" – property – without becoming "greedy, boastful, or haughty" as property-owners. She explains that although neither her grandfather nor father possessed an official title deed to land in Kibera, they "worked the land" with reverence and honor, a practice that each man undertook throughout his lifetime and one that instilled a sense of proprietorship beyond the legal definition of property rights. 'Working the land', whether cultivating the *shamba* like her grandfather, building property like her father, or maintaining the property as Bibi Jaina does and passing it on to her grandchildren, illustrated to me that Nubians in Kibera 'perform property' through a moral ethic of *barakat* and simultaneously emplace and imbibe this moral ethic in their property and land (Blomley 2013, 25; Smith 2019, 81). Alongside burying their family in the cemetery, performing property this way generates over time the sense that Kibera belongs to them, and they to it.

This way of emplacing oneself materially to a place and people past and present, and the claim-making possibilities it affords land insecure Nubians has over the years undermined the state's position that Kibera is state land and has caused friction between Nubians and their equally land insecure neighbors. The tension between neighbors was particularly played out in the aftermath of the raze when residents either mistakenly or purposefully appropriated the ruined materials that hours before constituted Bibi Jaina's property:

> Abdul and Jabril [brothers] they helped Hakim and his brother get their things together. But skirmishes happened. Those who helped was [sic]

> not people we know. They came with bad thoughts to loot. I made the boys just get the things and bring it here [her home] so it can be safe. They even took the *mabati* [corrugated metal sheets] and materials to sell (…). Everything, it was all gone.

The term 'looting' was used to describe the actions of Kiberans following the 2003 and 2004 razes as well (Bowedes 2005, 18–19). Consistent in these reports is that 'looting' is loaded with overt expectations and undue responsibilities that the observer placed on Kiberans to conduct themselves virtuously in the aftermath of the raze. These expectations of others are evident in Bibi Jaina's retelling above in that she anticipated that her fellow Kiberans would maintain the norms of material possession and ownership that preceded the raze, norms which preserved longstanding material differences between Nubians and non-Nubians in Kibera. Expounding on the extract above is not to lambast Bibi Jaina. To be sure, those whom Bibi Jaina defined as looters may have neither known the significance of their actions nor have looted at all. Rather, Bibi Jaina's retelling illustrates two points for understanding how the Kenyan state, via the raze, fundamentally reconfigured the materiality of Nubian religiosity and the material dynamics between Nubians and non-Nubians in Kibera.

First, we see that 'looting' is more than a moral determination of actions committed, but a pivotal moment when the state, by way of the bulldozers, retreats from Kibera and the residents of Kibera are left to reassemble their neighborhood. Bibi Jaina's retelling suggests that she assumed her neighbors would rebuild through the social and material infrastructures that before the raze constituted and organized religious differences in Kibera; that is, Nubian property as constructed from mud, wattle, and sometimes stone. From this perspective, it may be said that for Bibi Jaina, the reappropriation of her ruined property was also a radical exercise in reconstructing the history of and social hierarchies in Kibera in ways that erased and disadvantaged Nubians.

Second, Bibi Jaina's determination that her fellow Kiberans "came with bad thoughts to loot" requires on the part of the listener and reader, an empathic understanding of the conditions under which the experience took place and the kinds of emotions the retelling of this experience evokes. Consider that the relatively short period between destruction and appropriation may have deprived Bibi Jaina the opportunity to comprehend and/or mourn the loss of her property. As Irene Stengs (2018, 268) reminds us, in the wake of a catastrophic event, mourning and commemoration over ruins are necessary rituals to "mediate and organize grief, anger, sadness and retaliation". In this respect, the inability to mourn her loss may explain why the role of the state and the

road of the state does not feature in Bibi Jaina's recollection of the morning of the raze while the assumed motives and intentions of her fellow Kiberans overwhelms her recollection.

As bulldozers gave way to road flattening machines which smoothed the earth and gave shape to the bypass road, Kiberans gradually began to reconstruct their mosques and churches. In the ensuing months, the entangled circuits of material ruination and revitalization and the incremental construction of the bypass road, shifted from the bulldozed site in Kibera to the courts in Kenya. In 2019, the Nubian Rights Forum filed a temporary injunction with the Environmental and Land Court of Nairobi to restrain the defendant and their former rentee – the Full Gospel Church of Kibera – from constructing "a permanent church building" on their parcel of land. The Full Gospel Church of Kibera (FGCK) formally occupied an "impermanent" church constructed from *mabati* on the land owned by trustees of the Kibra Nubian Community whom the Nubian Rights Forum represented. Following the bulldozing in July 2018, the structure that housed the FGCK was demolished and "the land on which the church building was hitherto situated became smaller" (ELC Suit No. 268 of 2019, 2).

Whereas before the raze, the Full Gospel Church of Kibera was previously constructed entirely with *mabati*, their senior clergy decided that "for the purpose of durability, structural stability and safety of the defendant's members", they would approach their landlords and request "to construct stone pillars from the foundation of the building to the first floor of the new church structure" (2). However, the Kibra Nubian Community denied the FGCK request and filed suit for the demolition of the church. According to Nubian Rights Forum, the use of materials including "stone pillars and the lintel" indicated to the Kibra Nubian community "that the defendant is constructing a permanent church building" and was therefore in breach of the rental agreement that prohibited the erection of structures that were "inharmonious to the Community's use of land".

The judge ruled in favor of the Full Gospel Church of Kibera and awarded their claim to damages. He found that "[w]hat the defendant is putting up is a building. The new church building is being put up where the defendant's old church building stood". The ruling was indeed advantageous for the Kenyan government. In addition to the bulldozing, this judgement further erased the materiality and aesthetics of what counts as a church or any place of worship in Kibera. For the Kibra Nubian Community and for individuals like Bibi Jaina who intended to rebuild, the ruling raised the question that if property deemed religiously significant to those who use it cannot be defined, set apart, and protected by its material assemblage, then how will the private property

which Bibi Jaina considers to be religiously meaningful, be safeguarded in the future?

6 Bypassing Material Blockage

After the road flatteners smoothed the stretch of earth between Lang'ata and Ngong Road, construction of the bypass road was suspended, and a row of immobile machines were parked on the dusty road. A few Kiberans with whom I spoke during my fieldwork in 2019, stated that stalled road works usually meant that "the government ate the monies" or was engaged in corruption. Until the state resumed construction of the bypass road, the idle construction machines, they said, functioned as a sort of placeholder of power to signal to Kiberans that the land belonged to the state. A question that preoccupied this group of Kiberans was when and how a neighborhood rebuilds itself amidst such uncertainty.

Overall, most residents expressed their frustration at the government who not only upended the lives of Kiberans only to pause construction of the bypass road, but also refused to compensate residents for their loss. Their frustrations at the government's irresponsibility, ineptitude and greed were embroiled on the one hand in fears of being existentially, emotionally, and financially 'stuck' in this liminal period of destruction and reconstruction and on the other hand, worries about 'going backwards'. As the period of inactivity continued and anxiety about the future loomed in Kibera, it seemed to me that the 'thingness' of the bypass road – those irreducible qualities of affect and influence that shapes the ways in which humans, in this case Kiberans, are presently restricted from organizing their futures – became increasingly pronounced (Terzidou 2020).

For Bibi Jaina in particular, the suspension of the bypass road obstructed her ability to rebuild her property; property that would allow her to honor her father and grandfather and provide her grandsons with a connection to their religion and ancestors as well as an income. Individuals like Bibi Jaina who lost their property on 23 July 2018 are perhaps the first generation of Nubians in Kibera to grapple with what is at stake for the Nubian community if they are no longer able to perform and sustain their religiosity through their property. How does she evoke a connection to her forebearers, and how will her grandsons be able to achieve this connection if they remain propertyless in Kibera? In the extract below, Bibi Jaina grapples with this question by voicing her fears that the Nubian cemetery might also be destroyed by the state in the near future:

T: So, the bypass is meant to be completed in 2020?

B: Yes, that's what they say.

T: So, what will Kibera be like in the future?

B: That is a difficult one. Even if we remain in Kibera it will not be the same Kibera (…). For Nubians it [Kibera] is a home. That is what it was meant to be. The rest of their tribes they have their homeland, where they come from. The Kikiyu come from central [Kenya], the Luos and the Luhya come from western [Kenya] and the Kamba come from Eastern. They have their home. They have a place to bury. They have a place where their tribe makes sense. *Kibra* [using the Kinubi word, TW] is our ancestral place. Here is where we make sense of who we are. Out there we have nothing to ground us, firm. My fear is if we leave, they will remove our loved ones buried in the cemetery. But what is stopping them?

The extract above illuminates what it presently means for Bibi Jaina that Nubians remain in Kibera. Not only have grandsons become the first generation of propertyless Nubians at least in the family, but should the destruction of the Nubian cemetery occur, Bibi Jaina and perhaps her mother will be the first Nubians to be buried outside Kibera. Additionally, Bibi Jaina expresses a fear that if Nubians flee Kibera to 'bypass the bulldozer' or avoid a possible raze, the state might destroy their cemetery in their absence. That Bibi Jaina is beset by an event that has not yet happened but influences no less how she presently evaluates the religious future of Nubians in Kibera, illuminates the effect, as well as the enduring and elusive affects, of state violence. Her worry illustrates the ambiguity, and perhaps insidious nature of the things of violence as that against which Nubians both compete and at once depend on to ensure a place for themselves in an uncertain future.

At the same time, what is noteworthy is the logic and categorical speak she employs to articulate her fear that appears to enforce the separation between religion and tribe through land and property rights when she says: "They have their home. They have a place to bury. They have a place where their tribe makes sense". However, by defining home as a place where one is buried with one's ancestors and classifying Kibera as her ancestral home, Bibi Jaina also appears to engage in the politics of ethnicity. It could be argued that given the destruction of her property months prior, and the uncertainty whether the place where her father and grandfather are buried will be destroyed in the future, Bibi Jaina is not 'making' Nubians into an ethnic group but working

through whether the state will respect the burial site of a community whom it discounts as citizens based on their non-ethnicity? In this respect, we see how the remains of the past – the unfinished road, unprocessed ruins of the bulldozing, and the dead – are active in and activated for, articulating in dichotomous religion-tribe terms, to whom Kibera belongs and who belongs in it.

Since the raze, Bibi Jaina fears as well for the future of her grandsons to whom she intended to bestow the property. Indeed, the property would ordinarily be divided amongst her six children but as Bibi Jaina explained, the 'stateless' status of her grandsons excludes them from applying for employment opportunities and tertiary education in Kenya. Since 2004, Bibi Jaina has accompanied her grandsons to their 'vetting' interview, the formal and often discriminatory process Nubians undergo at eighteen to obtain a Kenyan identity document and passport. She has both witnessed and experienced the discrimination that her grandsons faced by local officials who required official documentation to verify that the family has lineage in Kenya but often claimed that Bibi Jaina's nursing degree is fraudulent. If the applications of her grandsons would be rejected, she intended to make a comfortable living in Kibera as landlords for them. Since the raze, however, Bibi Jaina worries that her grandsons will have to seek employment outside Kibera where they will continue to endure prejudice. What, then, would it mean to be Nubian if more people felt impressed to not only work and reside outside Kibera, but attend a different place of worship and possibly be buried elsewhere? Will these non-Kiberan Nubians still maintain autochthonously that Kibera is in their blood? What are the ontological implications for future generations who cannot reproduce the material aspects of their religious community *in* Kibera? Or, as Bibi Jaina rhetorically asks during our conversation: "[w]hat is the Kenyan Nubian outside of Kibera where no one understands him?"

These fears and concerns about the future of Nubians in Kibera illuminates how state violence functions on a continuum of normalized discrimination and prejudices about the illegal destruction of their property. This section shows that state violence is also intimate, emotive, embodied, and is built up and is stored in the body. The painful experiences that Bibi Jaina encountered and the feelings she conveys, prevents her from engaging with the Nubian burial site with the gratitude and reverence for her predecessors that I observed when she presented the photographs of her grandfather and father, as she fears it may be destroyed. Rather, the Nubian cemetery appears to be the next and final scene of state violence against the Nubian community. In this sense, it is not only her grandsons who cannot mediate through the material and temporal dynamics of their religiosity following the destruction of the family property and suspension on the construction of the bypass road; Bibi Jaina is

similarly and presently entrapped in a state of grief and loss of the past, concerns for the future of Nubians, and whether she will be buried in her home or not.

7 Conclusion

As I exited Bibi Jaina's home on my final day of fieldwork in Kibera, I wondered which of the dwellings may contain the materials of Bibi Jaina's former property and what might these materials mean and mediate now that they constitute the homes, shops, and daycares of her neighbors?[12] While the social life of the ruined matter continued in new ways in Kibera, the social career of the bypass road remained at the time, deferred but exerted nonetheless, a considerable influence over the material possibilities for the formation and continuation of religion in Kibera in the present and future as well. In this chapter, I have focused on the dynamics of material destruction of property deemed both religiously significant in the case of Bibi Jaina, and a place of worship in the case of the Full Gospel Church. These properties were traced alongside the material construction of the bypass road to illustrate how state violence in Kibera manifests and functions on the one hand, and how it shapes and impedes the material conditions and possibilities of religion, on the other. The bypass road, its cartographic beginnings and post-independent becomings, allowed me to illustrate the evolution and continuum of state violence and its effects on the Nubian community in Kibera. By studying state violence ethnographically and through the lived experiences of Bibi Jaina, this chapter has also shown how state violence becomes manifest in embodied and emotive ways which affects multiple generations of Bibi Jaina's family.

Bibi Jaina occupies a distinct socio-economic position in Kibera. Unlike many Kiberans, she is a property owner but exists outside the status quo of land politics organized and managed by 'big men' in Kenya. As a result, and as Nubian Muslim living in a country that fails to recognize her as citizen or her claim to Kibera as a homeland, Bibi has to 'bypass the bulldozer' by emphasizing how her relationship to Kibera and her duty as a property owner are intrinsic to the preservation and continuation of her religiosity. This is not to say that her claims are invented or untrue. Rather, as this chapter has shown, these claims rely on and enforce material differences between Nubians and non-Nubians, which, as I hoped to have demonstrated, requires on our part

12 Fieldnotes, April 2019.

ethical sensitivity to comprehend what is at stake for Bibi Jaina, should she lose the last of her property or witness the destruction of the Nubian cemetery. In this respect, the future construction of the bypass road in Kibera will force Nubians to continue to find ways of bypassing the bulldozer and may hold considerable risk for the future of Nubian religiosity and the vitality of interreligious coexistence in Kibera.

References

Amis, Philip. 1984. "Squatters or Tenants: The Commercialization of Unauthorized Housing in Nairobi." *World Development* 12 (1): 87–96.

Amnesty International. 2009. *Kenya: The Unseen Majority: Nairobi's Two Million Slum-Dwellers*. London: Amnesty International Publications. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR32/005/2009/en/. Accessed: 25-08-2021.

Aretxaga, Begoña. 1999. "A Fictional Reality: Paramilitary Death Squads and the Construction of State Terror in Spain." In *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, edited by Jeffrey A. Sluka, 46–69. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Aretxaga, Begoñ. 2001. "The Sexual Games of the Body Politic: Fantasy and State Violence in Northern Ireland." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 25 (1): 1–27.

Aretxaga, Begoñ. 2003. "Maddening States." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (1): 393–410.

Balaton-Chrimes, Samantha. 2015. *Ethnicity, Democracy and Citizenship in Africa: Political Marginalisation of Kenya's Nubians*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

BBC News. 2018. "Kenya Slum Demolished to Make Way for Road." *BBC News*, 23 July, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44931808. Accessed: 27-09-2021.

Bize, Amiel. 2017. "Jam-space and Jam-time: Traffic in Nairobi." |In *The Making of the African Road*, edited by Kurt Beck, Gabriel Klaeger, and Michael Stasik, 55–85. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Blomley, N. 2013. "Performing Property: Making the World." *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 26: 23–48.

Bodewes, Christine. 2005. *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera, Kenya*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Campbell, Jeremy M. 2012. "Between the Material and the Figural Road: The Incompleteness of Colonial Geographies in Amazonia." *Mobilities* 7 (4): 481–500.

Ciabarri, Luca. 2017. "Biographies of Roads, Biographies of Nations: History, Territory and the Road Effect in Post-Conflict Somaliland." In *The Making of the African Road*, edited by Kurt Beck, Gabriel Klaeger, and Michael Stasik, 116–140. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Clark, David. 1978. "Unregulated Housing, Vested Interest, and the Development of Community Identity in Nairobi." *African Urban Studies* 3: 33–46.

Cupers, Kenny and Prita Meier. 2020. "Infrastructure between Statehood and Selfhood: The Trans-African Highway." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 79 (1): 61–81.

De Smedt, Johan. 2009. "'No Raila, No Peace!' Big Man Politics and Election Violence at the Kibera Grassroots." *African Affairs* 108 (433): 581–598.

De Smedt, J.V.A. 2011. "The Nubis of Kibera: A Social History of the Nubians and Kibera Slums." PhD diss., Leiden University.

Dixon. Robyn. 2015. "A Kenyan Road Project is Taking Huge Bites out of the Kibera Slum." *LA Times*, 11 September, 2015. https://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-kenya-demolition-20150911-story.html. Accessed: 27-09-2021.

Ekdale, Brian. 2014. "Slum Discourse, Media Representations and Maisha Mtaani in Kibera, Kenya." *Ecquid novi: African Journalism Studies* 35 (1): 92–108.

Ekdale, Brian and David Tuwei. 2016. "Ironic Encounters: Posthumanitarian Storytelling in Slum Tourist Media." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 9 (1): 49–67.

Elfversson, Emma and Kristine Höglund. 2018. "Home of Last Resort: Urban Land Conflict and the Nubians in Kibera, Kenya." *Urban Studies* 55 (8): 1749–1765.

Fairhead, James. 1992. "Paths of Authority: Roads, the State and the Market in Eastern Zaire." *European Journal of Development Research* 4 (2): 17–35.

Golla, Rajiv. 2018. "'The Rich Man's Road': Nairobi Slum Demolished for Highway." *The Guardian*, 20 August 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/20/it-will-not-benefit-us-we-dont-have-cars-nairobi-kibera-community-cleared-road. Accessed: 29-09-2021.

Government of Kenya. 2004a. *Kibera-Soweto Slum Upgrading Project*, December. Nairobi: Government of Kenya.

Government of Kenya. 2004b. *Kenya Slum Upgrading Strategy: Implementation Strategy 2005–2020*. Nairobi: Government of Kenya. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/09/un-habitat_and_the_kenya_slum_upgrading_programme_-_strategy_document.pdf. Accessed: 29-09-2021.

Harvey, P. 2005. "The Materiality of State-Effects: An Ethnography of a Road in the Peruvian Andes." In *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Christian Krohn-Hansen, and Knut G. Nustad, 123–141. London: Pluto Press.

Jourde, Cédric. 2005. "'The President Is Coming to Visit!': Dramas and the Hijack of Democratization in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania." *Comparative Politics* pp. 421–440.

Kenya. 2004. "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal/Irregular Allocation of Public Land." Nairobi: Republic of Kenya.

Kenya Government. 1934. *Report of Kenya Land Commission*. Vol. X. H.M.S.O.

Kenya Government. 1934. *Evidence and Memorandum of Kenya Land Commission*. Vol. I. H.M.S.O.

Kimari, Wangui. 2017. "Nai-rob-me Nai-beg-me Nai-shanty: Historicizing Space-Subjectivity Connections in Nairobi from its Ruins." PhD diss., York University.

Kimari, Wangui. 2020. "War-Talk: An Urban Youth Language of Siege in Nairobi." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14 (4): 707–723.

Klopp, Jacqueline M. 2000. "Pilfering the Public: The Problem of Land Grabbing in Contemporary Kenya." *Africa Today* 47 (1): 7–26.

Klopp, Jacqueline M. 2012. "Deforestation and Democratization: Patronage, Politics and Forests in Kenya." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6 (2): 351–370.

Kubik, Jan. 2009. "Ethnography of Politics: Foundations, Applications, Prospects." In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, edited by Edward Schatz, 25–52. University of Chicago Press.

Lamont, Mark. 2017. "Ruin, or Repair?: Infrastructural Sociality and an Economy of Disappearances along a Rural Road in Kenya." *The Making of the African Road*, edited by Kurt Beck, Gabriel Klaeger, and Michael Stasik, 171–196. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Larkin, Brian. 2013. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42: 327–343.

Manji, Ambreena. 2014. "The Politics of Land Reform in Kenya 2012." *African Studies Review* 57 (1): 115–130.

Melnick, Amiel B. 2018. "Black Spots: Roads and Risk in Rural Kenya." PhD diss., Columbia University.

Meyer, Birgit, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate. 2010. "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion." *Religion* 40 (3): 207–211.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1999. "Society, Economy, and the State Effect." In *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, edited by George Steinmetz, 76–97. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Moskowitz, Kara. 2019. *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945–1980*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Mwanza, Kevin. 2018. "Despair as Bulldozers Destroy Hundreds of Homes in Kenya's Biggest Slum." *Reuters*, 23 July 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-slum-demolition/despair-as-bulldozers-destroy-hundreds-of-homes-in-kenyas-biggest-slum-idUSKBN1KE045. Accessed 10-06-2020.

Navaro-Yashin, Yael. 2002. *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Nubian Rights Forum versus Full Gospel Church of Kibera. *Republic of Kenya in the Environmental and Land Court of Nairobi*, ELC Suit No. 268 Of 2019.

Open Society Justice Initiative. 2010. "The Nubian Community in Kenya v. The State of Kenya: Communication 317/06." https://www.justiceinitiative.org/

uploads/66fcd2c5-e02a-4485-963b-ef5b71c23b52/ali-communication-20100517.pdf. Accessed: 28-09-2021.

Parsons, Timothy. 1997. "'Kibra Is Our Blood': The Sudanese Military Legacy in Nairobi's Kibera Location, 1902–1968." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30 (1): 87–122.

Patton, Carl V., ed. 1988. "Commercialized Rental Housing in Nairobi, Kenya." In *Spontaneous Shelter: International Perspectives and Prospects*, 235–357. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Republic of Kenya Ministry of Transport and Communication. 1988. *The Nairobi Bypass Construction Project Feasibility Test Final Report*. Vol. 2.

Republic of Kenya in the Environment and Land Court of Nairobi. 2017. "Petition No. 974 of 2016." April 28, 2017. http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/137069. Accessed: 10-06-2020.

Sarre, Johanna. 2018. "The Nubians of Kibera 'Revisited': Detribalized Natives, Slum Dwellers, Middle Class?" In *Middle Classes in Africa*, edited by Lena Kroeker, David O'Kane, and Tabea Scharrer, 135–156. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Stengs, Irene. 2018. "Ascertaining the Future Memory of Our Time: Dutch Institutions Collecting Relics of National Tragedy." In *Heritage. Sense and Essence: Heritage and the Cultural Production of the Real*, edited by Birgit Meyer, and Mattijs van de Port, 158–181. Berghahn Books.

Terzidou, Matina. 2020. "Re-Materialising the Religious Tourism Experience: A Post-Human Perspective." *Annals of Tourism Research* 83: 102924.

The Kenya Gazette. Vol. CXX – No. 55. May 7, 2018. Government Printing Office.

The National Archives of the United Kingdom. *The Key Plan of Nairobi Township* 1916–1923, MPGG 1/101/2.

The Official Gazette of the East African Protectorate. July 10, 1918. XX – No. 61. Government Printing Office.

van Alphen, Floor. 2012. "Identities: Never the Same Again?" *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 46 (3): 296–302.

Vasagar, Jeevan. 2004. "Bulldozers Go in to Clear Kenya's Slum City. *The Guardian*, April 20, 2004. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/apr/20/kenya.jeevanvasagar. Accessed: 12-06-2021.

CHAPTER 5

When Times Are Out of Joint

Contestations of Official Temporal Religious Forms

Christoph Baumgartner

1 Introduction

Religions materialize in a variety of different objects, practices, and claims. People do not only hold different beliefs about, for instance, the existence and qualities of God or other supernatural beings and life after death, they also want to actively live their religion: gather and pray in houses of worship, produce and consume food, sometimes use psychedelic substances in rituals, print and disseminate religious writings, don clothing and headgear, ring church bells, broadcast and listen to the call of prayer, love and marry partners as they deem appropriate for their religion, and so forth. Next to this, religion – in Europe predominantly Christianity – is also a structuring principle that has shaped societies significantly (Joppke 2015, 2) and continues to influence political institutions, the public realm and material culture. In Germany, on which I will focus in this contribution, the built environment and cultural landscape are replete with objects that are part of or have clear references to Christianity like crucifixes in or on public buildings, street names and monuments of Christian figures (e.g., Mary, Saint Boniface or Martin Luther) and public celebrations of, for instance, Saint Martin of Tours or Saint Nicholas. Moreover, most public holidays are Christian holidays, such as Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day, and Christmas. It is safe to say, therefore, that despite an increasing pluralization of the religious field and a rapid secularization and unchurching of society since the 1960s, Christianity is part and parcel of the public sphere in Germany, and among all religions, it has a dominant and even privileged status in German society.

It is fairly uncontroversial to say that material things in general and religious forms like practices or tangible objects in particular can be morally and politically significant. With respect to religion, Marian Burchardt points out that religions actively shape cities "through inscribing their symbols and architectural languages into urban morphologies and appearances" (Burchardt 2017, 237; my translation). Accordingly, the built environment of societies with a historically dominant religion is usually dominated primarily by one particu-

lar religion. Such uneven material presence of different religions is politically significant, Burchardt argues, since it inscribes lines of cultural belonging that influence how different groups and people can or cannot relate to the space of the city or society in general (see Burchardt 2017, 235). This is particularly important if religious forms are not only public in the sense that they occupy a place in the realm where people meet and interact with each other in a society, but if they are endorsed by the state and construed as characteristics of national culture or as being in some other form especially significant for society and politics at large.

In the following I will refer to such forms as official religious forms, which denotes that they are rooted in or even part of a particular religion and at the same time endorsed or even established by official authorities, usually the state. This contribution focusses on contestations of official temporal religious forms and more specifically on the ethical and political issues that are involved in controversies about the status of Good Friday as silent public holiday and debates concerning the introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany. Temporal forms generally include structures like clock time, the calendar, and holidays, but also material forms like statues or memorials that commemorate events or persons from the past. Although not all temporal forms are direct parts of material culture, they materialize indirectly in things like clocks or calendars in print or on screen. Next to that, structured time coordinates human conduct; schedules make us go to school, take the train, or gather in stadiums at specific times, deadlines determine our priorities on a daily basis, during moments of silence people keep still, and a curfew forces people to stay at home at night. Temporal forms involve an ordering and shaping of what is possible to do in a given context (see Levine 2017) and for that reason they matter to critical theories of society and culture.

In contexts of religiously diverse and to a large extent secularized democracies official temporal forms can raise several challenges that are especially urgent for societies committed to political equality and ideals of social inclusion. It is here, that official temporal forms are in danger of getting out of joint[1] with the times and temporal regimes that matter both existentially and politically for large parts of society. Public controversies and social conflicts about such challenges can be violent in the sense that they forcefully block efforts of members of religious minorities to be recognized as full and equal members of the collective 'we' that shapes the present and the future of society.

1 The phrase 'when times are out of joint' alludes, of course, to Shakespeare's Hamlet, see also Assmann 2020a.

To identify and explore political aspects of contested official temporal religious forms in democratic societies that are committed to political equality and social inclusion is the aim of this contribution.

2 The Moral and Political Significance of Temporal Forms

Time materializes in a number of forms in society. Clocks and calendars regulate the flow of time and create temporal structures that affect all members of a society and render possible the temporal coordination of activities like work, travel and play at specific days and hours. Public holidays provide shared days of leisure and rest,[2] and in many instances, they commemorate particular people or events from the past. This also applies for public memorials, which are in many cases material representations of people or events from the past in the present. The official temporal forms that I am interested in here are authorized and regulated by the state, for instance by means of holiday laws, public commemorations, or the erection of monuments. They provide shared temporal resources and structures for all people in society, demand compliance (as in the case of Sunday rest or public moments of silence) and they often entangle a specific and selected (view of the) past with the envisaged and aspired future of society (see below).

Religions also produce specific temporal forms and 'higher times' that interrupt the ordinary flow of profane time and invest certain moments with a special meaning and value. Such 'religious time' can establish continuities between current believers and ancient times, events and ancestors or saints (see Chidester 2016; Taylor 2007, 54–61). Religions can also make specific demands about common days of rest, periods of particular religious practices like fasting or special times of worship, and when and how these times should be observed. Cases in point are the prohibition of work on Sabbath in Judaism, the special character of Sunday as day of worship in Christianity, and Friday prayer in Islam (see Gavison and Perez 2008, 189–196).

2 See Walzer (1983, 194) with respect to the Jewish Sabbath. Michael Walzer distinguishes between 'two forms of rest': There are public holidays on the one side, that are provided for all members of society in the same form and at the same time, and accordingly require enforcement mechanisms like Sunday closing laws. Such public holidays can, according to Walzer, be "part of the common life that makes the community" and "shape and give meaning to the individual lives of the members" (Walzer 1993, 194). From this he distinguishes vacation, that is "individually chosen and individually designed" (Walzer 1983, 191). The issues that I am interested in, here, are related to public holidays, and not in the same sense to vacation.

In circumstances of religious diversity, the presence of particular official temporal forms on the one hand and religious demands concerning time on the other can easily raise ethical or political issues – especially if the set of official holidays of a society reflects only one religion, whilst the actual religious field of that society is becoming more and more diverse, with many people who do not identify as religious at all. Let me address two such issues, the temporal coordination problem, and the evaluative and expressive function of official temporal forms.

Religious practices such as specific forms of prayer or fasting have to be performed at specific times, so that believers may need to request for abstention from work if they have to carry out their religious duties during working days and hours. Concrete examples that are discussed in philosophical literature include a US-case of a Seventh-Day Adventist whose employer shifted to a six-day workweek and thus expected her to work on Saturdays, the obligatory day of worship of her religious community (see Nussbaum 2008, 135–140), and the case of a Muslim teacher in London who was not allowed by his school to be absent for a part of his teaching time to attend a mosque for prayers on Friday afternoon (his absence would have had to be covered by other teachers, see Jones 1994).[3] Whilst the primary problem in such cases is a time-related direct conflict between religious and work-related obligations of individual believers, such cases also illustrate the more general issue of the "temporal coordination problem" (Julie Rose), which concerns shared temporal resources that are necessary to exercise associative freedoms and certain aspects of freedom of religion respectively. Potential associates, for instance members of a religious group, face the challenge that they "must synchronize their schedules to realize periods of shared free time" (Rose 2016, 262). If members of a Christian church have the religious duty to jointly celebrate church service on Sundays, they can practice this part of their religion relatively easily in societies where Sunday is a public day of rest – they benefit from status quo biases (Laborde 2008, 22) and enjoy, one could say, a 'Christian privilege'[4] that allows them to

3 Such cases can become especially thorny if believers have to quit their jobs due to a conflict between religious and work-related obligations, since if they cannot find jobs that better allow them to perform their religious duties, the question arises whether they are eligible for unemployment compensation. Martha Nussbaum describes one such case in her analysis of the US-case of Seventh Day Adventist Adell Sherbert (Nussbaum 2008, 136–140).

4 For the concept of Christian privilege see Schlosser 2003. This concept is based on research on white privilege, which denotes "subtle, yet powerful ways that white people silently enjoy advantages in the United States" (Schlosser 2003, 45). White privilege is not limited to the United States, of course, but often operates in other societies where white people are dominant and in power, as well. For research on white privilege see Kendall 2006.

practice their religion within existing social institutions (such as public days of rest) without facing significant obstacles. Members of other religions, however, who perform common worship on, say, Fridays, have to do quite some effort to reconcile their religion with their job (file a request for abstention, explain to their colleagues, perhaps give up some vacation time etc.). In many cases this can be solved through accommodations that allow believers to abstain from work during their religious ceremonies and compensate for the absence by working outside of regular working time.[5] However, this does not solve other issues that are related to religious public holidays in liberal democratic and religiously diverse societies.

Next to the temporal coordination problem, the expressive and evaluative function of official temporal forms also raises ethical issues. Scholars of cultural memory like Aleida Assmann point out that groups – for instance religious communities, but also large countries and societies – construe and manifest their practical self-understandings and their collective identities with reference to the past (see Assmann 2020a and Assmann 2020b). According to Assmann, such groups develop imagined self-images that are based on "chosen key events, significant places, and cultural artifacts and practices that offer the group, together with a particular image of history, both a sense of their uniqueness and a historical orientation" (Assmann 2020a, 210). This process connects the present with the past and the future through practices and objects that 'bend' the linear flow of time into cultural strategies for actualizing and reappropriating the past". (Assmann 2020a, 209). The past, however, that is actualized in the present and for the future, does not consist of some objectively given event or moment in time but is chosen and thus selected and construed as particularly significant for the present by people, usually cultural majorities and/or people in positions of power. Chong-Ming Lim refers to such processes as commemorations in the sense of practices or objects that "acknowledge the importance of a certain person or event (and often the values that undergird them) for the community" (Lim 2020, 187). Consequently, it is important to realize that commemorations not only remember historical events or people as something that is in the past, but also involve evaluation and express values, ideals and beliefs that are important for the present and the future. Lim describes this appositely by characterizing commemorations as 'composite' practices or objects – "they are remembrances of certain peo-

5 This is proposed by Julie Rose, who argues that in order to prevent Sunday free time laws from constraining religious liberties, such laws "ought to include accommodations for those citizens who have a Sabbath day on a different day of the week" (Rose 2016, 274).

ple or events, accompanied by the expression of some evaluative view (or views)" (Lim 2020, 187). To give an example, the fact that the German reunification is annually commemorated by a national holiday on 3 October not only remembers the historic date of 3 October 1990 when the unification of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic was formally completed. Rather, the national holiday and the ceremonial acts and citizens' festivals organized on that day remember an event that happened in the past, but they also activate it for the present and the future by expressing that the unity of Germany is considered of great value for the German society at large. This aspect of (re)activating specific moments, people, or events of the past in the present and for the future (since they are considered especially significant or valuable) creates connections between collective memory and commemorations on the one side, and collective identities on the other. Assmann calls this "the aspect of reactivating the past and making it possible to appropriate it into an active 'functional memory'" (Assmann 2020a, 211). It matters, therefore, for the self-understanding of a group or society, which events and people are commemorated – and how – and thus publicly marked as significant not only for some private individuals, but for a group or society at large. This renders official temporal forms and structures normatively significant, and Aleida Assmann rightly points out that in the context of democratic societies, the close connection between cultural memory and identity requires a careful construction of cultural memory – that includes official temporal forms in the sense described above – so as to "create possibilities for identification and structures of participation that enable individuals as well as collectives to make the past their own" (Assmann 2020a, 211).

But what does this mean for official religious temporal forms in the context of religiously pluralistic and to a large extend secularized societies that are committed to political equality and social inclusion? Commemorating, for instance, the Reformation and celebrating Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost as public holidays can easily be understood as elevating and publicly marking Christianity as particularly authoritative for current society through a normative use of Christian temporal forms. If that is the case, certain temporal forms inscribe into the public realm cultural and religious biases that portray a specific religion – here: Christianity – as 'normal' and fully belonging to a group, for instance, German society. This is because certain official temporal forms express what is considered especially significant or valuable by and for society, and, resulting from this, due to their normative function for the formation of collective identities.

These ethical and political issues related to official religious temporal forms in religiously pluralistic societies committed to political equality figure promi-

nently in a number of controversies and cases related to memorials and public holidays. The following section presents two such cases; controversies about the status of Good Friday as silent holiday on the one hand, and about the introduction of an Islamic public holiday on the other.

3 Political Contestations of Official Temporal Religious Forms in Germany

In Germany, public holidays are, with the exception of German Unity Day (which is established as national day by federal law), regulated on the level of the states (*Länder*), and there are significant differences concerning the number and character of public holidays between the states. In all states, however, several – mostly Christian – holidays enjoy the special status of a public silent holiday. It is forbidden by law to organize public entertainment events on such days, including the public screening of ca. 700 movies that are listed as improper for that day (e.g., *Ghostbusters* and *The Life of Brian*), dancing and musical performances that disturb the silence and undermine the solemnity of the holiday. On Good Friday, sports events are forbidden as well. The comprehensiveness of the protection differs between German states, with the most moderate regulations in Berlin (at Good Friday from 4.00h a.m. until 9.00h p.m.) and Bremen (6.00h a.m. until 9.00h p.m.), whilst Bavaria protects a period of silence from Maundy Thursday 2.00h a.m. until Holy Saturday 12.00h p.m. This special status of silent holidays is debated almost every year, and next to commercial interests there is also protest from people and organizations who object to the special protection of silence on those days on principled grounds. In 2017, for instance, youth organizations of the Social Democratic Party, the Free Democratic Party and the Green Party in Hannover held dance demonstrations against the *Tanzverbot* on Maundy Thursday and justified their protests with reference to the separation between church and state and the secular character of the German state. A spokesperson of Hannover's Green Youth Party declared "the freedom-restricting rules for 'silent holidays'" to be an "idea from yesteryear" (Brady 2017) and suggested to hold a silent holiday on Holocaust Memorial Day, the day when the surviving prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau were liberated in 1945 (which is not even a public holiday in any of the German states), instead of on a religious holiday (Brady 2017).

A more formal and institutional route of protest was taken by the Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich (*Bund für Geistesfreiheit München*; hereafter BfG), an organization that understands itself as representing principles of

enlightenment and humanism, advocating the interests of nondenominational people and a strict separation of religion and the state.[6] In 2007, the BfG organized a public ticketed event to take place on Good Friday in a theatre in Munich. The motto of this event was 'Religion-free Zone Munich 2007,' and a party that was part of it was announced as 'Heidenspaß-Party'[7] with a screening of two movies and a 'Dance for Free Spirits' – clearly phrases that are meant to convey a critical message with respect to the law on silent public holidays that was presented by the activists as outdated and no longer appropriate in a religiously diverse society. This party was prohibited by the public authority, who argued that it would have violated provisions of the Bavarian Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays, which determines that exceptions from the prohibition to perform activities such as dancing are ruled out for Good Friday (but not for other silent holidays). The BfG appealed through several levels of jurisdiction and finally to the Federal Constitutional Court where its representatives claimed that the prohibition of the event violated their right of freedom of assembly, because it was a political event with the purpose "to point to the Bavarian Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays, which is from our perspective undemocratic and outmoded, and to get it revised" (BfG 2007; my translation). Moreover, the BfG also argued that the freedom of faith and conscience of members of the BfG was violated: as an ideological community, the BfG is a recognized body under public law (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*) and thus has the same legal status as, for instance, Christian churches. The BfG understood the planned event as manifestation of their beliefs and parts of the event like the screening of the movies, speeches, and written materials that were to be distributed were meant to be proclamations of the beliefs of the members of the BfG.

The Federal Constitutional Court confirmed both claims in an Order of the First Senate in 2016 and declared that whilst the provisions of the Bavarian Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays protecting public silence on Good Fridays are generally compatible with the Constitution, "the absolute exclusion of exemptions [...] that applies to this day and according to which exemptions – even exemptions for important reasons – from the prohibition

6 The following description of the facts of the case and the arguments brought forward by the parties involved is based on the documentation of the Federal Constitutional Court in its decision (see BVerfG 2016a).

7 "Heidenspaß" literally translates as 'heathen-fun,' but according to colloquial usage of the term 'Heiden-', which as prefix denotes an emphasis, the term 'Heidenspaß' is also a play on words here. (BVerfG 2016b).

of activities are barred from the outset [...] proves to be disproportionate" (BVerfG, 2016b). The Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich should have been granted such an exemption for their event. Not granting it, violated both their freedom of assembly and their freedom of faith and conscience. Whilst this may at first sight be understood as a legal victory for the BfG, it is important to realize that they did not achieve what they wanted to achieve with their protests. The Bavarian Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays was revised in 2013 (and thus before the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court), but only to the effect that the protection of silence during silent holidays other than Good Friday and Holy Saturday is reduced by two hours and begins now at 2.00h a.m. rather than 0.00h a.m.; the strength and scope of the protection of silence on Good Friday remains fully intact. For the interest of this chapter, it is especially important to study the reasons that Bavarian legislators provide for the modest revision. On the one hand, they emphasize that silent holidays and other public days of rest are "indispensable to the preservation of our Christian and cultural traditions and values in Bavaria and for social cohesion" (BayLTDrucks 16/15695, 3; my translation). This motivates the continuation of the relatively comprehensive protection of silent holidays in Bavaria. On the other hand, the Bavarian government points out that legislation also has to recognize changes in society, such as the fact that lifestyles of members of the Bavarian society have changed and are no longer homogeneous. Accordingly, provisions regulating public holidays have to reconcile conflicting positions. This aspect seems to suggest that official temporal forms such as public holidays should acknowledge changes in society – for instance with respect to religion – at least to a certain extent. Does it also imply that the presence of an increasing number of Muslims in Germany should be acknowledged by introducing an Islamic public holiday?

This question is a recurring matter of public debate, and it was discussed especially vividly in 2017, when the then Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière publicly stated at a campaigning event that one could think about introducing a regionally defined Islamic holiday – later he clarified that he did not suggest to actually introduce one (see FAZ 2017). This could be possible, he suggested, in regions where many Muslims live; comparable to All Saint's Day, which is a public holiday only in regions with a largely Catholic population. In fact, some German states such as Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen already implemented regulations that allow Muslim students and employees to take a day off on certain Islamic holidays (Wagener 2017), but nowhere in Germany an Islamic holiday has the status of a public holiday.

De Maizière's statement was received very positively by the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland*) whose chair-

man Aiman Mazyek pointed out that such a holiday could grant "Muslims a sense of being taken into account at school and in the workplace" (Wagener 2017). Some representatives of Christian churches also supported an introduction of an Islamic public holiday. The spokesperson of the Central Committee of German Catholics Thomas Sternberg, for instance, argued that Christian public holidays like Easter and Christmas express that German society is connected with the Christian tradition. This cultural connection, however, would not be threatened by the introduction of an Islamic holiday, but rather by the fact that an increasing number of people have lost any positive sense for Christian holidays and do not even know the religious meaning of, for instance, Pentecost or Ascension Day (ZEIT online 2017). Accordingly, Sternberg concluded, the introduction of an Islamic holiday in regions with a high percentage of Muslims would not "betray the Christian tradition of the country", but rightly and publicly "take note of the Islamic holiday culture" (ZEIT online 2017; my translation).

Conservative politicians of Thomas de Maizière's own party Christian Democratic Union CDU, however, swiftly rejected the idea of introducing an Islamic holiday even on the regional level. The Secretary General of the Christian Social Union CSU – the Bavarian counterpart of the CDU – outrightly rejected Thomas Sternberg's statement and expressed his consternation and discontent that "even the top of the Committee of German Catholics supports an Islamic holiday" (FAZ 2017, my translation). Together with the Free Voters of Bavaria (*Freie Wähler*; FW), the CSU even initiated a formal political intervention when both parties submitted to Bavarian State Parliament urgency motions to pre-emptively disallow introducing an Islamic public holiday (see BayLTDrucks 17/18705 and BayLTDrucks 17/18718). Both urgency motions mobilized the 'Christian-Jewish-occidental imprint of Bavaria' to rule out the possibility of establishing an Islamic holiday as public holiday even before anybody had actually proposed such a thing in Bavaria. Clearly, the CSU and the FW in Bavarian State Parliament assumed that an Islamic public holiday was incompatible with the existing holiday culture in Bavaria and would undermine what they described as 'Judeo-Christian values and traditions' (BayLTDrucks 17/18718, my translation), 'Christian imprint of Germany and Bavaria' and 'Christian-occidental heritage' (BayLTDrucks 17/18705, my translation).

Which insights does the exploration of these controversies yield for the topic of this chapter, and especially the ethical and political aspects of contested official temporal religious forms in democratic societies committed to political equality and social inclusion?

4 Ethical and Political Aspects of Times Being Out of Joint

The controversies about the special status of Good Friday as silent holiday and the (im)possible introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany demonstrate that official temporal forms can have significant ethical and political dimensions, especially in contexts of religious diversity and rapid social change. It is important, therefore, to include temporal forms into analyses of materializations of religion and corresponding politics of religious diversity. Thereby it is important to consider that temporal forms share with material objects and bodily practices a characteristic that anthropologist Michael Lambek describes as 'ordinary ethics': they imply normative ideas and evaluations that are "relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself" (Lambek 2010, 2). Let me have a closer look at this.

From the perspective of ordinary ethics in the sense described by Michael Lambek, official temporal forms like public days of rest, official holidays and public monuments could be described as remembering and materializing cultural traditions or historic events in a way that expresses some (usually, but not necessarily, positive) evaluation. This evaluation, however, is often implicit and not spelled out in explicitly normative terms, and importantly the values expressed by temporal forms do usually not demand internal acceptance and compliance. Aleida Assmann describes this aspect of a relative non-bindingness with respect to cultural memory in the context of democratic societies, where, as she suggests, the "structures of participation and belonging" provided by cultural memory "are only an offering and not an obligation imposed from the outside" (Assmann 2020a, 211). Moreover, many public temporal forms do indeed often do the work they are supposed to do (e.g., providing shared days of rest, expressing values) "without calling undue attention" to themselves, as Lambek describes it for 'ordinary ethics' (Lambek 2010, 2) – probably most people take it as a matter of course that Sunday is a public day of rest, for instance, use shared temporal resources for activities that need to be done synchronously (participating in community events, playing a team sport, singing in a choir et cetera). However, the controversies sketched out above demonstrate that this does not apply to all people in society and also not to all official temporal forms in exactly the same way. People campaigning against the status of Good Friday as silent holiday as well as proponents of the introduction of an Islamic holiday as public holiday in Germany argued that there is a problematic mismatch in society with respect to temporal forms. They suggest that official temporal forms on the one hand and times that actually matter for many people in society on the other are out

of joint. For many official temporal forms reflect Christianity, whilst the actual religious field in Germany has undergone profound changes since the 1950s, including significant pluralization and most importantly rapid unchurching (see Großbölting 2013; Pollack and Rosta 2017). The two cases also illustrate that both of the ethical and political issues that I mentioned above are important in this context.

With respect to the temporal coordination problem, the Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich and other critics argue that the strict protection of public silence and solemnity on Good Friday and thus the creation of a specific temporal resource for Christians imposes undue limitations on the liberties of other people. The (qualified) confirmation of this claim by the Federal Constitutional Court and the existence of regulations concerning Islamic holidays in Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg illustrates the importance of accommodations that allow religious minorities to practice their religion (see Rose 2016). More important, however, but also more complex from an ethical and political perspective is the second morally relevant aspect, the expressive and evaluative dimension of official temporal forms. For the controversies described above, this issue is important in at least two different respects.

In the controversy about silent holidays, critics argue that the special status of a silent holiday should not be given to a holiday of a particular religion, Christianity, since that would express that the German state would actively endorse Christianity (and Christianity alone). This would be at odds with its secular character and also with the actual religious composition of society. In discussions about the introduction of an Islamic public holiday, on the other hand, proponents of that idea argued that introducing an Islamic holiday as official temporal form would signal to all people in society, that Islam is not some 'alien religion' (Gould 2013) that is 'tolerated' in Germany, but as a religion whose followers enjoy the same status as any other member of society. Conservative politicians and the Bavarian parliamentary groups of CSU and FW, however, reject in their statements both of these arguments and construe Christian holidays in cultural terms. Does such culturalization of religion (see Beaman 2020, Joppke 2018) solve the puzzle of religious diversity in pluralistic democracies and secular states? This is doubtful for a number of reasons. First of all, what counts as cultural in the context of policies of religion and religious diversity is usually defined from the perspective of majorities (Laborde and Lægaard 2020, 182), while members of minorities (who are affected by decisions made possible through such culturalization) do not necessarily agree with such definitions. The controversy about the status of Good Friday clearly illustrates this, since the critics argued that the special protection of silence on Good Friday violates principles of non-discrimination and impartiality of the

state towards different religions and non-religious worldviews.[8] The state can only escape the accusation of violating such principles if it construes Christian forms, and not those of other religions, as culture. If, however, such culturalized religion is charged with a normative status and positioned against material manifestations of minority religions in the public realm, the state slips from the danger of religious discrimination into problems of social exclusion. For in that case, the minority religions and also non-religious people are discursively excluded from "the narrative of 'we' in the public sphere, and as contributors to nation in the present tense, the past, and potentially the future" (Beaman 2020, 19), as Lori Beaman aptly describes the dangers of culturalization of religion in the context of state policies. "What is worth preserving and protecting does not belong to [religious minorities and the nonreligious] and does not originate with them" (Beaman 2020, 19). This exclusion from the "narrative of 'we' in the public sphere" (Beaman 2020, 19), can occur through public conflict, but also and sometimes more effectively tacitly and indirectly. The violence it does to people's efforts to be recognized as full and equal members of the collective 'we' that shapes the present and the future of society can on the one hand alienate people from the state (see Modood and Thompson 2021). On the other hand, it can also portray those who are not publicly included in the narrative of 'we' as not fully belonging in the eyes of members of the cultural majority (see Laborde 2017, 135–137). Both aspects indicate that Assmann's claim that cultural memory (and thus also certain official temporal forms) provides "structures of participation and belonging" only in the mode of an "offering and not an obligation from the outside" (Assmann 2020a, 211) needs to be qualified. If participation and belonging to a society is conditional on the recognition as equal participant and full member of society by others, achieving full participation and belonging can be impeded if the dominant narrative of 'we' does not offer a place for certain people. The question of whether or not somebody wants to accept the 'offering' that Assmann describes for cultural memory, is only one factor next to others that are equally important and related to processes of recognition and belonging. Such processes depend on a multitude of factors, relations and people and cannot be fully determined by the person who wants to participate on a par with others in social and political interactions and the future development of society.

8 I cannot go into the debate about 'symbolic establishment' and whether certain forms of it can be compatible with principles of non-discrimination and political equality, here. Important contributions include Laborde and Lægaard (2020), Lægaard (2017), and Modood and Thompson (2021).

An additional and with respect to political equality even more problematic aspect related to the culturalization of religion concerns the increasing mobilization of terms like 'Judeo-Christian culture' to actively portray Islam as a foreign religion. This is the case in a number of European countries including Germany where illiberal and xenophobic versions of right-wing populism and nationalism 'hijack religion' (Marzouki et al. 2016) to construe an 'identitarian Christianism' (Brubaker 2017, see also Hemel 2014) that is then positioned against minority religions, especially Islam. Conservative members of parties like CDU and CSU increasingly share in this mobilization of 'Judeo-Christian culture' against Islam. Cases such as the initiatives to pre-emptively ban an Islamic public holiday in Bavaria illustrate the political-discursive fortification of a 'Christian-Jewish-occidental imprint on Bavaria' or an allegedly Christian 'cultural tradition of Bavaria' as it exists, or rather as it is imagined at a certain moment in time. In circumstances of rapid social change, however, such a political-discursive fortification of culture locks off the constellation of times being out of joint and can transform official temporal religious forms into 'things of conflict'. For democratic societies committed to political equality and social inclusion, this is problematic because it impedes developing the repertoire of official forms that provide anchors for belonging and participation. The two ethical issues related to temporal forms mentioned above – the temporal coordination problem and the evaluative and expressive function – however, require such changes. Therefore, a combination of politicizing culturalized religion (here: Christianity) and regulating and suppressing temporal and material forms of minority religions in the public realm can be "toxic to democracy" (Beaman 2020, 132).

Acknowledgements

This publication is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 665958. I want to thank the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies Erfurt where I held a Fellowship in 2019–2020. I am grateful to Birgit Meyer for our ongoing conversations and for her comments on an earlier version of this text. I also would like to thank Lucien van Liere and Erik Meinema and the anonymous reviewer for their comments.

References

Assmann, Aleida. 2020a. *Is Time out of Joint?: On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*. Translated by Sarah Clift. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Assmann, Aleida. 2020b. *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*. Third, revised and expanded edition. München: C.H. Beck.

BayLTDrucks 16/15695. Gesetzentwurf der Staatsregierung zur Änderung des Feiertagsgesetzes. 20 February 2013.

BayLTDrucks 17/18705. Dringlichkeitsantrag 'Feiertagskultur bewahren: Keine muslimischen Feiertage einführen!'

BayLTDrucks 17/18718. Dringlichkeitsantrag 'Keine muslimischen Feiertage!'

Beaman, Lori G. 2020. *The Transition of Religion to Culture in Law and Public Discourse*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

BfG. 2007. "Wir werden ein Verbot nicht hinnehmen!" Pressemitteilung Bund für Geistesfreiheit München April 2. http://www.religionsfreie-zone.de/karfreitagpm1.htm.

Brady, Kate. 2017. "Germany hangs up its dancing shoes for Good Friday 'Tanzverbot.'" Deutsche Welle April 13, 2017. https://www.dw.com/en/germany-hangs-up-its-dancing-shoes-for-good-friday-tanzverbot/a-38368611. Accessed: 23-09-2021.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2017. "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40 (8): 1191–1226. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700.

Burchardt, Marian. 2017. "Infrastrukturen des Religiösen: Materialität und urbane Ordnungsregime." In *Architekturen und Artefakte. Zur materialen Seite des Religiösen*, edited by Uta Karstein and Thomas Schmidt-Lux, 233–249. Wiesbaden: Springer.

BVerfG. 2016a. Beschluss des Ersten Senats vom 27. Oktober 2016 – 1 BvR 458/10 –, Rn. 1–124. https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/e/rs20161027_1bvr045810.html. Accessed: 23-09-2021.

BVerfG. 2016b. "The absolute exclusion of exemptions from the special protection of silence on Good Friday is incompatible with the fundamental rights." Press Release No. 87/2016 of 30 November 2016. https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2016/bvg16-087.html;jsessionid=6E80B80BA58F34ED6CF77FD357C8F53C.2_cid383. Accessed: 23-09-2021.

Chidester, David. 2016. "Time." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, 340–351. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FAZ. 2017. "Muslimischer Feiertag: De Maizière fühlt sich missverstanden." Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 17. October 2017. https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/muslimischer-feiertag-de-maiziere-fuehlt-sich-missverstanden-15250862.html. Accessed: 20-09-2021.

Gavison, Ruth and Nahshon Perez. 2008. "Days of rest in multicultural societies: Private, public, separate?" In *Law and Religion in Theoretical and Historical Con-*

text, edited by Peter Cane, Carolyn Evans and Zoe Robinson, 186–213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gould, Robert. 2013. "'Alien Religiosity' in Three Liberal European States." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14 (2): 173–92. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2013.792648.

Großbölting, Thomas. 2013. *Der verlorene Himmel: Glaube in Deutschland seit 1945*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Hemel, Ernst van den. 2014. "(Pro)claiming Tradition: The 'Judeo-Christian' Roots of Dutch Society and the Rise of Conservative Nationalism." In *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere. Postsecular Publics*, edited by Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw and Eva Midden, 53–76. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, Peter. 1994. "Bearing the Consequences of Belief." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (1): 24–43.

Joppke, Christian. 2015. *The Secular State under Siege. Religion and Politics in Europe and America*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Joppke, Christian. 2018. "Culturalizing Religion in Western Europe: Patterns and Puzzles." *Social Compass* 65 (2), 234–246.

Kendall, Francis. 2006. *Understanding White Privilege. Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*. New York: Routledge.

Laborde, Cécile. 2008. *Critical Republicanism. The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Laborde, Cécile. 2017. *Liberalism's Religion*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Laborde, Cécile and Sune Lægaard 2020. "Liberal Nationalism and Symbolic Religious Establishment." In *Liberal Nationalism and its Critics*, edited by Gina Gustavsson and David Miller, 172–187. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lægaard, Sune. 2017. "What's the Problem with Symbolic Religious Establishment?" In *Religion in Liberal Political Philosophy*, edited by Cécile Laborde and Aurélia Bardon, 118–131. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lambek, Michael. "Introduction." In *Ordinary Ethics. Anthropology, Language, and Action*, edited by Michael Lambek, 1–36. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Levinson, Sanford. *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*. Illustrated Edition. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.

Liao, Shen-yi, and Bryce Huebner. 2020. "Oppressive Things." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12701.

Lim, Chong-Ming. 2020. "Vandalizing Tainted Commemorations." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 48 (2): 185–216. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12162.

Marzouki, Nadia, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy, eds. 2016. *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*. Oxford, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Modood, Tariq, and Simon Thompson. 2021. "Othering, Alienation and Establishment." *Political Studies*. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720986698.

Nussbaum, Martha. 2008. *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality*. Basic Books.

Pollack, Detlef, and Gergely Rosta. 2017. *Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison*. Translated by David West. Illustrated Edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: OUP Oxford.

Rose, Julie L. 2016. "Freedom of Association and the Temporal Coordination Problem." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24 (3): 261–76. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12098.

Scheffler, Samuel. 2007. "Immigration and the Significance of Culture." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35 (2): 93–125. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2007.00101.x.

Schlosser, Lewis Z. 2003. "Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo." *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 31 (1): 44–51. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2003.tb00530.x.

Schulz, Johannes. 2019. "Must Rhodes Fall? The Significance of Commemoration in the Struggle for Relations of Respect." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27 (2): 166–86. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12176.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Wagener, Volker. 2017 "Could Germany Soon Have a Muslim Holiday?" Deutsche Welle 14 October 2017. https://www.dw.com/en/could-germany-soon-have-a-muslim-holiday/a-40947802.

Walzer, Michael. 1983. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books.

ZEIT online. 2017. "Thomas de Maizière: Innenminister ist offen für muslimische Feiertage." *Die Zeit*. October 12, 2017. https://www.zeit.de/zustimmung?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.zeit.de%2Fgesellschaft%2Fzeitgeschehen%2F2017-10%2Fthomas-de-maiziere-muslimische-feiertage-cdu. Accessed: 17-09-2021.

CHAPTER 6

Witchcraft, Terrorism, and 'Things of Conflict' in Coastal Kenya

Erik Meinema

1 Introduction

This chapter is based on extensive ethnographic research in the coastal Kenyan town of Malindi, where concerns about witchcraft and terrorism reflect and inform tensions and conflicts, which sometimes result in violence.[1] In recent years, Kenya's coast has witnessed terrorist attacks and recruitment efforts by Somalia-based Islamic terrorist organization Al-Shabaab, leading various Western donors to fund programmes to "counter violent extremism" that are implemented by Kenyan civil society organizations. Although Western donors often primarily aim to counter violent extremism that is related to Islam (see Meinema 2021a), a recent "action plan" to "counter violent extremism" by the government of Kilifi County (2017), in which Malindi is situated, also argues that a "strong belief in witchcraft practices" is a "motivating factor" of "violent extremism". The report subsequently mentions the problem of witchcraft-related killings, which primarily occur among the Mijikenda ethnic group, and the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a coastal secessionist movement which the report links to Mijikenda "traditionalism" by mentioning the sacred Kaya forests of the Mijikenda as MRC "hideouts".

This understanding of "violent extremism" as not only related to Al-Shabaab, but also to "witchcraft practices", coastal secessionism, and Mijikenda "traditionalism" raises several questions, which I aim to address here. How do discourses about witchcraft and terrorism intersect in coastal Kenya? And how do these discourses shape modes of religious coexistence in Malindi, given that witchcraft and terrorism are often primarily associated with particular religious groups? In particular, the chapter aims to investigate how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism politicize and shape how various religious

1 My research took place between August 2016 and September 2017 and mainly focused on civil society organizations that are funded by Western donors to build peace and to counter violent extremism via an 'interfaith' approach. I also made countless observations during everyday interactions, public meetings, and religious gatherings in Malindi.

groups materially manifest themselves in the urban environment of Malindi (cf. Meyer 2015, 597). In these dynamics, particular material objects become 'things of conflict' because they are commonly associated with witchcraft or terrorism, which may link widespread fears about witches and terrorists to the actual people who engage with these objects.

The earlier mentioned questions are pertinent, because of the religious diversity that characterizes Malindi and the coastal region of Kenya more generally. While Kenya as a whole has a Christian majority population, Malindi has long been inhabited by Swahili Muslims, whose presence in towns along the East African coast stretches multiple centuries. In rural areas around these towns, other coastal groups such as the Mijikenda often form the majority. In the Malindi environment, the Giriama are the most populous Mijikenda subgroup, who may self-identify as Christians, Muslims, or "Traditionalists".[2] Malindi is also inhabited by Christians who come from "upcountry" (*bara*) parts of Kenya and have varying ethnic backgrounds. While the 2010 Constitution of Kenya states that "there will be no state religion", Christianity has long played predominant roles in Kenyan law, public life, and politics (Deacon et al. 2017). In this situation, Swahili Muslims and Mijikenda from various religious backgrounds have often complained about political and economic marginalization in relation to people from 'upcountry', who are most often Christians. In recent decades, such feelings of marginalization have not only informed recruitment strategies of Al-Shabaab, which has managed to gain support amongst a small segment of Kenyan Muslims, but also a wider popular appeal for the MRC, which was mainly active between 2010 and 2013. This coastal secessionist movement involved people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds and primarily mobilized a regional coastal identity to challenge "upcountry" domination (Willis and Chome 2014). Taking the religiously diverse constellation of Malindi as a starting point, this chapter explores how fears about witchcraft and terrorism set in motion complex dynamics of revelation and concealment, which shape the material ways in which various religions manifest themselves in Malindi.

The chapter is constructed as follows. First, I provide a theoretical reflection on witchcraft and terrorism that describes these phenomena as entangled with social tensions, mistrust, and complex dynamics of revelation and concealment, which can be studied productively through a focus on materiality. Second, I focus on the ways in which people speak about witchcraft

2 In Malindi, the term 'Traditionalism' is commonly used to refer to the indigenous African religious traditions of the Giriama, for which I use the term 'Giriama Traditionalism' here to distinguish it from other forms of indigenous African religiosity.

and witchcraft-related violence in Malindi and explore how different religious groups position themselves in relation to these phenomena. I pay special attention to the ways in which discourses about witchcraft shape the material religious forms through which people express themselves in the urban environment of Malindi. Third, I investigate how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism intersect within Kenyan understandings of violent extremism and show how attempts of Muslims and Traditionalists to avoid associations with violent extremism shape the material forms by which they organize themselves in Malindi. Finally, demonstrating that Christianity is only rarely associated with witchcraft or terrorism, I analyse how the circulation of discourses about witchcraft and terrorism affects the material expression of Christianity, Islam, and Traditionalism in uneven ways.

2 The Materiality of Mistrust

Anthropological studies of witchcraft have often emphasized that discourses about witchcraft offer insights into the tensions and social bonds around which society is organized (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1950). Suspicions that particular people secretively practise witchcraft frequently arise around instances of misfortune or social inequalities, focusing on objects, people, or behaviour that are considered extraordinary or anti-social. Such suspicions may crystalize in witchcraft accusations, which link instances of misfortune and the alleged anti-social behaviour of the accused together by treating them as part of an underlying deeper evil, namely witchcraft (Parkin 1985, 228–9). As witchcraft accusations frequently focus on those who fail or refuse to adhere to particular moral and behavioural standards, they tend to reflect tensions within society, as well as providing a vocabulary to express, catalyse, and intervene in such tensions (Stewart and Strathern 2004, 1–28).

While witches are often seen as evil, anthropologist Peter Geschiere (2013, 14) stresses that witchcraft should not be conceptualized as the antithesis of sociality, trust, and kinship but rather as its flipside, since witches are often considered to be dangerous exactly because they disrupt social bonds from within, forming a dangerous threat of betrayal in intimate circles of sociality where sociability and trust should reign. I made similar observations in Malindi, where people often understand jealousy (*wivu*) among family members or neighbours as a central driver for people to practise witchcraft (*uchawi*) (Tinga 1998, 183). Yet, witchcraft discourse can also take the nation as the social unit that is threatened by occult forces from within. Noticeably, political relations in Kenya are often described in familial terms, emphasizing the paternal

responsibility of a predominantly male and elderly elite to provide guidance and development to women (*wamama*) and youth (*vijana*) (Van Stapele 2016, 314). Thus, when witchcraft fears are raised on a national scale, arguably they are powerful because they resonate with similar fears that exist within intimate social bonds on familial scales.

Within the Kenyan context, notions of witchcraft as a threat to the nation have roots in colonial times. British administrators generally conceived fears about witchcraft to be an expression of African superstition, which they expected to disappear under modernization. Paradoxically, however, British officials also used the term 'witchcraft' to demonize African movements that challenged colonial authorities. For example, British officials associated the Mau Mau uprising against settler colonialism in the 1950s with "witchcraft and savagery" (Smith 2008, 28). Central to colonial fears was Mau Mau's appropriation of traditional Kikuyu oaths, which Kenya government commissioner Frank Corfield considered to be "intimately connected with the belief in witchcraft" (Corfield 1960, 163). Mau Mau was also described as a terrorist movement, and subsequently became "the international face of terrorism in the 1950s", which "embedded itself in the Western mind as the metaphor for deranged violence, primitive savagery, and rejection of 'civilization'" (Berman 2007, 529). Scholars have argued that these imaginations concealed economic and political motives of Mau Mau, and legitimized its violent repression by colonial authorities (Berman 2007, 542). The condemnation of African ideas and practices as related to 'witchcraft' should be understood in relation to broader trends in the history of colonialism, in which concepts such as 'witchcraft', 'idolatry', and 'fetishism' were used to negatively evaluate indigenous African religious traditions along evolutionary lines as backward and primitive (see the introduction to this volume; Meinema 2021b).

Notions of malicious spiritual forces being dangerous threats to peace and public prosperity continued to shape postcolonial political dynamics. In the 1990s, for example, the Mungiki movement rose among marginalized Kikuyu, which took inspiration from Mau Mau and Kikuyu Traditionalism. The movement criticized political elites, involved itself in organised crime, and quickly gained a notorious reputation for violence. Government officials, church leaders, and political commentators subsequently associated Mungiki with devil worship, with concerns again focusing on Mungiki's use of ritualized oaths (Smith 2011, 58). Given that the state has responded to Mungiki through police crackdowns and extrajudicial violence (Van Stapele 2016), I suggest that such imaginations present Mungiki as a demonic evil that needs to be dealt with in a confrontational and violent manner (Rio et al. 2017, 25).

Furthermore, the association of particular groups such as Mungiki with demonic spiritual powers sets in motion complex dynamics of revelation and

concealment. Stating that Mungiki is influenced by demonic powers arguably allows political elites to connect widespread fears about malicious spiritual forces to actual people and the outward appearances with which Mungiki members are commonly recognized. These outward appearances are shaped by particular material objects, such as dreadlocks, snuff tobacco, red eyes which indicate possession by demons, and paraphernalia which are allegedly used in oathing rituals (Knighton 2009, 240; Smith 2011, 74; Phombeah 2003; Daily Nation 2011; Mwangi 2018). These material objects subsequently inform the mental images that people have of those who engage demonic spiritual forces. However, when dreadlocks and snuff tobacco started to serve as indicators for Mungiki membership during violent police crackdowns, many youth – Mungiki members or not – stopped having their hair in dreadlocks to avoid attracting the unwanted attention of security agencies (Rasmussen 2010, 309). These dynamics not only demonstrate that having dreadlocks was insufficient to determine Mungiki membership, but also that state attempts to identify and eradicate Mungiki are constantly complicated as people avoid the material signs that become associated with it. This complexity is further enhanced because Mungiki has never been a uniform movement. The 'brand name' Mungiki has been appropriated by different groups, and thrust onto others whom the state wished to suppress, so both the Mungiki movement and the demonic forces to which it is linked continue to resist a total definition (Smith 2008, 39; cf. Meyer 2015, 132).

Similar dynamics can be seen in relation to discourses about terrorism, although terrorism discourses only rarely focus on intimate circles of sociality of neighbours and family members; they focus instead on social relations on a national scale. Taking inspiration from U.S. rhetoric in the Global War on Terror, President Uhuru Kenyatta has described Al-Shabaab attacks as "senseless" or "barbaric" acts of violence, and as the work of "evil-doers" or "the devil" which poses "a threat to the nation" (Standard 2013a; Presidency of Kenya 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Although Kenyatta stresses that "Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance", he nevertheless links terrorism to Islam by arguing that radicalization "occurs in the full glare of day, in madrassas, in homes and in Mosques with rogue Imams" (Presidency of Kenya 2015). Such political rhetoric has coincided with increased surveillance of Muslims by Kenyan and Western intelligence services, and attempts of Kenyan security agencies to crack down upon suspected Al-Shabaab members, sometimes through extrajudicial violence. In relation to these developments, young Muslim men in Malindi told me that they avoid wearing particular kinds of Islamic dress (such as having a beard or wearing a *kanzu* tunic), which could attract unwanted attention from security agents, since they have implicitly come to be associated with radicalization or terrorism.

Several similarities between discourses about witchcraft and terrorism can be noted here. First, they provide a way of speaking about hidden enemies, since both witches and terrorists are thought to covertly plot violence that disrupts social relations from within. While witchcraft suspicions often arise within the intimate circles of sociality, discourses about witchcraft can also take shape on a national scale. It is on this national scale that discourses about terrorism are also often formulated. Second, while the presence of witches and terrorists is frequently feared and suspected, they generally remain invisible, although terrorists often reveal themselves when they execute violent attacks. Third, witches and terrorists are seen as evil figures who deserve extreme punishment, and they are regularly thought to be influenced by external malicious powers (such as the devil). Furthermore, 'witchcraft' and 'terrorism' are also externally ascribed labels, which conceal the economic and political motives of the accused. Finally, state actors often attempt to expose hidden evils and formulate suspicions that particular groups may involve themselves in witchcraft or terrorism. In response, people aim to evade being linked to these vices, by avoiding particular material religious forms that are commonly associated with witches and terrorists.

These observations demonstrate how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism set in motion complex dynamics of exposure and concealment, in which state actors and others aim to identify and eradicate hidden enemies. In these dynamics, particular material objects or religious forms may function as social stigma which link those who engage with them to witchcraft or terrorism (Goffman 1963, 58). These material objects and religious forms are therefore avoided by those who do not wish to be seen as (potential) witches or terrorists. In this way, discourses about witchcraft and terrorism may be understood to have a formative dimension, because the dynamics of exposure and concealment that they set in motion shape urban environments and the material religious forms that take place in them. Furthermore, these dynamics often impact Christians, Muslims, and Traditionalists in divergent ways, since terrorism is often primarily associated with Islam, and witchcraft with indigenous African religious traditions. In the rest of this chapter, I investigate how these dynamics shape the public expression of Christianity, Islam, and Traditionalism in Malindi in distinctive and uneven ways.

3 Traditional Healers or Witchdoctors?

During my fieldwork, I noticed how Christians, Muslims, and Traditionalists often understand misfortune such as illnesses in reference to an invisible spir-

itual realm, which can be maliciously influenced by envious neighbours and benevolently by various religious practitioners (see McIntosh 2009; Ciekawy 2001; Tinga 1998). These religious practitioners include *waganga*, a Swahili term frequently translated to English as 'traditional healers' by clients, and as 'witchdoctors' by those who condemn them. In the Malindi environment, many *waganga* are of Giriama ethnic backgrounds, who engage in healing and divinatory practices (*uganga*) that many consider to be closely associated with Giriama Traditionalism. These *waganga* can be consulted for diagnosing or treating problems that are explained in relation to spirits (*mapepo* or *majini*) and witchcraft (*uchawi*). Although many Giriama *waganga* incorporate Islamic elements such as the Qur'an in their ritual practices and may even self-identify as Muslims, Swahili Muslims often condemn traditional healing (*uganga*) as apostasy (*ushirikina*, from Arabic, *shirk*). Such criticism resonates with common Islamic critiques along the Swahili coast, which argue against "mixing" Islam with "traditional religions" (*dini za kiasili*) (Kresse 2018, 87). According to these critiques, such mixing would lead to unacceptable innovations in Islam (*bidaa*), such as the acceptance of witchcraft beliefs, traditional healing practices (*uganga*), spirit possessions, and/or the use of charms (Parkin 1985, 228; McIntosh 2009, 214; Kresse 2018, 87, 195). As unwanted innovations are often thought to originate from indigenous African religious traditions, many Muslims associate witchcraft – and ritual ways of diagnosing and healing it – primarily with Traditionalism. Regardless of their ethnic background, many Christians in Malindi similarly suggested that *waganga* depend on witchcraft or demonic forces, and that using their services is incompatible with being Christian.

Because of recurrent associations with backwardness and witchcraft, I noticed that many Giriama in Malindi refrained from publicly aligning themselves with Traditionalism, and instead often self-identified as Christians or sometimes as Muslims. Nevertheless, many Giriama (alongside other people from varying ethnic and religious backgrounds) often continued to secretively visit *waganga*. It must be noted, however, that despite being primarily associated with the Giriama and their traditional practices, fears about witchcraft continued to be shared by Christians and Muslims from various ethnic backgrounds as well. For example, a non-Giriama Christian interlocutor argued that "competition to be at the top of the food chain" in business and politics also finds expression in the spiritual realm, in which people "kill each other" through witchcraft. Similarly, a Swahili Muslim interlocutor admitted that some Muslims keep spirits (*majini*) with the aim of becoming rich by offering them the blood of relatives, a form of witchcraft that some Giriama also suspect wealthy Swahili Muslims of engaging in (see McIntosh 2009). Fur-

thermore, many Swahili Muslims also visit their own religious specialists who provide treatments for problems that are understood in relation to the spiritual realm.[3]

I also noticed that besides refraining from self-identifying as a Traditionalist, many Giriama generally avoided public engagement with particular material objects, such as traditional dress, charms, ritual objects, and musical instruments, because occult forces are considered to appear through them. For example, one Giriama interlocutor explained that it had become problematic to take traditional percussive instruments – which are also used in divination practices – to church services. This interlocutor also said that traditional clothes are generally avoided by Giriama in Malindi in favour of Western-style dress, since traditional attire is seen as "devilish" and regarded as a possible indicator that the wearer might be a witch.

Such condemnation may explain why many *waganga* work secretively and rely on signs placed on trees and lampposts that indicate phone numbers rather than specific whereabouts for advertisement. This demonstrates how *waganga* have appropriated technologies such as phones and signposts to achieve a degree of public visibility in ways that simultaneously allow them and their locations to remain concealed. Furthermore, when I visited several *waganga* through the help of interlocutors, I found out that many *waganga* offer their services in the outskirts of Malindi, in huts or small palm-leaf-fenced spaces that do not display any advertisements to draw potential clients in. This demonstrates how many *waganga* navigate the politics of public visibility by using informal social networks to be located. I made similar observations when I visited Swahili religious specialists with the help of some of my interlocutors, who often receive clients behind closed doors in houses that do not provide advertisement.

While the location of *waganga* are usually known by those who live around them, one interlocutor explained that the people who visit *waganga* usually search for those with good reputations that are located far from where they live so that their visits will not be noticed by their neighbours. This is important not only because *uganga* is seen as incompatible with Christianity and Islam, but also because those who visit *waganga* run the risk of being accused of practising witchcraft (*uchawi*) themselves (also see Ciekawy 2001, 175–6). For example, one Giriama interlocutor explained how using *waganga*

3 In Malindi, Swahili Muslim religious specialists often distinguish themselves from Giriama *waganga* by referring to themselves as *mwalimu* (teacher), *mwalimu wa kitabu* (teacher of the book), *daktari* (doctor) or *tabibu* (healer), see McIntosh (2009, 229, 270).

to attract clients to one's business may be interpreted as witchcraft, as this would imply that one is drawing clients away from others. While engagements with *waganga* are thus always considered suspicious and potentially dangerous, many Muslims and Christians completely deny that *uganga* can be used benevolently, and associate all forms of *uganga* with spiritual danger, apostasy, and an idea of absolute demonic evil, even when it is used for protective or healing purposes (also see Parkin 1985, 228). In relation to such judgements, many Muslims, Christians, and Traditionalists in Malindi publicly distance themselves from *waganga* and the material forms associated with these practitioners, although many continue to engage with them secretively.

4 Witchcraft-Related Violence

Despite the secrecy that surrounds the topic of witchcraft in Malindi, it sometimes becomes an issue of public contention when suspicions that neighbours or relatives secretively practise witchcraft are settled in a violent manner. In these cases, state actors and Giriama elders both wish to intervene in the social dynamics that inform witchcraft-related violence, with the aim of reducing it. In this section, I analyse how public contestations around witchcraft-related violence further shape material forms of religious expression in Malindi.

During my fieldwork, I heard several stories about Giriama youth who would accuse elderly neighbours or relatives of being witches, after which they would kill them or chase them away so that they inherited their land and other family assets. Such witchcraft-related violence has led the county government of Kilifi to initiate a public campaign to encourage people to abandon "the backward ideologies of believing in witches" (Agoro 2019) through the slogan "old age is not witchcraft" (*uzee sio uchawi*), which they disseminate via public signboards and occasional public meetings. Through such messages, government officials in Kilifi county stand in a long tradition in which state officials reject belief in witchcraft as backward and superstitious.

Several interlocutors explained that state attempts to halt witchcraft-related violence are complicated by the Witchcraft Act, which was introduced under British colonialism in 1925 and remains largely unaltered today. While the Witchcraft Act criminalizes those "pretending to exercise witchcraft", convicting suspected witches is often difficult because it requires tangible evidence of a crime that largely remains invisible (Luongo 2008, 41; 2011, 93). The Witchcraft Act also criminalizes accusing others of practising witchcraft and also criminalizes attempts to identify witches via "non-natural means" (i.e. *uganga*)

unless the accusations are presented directly to government officials. Law scholar Katherine Luongo (2011; 2008, 36) stresses that these legal conditions make it virtually impossible to settle witchcraft suspicions through a court. In this situation, people who fear bewitchment sometimes resort to violence to settle suspicions, a problem that has challenged government authorities since colonial times. The observations of Luongo are consistent with my own. The court records show that the Malindi High Court regularly tries people who have allegedly murdered elderly relatives that were accused of practising witchcraft but is generally uninterested in verifying the accusations of witchcraft that inform these murder cases.[4] Furthermore, while I met several accused elders who were attacked or chased away by younger relatives, I never met youth who publicly made accusations of witchcraft against specific elders, possibly because they feared government interference and criminalization if they openly did so. I also noticed that several Giriama elders in Malindi dyed their grey hair black, because grey hair is sometimes interpreted as a sign of being a witch, and this indicated that they were frightened of being accused of practising witchcraft.

Given the ineffectiveness of government measures in halting witchcraft-related violence, some Giriama elders in Malindi propose that government authorities should work together with 'traditional' Giriama practitioners to identify and ritually negate witchcraft, in order to quell persistent fears about witchcraft among Giriama youth. According to several Giriama elders, 'traditional' means of dealing with witchcraft accusations only very rarely resulted in suspected witches being killed, since they included ritualized ways of identifying witchcraft through divination (*uganga wa kuvoyera*) and oath ordeals (*kiraho*), after which identified witches were ritually cleansed and swore oaths to ensure that they would never practise witchcraft again (see Parkin 1991, 150–1). Yet, persisting associations between Giriama Traditionalism and witchcraft make many government officials reluctant to seek such cooperation. For example, during a conversation I had with a government official in Malindi, this official stated that he rejected cooperation with Giriama practitioners (*waganga*) to halt witchcraft killings. Instead, he argued that the Kenyan government "puts God first", implying that the government cannot cooperate with ritual practitioners who engage spiritual forces other than the God of monotheist religions such as Christianity and Islam. Such judgements are perhaps unsurprising, because traditional means to quell witchcraft fears, para-

4 I studied the jurisprudence of 48 court cases at Malindi High Court, which were found by entering 'witch' and 'witchcraft' as keywords at: http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw.

doxically, acknowledge that witchcraft exists, while many state actors wish to distance themselves from such "outdated beliefs".

The above analysis demonstrates how suspicions about witchcraft may become an issue of public contention when they are settled in a violent manner. In these dynamics, state actors aim to reduce witchcraft-related violence by denying the claims of Giriama youth that their elderly relatives may bewitch them. Instead, they conceptualize accusations of witchcraft as superstitious and resulting from adherence to a "backward ideology" that supposedly 'real' Christians would not believe in. Alternatively, Giriama elders propose to defuse suspicions about witchcraft by using traditional means to identify witches and offering ritual solutions. However, many government officials remain reluctant to work together with Giriama ritual specialists, because they associate Giriama ritual practice with "outdated" witchcraft-related beliefs, which in their view contradict the monotheism of Christianity and Islam. Such condemnation of Giriama Traditionalism not only complicates attempts to halt witchcraft-related violence, but also reinforces patterns in which Giriama Traditionalism is denied the same public recognition and material presence as Christianity and Islam because it is associated with witchcraft.

5 Kenyan Discourses on Violent Extremism

In relation to the on-going violence around witchcraft, Giriama elders have at times stated that the government is not doing enough to prevent the killing of elders (Standard 2019). For example, one Giriama elder argued that "if there is a bomb blast and one person dies, the whole government machine comes. But here, six or seven people are injured every week [after being accused of witchcraft]. Does this mean that they are not people?". Indeed, besides the earlier mentioned public campaign, I have not heard of any systematic efforts by state authorities to prevent witchcraft-related violence.

Contrastingly, the Kenyan government actively cooperates with Western governments to deal with Al-Shabaab. This cooperation not only involves 'hard power' approaches by security agencies, aimed at intelligence gathering, arresting terrorism suspects, and military action against Al-Shabaab, but also 'soft power' preventive approaches to counter violent extremism. In another article (Meinema 2021a), I argue that while Western donors try to maintain a public stance of neutrality towards different religions, they perpetuate associations between Islam and terrorism by implicitly mobilizing a distinction between 'moderate' and 'radical' Muslims, which informs their counterterrorism activities in Kenya. Thus, contrary to in the 1950s when Mau Mau was

described as a terrorist movement, British policy makers no longer fear that beliefs in witchcraft amongst Africans might inform terrorism and supposedly irrational violence. Instead, they rather see the global spread of 'radical' (or Salafi-inspired) Islam as posing a threat to security and their geopolitical interests because it is feared that it may inspire terrorism. Ironically, while Salafi-inspired reformist movements in Kenya often distance themselves from 'traditional' African practices in ways similar to those of many Christians and Kenyan state actors, some policy analyses now consider 'Sufi' Islam to be more peaceful, exactly because it is thought to embrace cultural elements shared by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, such as "witchcraft beliefs" (Møller 2006, 9; Republic of Kenya 2016, 18).

Despite the preoccupancy of Western donors with Islamic terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab, I noticed during my fieldwork that in Kenyan discourses about violent extremism, both witchcraft and terrorism continued to be seen as potential threats to peace and national unity. Whereas Kenyan state actors often envisioned accusations of witchcraft that arise within intimate circles of sociality as resulting from adherence to a "backward ideology", they continued to recognize witchcraft as dangerous when they suspected that it posed a threat to peace on a national scale. Thus, while the Kenyan state criminalizes people who accuse others of practising witchcraft, state actors paradoxically continue to fear that particular groups engage in forms of witchcraft that may inspire politically subversive activities or violent extremism. In these cases, state actors actively strive to identify and eradicate those who engage in "witchcraft practices", similar to the ways in which state actors deal with the threat of terrorism. To further explore this overlap between fears about witchcraft and terrorism, the rest of this section investigates how anxieties about witchcraft and terrorism intersect within Kenyan discourses on violent extremism. Additionally, I examine how within Kenyan understandings of violent extremism, witchcraft and terrorism are feared because they are envisioned as dangers to peace and unity on a national scale.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that two Muslim-led civil society organizations (CSOs) that receive funds via the UK Conflict and Stability fund to "build resilience" against "violent extremism" are aware that Western donors primarily focus on Muslims, who are perceived to be particularly susceptible to violent extremism. Consequently, these two Muslim-led CSOs often avoid addressing violent extremism altogether, because they fear that openly addressing this sensitive topic would bring about security risks or the further stigmatization of Islam. Instead, they espouse a view of Islam as a moral and peaceful religion, and thus a potential remedy against radicalization, which in their view rather results from a *lack* of religiosity amongst young people.

In relation to these dynamics, I also noticed how some Muslims aimed to broaden discussions about violent extremism beyond a narrow focus on Islam, by mentioning Mungiki, political violence, the MRC, and criminal gangs as well as Al-Shabaab as examples of violent extremism (Meinema 2021a). Earlier in this chapter, we have seen that Mungiki is often associated with devil worship in public discourse. This wider understanding of violent extremism thus not only focuses on terrorism or Islam, but also resonates with concerns about demonic spiritual forces and witchcraft, which have informed Kenyan political imaginations since colonial times.

Furthermore, during various interfaith dialogues organized in Malindi, I observed how Muslim participants sought to align discussions about violent extremism with broader concerns about violence as related to anti-social attitudes and witchcraft. For example, one Muslim claimed during a dialogue meeting that Giriama youth who accuse elders of being witches should also be considered "part of extremism". During another interfaith dialogue, a Muslim facilitator reasoned that violent extremism "has nothing to do with religion" but should rather be understood as a selfish, anti-social response to the experience of marginalization and grievances. Since this explanation resonates with conceptions of witches as driven by greed and jealousy rather than by a commitment to communal peace and well-being, it associates terrorism not so much with a 'radical' interpretation of Islam but rather with the kind of anti-social attitudes that are also commonly ascribed to witches. Noticeably, such a broader understanding of violent extremism is sometimes also held by Christians. For example, when I asked a Catholic schoolteacher in Malindi about her school's mission to "reduce radicalization", she argued that radicalization "is not necessarily Islamic" but should instead be associated with those "who do not identify with any religion" and engage in "devil worshipping" instead.

Furthermore, the previously mentioned action plan to counter violent extremism in Kilifi County similarly associates violent extremism not only with Al-Shabaab but also with "witchcraft practices" among the Mijikenda and the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). The MRC is a coastal secessionist movement that was mainly active between 2010 and 2013 and sought to address coastal marginalization by mobilizing a regional coastal identity to challenge domination from "upcountry" (*bara*) (Kresse 2018, 23–5; Mwakimako and Willis 2014, 17–8). Besides having a secessionist agenda, various violent incidents have been ascribed to the MRC in newspaper reports. However, MRC-leaders have generally denied involvement in violence and have emphasized that they choose legal and peaceful means to pursue their political goals (Mwakimako and Willis 2014, 17; Willis and Chome 2014, 4–5).

The previously discussed action plan of Kilifi County similarly associates the MRC with Mijikenda Traditionalism by listing two sacred Kaya forests of the Mijikenda as MRC hideouts. Various newspapers have occasionally reported about MRC-related "oathing" taking place in Kaya forests, while other articles discuss "witchdoctors" being charged for administering MRC oaths, for which they use "witchcraft paraphernalia" (The Star 2019; Standard 2013b; Standard 2013c; Citizen 2015). It remains unclear how oathing in Kaya forests is connected to the MRC, especially since MRC leaders again deny any relation to such practices (Willis and Chome 2014, 4). Yet, concerns about MRC oaths and witchdoctors resonate strongly with anxieties about oathing practices that figured prominently in political imaginations of Mau Mau and Mungiki.[5] This is another way in which anxieties about witchcraft continue to resonate in Kenyan understandings of violent extremism. The perpetuation of such fears in relation to the MRC arguably undermines the political legitimacy of this movement, even when MRC members choose legal and peaceful means to pursue their political goals and whether members engage in Mijikenda ritual practices or not.

In this section, I have sought to demonstrate how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism intersect in Kenyan understandings of violent extremism. Particularly, I showed how Muslims who participate in CSO programmes often aim to broaden debates on violent extremism by focusing on a much wider range of security issues to evade an exclusive focus on Islam. Such a wider understanding of violent extremism is also shared by some state actors and Christians, who not only mention Al-Shabaab as an example of violent extremism, but also political violence, Mungiki, criminal gangs, and the MRC. In this way, Kenyan understandings of violent extremism often do not exclusively focus on terrorism that is perpetrated by Islamic groups such as Al-Shabaab. These discourses are also informed by anxieties about witchcraft and ritualized oaths which have characterized Kenyan political imaginations since colonial times. Within discourses on violent extremism, however, "witchcraft practices" are feared not so much because they may harm relatives or neighbours within intimate circles of sociality but because – in a way that moves them to the national level – they are imagined to threaten peace and unity on a national scale. In the next section, I will demonstrate how the attempts of Muslims and Traditionalists to avoid being associated with violent extremism shape the material forms through which they organize themselves in Malindi.

5 As well as the so-called 'Kaya Bombo' violence that occurred in coastal Kenya in 1997 (Ciekawy 2009).

6 Avoiding Material Religious Forms

Particular religious groups may not only aim to discursively dissociate their religious traditions from witchcraft or terrorism, but also strive to avoid engagement with particular material objects that inform the mental images that people have of witches or terrorists. In this section, I analyse how both Muslims and Giriama Traditionalists in Malindi attempt to avoid particular 'things of conflict' that are commonly associated with witchcraft or terrorism. In this way, I aim to demonstrate how the circulation of fears about witchcraft and terrorism has politicized and shaped the material ways through which different religious groups materially manifest themselves in Malindi.

During my fieldwork, one Muslim interlocutor explained that "Wahhabi-influenced" Muslims used to openly meet in Malindi, but no longer did so, because if you "align with Wahhabi, you are seen as an extremist, you are subjected to a lot of security risks". Furthermore, during various Friday sermons, semi-public meetings in mosques, and other public meetings, I noticed that Muslim leaders in Malindi generally refrained from publicly airing political dissent, even though criticism of the government has had considerable popular appeal in mosques in coastal Kenya in recent decades, resulting in a "very public politics of overtly Muslim discontent" (Deacon et al. 2017, 12). Given the previously described securitization of Islam, Muslims in Malindi have arguably stopped publicly airing political criticism, since this could easily confirm suspicions that they may have become radicalized.

Some of my observations indicate that Muslims in Malindi have also toned-down discussions and polemical debates with their Christian neighbours. During my stay, I heard several stories about competitive open-air debates (termed *mihadhara*) that took place in Malindi in the recent past in which Muslim preachers had engaged in polemical theological discussions with Christians while referring to both the Quran and the Bible. Several interlocutors suggested that *mihadhara* in Malindi were often initiated by Muslims, who invited Christians to these events, just like elsewhere in East Africa (Wandera 2015, 28). Yet, in relation to fears that *mihadhara* may provoke conflict or heighten tensions between Muslims and Christians because of the polemical tone of these meetings, the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics called on preachers and state authorities to limit such preaching events, which has led to legal limitations on polemical open-air preaching in the Mombasa region (Petersen and Wandera 2015, 7). Various interlocutors told me that *mihadhara* were no longer organized in Malindi in relation to similar fears. Indeed, one Christian interlocutor stated that public polemical preaching once sparked tensions in Malindi, which almost led to a clash between Muslim and Christian audience

members. I never witnessed any Muslim-initiated public preaching taking place in Malindi, which confirmed the accounts of my interlocutors. These observations suggest not only that many Muslims in Malindi avoid forms of public religious expression which could confirm suspicions that they harbour resentment towards Christians or the Kenyan state but also that state authorities intervene in *mihadhara* because they are perceived to threaten peaceful religious coexistence.

Broader understandings of violent extremism as related not only to Al-Shabaab but also to the MRC and the witchcraft practices that are associated with the Mijikenda also influence how Giriama Traditionalists materially manifest themselves in the urban environment of Malindi. Suspicions about politically subversive forms of witchcraft sometimes extend to the material forms through which Mijikenda Traditionalists become identifiable. For example, Amason Kingi, the governor of Kilifi County, publicly stated in 2019 that Mijikenda attire has been wrongfully used by security agencies to identify MRC members.[6] I also noticed that Giriama elders in Malindi are aware that security actors sometimes associate Mijikenda Traditionalism with witchcraft, subversive political practices, and the MRC. In opposition to such associations, Giriama elders often preach peace when they organize cultural events in Malindi, and regularly organize peace walks during which they advocate peace and national unity. Such physical demonstrations of loyalty to the nation are relevant, because several Giriama elders were arrested when they prepared to participate in a peace walk while wearing traditional attire, under suspicion that they were gathering for a MRC-meeting (Kilifi News 2015). This shows how particular material forms that are commonly associated with Mijikenda tradition and ritual practice have implicitly come to inform the mental images that state actors have of those who allegedly engage in politically subversive activities, which some suspect to be informed by witchcraft practices.

Taken together, these observations show how the circulation of fears about witchcraft and terrorism within Kenyan discourses about violent extremism affects the ways in which Muslims and Giriama Traditionalists publicly express themselves in Malindi. Both Muslims and Giriama Traditionalists engage in a (self-)restriction of public religious expression by avoiding particular material religious forms that are commonly associated with witches or terrorists. While Giriama Traditionalists often promote peace when they wear traditional Mijikenda attire during public events, Muslims generally avoid engaging in public competitive preaching, wearing particular kinds of Muslim dress, or

6 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2495782110446615.

publicly expressing political discontent. This is crucial, because these material forms have come to inform the images that policymakers and state actors have of Muslims and Giriama Traditionalists who potentially engage in various forms of violent extremism and require policy or security intervention.

7 Pentecostalism in Malindi

The (self-)restriction of public religious expression and cautious interaction with various material religious forms that I observed among Muslims and Traditionalists have not similarly affected Christians in Malindi. For example, while Muslims stopped organizing competitive public preaching events, Christian evangelization campaigns continue to take place in Malindi. Such 'crusades' are organized by Malindi-based Pentecostal churches, and sometimes also by various international ministries. Although crusades often avoid predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods, they regularly involve public stages, preaching through PA-systems, evangelizing in the streets, and playing loud worship music, making it difficult to avoid them completely.

Highlighting a competitive attitude towards Muslims, some Pentecostal preachers in Malindi also associate Islam with Al-Shabaab and demonic spiritual forces. For example, during an interfaith dialogue, a Pentecostal pastor sparked controversy when he explained that he avoids Muslims in the same way that he avoids witches, since Muslims could be "linked to this Al-Shabaab". During one conversation, another Pentecostal preacher argued that Muslims "use religious demonic forces" and also said that the "Mijikenda religion is more close to witchcraft than religion". The pastor explained that he hoped to succeed in overcoming the challenge of Muslim-Christian competition in Malindi, which would make Malindi a "peaceful" and "God-fearing town" in which "Islam would lose its grip". During a worship meeting, he similarly preached about how "Malindi would feel our impact", mentioning the transport industry as a sector that Christians would come to occupy. Since Muslims currently own much of Malindi's public transport industry, this preaching is implicitly competitive towards Muslims.

Despite the competitive attitudes of some Pentecostal pastors, Muslims rarely openly complain about the growing public presence of Pentecostal Christianity in Malindi. This signifies how many Muslims have developed "techniques of inattention" towards the sometimes provocative and strongly audible presence of Pentecostalism (Larkin 2014), even while Muslims have toned down their own competitive preaching. Nevertheless, some Muslim interlocutors privately grumbled that Pentecostal worship is too long or too

loud, especially when it takes place close to residential areas where may Muslims live. When formulating such complaints, these Muslim interlocutors pointed out that in the past, churches were respectfully built on the edge of town, so that Muslims would not be bothered by them.

How can we explain this situation, in which some Pentecostal churches continue to organize crusades in Malindi while it is unthinkable that Muslims could organize similar public preaching events, especially if they were provocatively labelled 'jihad'? This difference can arguably be understood in relation to the broader inclination of churches in coastal Kenya to refrain from raising political criticism, and to instead present themselves as peaceful and loyal to the Kenyan nation (cf. Deacon et al. 2017). Consequently, Christianity is generally not associated with witchcraft and terrorism in Kenyan political imaginations, or seen as a potential politically subversive threat. In this situation, polemical public preaching events organized by Muslims are banned because they are perceived to threaten peaceful religious coexistence, while state actors generally do not see polemical Pentecostal crusades as requiring similar state intervention.

On several occasions, I noticed that Pentecostal preaching not only demonized Islam, but also Traditionalism. For example, a Giriama Pentecostal pastor once explained that "the Christian way is the only way" to deal with malicious spiritual forces, and he suggested that both Islam and Traditionalism engage and appease spirits instead of getting rid of them altogether. He illustrated his claim by showing me videos of exorcisms of Islamic spirits (*majini*). When I later visited his church, I indeed witnessed how *majini* were exorcised from churchgoers, and the exorcism of both *uganga* (traditional healing) and *uchawi* (witchcraft) from an elderly Giriama woman. Since the pastor of this church associated both traditional practices (*uganga*) and Islam with malicious spiritual powers, he suggested that spiritual well-being and peace can only be achieved when one breaks completely from these religious traditions by invoking the Holy Spirit.

Although Pentecostalism promises deliverance from malicious spiritual forces, this promise of spiritual protection paradoxically confirms and thus perpetuates fears for malicious spiritual forces, such as witchcraft, *majini*, and 'devil worship' (Rio et al. 2017, 12). Ironically, I noticed that despite their increasing presence in Malindi, Pentecostal churches also do not escape being associated with malicious spiritual forces either. In several instances, I noticed that some Giriama and Swahili interlocutors express suspicion that particular Pentecostal churches were involved in devil worship, for example when pastors use loud distorted voices during preaching, which one interlocutor interpreted as an indicator that they were possessed by malicious spirits. This

shows how in the diverse religious field of Malindi, people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds share fears of malicious spiritual forces, which are conceptualized through the Pentecostal language of devil worship.

In this section, I have analysed how Christianity in Kenyan political imaginations is not often associated with terrorism or forms of witchcraft that threaten to disrupt peace and unity on a national scale. Consequently, state authorities generally do not see public preaching events organized by Christians as a threat to peaceful religious coexistence in the same way as public preaching that is initiated by Muslims, even though Pentecostal preaching is sometimes polemically aimed against Islam and Giriama Traditionalism. On some occasions, Pentecostal pastors accuse Islam and Giriama Traditionalism of engaging or appeasing malicious spiritual forces. Paradoxically, however, such Pentecostal preaching recognizes that malicious spiritual forces exist, even though it aims at breaking completely with those forces by invoking the Holy Spirit. In this way, Pentecostal preaching perpetuates fears of witchcraft and other malicious spiritual forces that can be found among Christians, Muslims, and Giriama Traditionalists alike. Yet, while Giriama Traditionalism is often perceived to be intrinsically connected with witchcraft in the eyes of Muslims and Christians, Pentecostalism commonly continues to be seen as a powerful solution to witchcraft, including among many Giriama who have become Christians. Since Pentecostal Christianity is generally not associated with terrorism, and is often seen as a solution to witchcraft rather than being associated with it, Pentecostal Christians do not have to engage in the (self-)restriction of public religious expression that I observed among Muslims and Traditionalists. I argue that these dynamics privilege the public expression of Christianity in Malindi.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism set in motion complex dynamics of revelation and concealment which politicize and shape the material ways in which various religious groups manifest themselves in the urban environment of Malindi. In these dynamics, particular material religious forms become 'things of conflict', which may link widespread fears about witches and terrorists to actual people and their outward appearances. Consequently, many Giriama evade public engagement with traditional objects, such as traditional attire, musical instruments, and traditional healing practices (*uganga*), to avoid being associated with witchcraft, even as many Giriama continue to secretively engage with them. As a result,

Giriama Traditionalism generally has a relatively low public profile in Malindi. Since Islam is often associated with terrorism, many Swahili Muslims similarly refrain from wearing particular kinds of Muslim dress or having a beard, competitive public preaching, and the open expression of political discontent. This is relevant, because these forms of religious expression have implicitly come to serve as indicators that one may be susceptible to radicalization, and consequently, they could attract unwanted policy or security interventions. In relation to these dynamics, many Muslims in Malindi also strategically avoid the sensitive topic of terrorism when they participate in Western-funded programmes to counter violent extremism. Yet, while Western donor policies generally focus on countering violent extremism among Muslims, some Muslims aim to broaden discussions on violent extremism by mentioning not only Al-Shabaab, but also the MRC and accusations of witchcraft among the Giriama as examples of violent extremism. In this way, they arguably aim to align debates about violent extremism with fears about the potentially violent and politically subversive threat of witchcraft, which have informed Kenyan political imaginations since colonial times. Within this broader understanding of violent extremism, witchcraft continues to be primarily associated with Traditionalism. This also impacts the ways in which Giriama Traditionalists assume a public presence in Malindi, since they often physically demonstrate their loyalty to the Kenyan nation when they organize public activities to avoid being associated with the MRC, which is suspected of engaging in politically subversive activities that are inspired by "witchcraft practices".

While Christianity does not remain entirely free from suspicions of engaging demonic spiritual forces, it is generally not associated with the potentially subversive threats of witchcraft and terrorism within Western donor policies or Kenyan political discourse. Since Christians do not have to engage in the (self-)restriction of public religious expression in ways that are similar to those of Muslims and Traditionalists, Christianity has assumed a growing public presence in Malindi at the expense of Islam and Giriama Traditionalism. Pentecostalism in particular is an increasingly appealing religious alternative for many Giriama in Malindi, since it promises deliverance from witchcraft and other malicious spiritual forces, which in Pentecostal discourses are sometimes associated with Islam and traditional healing practices (*uganga*). Since Christians are only rarely suspected to be witches or terrorists, I thus argue that the circulation of fears about witchcraft and terrorism privileges the public expression of Christianity in Malindi. This perpetuates a colonial pattern in which Christianity is generally seen as a civilized religion that is compatible with modern statecraft. Simultaneously, religious minorities continue to be looked at with suspicion, not only because they may perpetuate "out-

dated" witchcraft beliefs, but also because it is feared that they may inspire forms of terrorism or witchcraft that threaten peace and unity on a national scale.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I am thankful to my interlocutors in Malindi, whom I have anonymized in this chapter. I have also benefitted from conversations with Birgit Meyer, Lucien van Liere, Peter Geschiere, and Benjamin Kirby, who read earlier versions of this chapter and provided helpful feedback. I also received useful comments from participants during the seminar 'The Things of Conflict; A Religious Studies Perspective' that Lucien van Liere and I organized in 2019, and from the anonymous reviewers of this chapter. The PhD research on which this chapter is based was funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO, grant number 406-15-072), which is gratefully acknowledged. All mistakes remain my own.

References

Agoro, Abel. 2019. "Kilifi Pastors Face Arrest over Inciting Residents to Lynch the Elderly." *Kenyans.co.ke*. https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/36720-kilifi-pastors-facing-arrests-charges-incitement-residents-commit-crime. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Berman, Bruce. 2007. "Review: Mau Mau and the Politics of Knowledge: The Struggle Continues. Reviewed Work(s): Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britian's Gulag in Kenya by Caroline Elkins; Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire by David Anderson." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 41(3): 529–45.

Ciekawy, Diane. 2009. "Demonic Tradition: Representation of Oathing in Newspaper Coverage of the 1997 Crisis in Coastal Kenya." In *Media and Identity in Africa*, edited by Kimani Njogu and John Middleton, 287–307. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Ciekawy, Diane. 2001. "Utsai as Ethical Discourse: A Critique of Power from Mijikenda in Coastal Kenya." In *Witchcraft Dialogues: Anthropological and Philosophical Exchanges*, edited by George C. Bond and Diane Ciekawy, 158–89. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Citizen. 2015. "Fear Grips Kilifi over Regrouping of MRC." Published March 27. https://citizentv.co.ke/news/fear-grips-kilifi-over-regrouping-of-mrc-69485/. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Corfield, F.D. 1960. *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Daily Nation. 2011. "Mungiki Go Underground." https://www.nation.co.ke/news/regional/Mungiki-go-underground-/1070-1252688-xjylrnz/index.html. Accessed: 08-08-2019.

Deacon, Gregory, George Gona, Hassan Mwakimako, and Justin Willis. 2017. "Preaching Politics: Islam and Christianity on the Kenya Coast." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35 (2): 148–67. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2017.1287345.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. 1950. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Geschiere, Peter. 2013. *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust, Africa in Comparison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Kilifi County. 2019. *Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism in Kilifi County*.

Kilifi News. 2015. 50 Peace Walkers Arrested in Malindi. Published July 21. https://kilifinews.blogspot.com/2015/07/50-peace-walkers-arrested-in-malindi.html. Accessed: 09-03-2022.

Knighton, Ben. 2009. "Mungiki Madness." In *Religion and Politics in Kenya. Essays in Honor of a Meddlesome Priest*, edited by Ben Knighton, 223–50. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kresse, Kai. 2018. *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Larkin, Brian. 2014. "Techniques of Inattention: The Mediality of Loudspeakers in Nigeria." *Anthropology Quarterly* 87 (4): 989–1015.

Luongo, Katherine. 2011. *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900–1955*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Luongo, Katherine. 2008. "Motive Rather than Means. Legal Genealogies of Witch-Killing Cases in Kenya." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* XLVIII (1–2): 35–57.

McIntosh, Janet. 2009. *The Edge of Islam: Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Meinema, Erik. 2021a. Countering 'Islamic' Violent Extremism? The Implementation of Programs to Prevent Radicalization by Muslim-led Civil Society Organizations in Malindi, Kenya. *Religion* 51 (2), 259–279.

Meinema, Erik. 2021b. Regulating Religious Coexistence. The Intricacies of 'Interfaith' Cooperation in Coastal Kenya. PhD diss., Utrecht University.

Meyer, Birgit. 2015. *Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2019. *H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta – Statement on the Terrorist Attack at Dusit Complex, Nairobi*. http://www.mfa.go.ke/?p=2435. Accessed: 06-08-2019.

Møller, Bjørn. 2006. *Political Islam in Kenya*. DIIS working paper 22. Copenhagen: The Danish Institute for International Studies.

Mwakimako, Hassan, and Justin Willis. 2014. "Islam, Politics, and Violence on the Kenya Coast." *Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Sécuritaires dans la Corne de l'Afrique*. Note 4. http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/sites/lam/files/note4_observatoire.pdf

Mwangi, Macharia. 2018. *11 Suspected Mungiki Members Nabbed During Night Ritual.* https://nairobinews.nation.africa/suspected-mungiki-members-nabbed/. Accessed: March 7, 2022.

Parkin, David. 1991. *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual among the Giriama of Kenya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parkin, David. 1985. "Entitling Evil: Muslims and non-Muslims in Coastal Kenya." In *The Anthropology of Evil*, edited by David Parkin, 224–243. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Peterson, Henrik Sonne, and Joseph Wandera. 2015. "Religious Other as Another Self. Partisan Mindset and the Development of Security in East Africa." Accessed August 8, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/26910893/Religious_other_as_another_self_Partisan_mindset_and_the_development_of_security_in_East_Africa.

Phombeah, Gray. 2003. *Profile: Kenya's Secretive Mungiki Sect*. Published February 11. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2745421.stm. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Presidency of Kenya. 2015. "Statement by H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta on the Terrorist Attack at Garissa University College, Garissa County." http://www.president.go.ke/2015/04/04/statement-by-h-e-uhuru-kenyatta-on-the-terrorist-attack-at-garissa-university-college-garissa-county-delivered-during-a-live-address-to-the-nation/. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Rasmussen, Jacob. 2010. "'Mungiki' as Youth Movement, Revolution, Gender, and Generational Politics in Nairobi, Kenya." *Young* 18 (3): 301–19.

Republic of Kenya. 2016. *National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Rio, Knut, Michelle MacCarthy and Ruy Blanes. 2017. "Introduction." In *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft. Spiritual Warfare in Africa and Melanesia*, edited by Knut Rio, Michelle MacCarthy and Ruy Blanes, 1–36. Palgrave Macmillan.

Smith, James Howard. 2011. "Making Peace with the Devil. The Political Life of Devil Worship Rumors in Kenya." In *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa*, edited by James Howard Smith and Rosalind I.J. Hackett, 49–81. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Smith, James Howard. 2008. *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Standard. 2019. *Stop Killing Us, Say Elderly Men Living at the Mercy of Armed Lynch Mob*. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001314230/stop-killing-us-say-elderly-men-living-at-the-mercy-of-armed-lynch-mob. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Standard. 2013a. "Full Statement of President Uhuru Kenyatta on Terror Attack." https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000094033/full-statement-of-president-uhuru-kenyatta-on-terror-attack. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Standard. 2013b. "Seven Suspected Witchdoctors Arrested for Administering Oath to Mombasa Republican Council Members." https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000088719/n-a. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Standard. 2013c. *Witchdoctors Remanded for Administering Oath on MRC*. Published May 14. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000083581/witchdoctor-remanded-for-administering-oath-on-mrc. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Star, the. 2019. *Three Arrested as Police Disperse 50 MRC Youth*. Published May 13. https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2019-05-13-three-arrested-as-police-disperse-50-mrc-youth. Accessed: 28-03-2022.

Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew Strathern. 2004. *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tinga, Kaingu Kalume. 1998. "Cultural Practice of the Midzichenda at Cross Roads: Divination, Healing, Witchcraft and the Statuary Law." *AAP* 55: 173–84.

Van Stapele, Naomi. 2016. "'We are not Kenyans': Extra-Judicial Killings, Manhood, and Citizenship in Mathare, a Nairobi Ghetto." Conflict, Security & Development 16 (4): 301–25.

Wandera, Joseph. 2015. "The Use of Sacred Texts by Islamic Public Preachers in Mumias, Western Kenya." *Africa Today* 61 (3): 16–42.

Willis, Justin, and Ngala Chome. 2014. "Marginalization and Political Participation on the Kenya Coast: the 2013 Elections." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8 (1): 115–134.

CHAPTER 7

What's in That Picture?

Humanitarian Photographs and the Christian Iconography of Suffering and Violence

Lucien van Liere

1 Introduction

In her fascinating book on war photography *The Cruel Radiance*, Susie Linfield (2012) discusses a photo made by Jerome Delay in Baghdad in 2003. The photo depicts women mourning the death of Mohammed Jaber Hassan. Together with scores of others, Hassan was a victim of a bomb attack on a market in Baghdad. The women are all dressed in chadors. This is a portrait of "deep sadness that merges into anguish", Linfield acknowledges. In the deeply creased cheek of an elderly woman depicted in the picture she senses a universe of sorrow. But then Linfield changes her tone and continues, "looking at Delay's picture, that universe did not encompass me or pull me in; the image created no bond between me and the Iraqi women". She experienced no empathy, nor pain or guilt. Instead, the picture reminded her of countless other photographs "of black-draped women as they wail over their sons – and, often, celebrate them as martyrs and spur others on to new, deadly feats" (27). The image coming alive in this picture for Linfield celebrates instead of mourns death. What she saw in the photograph was not what the picture showed her. A much wider image full of conflict memory, religious difference, and visual violence, became active, took over, and prevented her from being 'pulled in'.

Since the 19th century, photographs of humans have been used to 'tell' something about conflict. Latest media technologies have consequently been used to raise public awareness of human suffering (Lissner 1977; Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 1). Since these technologies developed greatly in the 20th and 21st centuries, photographic imageries have been used to display harm, suffering, and atrocities, but also to suggest conflict-positions using binary models of innocent victims versus violent perpetrators. Christian missionaries and organizations have been at the cradle of – what is called – 'humanitarian photography' (Twomey 2012, 2015; Stornig 2018).

A deeper reflection from a religious studies perspective can shed an interesting light on why photographs and videos impact our understanding of

violent conflict. To contribute to such a perspective, this chapter focuses on the picturing of human bodies in conflict photography that mediates religious iconography. With 'religious iconography' I refer to visual images that are symbolically 'possessed' (see below) by visual and narrative religious traditions. I will forefront western Christian trajectories of religious imageries of suffering as signifying frames that move between the viewed and the viewer. From this perspective I pay attention to photographic portrayals of human bodies in humanitarian and atrocity photography that mimic Christian iconographies such as the suffering Christ, or the Pièta. The aim of this chapter is thus twofold: to analyze how photographs suggest binary frames, and to understand the power of photography as (partly) rooted in historic repertoires of meaningful suffering. Both trajectories are intermingled. In the following paragraphs I will therefore first pay attention to the power of pictures and critically discuss the reservations Susan Sontag formulated towards photographs as lacking complex narratives. Her comments can be understood as distrust towards how we look at photographs as indeed atrocity photographs suggest simple directories of innocent victims versus (often absent) violent perpetrators. At the same time, we need an approach towards the impact of photography on how conflict is understood and how and why some photographs 'speak' to us the way they sometimes do. Hence, in the following paragraph I will use notions from W.J.T. Mitchell on the agency of pictures. Mitchell's distinction between pictures and images helps to comprehend how certain understandings of humanitarian photography are related to religious and cultural repositories of iconized meaningful suffering. In that context, I will explore how moral humanitarian perspectives on sensational photographed suffering is at least partly based on such repositories of suffering that are stored in memorized ways of seeing. From this perspective I will describe how many humanitarian pictures share a deeply rooted rescue-narrative that may be linked to Christian soteriological trajectories of suffering, guilt, and moral response. After discussing the photographic imageries of this narrative, I will consider a few photographs that were understood by journalists and scholars within the imagery frame of this Christian iconic repository.

Before we continue, a critical note should be made. This chapter is rather explorative. Discussing regimes of seeing, interpretation, and empathy runs the danger of discussing loose, even vague relations that are far from self-evident. Still, I think it is important to explore these lines of thinking in order to comprehend more deeply how we understand conflicts based on their materialized visualizations in contemporary media and how our way of looking at visualized suffering and violence relates to the frames of meaning that are (still) active in our specific contexts. This chapter explores these lines of

thinking without any pretensions to have outlined definitive frameworks in a convincing manner. It is rather an invitation for further discussion.

2 Visuality, Materiality, Conflict

The materiality and visuality of violent conflict have not yet gained much attention in religion-related conflict analysis (as explained in the Introduction of this book). Yet, the visualization of violence is part and parcel of its complexity. Our understanding of what goes on in a violent conflict is nowadays heavily instructed by media coverages, videos, and photographs that suggest a certain realness of what goes on. Movies, series, games, and memes also play a role in suggesting wide frames of conflict and often propose simple moral views. Due to the rise of social media as main source of information, the rapid sharing of decontextualized pictures, user-generated recordings of events, misinformation, and deep fakes, visualizations of conflicts no longer belong solemnly to the controlled property of the big news agencies. How people's perceptions of conflict are determined by these visualities is neglected by scholars if the focus is too strongly on conflict *causes* which are often understood in rather mental terms (see Introduction). A one-sided focus can lead to an underestimation of the impact of conflict visualizations. This, while strategies of communication representing violent conflict through visual imageries have accelerated and visual interconnectivities have increased (Friis 2015, 728). These developments not only threaten mainstream media but might also endanger social stability among communities (Weimann 2006; Bräuchler 2013). Governments are concerned about the impact of these developments on public perceptions of social conflicts and make efforts to control the affects raised by photographic imageries and user-generated short videos (Butler 2010, 72).

Whereas in religious studies the analysis of visual representations of (religion-related) conflict is still weak, in racism studies and feminist studies, much more attention is given to visuality, for example by concentrating on how human bodies are portrayed and captioned within sensational photography (Smith 2004; Goldsby 2006; Wood 2009; Lydon 2016). Also in visual analysis, the medialization of pictures and how (the distribution of) photography reflects conflict-positions is addressed (Linfield 2012; Tulloch and Blood 2012; Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015). But in these critical studies, it is religion and religious iconography that is often a blind spot or addressed only by implication or in footnotes. Also in the analysis of power-relations as represented in humanitarian photography or in war photography, religious iconography is

often neglected. This, while some iconic conflict pictures can clearly be related to a religious archive that may direct certain conflict-perceptions. In western contexts, this archive is grounded in memorized ways of seeing and iconized visualizations, for example in photographs of mothers with wounded or dead children mimicking a Pièta (such as the world press photos of 2012 and 2017) or in photographs reminding of a crucifixion. But also wider, in the binary frames often suggested by humanitarian and atrocity photography demanding guilt and moral judgments. How we look at pictures is part of the narratives we live in. In line with this, Roxanne Brook Vigil rightfully argues that scholars should pay more attention to societal meanings that are "associated with the image that is produced as a form of narration". Visuality is closely related to the production of meaning as "the visual component affects the way meaning is produced through violent images when they are narrated against the backdrop of society" (Brook Vigil 2017, 4–5). Let us first discuss some skeptical reservations about whether photography can make people think or whether photography (and with that the pictorial) does not pass the lines of 'sheer entertainment'.

3 Seeing Photographs

During the First Gulf War in 1991, I was part of a critical leftist student group. To underscore our opinion about how morally wrong this war was, we distributed pictures of Iraqi child victims to raise empathy. We, or at least I, thought that seeing a picture of a suffering child would work as a wake-up call, appeal to a shared humanity, and would in the end lead to a stronger public rejection of the war. I thought these pictures were self-evident. I saw these photographed children as the source of my actions, as if they were 'demanding' me to tell 'the truth' of what happened to them. I never questioned what these pictures exactly showed: for me, these pictures were atrocity photographs showing the innocent victims of a senseless war. We were certainly not alone in thinking that photography of war victims would affect emotions of empathy. The strategy to appeal, shock, and argue by using photography of 'vulnerable victims' has been used by many political, religious, and human rights groups. Pictures of people in distress are widely used on the internet and in folders, by the recruitment of combatants for governments, guerilla groups, and jihadi groups, by governments and organizations, protest-groups, and interest-groups. The visualization of conflict by focusing on the tormented fragile human body is an important strategy to influence (public) opinion. Guided by their captions, pictures have become strong statements influencing opin-

ion in digital participatory cultures. But this is also what makes them things of conflict. War and atrocity photographs often suggest simple understandings of complex conflicts. The focus on bodies in conflict photography often suggests physical transgression and reduces the intricacy of conflict to a simplified moral binary of good victims and bad perpetrators. This focus can affect strong emotions. The awareness of the powerful influence of pictures on conflict-perceptions results in specific usages by conflict actors and by the sensational press and has thus also raised profound distrust.

Already in the 1970s, way before the global popularity of the internet and the mass-sharing of photographs and user-generated videos on TikTok and other platforms, Susan Sontag maintained that photography was becoming one of the "principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation" (24). Photography, including war photography, had gained enormous prominence throughout the 20th century and Sontag saw how pictures could influence human experience or even create. Being very sceptic, she clearly articulated her ambivalence in a book that would become an icon in critical visual analysis, *On Photography* (1977). The distrust towards the visual, also uttered by writers such as Roland Barthes (and earlier by Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, and Siegfried Kracauer) and by those (loosely) standing in Sontag's tradition seems to be more relevant than ever (Sekula 1984; Linfield 2012). This distrust comprises criticizing the political emptiness of photography due to a lack of context and critiquing the affective affirmation of visuality as pure entertainment. Although for example Barthes admired photography, he was very skeptical about photos as sources of information and knowledge. He responded to an exhibit in Paris on so-called 'shock-photos' in the early 1970s saying that 'shock-photos' have no effect at all. They are "overstructured" and dispossess the viewer from judgment (Barthes 1979, 71). Frederic Jameson, not shy to use strong words, argued even stouter, that the emerging visual culture is essentially pornographic and has its end in "rapt, mindless fascination" (Jameson 1990, 1). Later, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag succinctly summarized her opinion about photography sharply as turning events or people into objects that could be symbolically possessed (2003, 72). Although her critique was more nuanced in 2003, the political and ideological uses of the visual continued to cause her concern, not in the last place because of simplified moral understandings that tear pictures out of their contexts. Sontag's critique remains topical. Atrocity photography and videos can be used by either side of the conflict to state arguments about what is shown, as happens at this moment of writing with visual material from the Russian-Ukrainian war. But atrocity photography not only dims the context and historical narrative of the event that was 'captured' and 'shot' but also affirms social

preferences and self-understandings of the viewers. In an analysis of American visual culture, Jeffrey Alexander (2012) for example shows how after the Second World War a narrative gradually gained popularity that stressed the extreme vulnerability of 'good' victims which resulted in new forms of identification and entertainment. Shortly after the war, photographed victims of the Shoah reached the US. While in the beginning they were included in an American rescue narrative showing the evilness of the Nazis; later however they became the objective 'proof' of what modern people are capable of. Alexander points to *The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum* in Washington, DC, where visitors were invited to 'experience' the story of extermination (89). The museum works with pictures of victims to tell the story. Edward Linenthal, American historian and consultant of the museum, is quoted by Alexander as arguing that the faces "of Holocaust victims in the exhibition are shattering in their power (…). The faces (…) assault, challenge, accuse, and profoundly sadden visitors throughout the exhibition" (quoted in Alexander, 90).[1] At this point the victims are frozen in pictures, are 'endangered' by entertainment (see also Adorno 1992 [1958], 88) and become 'symbolically possessed' by the narratives of the audience.

4 Feeling Photographs

Sontag's main point of critique on photography is that photographs lack narratives. The pictures shown in a museum do not 'tell', and if they tell, it is just a suggestion that leave the interpretation to the viewer. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler has criticized precisely this point in Sontag's account. Deriving from the idea that interpretations of photographs are more than subjective acts and "take place by virtue of the structuring constraints of genre and form on the communicability of affect", she allows for the photograph itself to become a "structuring scene of interpretation", that may "unsettle both maker and viewer in its turn" (Butler 2010, 67). Butler's comments open a way to look at a picture and 'see' how it 'speaks'. How do unsettling photographs have agencies that overwhelm us? Why was I convinced that war photos of children in distress could confront even the harshest promotor of the war in Iraq with the consequences of his or her inhumane point of view? Look at these children!

Especially since the 'pictorial turn', that famously gained momentum through the works of W.J.T. Mitchell, the harsh skepsis towards pictures and

1 For the controversies and difficulties around the museum, see Linenthal 2001.

photographs that became mainstream criticism on the political left, has been a bit nuanced. Not that the power of visuality as a medium to neutralize war and suffering as an 'experience' was denied or neglected. Rather, the idea that texts, rationality, thinking, or – in Mitchell's own words – "[l]inguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, various models of 'textuality'" (Mitchell 1995, 11) should prevail as critical frames to approach visuality, as if what we see only depends on what we know, or, as if knowing should precede seeing, is put into perspective (16). The visual is, so to say, not a sheer projection of the rational. As Martin Jay had concluded in his landmark study on the denigration of vision in French philosophy one year earlier, "there is no privileged vantage point outside the hermeneutic circle of sight as perceptual experience, social practice, and discursive construct" (Jay 1994, 587). Would it then be possible that even though pictures cannot escape our projections, something might break through? Something maybe that does not per definition affirms what we want to see or how we like to be entertained, but something that is more deeply embedded in our biological and cultural histories? Horst Bredekamp has coined the term "image acts" to point to the 'agency' of pictures as they make people think and act (Bredekamp 2010). There seems to be a powerful 'image' in pictures of suffering that impacts on the viewer, convinces the viewer of a certain realness that lies beyond the flat reality of 'just' a photograph. Putting this in an even wider perspective and blurring the lines between discourse and picture, Helle Palu writes in an article on visual representation and the US war on terror that words "are not only words, but at the same time pictures, too. Metaphors are not only words or verbal expressions, but they are at the same time mental images in use, and very often these mental images in use are realised as visual images in use" (Palu 2011, 175). This complex of visuality, discourse, and imagery, is highly relevant for the analysis of conflict pictures in religious contexts, as I will show. Pictures are the visual grammar of conflict that uplifts 'what goes on' to a transcendent level of religion, politics, and human rights.

The power of a picture in relation to human emotions and social embeddings, what a picture can 'do', cannot thus simply be reduced to emptiness or mindless fascination, as Jameson would have it. The flat and blunt portrayals of human bodies in pain can shock anyway and not only with the background knowledge of a compound narrative. Photographs, so to say, are part and parcel of the epistemology of conflict. Discussing the agency of pictures, Mitchell says in an interview that a picture is "at least potentially a kind of vortex, or 'black hole' that can 'suck in' the consciousness of a beholder, and at the same time (and for the same reason) 'spew out' an infinite series of reflections" (Grønstad and Vågnes 2006, 1). Pictures do have a certain 'agency' and may

arouse 'unconscious' trajectories. However, pictures do not work outside the communities that senses them symbolically. Randall Collins describes how close-ups during memorial meetings for 9/11 victims that were broadcasted on American TV channels created emotional participation and entrainment among the viewers at home. The faces shown were faces that mourned the victim(s). "These long-distance rituals can give a sense of shared emotion, solidarity, and respect for symbolism" he claims (Collins 2004, 55). Especially the televised presentation of close-up faces that mourn the dead in the context of symbols like flags and national anthems, charge these symbols emotionally with meaning and create a feeling of being a community under attack (see Marvin and Ingle 1999).

In Mitchell's view, the image is something that does not belong to the picture but might cause feelings of nausea, shock, or amazement while looking at the picture. An image is, Mitchell writes, "any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or other" (Mitchell 2005, xiii–xiv). The potency of pictures creating feelings of a black hole, is unthinkable without the image and reveals the diffuse embeddedness of pictures in wide political, cultural, religious imageries. Images belong so to say to the subjective domain of (collective) memories stored in cultural representations, (local) epistemologies, and – indeed – religious archives that determine up till a certain extent what we see in a picture and how we respond to it with empathy, guilt, anger, or disgust. "Image acts" (Bredekamp 2010) 'speak' not in the void. This counts especially for 'images' of suffering that have a rich history in western iconographies and have become 'iconic' images that appear in various pictures. Iconicity collects material and discursive representations in a historic continuum. In this sense, iconicity is not per definition religious but (also) historical and always archival. In western imageries for example, pictures of Shoah-survivors are part of such a non-religious memorized way of seeing. In line with this, the photograph taken of Fikret Ali and other inmates at the Trnopolje camp in the Prijedor region during the war in Bosnia depicted these men as emaciated and behind barbed wires. The picture was published on the cover of *Time Magazine* in August 1992 with the caption "Must It Go On?" The photograph reminded many of the Nazi death camp pictures that were taken just after the liberation of these camps. At least partly due to this 'image', in Mitchell's sense, the picture of Fikret Ali caused heated debates in the press (see Campbell 2002). For many, the photograph roused a complex mix of somatic shorting and cultural-historic fascination through which the historic imagery erupted. Also, earlier, during the Biafran war (1967–1970) photographs of starving children were widely published and compared to photographs of children from Nazi concentration camps. Although the Shoah had

not yet received the symbolic core in western memory culture it had reached in the 1990s (see Alexander 2012), Lasse Heerten has convincingly shown how "the visual interconnection between Biafra and the Holocaust" contributed highly to how westerners understood what was going on (Heerten 2015, 253). Photographs of mostly groups of people, often children, reached the front pages of western magazines. Heerten observes that also in captions they were never given a voice to speak of their own. "The agency to speak – and to act – lies entirely within the Western observer" (256), he writes. The famine of Biafra was fully placed within the imagery of the Shoah. A decade after the Biafran war, in 1977, the same year Sontag published her critical study, Jørgen Lissner addressed, as one of the first, the problematic relationship between representation and imagery in humanitarian photography and argued that such photographs of starving and malnourished children widened the gap between those representing (humanitarian organizations from 'the North' in search for funding) and those represented (the poor South in need of rescue) (Lissner 1977).

5 An Archive of Iconic Suffering

I think it is important to save the possibility that human physical responses of disgust, nausea, and shock can be pre-rational responses to what is perceived without explaining these responses by rationalizing all emotions to socio-political and religious imageries and narratives. However, my concern here is predominantly with the way photographs contribute to religion-related conflict positions which means that I am interested in what photographs 'do', and how they are part of the material infrastructure of suffering and meaning.

Scholars of visual culture point to historic trajectories that have become part of our cultural pictorial memory and determine up till a certain extend what we recognize, how we respond to pictures, and what we think we see. 'Seeing' is a creative and selective process that combines what is seen with a pictorial repository and individual and social needs (see Jokeit and Blochwitz 2020, 445). Although scholars often refer to photos that remind of such pictorial repositories of suffering and consolation (for example Caruso 2016, 78; Merziger 2018, 244), clear lines between western Christian iconography and current ways of understanding responses to humanitarian and atrocity photography are not drawn by most authors. Indeed, these lines are not clear most of the time but, as I argued, a careful exploration of how iconized visuality of conflict impacts on conflict understandings (and even conflict policies) is an important venture that is very much needed. I will shortly draw a few historic

lines of this repository to explore how humanitarian and atrocity photographs can become iconized through modern-day media by containing references to visualized Christian representations of meaningful suffering.

For a long time, suffering had a deeply religious and political meaning in Christian European cultures. If suffering was portrayed in visual arts, it was often the justified suffering of sinners, heretics, and enemies, or the unjust suffering of martyrs, Biblical figures, and Christ. Visual violence was meaningful, educational, and virtuous. Religious arts portraying human suffering could (and still can) fascinate without shock for what is seen, as this was/is part of a collective narrative iconicity, both memorable and recognizable. Historian Valentin Groebner (2004) describes how towards the end of the Middle Ages the physical agony of Christ was depicted abundantly in arts and plays in European cities (see also Terry-Fritsch and Labbie 2012; Marculescu 2016). This was not only done to move the viewer and for entertainment purposes. Groebner also points to the imagery that appears in these pictures as significations of the social world in which they were made and showed. The bloody suffering of Christ so to say charged perspectives on human suffering, but also moral ideas on justified suffering. Timothy Gorringe, in his study on religious and secular trajectories of atonement, writes that "the death of Christ dominated the 'structures of affect' of Europe for five hundred years, and in so doing they pumped retributivism into the legal bloodstream" (1996, 224). In the Middle Ages, public executions "in the cities were often strikingly described in a Christological tenor", writes Groebner (225). The spectacle of the scaffold participated in the bloody image of Christ. For the viewer, legal punishment coincided with the visual religious imagery of retaliation and retribution. Interestingly, in the course of history, the human body became increasingly part of visual entertainment. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the bodies of saints and of Christ as portrayed in the arts, became more sexualized and violence more graphic.[2] Art historian Stephen Eisenman writes about the erotization of suffering in western paintings and sculptures. Retributivism became, so to say, more articulated. Based on Leo Steinberg's famous study *The Sexualization of Christ*, Eisenman writes that "Christ at the moment of his crucifixion is often depicted as intensely beautiful, even sexually aroused" (Eisenman 63). Christ's body became more painted with physical details. This gave him a more human appearance, parallel to developments in theology and

2 For example, the famous *Saint Sebastian* paintings by Guido Reni (1615) or by Peter Paul Rubens (1614), or earlier in renaissance paintings of Christ on the cross like the *Man of Sorrows* by Maertan van Heemskerck (1532) or the *Crucifixion* by Lucas Cranach (also 1532).

philosophy (Taylor 2007). The violated human body fused with the image of meaning, narrative, devotion, and theology to become the picture of Christ. The suffering Christ, saints, heretics, and enemies were all part of a regime of judgment and retribution, but these images also had impact on how suffering was understood and called up the believer to relate to the pain of Christ who suffered *pro nobis*. Suffering was part and parcel of a great narrative of meaning. Thomas Laqueur (1989) describes how views on the suffering human body in the 18th and 19th centuries were still strongly rooted in ideas of the physicality of Christianity and its emphasis on the body of Christ. While this body had been the central focus of Christian devotion, mediating between suffering and acts of mercy, another trajectory appeared in these centuries, deeply rooted in this Christian imagery, namely the suffering of the individual that "came to have a power of its own" without referring only to the regimes of transcendent judgment (177). This enabled the imagination to "penetrate" the life of another, writes Laqueur, and he continues: "Humanitarian narrative exposes the lineaments of causality and of human agency: ameliorative action is represented as possible, effective, and therefore morally imperative" (178).

In this context it might not come as a surprise that towards the end of the 19th century, photographs of suffering of non-westerners to raise empathy among communities in 'the West' at an organized level first appeared in the context of Christian missionaries and organizations. The Indian famines of the 1870s and 1890s were brought to mostly Christian European, American, and Australian audiences through photographs (Twomey 2012). Heather Curtis (2012; 2015) shows how photographs of this famine were abundantly spread among American evangelicals. Since the introduction of the first portable Kodak in 1888 and fast developing printing techniques it became possible to print photographs in magazines. Photographs were, contrary to engravings, seen as true pictures. The Indian famine was one of the first photographed human disasters that was published by press agencies. The purpose of showing these photographs was clear and framed in virtuous terms. As Curtis writes, "by combining images of suffering people with graphic narratives of misery, publicists sought to stimulate American spectators to engage in benevolent action" (Curtis 2012, 157). The photographs were used to shock and raise empathy. Curtis writes that especially US evangelicals were at the cradle of this kind of – what she calls – "pictorial humanitarianism", the use of images of suffering as instruments for producing sympathetic feelings and raise money for missionary or humanitarian projects. A decade later saw the first clear case of atrocity photography when photographs of the atrocities in the Congo Free State became known to a European audience through campaigns with lecture and lantern, also organized by missionaries. These were especially photos of

children posing with severed limbs and dressed in white clothes to dramatize the amputations (Grant 2015, 64–89; Linfield 2012, 48–50). Grant, referring to Jacobsen (2014), writes that although scholars have understood photographs of the Congo Free State mainly in secular terms, "it was Protestant missionaries who established the basic narrative structure in which the photographs were situated, and these missionaries initially spoke not of rights but Christian duties" (Grant 65). Analyzing the photo-archive of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the wake of the First World War, Francesca Piana writes in a similar vein that

> [T]he ICRC relied on both Swiss and Western cultures and morality. Christian symbols as well as a religious sense of 'sin' underpinned images, which a virtuous and civilized audience was expected to respond to by giving money. The immobility of victims, visual references to the crucifix, images evoking Madonna holding Jesus as well as of saints and martyrs were some of the elements characterizing the ICRC's iconography of victimhood. (Piana 2015, 153)

It is too far-fetched to draw clear lines between these histories of iconic suffering and current conflict photography. It is however at least interesting to see that conflict photography in western countries depicting non-western conflicts, echoes trajectories of retribution that are embedded in Christian archives of meaningful suffering. Photographs and viewers are entangled in a dialectic process of pain and rescue. Evoking confrontation, they work within a regime of a (secularized) hamartiology. This process gives agency to the image. Linfield writes that "every image of suffering says not only 'This is so', but also, by implication, 'This must not be', not only, 'This goes on', but also, by implication, 'This must stop'" (Linfield 2012, 33). Up till a certain extent this becomes also visible in the way war photographers reflect upon what they do. James Nachtwey for example writes that documentary photographers provide a fundamental service: "they inform, or educate, a mass audience in order to reform the conditions that are responsible for the suffering of large numbers of people" (Nachtwey 2009, 4). One of the war photographer's tasks, Nachtwey contends, is to "reveal the unjust and the unacceptable, so that their images become an element in the process change" (Nachtwey, 5). Although a clear Christian iconography went often missing in the 20th and 21st centuries, moral frames in which atrocity photography is frequently put, still echoes this long tradition of meaning-making, suffering as revelation, and devotion as awareness. In the by the mass media exploited photographic portrayals of 'innocent victims', and in the recognition of (unintentional) victims as martyrs, one

might recognize devotional trajectories around the innocent Christ and the unjust but 'revealing' suffering of martyrs.

6 The Basic Narrative Structure of Victimhood and Rescue

Photography has played an increasingly important role in many situations of violent conflict. In the history of atrocity photography, especially children and women have often been portrayed as victims. This is interesting because the traditional iconography depicts mostly males as victims and women as devoted and consoling. We will later see that especially the suffering of males evokes iconic trajectories of the suffering Christ, while that of women and children evoke more clearly the religious and humanitarian binary we discussed above. I will first pay attention to this photographic framing of women and children.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, writes Heide Fehrenbach, suffering children "were increasingly pictured with mothers in variations of the well-known Christian tropes of Madonna and child or the Pièta" (2015, 167). In a similar vein, Peter Balakian, writing about the photographic imagery of the Armenian genocide, points to Victorian Christianity's ideal of childhood. Seeing gritty photographs of dead children, or begging children, evoked "deeply felt notions of the child as innocence endangered, defiled by evil, in need of rescue from the heathen" (Balakian 2015, 111). After 1945, photographs of children became ubiquitous in the publications and campaigns of religious and secular NGOs and international humanitarian organizations (Fehrenbach 2015, 167). It cannot come as a surprise that pictures of children in despair can activate a register of strong feelings and responses and are therefore often used by NGOs and interest-groups to define a conflict as disastrous and unjust. Even so, Kate Manzo writes about an iconography that uses modern western childhood for humanitarian identity strategies (Manzo 2008, see also Piana 2015, 156). For example, a photo of the 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh from Aleppo (2016), sitting at the backseat of an ambulance while looking shellshocked was widely featured by western media as a way te relate to the humanitarian crisis in war-ravaged Syria. According to Omran's father however, the photo was used by rebel groups for propaganda as he told a reporter of Iran's Al-Alam TV (BBC News 2017). According to CNN-reporter A.J. Willingham, commenting on photos like this and echoing a Christian trajectory explained by Balakian (above), the reason why many indelible images are often of children, is that while "war seeks to paint in black and white, good and evil; a child is never the enemy. And yet, they are so often the victims. To see a child this way is to see war without

politics or ideologies. What's left underneath is just crushing human sorrow" (Willingham, compare Balakian 110–1). This view is often expressed by scholars of visual analysis and photography (Linfield, 130–3). It is clear how portrayals of child victims influence how people can grasp the legitimacy of conflict.[3] Despite Willingham's view however, many photographs do raise political, ideological, or religious views precisely because they depict children and suggest a conflict frame of strong violent perpetrators and defenseless innocent victims. 'Innocent' children, in a sense, recount the innocence of the sufferer in classic iconic portrayals. Both trajectories suggest perpetration without visualization, a moralized lens in which only the innocent 'reveals' the truth and calls for retribution, whether within a religious or in a humanitarian frame. Linfield writes that children represent the "ur-human". Although photographs of children are no more political explanatory, she contends, they are often understood to "expose the wounding of innocents" (Linfield 130). Precisely this power of pictures raises imageries and narratives about who did the wounding and may suggest "rapt" binary frames on innocence versus guilty.

The idealization of the victim within a binary frame of pure versus impure, peaceful versus violent, innocent versus guilty constructs the power of the image which contributes strongly to political and gendered interpretations. "In contemporary humanitarianism", Marta Zarzycka argues, "poor, indigenous, and displaced communities are frequently both feminized and constructed as child-like – helpless, immature, erratic" (Zarzycka, 2015). Women and children are, so to say, more suitable as ideal victims than males in their prime (Christie, 1996, see also: Moeller 1999, 107). Pictured as the 'ideal victims' however, they suggest configurating ideas of power and perpetration. Dubravka Žarkov describes in her detailed study *The Body of War* on representations of female and male bodies in the Serbian and Croatian press before and during the Balkan War how the victimized female body "is one of the most powerful metaphors in the violent production of collective identities. The ubiquity and visibility of these practices continue to produce women as victims only, and as the only victims, denying women both subjectivity and agency and denying men their vulnerability" (Žarkov 178). According to Žarkov, this scheme

3 An example Andrew Silke (2005) gives is the Provisional IRA bombing in Warrington, England, on March 20, 1993, in which two children, a three-year-old boy and one twelve-year-old boy, were killed. The boys' deaths were widely reported. *The Daily Mirror* posted a photo of the youngest victim, Jonathan Ball, on its cover titled "Sacrificed. And For What?". A peace march was organized in Dublin. An IRA sympathizer who wanted to join the demonstration along with some other members noticed that the protesters were actually furious with the IRA. Britain had suffered many attacks, including earlier in 1993, but the Warrington attack in which two children were killed, changed the mood. After this attack, the IRA no longer focused on shopping centers and other civilian targets, but on economic targets.

produces dominant binary categories of femininity and masculinity through notions of those who endure and those who perpetrate violence. Also, in an article on photojournalism, human rights, and the US war in Afghanistan (2001–2021), Wendy Kozol writes how a strong (feminist) critique has been expressed against what she calls the politics of pity in photojournalism, depicting "Third World" women as victims in need of rescue (Kozol 2014, 191). Kozol sharply describes how the post-9/11 retaliation narrative in the US was combined with a rescue narrative on suppressed women. By presenting precarity within a Eurocentric rescue narrative, "racialized" sentiments about Afghan women became part of the US rhetorical justifications for waging war (196). In the wake of the war, AP photographs pictured women that were less veiled or not on the run as refugees, as women's progress towards a western imagery of gender liberation. "Crucially, in the months after the fall of the Taliban, many photographs visualized women as newly constituted citizens through participatory acts in a global commercial culture" (202). After the Taliban retook Kabul in August 2021, photographs of veiled women reappeared in the western press, stressing the re-emergence of non-participatory positions of women in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. They became again women in need of rescue. The feminization and the framing of children as innocent victims point to the continuation of soteriological scripts in humanitarian photography that work through binary frames of innocence versus guilt and victimhood versus perpetration. Also, many of these photos suggest a regime of judgment, based on human rights instead of Christian values. Still, Christian scripts that have long been part of the western imagination seep into humanitarian photography: retribution, redemption, judgment. These scripts contribute at least partly to the power of images that appears in conflict photography. This is not to say that Christianity forms the fundamental frame to understand this photography and its impact. My perspective comes from a different angle: certain imageries (in Mitchell's sense) from an iconographical religious past that is related to meaningful suffering are still at work in pictures of conflict photography. These imageries inspire how we look at certain conflicts and activate rescue-narratives that can be seen as the cultural echoes of trajectories of retribution, conversion, and transcendent judgment.

7 Iconic Power

While sharply criticizing the projection of a Eurocentric humanitarian visual discourse on Afghan women in need of liberation, say, the 'symbolic possessions' (Sontag) of objectified pictures, Kozol neglects the deep soteriological notions of Christian European missions and virtuous ideas of duties that echo

not only in the photograph (what is shown) but also in the responses of viewers that create at least partly the fuel for her criticism. She stresses photographs predominantly as power-frames drenched in cultural-political assumptions of progression and humanitarianism. However, discussing the impact of photography on conflict perspectives should also take the deeply rooted iconic power of pictures into account. Photographs might emit an iconic power for the viewer, which roots the picture deeply into the 'image' of religion and culture. This iconic repository contributes to the sensations and meaning-attributions of photographs. Photo critic John Berger for example describes how in October 1967, when a picture was published in his evening paper with the dead body of Che Guevara, this reminded him of Mantegna's painting of *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1490). But although Mantegna's painting tells a story, as was the purpose of paintings in the 15th century, the publication of a photograph of Guevara's dead body in a newspaper has a sharp political meaning, Berger maintains, namely in which this body becomes a mere object of demonstration. Not to demonstrate the horror of death, and certainly not the suffering of the innocent, but, at "the instant of horror, the identity of Guevara and, allegedly, the absurdity of revolution" (Berger 2013 [1967], 9). Berger's notion raises the question of how pictures join iconographic trajectories and how this contributes to both their success and to their conflictual potential. Berger's memory of Mantegna's painting brought him to the sharp political meaning of what was meant by showing Guevara's dead body.

Still, it is not easy to understand how the iconic power of photographs exactly work and certainly not all photographs have this power. The question then remains is how Berger's 'remembrance' and that of many others pointing to religious iconic images appearing in photographs are recognized and determine conflict understandings. This question is somewhat different from the one I tried to answer above, which focused on themes that are part of a religious archive, such as redemption and judgment, themes still belonging to the missionary western zeal. The central question now concerns the pictographic tradition of religious iconography.

Dominik Bartmanski and Jeffrey Alexander write that objects "become icons when they have not only material force but also symbolic power". But this is not enough, they contend, because to be 'successful' and have impact, viewers need to have – what they call – an "iconic consciousness when they experience material objects, not only understanding them cognitively or evaluating them morally but also feeling their sensual, aesthetic force" (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 1). In a similar vein, Robert Haiman and John Lucaites define an iconic photograph as "an aesthetical familiar form of civic performance coordinating an array of semiotic transcriptions that

project an emotional scenario to manage a basic contradiction or recurrent crisis" (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 29). This sheds another light on Sontag's critique of photographs becoming objects that can symbolically be possessed. Indeed, the subject of possession is itself possessed by the aesthetical force that appears in the picture, a relation the subject has with a complex history of shared iconicity. The subject's response belongs so to say to the script as the response of the audience belongs to the script of the passion-play. For Berger, the full victory over Guevara's death became sensible when the photograph reminded him of Mantegna's painting of Christ.

Photographs not only evoke moral judgments, as the paintings and statues of the crucified did and still do, but also depict the human body as vulnerable against a background of sheer injustice. This sharp binary is part of the icon-making of modern humanitarian photography in which the bodies of individuals are depicted as violated against the backdrop of often anonymous perpetrating powers. These photographs suggest disproportionate power-relations and sensational approaches of basic contradictions that give these pictures an iconic status. In the following paragraph I will discuss three cases in which conflict photographs were integrated into Christian iconographies. The emphasis here is on how the audience 'captured' conflict photographs within Christian iconographies of suffering.

8 Iconic Photographs

On 22 September 1997, Hocine Zaourar, a war photographer working for Agence France-Presse, took a picture in a local hospital in Benthala, just south of Algiers. The picture shows a crying woman who seems to be comforted by another. The picture was a rare image of the Algerian civil war (1991–2002) and would become World Press Photo of the year in 1997. Zaourar took the photograph a day after a massacre of hundreds of civilians by insurgents. The photograph was almost immediately published in about 750 journals and newspapers worldwide and was captioned by Le Monde and The Guardian as "a Madonna in hell" (Flood 2017, 115). Juliette Hanrot has argued that the photograph gained popularity in Western countries because of its appeal to a Christian iconography of suffering (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 111). Captions dramatized this image by mentioning that this woman had lost eight of her children during a raid a day before although later it became clear that the woman in the picture, Oum Saad, was grieving for three other relatives, not her children. However, positioning her "as a mother mourning the loss of her eight children", Joseph McGonagle writes, "draws parallels with notions

of motherhood worldwide" (McGonagle 2014, 80). The misinformation of a grieving mother allowed many media to draw relations between the picture and romanticized Madonna-iconographies. This may surely have contributed to becoming the World Press Photo of the year. Maria Flood notes that "the association of the woman in the picture with a Christian imaginary of suffering points not only to the Eurocentrism of Western viewers, but also highlights a certain Occidental gaze on non-Western suffering, embodied, in this case, in the figure of the passive female victim" (2017, 116). This way, non-Western suffering implodes into iconic epistemologies of Western suffering. Distant viewers are not just receivers of information on suffering, Paul Frosh writes, but are "performative co-constructors of witnessing" (Frosh 2009, 60) and may as such determine the understanding of conflict. In this case, these co-constructors 'converted' a Muslim woman into a Catholic Pièta.

In another case, the image of Christ appeared for many in a photograph of the scene where Matthew Shepard had been murdered. Shepard, a 21-year-old gay student at the University of Wyoming in the US was killed in 1998 by two men after a car ride. He was found near a wooden crossrail fence and barbed wires in a meadow. A mountain biker found him and at first thought Shepard's body was a scarecrow. This comparison to a scarecrow, and an "(erroneous) image of Shepard tied in spread-eagle fashion that this called to mind, would be much cited in the coverage and cultural imagery of his murder" (Petersen 2011, 24). A picture of the murder-scene with the crossrail fence and barbed wires contributed to interpretations of martyrdom. Shepard had been widely portrayed in visual arts as a modern 'gay martyr', a saint, or a Christ-figure (Cherry 2020). Paul Middleton writes that the ability of 'America' to identify with Shepard *and* "the Christological imagery drawn from the well of American religiosity" and the "contestation of Shepard by some ultraconservative religious groups", construed the success of the story (Middleton 2020, 192). He observes that "for a martyr narrative to work, it must emphasize community boundaries and create an outside, 'evil other'" (190) which means that the impact of a picture cannot be derived from the religious script alone; the religious imagery is part and parcel of a tradition in which conflict-frames are suggested. The haunting image of the suffering Christ or of the tortured martyr contains a strong conflict-frame that continue to refer to vulnerable victims and often absent aggressive perpetrators. Shepard's 'iconization' into this binary regime of innocence versus cruelty, thrives on robust trajectories of collective memories of romanticized martyrdom within Christian American communities.

Iconization also became visible in the reframing of an execution video. In 2015, a video was published by *al Hayat Media Center* and showed the beheading of 21 migrant workers by a branch of Islamic State at a waterfront near

Tripoli. The victims were dressed in the gear of Abu Ghraib while the perpetrators were dressed in black ninja-style clothes. The video was clearly made with the aim of generating impact on the internet using sharp contrasts in colors and positions. In the middle stood a man who identified the victims as "crusaders" and argued that their action was a retaliation for the oppression of Coptic women willing to convert to Islam in Egypt (see Van Liere 2020a for a context-analysis). The video generated an enormous response among political and religious leaders, in newspaper articles, and on social media. In many cases, the victims were clearly reframed in Coptic and Catholic iconic scripts of martyrdom. Stills from the video featured on internet platforms with captions referring to Islamic State and Coptic Christians, adding to perspectives of Christians in Egypt and elsewhere as structurally persecuted by an 'aggressive' Islam (Van Liere 2020a). Offline in Egypt, the faces of the victims were iconized within Coptic trajectories of martyrdom whilst appearing on banners and murals. Online, some stills were artistically reframed into iconographies of martyrdom and some artworks creatively added the presence of a Jesus-figure. For example, one painting, uploaded on Flickr a few weeks after the video was featured, depicts Jesus wearing his cross ahead of the men who are about to be executed (Montgomerie). The painting pulls the atrocity into a religious frame and spews out, to use Mitchell's phrasing, in a series of images. In artworks like this, the atrocity becomes more than an act of violence and the 'meaning' of the beheading as given by the perpetrators in the video, is turned upside down. The victims who are dressed in the gear of Abu Ghraib and 'convicted' as categorical retaliation now transform into martyrs, becoming 'witnesses' of the suppression of the Coptic church and of Christians worldwide by Islamists. The victims are given meaning within a wide historical continuum in which they are 'saved'. Interestingly, artworks such as paintings are used to reframe pictured or videoed violence and provide clear meanings based on religious iconography. This also happened with the photographs of Saad and Shepard. This sheds an interesting light on the observation made by Sontag, namely that paintings tell stories while photographs do not. In these cases, we see how photographs and stills from a video become narrated within artworks and reframed into well-known religious scripts.

The suffering of Oum Saad, Matthew Shepard, and the migrant workers[4] has promptly been elevated into strong social imageries of religious groups,

4 The names of the victims are: Bishoy Adel Khalaf, Samuel Alhoam Wilson, Hany Abdel-Masih Salib, Melad Mackeen Zaki, Abanoub Ayad Attia, Ezzat Bushra Nassif, Yousef Shokry Younan, Kirillos Shukry Fawzy, Majed Suleiman Shehata, Somali Stéphanos Kamel, Malak Ibrahim Siniot, Bishoy Stéphanos Kamel, Mena Fayez Aziz, Girgis Melad Sniout, Tawadros Youssef Tawadros, Essam Badr Samir, Luke Ngati, Jaber Mounir Adly, Malak Faraj Abram, Sameh Salah Farouk, Matthew Ayariga.

not only inscribing these photographs and stills into iconic trajectories (that gave them at least up till a certain extent their power) but also providing them with a soteriological frame of rescue and redemption and thus contributing to a conflict-perspective of victims and perpetrators along religious lines.

9 Christ at Abu Ghraib

As shown in the cases above, conflict photographs can be uploaded to 'iconic epistemologies', that is: knowledge charged with iconic repositories and intermingled understandings of meaning. In this final part I will discuss a case from the Abu Ghraib photographs of prison abuse by American GIs in Iraq. The photographs were widely published in late April 2004 and appeared everywhere in journals, magazines, on websites, including websites promoting violence (like the Muntada al-Ansar website), as well as on human rights platforms. Since 2004, an enormous amount of academic and opining articles, studies, and reports appeared around the case, as well as documentaries such as Errol Morris' *Standard Operating Procedures* (2008) and movies for a larger public like *The Boys of Abu Ghraib* (dir. Luke Moran 2014) and *The Report* (dir. Scott Z. Burns, 2019). The impact of the photographs was enormous and still resounds in many academic and political statements and publications, not only in the English-speaking Western countries but also in the Middle East. US Major Alexander Maxwell (pseudonym) noted (quoted by R. Gordon) that the abuses and torture in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib have contributed more to the support for Al Qaida than any Islamic ideology or theology (Gordon 2014, 164). Also, US general Stanley McChrystal, who held several command positions in the coalition wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, wrote in his memoires that "In my experience, we found that nearly every first-time jihadist claimed Abu Ghraib had first jolted him into action" (McChrystal 2013, 172). The Abu Ghraib pictures and narratives generated several circles of violence. For example, the beheading of Nicholas Berg in 2004 is seen as a response to 'Abu Ghraib' (see van Liere 2020a; 2020b). The crooked power balance emitted by the pictures was not only articulated in dress versus naked, high versus low, but also and maybe even especially so by the guards shown relaxed and laughing over their prisoners.[5]

5 This article is not the place to discuss humor and violence but this relation and how humiliation that is guided by the visible pleasure of perpetrators causes fierce responses remains largely underexposed in academia.

Of the few hundred pictures that were made public (out of approximately 16.000) one particular picture became a metonym for Abu Ghraib while it was picked up again and again by journalists, cover designers, and webmasters in the West: the hooded prisoner who was nicknamed 'Gilligan' (Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh) by his guards, with a black hood and wires on his hands, his arms spread. Interestingly, to my knowledge, the picture that was widely published in the Middle East was the photograph in which a scared prisoner was driven into a corner by a guard and a black dog. Osama bin Laden commented on this photograph at length, 'seeing' the true powers of 'America' revealed in the impurity of this dog (see van Liere 2020b).

Shortly after the pictures were published, Mitchell wrote a short opining article in the Chicago Tribune about the hooded man with his arms spread: "Whatever the truth about the person under the hood, his image has become the globally circulated icon of the war in Iraq". The reason for this hooded man to become such an icon was, writes Mitchell, that he seemed to be "what we used to call a 'Christ figure.'" This specific use evoked "a long history of images that unite figures of torture and sacredness or divinity" (Mitchell 2004). In a later publication, Mitchell (2011) understands the iconic 'image' as having two bodies "shuttling between sovereignty and abjection, terror suspect and torture victim, criminal and martyr"; an ambivalence between state power (Christian democracy and enlightenment) and religion (Muslim tyranny and idolatry) evoked by the iconography of Christ (158–9). Mitchell is surely not alone in seeing a 'Christ figure' in 'Gilligan'. John Paul also wrote that upon seeing the pictures, he felled he had already seen them before, and links the pictures to trajectories of Christian representations of the mockery and torture of Christ in western art history (Paul 2011, see also Eisenman). Afterwards, questions were raised of whether this was a 'real' situation of torture or that the picture was misleading (Linfield, 157–8) but a Christ-figure was widely recognized in the picture.

Sabrina Harman, the photographer of many other Abu Ghraib pictures, later said that she couldn't phantom the public fascination with the Gilligan photograph. "There were so many worse photo's out there", she said, "nothing negative happened to him really". He wasn't tortured, she claimed. Harman couldn't see the iconic power of precisely this photograph. Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris acknowledge the association with Jesus on the cross, but a picture must be ghastly to behold, they write, and pictures of Jesus are part of religious imaginations. Rather, they explain the fascination for precisely this photo as an image of carnival weirdness that is mysterious, a primal scene of martyrdom, while at the same time a symbol of what "we know" was wrong at Abu Ghraib (Gourevitch and Morris 2008). How can this picture be a symbol

of what "we know" was wrong? Again, also this picture, as many pictures of Abu Ghraib, emits strong disbalances of power which contributes to its iconicity. Although in many other pictures of Abu Ghraib the power-relations are physically presented in dichotomic visualities like dressed versus naked, up versus down, standing versus lying, the Gilligan photograph visualizes sheer victimhood and tranquility at the same time. Faleh was standing on a box in a gesture of surrender while every move could be deadly. It is a picture of a world being threatened but standing still.

At this point, art historian Stephen Eisenman contends, based on the same photograph, that images of torture, power, and domination, are a transgenerational part of western cultural history. He argues that the Abu Ghraib pictures were both shocking and familiar. The trajectory or, as Mitchell would have it, 'image' that appears in these pictures is the human body "as something willingly alienated by the victim (…) for the sake of the pleasure and aggrandizement of the oppressor" (Eisenman 16). Eisenman uses the Pathos-formula, coined by Aby Warburg, to label this iconic trajectory which portrays the victim as a willing sacrifice to the omnipotent power, something that is abundantly visualized in Roman and Christian art (for example Christ as willing sacrifice). The tranquility of Faleh's picture that gained momentum together with the threat of electrocution seems to fit well within this frame of subjectivized victimhood, something most other published pictures from Abu Ghraib are lacking. It is at this point striking to see that especially males who suffer 'unjust violence' are integrated into martyr narratives and iconographies of the crucified Christ, like Shepard and 'Gilligan'.

The visualized difference in most other pictures between cheerful guards and mostly low-positioned (half-)naked prisoners also evokes for many a more categorical perspective on difference with 'religious social identity' as a schismatic imagery. The fact that (most?) prisoners were Muslims possibly influenced the scenario of torture in which men were forced to go naked, masturbate, take in erotic poses, or wearing women's underwear; forced differences that links to the western imagination of a squeamish and sexually interesting 'Islam'. American imam Abdul Malik Mujahid wrote shortly after the pictures were published that the "photos of American soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners have stunned and disgusted the world. But it is their sexual humiliation that is garnering much of the attention", and he continues: "Unlike what some in America lead us to believe, no one hates America in the Muslim world because of democracy and freedom. It is the immorality of America (…), along with American foreign policy which defines the conflict between the Westernized elite and religious elements in Muslim societies" (Mujahid 2004). For Mujahid, the pictures were part of a bigger continuum of a "Westernized elite" and

"Muslim societies". Joseph Pugliese also writes in a similar vein that the pictures compel viewers to "bear testimony to the deployment and enactment of absolute US imperial power on the bodies of the Arab prisoners through the organizing principles of white supremacist aesthetics that intertwine violence (…) with Orientalist spectacle" (Pugliese 2007, 33). And from a different but comparable perspective, Bruce Lincoln interpreted the power-relation in the pictures as a clear 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy. The GIs "endlessly repersuaded themselves" of the immense difference between them: we "are high; they are low. We are clean; they are dirty. We are strong and brave; they are weak and cowardly. We are lordly; they are virtually animals. We are God's chosen; they are estranged from everything divine" (Lincoln 2007, 102–3). Finally, theologian and writer Sarah Sentilles notes that the body postures in the Abu Ghraib photos, which were crafted through torture, replicated "echoes" of the cross and of the crucifixion, but by doing so also further violated the victims of torture "by identifying Muslim prisoners [in the pose of] Christ as a form of forcible conversion". This is, she argues, "at least rhetorically, the objective of most colonial projects" (Sentilles 2007).

What is striking about these interpretations is that they go behind the 'seen' and observe these photographs as signs of much deeper cultural and religious scripts that are predominantly understood within the sheer difference radiated in the photographs between victims and perpetrators. One might indeed ask whether these pictures are not reframed within sensational binary models such as East and West, Muslims and Christians, that enforce rather than analyze the visualization of events that are considered. The bodies of the prisoners and guards become media of grand narratives evoking colonial histories and missionary strategies. As a result, these pictures become just 'snapshots' of an iconized epistemology proving a rather theoretical point that does not move beyond this episteme itself. The disbalance of power contains a script, deeply related to religious understandings, necessary for the 'revelation' of injustice against the innocent, and for the making of the martyr. Verily, this is a trajectory that digs deep in western repositories of meaningful and revealing suffering.

10 Photographs as Things of Conflict: Conclusion and Discussion

How is a photograph a thing of conflict and what role does religion play in this? As described in the Introduction of this volume, a thing of conflict can be anything that belongs to an infrastructure and is part of social networks. In this chapter, this infrastructure is taken in the sense that conflict photographs can

trigger an – what Bartmanski and Alexander call – "iconic consciousness" that is deeply rooted in cultural-religious trajectories. Visualizations of conflict, although fragmented and scattered across many media platforms, can evoke a vertical historic infrastructure in which the imagery of pain and suffering is charged with religious meanings. Natalia Mielczarek's analysis of mutations of iconic pictures in modern news media and internet sharing, shows that due to technological developments, fragmentations of the classic grand narratives highlight a changing role of iconic pictures in processes of signification (Mielczarek 2016). Therefore, the classic iconography of suffering becomes vague and is often, though not always, less recognized. Nevertheless, the binary frame that appeals for virtuous responses and that is connected deeply with western archives of Christian soteriologies, remains unbroken.

Of course, not all photographs of suffering can be related to a grand narrative of meaningful suffering. Some photographs, and this may be part of the ambivalence we saw in Sontag and Barthes, can shock without becoming recognized within an iconized grand narrative. Also, the question of how and why human suffering is portrayed in pictures and videos remains relevant. Theodor W. Adorno for example asks how to do justice to victims of injustice by *not* showing what was done to them (Adorno 1992 [1958], 88, see also Barry 2010; Peters 2014). However, this does not refer to the binary frames we discussed in this chapter. As argued, many atrocity and humanitarian photographs signify the dynamic reconstruction of humanitarian identities and can be analyzed as visual references towards virtuous cultural-religious self-perspectives. While we should be reluctant to come with strong claims regarding the iconography of present-day photographs of suffering, we can with some confidence argue that in many western humanitarian and atrocity photographs, a basic narrative of the rescue of innocent victims is suggested which is part of their impact. This reminds us of the binary frames presented in iconic trajectories of the suffering of the innocent Christ, the martyrs, and of the consolation and grief of the Pièta that were part of religious infrastructures and had and still has the power to confront the believer, who is a traditional part of the narrative itself, with guilt and responsibility. Of course, this basic narrative is not only pictorial but also sourced in chains of wide narrative structures that materialize in specific situations. Humanitarian and atrocity photographs can be assessed from a critical perspective that pays attention to how the scripts we discussed are presented in photographs and in responses to photographs, and to how this contributes to conflict-understandings. This happened in Biafra, Afghanistan, and Abu Ghraib from where photographs of people in need of rescue were featured. In humanitarian and atrocity photography, the picturing of women and children seems to continue the soteriological trajectory of

rescue and salvation by evoking frames of innocent victims versus violent perpetrators and by pulling the viewer into this narrative. In some cases, as we have seen, photographs are reframed within iconographic artworks of suffering which allows a deeper integration of an iconic consciousness into political and religious contexts. Interestingly, photographs of non-western suffering can complicate this narrative, for example if the binary frame of innocent versus violent is challenged by other binary frames like the women dressed in chador evoking biased images of justifications of violence versus rejections of violence. In Linfield's case to which I referred in the introduction, a photograph of mourning women wearing chadors was understood as signifier of religion-based justifications of violence. Or, in a different vein, Sentilles' critique on identifying the posture of 'Gilligan' with that of an iconic Christ is evoking another binary frame of non-Westerners versus the ("at least rhetorically") colonial project of forced conversion. Although the basic narrative is historically deeply rooted in Christian visualizations of suffering and remains intact as a binary of moral oppositions, this narrative is getting fragmented in many other stories that continue to 'speak' through the visualizations of suffering in photography. Although explorative, in this chapter we have identified certain elements of this Christian iconography that have been rearranged in photographic images. This way, this chapter contributes to an understanding of the relationship between iconographic trajectories, visual infrastructures, memorized ways of seeing, and ideas of meaningful suffering that impacts on how we 'look' at and understand conflicts, 'symbolically posses' what we see, take in positions, and suggest solutions.

References

Adorno, Th.W. 1992. *Notes to Literature*. Vol. 2. Translated by Sherry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2012. *Trauma. A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.

Balakian, Peter. 2015. "Photography, Visual Culture, and the Armenian Genocide." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 89–114. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Barry, Barbara. 2010. "Chronicles and Witnesses: 'A Survivor from Warsaw' through Adorno's Broken Mirror." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 41 (2): 241–63. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41203368. Accessed: 16-10-2020.

Barthes, Roland. 1979. *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill & Wang.

Bartmanski, Dominik and Jeffrey Alexander. 2012. "Introduction. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life. Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology." In *Iconic Power. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmanski, and Bernhard Geisen, 1–14. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

BBC News. 2017. "Omran Daqneesh, Aleppo's bloodied boy, shown in new images." 6 June. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40176781. Accessed: 22-10-2021.

Berger, John. 2013. *Understanding a Photograph*, edited and introduced by Geoff Dyer. London: Penguin Books.

Bräuchler, Birgit. 2013. *Cyberidentities at War. The Moluccan Conflict on the Internet*. New York, Oxford: Berhahn.

Bredekamp, Horst. 2010. *Theorie des Bildakts*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Brook, Vigil Roxanne. 2017. *Strategic Advantages of Visual Violence*. Master's thesis. AUC Knowledge Fountain, American University in Cairo. https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/685.

Butler, Judith. 2010. *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

Campbell, David. 2002. "Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia. The case of ITN versus Living Marxism Part 1." *Journal of Human Rights* 1 (1): 1–33. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830110111544.

Caruso, Martina. 2016. *Italian Humanist Photography from Fascism to the Cold War*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Cherry, Kittredge. 2020. "Matthew Shepard: Modern Gay Martyr and Hate-Crime Victim." *QSpirit*. Last modified 14 October 2021. https://qspirit.net/matthew-shepard-gay-martyr/. Accessed: 19 October 2021.

Curtis, Heather. 2012. "Depicting Distant Suffering: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in the Age of American Empire." *Material Religion, The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 8 (2): 153–182.

Curtis, Heather. 2015. "Picturing Pain: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in an Imperial Age." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 21–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eisenman, Stephen F. 2007. *The Abu Ghraib Effect*. London: Reaktion Books.

Fehrenbach, Heide. 2015. "Children and Other Civilians. Photography and the Politics of Humanitarian Image-Making." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 165–199. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Flood, Maria. 2017. "Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966–2002)." *Journal of North African Studies* 22 (1): 109–31. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1229184.

Friis, Simone Molin. 2015. "'Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen': Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War Against ISIS." *International Affairs* 91 (4).: 725–46. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12341.

Frosh, Paul. 2009. "Telling Presences: Witnessing, Mass Media, and the Imagined Lives of Strangers." In *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, edited by Paul Frosh and A. Pinchevski, 49–72. Basingstoke. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goldsby, Jacqueline. 2006. *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gordon, Rebecca. 2014. *Mainstreaming Torture: Ethical Approaches in the Post-9/11 United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gorringe, Timothy. 1996. *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation*. Vol. 9 of *Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gourevitch, Philip and Errol Morris. 2008. "Exposure. The Woman Behind the Camara at Abu Ghraib." *The New Yorker*, 17 March, 2008. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/03/24/exposure-5. Accessed: 12 September, 2021.

Grant, Kevin. 2015. "The Limits of Exposure: Atrocity Photographs in the Congo Reform Campaign." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 64–88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Green, Micha. 2020. "Unintentional Martyr: How George Floyd's Death Revolutionized the BLM Movement." *Afro News*, 3 July, 2020. https://afro.com/unintentional-martyr-how-george-floyds-death-revolutionized-the-blm-movement/. Accessed: 12-12-2020.

Groebner, Valentin. 2004. *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*. New York: Zone Books.

Grønstad, Asbjørn and Øyvind Vågnes. 2006. "An Interview with W.J.T. Mitchell." *Image and Narrative* 15 (November), http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/iconoclasm/gronstad_vagnes.htm. Accessed: 20-04-2021.

Hanrot, Juliette, and Dominique Clévenot. 2012. "Fabrique d'une icône: La Madone de Bentalha: Entretien avec Juliette Hanrot." *Écrire l'histoire* 9: 111–118.

Hariman, Robert, and John Louis Lucaites. 2007. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heerten, Lasse. 2015. "'A' as in Auschwitz, 'B' as in Biafra: The Nigerian Civil War, Visual Narratives of Genocide, and the Fragmented Universalization of the Holocaust." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 249–274. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobsen, Oli. 2014. *Daniel J. Danielsen and the Congo: Missionary Campaigns and Atrocity Photographs*. Troon: BAHN.

Jameson, Frederic. 1990. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge.

Jay, Martin. 1994. *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press.

Jokeit, Hennric, and Daniel Blochwitz. 2020. "Neuro-Aesthetics and the Iconography in Photography." *Psych Journal* 9 (4): 444–57. https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.379.

Kozol, Wendy. 2014. *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*. Critical American Studies Series. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Laqueur, Thomas. 1989. "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative." In *The New Cultural History*. Vol. 6 of *Studies on the History of Society and Culture*, edited by Lynn Hunt and Aletta Biersack, 176–204. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Larson, Frances. 2014. *Severed. A History of Heads Lost and Heads Found*. London: Granta.

Lincoln, Bruce. 2007. *Religion, Empire, and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with a Postscript on Abu Ghraib*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Linenthal, Edward. 2001. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Linfield, Susie. 2012. *The Cruel Radiance. Photography and Political Violence*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lissner, Jørgen. 1977. *The Politics of Altruism*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation.

Lydon, Jane. 2016. *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Manzo, Kate. 2008. "Imagining Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood." *Antipode* 40 (4): 632–57.

Marculescu, Andreea. 2016. "Teaching to Hate through Theater: Hate, Violence, and the Invention of Piety in French Passion Plays." *Literature Compass* 13 (6): 389–99. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12328.

Marvin Carolyn and David W. Ingle. 1999. *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maynard, Patrick. 1983. "The Secular Icon: Photography and the Functions of Images." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42 (2): 155–69. Doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/430660.

McChrystal, Stanley A. 2013. *My share of the Task: A Memoir*. London: Penguin.

McGonagle, Joseph. 2014. "Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War." In *The Violence of the Image. Photography and International Conflict*, edited by Liam Kennedy and Caitlin Patrick, 78–96. London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

Merziger, Paul. 2018. "Mediatization of Disasters and Humanitarian Aid in the Federal Republic of Germany." In *Humanitarianism & Media: 1900 to the Present*. Vol. 9 of *New German Historical Perspectives*, edited by Johannes Paulmann, 240–262. New York: Berghahn Books.

Middleton, Paul. 2020. "The Scarecrow Christ. The Murder of Matthew Shepard and the Making of an American Culture Wars Martyr." In *Martyrdom. Canonisation, Contestation and Afterlives*, edited by Ihab Saloul and Jan Willem van Henten, 181–202. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Mielczarek, Natalia. 2016. *Lives of Iconic News Images Online: Appropriations of 'Big Pictures' and Their Rhetorical Work in Digital Participatory Culture*. PhD diss., University of Iowa.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 1995. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 2004. "Echoes of a Christian Symbol." *Chicago Tribune*, 27 June, 2004. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2004-06-27-0406270291-story.html. Accessed: 30-10-2020.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 2005. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 2011. *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moeller, S.D. 1999. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York: Routledge.

Montgomerie, Tim. 2015. *A Painting Marking the Recent ISIS Beheading of Coptic Christians*. Flickr. March 6, 2021. https://www.flickr.com/photos/122455144@N05/16736037202/in/photostream/. Accessed: 7-10-2021.

Mujahid, Abdul Malik. 2004. "Understanding Iraqi Prisoner Abuse in an Islamic Context." *Sound Vision*. https://www.soundvision.com/article/understanding-iraqi-prisoner-abuse-in-an-islamic-context. Accessed: 20-10-2021.

Nachtwey, James. 2009. "Introduction." In *Humanity in War. Frontline Photography Since 1860*, edited by Marko Kokic and Jean Milligan, 3–5. Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross.

Palu, Helle. 2011. "The Politics of Visual Representation. Security, the U.S., and the 'War on Terrorism.'" In *Images in Use: Towards the Critical Analysis of Visual Communication*, edited by Matteo Stocchetti, and Karin Kukkonen, 151–180. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Paul, John. 2011. "Torture and the Replication of Religious Iconography at the Abu Ghraib Prison: a Visual Semiotic Experiment." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 23 (3). Doi: https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.23.3.342.

Peters, Mathijs. 2014. *Schopenhauer and Adorno on Bodily Suffering. A Comparative Analysis*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Petersen, Jennifer. 2011. *Murder, the Media, and the Politics of Public Feelings: Remembering Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Piana, Francesca. 2015. "Photographs, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence. The International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War." In

Humanitarian Photography: A History, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 140–164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Polak, S., and Trottier, D. 2020. "Introducing Online Vitriol." In *Violence and Trolling on Social Media: History, Affect, and Effects of Online Vitriol*, edited by S. Polak and Trottier D., 9–20. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b0fvrn.4.

Pugliese, Joseph. 2007. "Abu Ghraib and its Shadow Archives." *Law and Literature* 19 (2): 247–76.

Raf, Sanchez. 2017. "New Photos Emerge of Omran Daqneesh, the Boy who Became a Symbol of Aleppo's Suffering." *The Telegraph*, 6 June, 2017. https://abcnews.go.com/International/photo-emerges-boy-symbol-aleppos-suffering/story?id=47849965. Accessed: 8-10-2021.

Sekula, Allan. 1984. *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983*. Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Sentilles, Sarah. 2007. "'He Looked Like Jesus Christ': Crucifixion, Torture, and the Limits of Empathy as a Response to the Photographs from Abu Ghraib." *Harvard Divinity Bulleti*n 36 (1). http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin_mag/articles/36-1/sentilles.html. Accessed: 21-07-2020

Silke, Andrew. 2005. "Children, Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Lessons in Policy and Practise." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17: 201–13.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. 2004. *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sontag, Susan. 2008 [1977]. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books.

Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books.

Stornig, Katharina. 2018. "Promoting Distant Children in Need. Christian Imageries in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries." In *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present*, edited by Johannes Paulmann, 41–66. New York: Berghahn Books.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Gifford Lectures 1999. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Terry-Fritsch, Allie, and Erin Felicia Labbie. 2012. *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Visual Culture in Early Modernity*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Tulloch, John, and R. Warwich Blood. 2012. *Icons of War and Terror: Media Images in an Age of International Risk*. New York: Routledge.

Twomey, Christina and Andrew J. May. 2012. "Australian Responses to the Indian Famine, 1876–78: Sympathy, Photography and the British Empire." *Australian Historical Studies* 43 (2): 233–52. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2011.640775.

Twomey, Christina. 2015. "Framing Atrocity. Photography and Humanitarianism." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 47–63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van Liere, Lucien. 2020a. "Conquering Rome. Constructing a Global Christianity in the Face of Terror. A Case Study into the Representations of the Beheading of Twenty-One Migrant Workers in January 2015." In *World Christianity. Methodological Considerations*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy. Leiden, Boston: Brill. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004444867_011.

Van Liere, Lucien. 2020b. "The Image of Violence and the Study of Material Religion: An Introduction." *Religions* 11: 1–18. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070370.

Weimann, Gabriel. 2006. *Terror on the Internet. The New Arena, the New Challenges*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Willingham, AJ. 2016. "How Children Change the Way We Think about War." *CNN Health*. 20 August, 2016. https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/20/health/children-of-conflict-photos-trnd/index.html. Accessed: 8-10-2021.

Wood, Amy Louise. 2009. *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940*. New Directions in Southern Studies. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Žarkov, Dubravka. 2008. *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Zarzycka, Marta. 2015. "Save the Child: Photographed Faces and Affective Transactions in Ngo Child Sponsoring Programs." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 23 (1): 28–42. https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1177/1350506814568362. Accessed: 8-10-2021.

CHAPTER 8

The Significance of Materiality in Conflict Analysis, Healing, and Reconciliation

Joram Tarusarira

1 Introduction

This chapter argues that to understand violent conflict more completely, including conflict that is religiously articulated, and to facilitate healing and reconciliation, analysts and practitioners need to seriously consider materiality and things as entry points, as they play a significant role in the immediate onset, escalation, or de-escalation of violent conflicts. Using cases of religiously articulated violence, it interrogates how prioritizing materiality and things illuminates an understanding of violence on the one hand and healing and reconciliation on the other. Focusing on materiality challenges the predilection to overlook the physical and material harm and concentrate only on broader theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are divorced from the victims' lived experiences. Concerning violence in which religion is a factor, the chapter argues that, contrary to the claim that violence is inherent in the beliefs and doctrines of the religious traditions involved, which allegedly prompt their subscribers to cause violence, actors in religiously articulated violence act not on the evoking of abstract ideas or beliefs, but often on the violation of materials and things. Accordingly, materiality and things ought to be seriously considered as entry points to analysing and addressing violent conflict in facilitating healing and reconciliation. However, this is not to suggest that materiality and things instigate violence: indeed, they do not in themselves evoke violence. Instead, it is to argue that it is the violation of things that stakeholders consider dear or sacred that sparks conflict and violence, leading to hurt, woundedness, and trauma. The high priority placed on reparations and the restoration of livelihoods, truth-telling, justice, and apologies in processes of healing and reconciliation indicates that it is the violation of bodies that hurts most. While discourses on reconciliation like forgiveness, coexistence, truth-telling, and healing may be perceived as abstract, moral, and existential questions, the chapter argues that they can only make sense if they are firmly grounded in materiality, that is, in the materiality of people's lived experiences. This approach is distinct from exist-

ing scholarly approaches to healing and reconciliation, which often focus on moral, intellectual, and existential questions that present abstract and universalist understandings of conflict and violence. A healing and reconciliation process that is primarily built around abstract ideas, beliefs, doctrines, and metanarratives, and not in people's lived experiences, is perceived as cheap, vapid, and lacking contextualization, thus being unsustainable. However, to focus on the centrality of materiality and things is not to imply that ideas are insignificant in mobilizing for conflict and violence, including those with a religious dimension. Both aspects, ideas and materiality, constitute important dimensions of violent conflicts, as well as of processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

In violent conflict situations where religion is a variable, religious ideas are mobilized in response to violations that are *seen* and *experienced*, and not the other way around (Pape 2006). With respect to violence that is articulated religiously, this train of thought on the one hand dislodges the attempt to locate the provenance of violent conflict merely within the beliefs and doctrines of religious traditions and challenges. On the other hand, there is an unsustainable dichotomy in which belief-dominant and ritualistic religious traditions are pitted against each other, with the former alleged to be good and peaceful and the latter bad and violent.

2 Materiality Matters

The chapter understands materiality and things in the context of the material turn, an analytical framework which proposes that we take as an entry point for our study of religion-specific, concrete visualities, for example, a) objects like relics, amulets, dress, painted or sculpted images, written words, and architectural spaces; b) feelings and sensory experiences like seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, as our emotions are related to what happens to objects we feel related to; and c) bodily performances in specific gestures, rituals, ceremonies, and festivals (Houtman and Meyer 2012; Strijdom 2014). It thus argues that objects, feelings, and the body are the primary location and targets of violent conflict. For instance, buildings and infrastructure are destroyed and people blown up by explosions. By definition, violence targets materialities like buildings and bodies. Healing processes should address these as well. How humans relate to violence should include the destruction of places that are dear to them and, more importantly, grief over loved ones who have suffered violence. The focus on justice and reparations, truth-telling and apology/repentance, and forgiveness as dynamics of reconciliation which

are connected to the violation of objects, feelings, and the body proves the centrality of materiality and things.

To argue for the centrality of objects, bodily expressions, feelings, and emotions is not to suggest that ideas are insignificant in mobilizing for or against violent conflict. There is an inextricable relationship between materiality and ideas. The chapter thus concurs with the 'material turn' in critical security studies, where analytical attention is devoted to object-oriented approaches to events and phenomena in international politics and everyday life (see Salter and Mutlu 2013). Inherent in this line of research is the overarching understanding of discourse and materiality as co-constitutive of the social order, a rejection of both wholesale social constructivism and materiality. The peace-promoting motives and ideas found in various religious traditions should be invoked to pursue peace and reconciliation. By "refusing the distance between the object and the discourse about it", critical object-oriented analysts have challenged the conventional understanding of 'matter' as a set of inert, neutral artefacts that humans use in the enactment of security (Bousquet 2008). Indeed, by recognizing materiality as "lively, affectively laden, and active in the constitution of subjects, (…) practices and processes", every social and discursive structure is effectively afforded a material character within this strand of literature (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016). The material turn resonates with the 'lived religion' approach in religious studies and a shift in humanities and the social sciences which gives greater importance to the quotidian: to the "spaces, rhythms, objects, and practices" around us (Sheringham 2006, 2; Vaughan-Williams 2016). In critical security studies, the everyday turn has shown that security is not only about exceptional politics, such that a distinction can be drawn between 'high' and 'low' politics, which for this chapter parallels beliefs, ideas, and meta-narratives as high, and materiality and the quotidian as low. The material turn thus disrupts this logic, which is elitist and proceeds to accentuate the concrete human subject at grips with experience, as an entry point to understanding social realities (Sheringham 2006, 2). Acknowledging the co-presence of materiality and ideas/beliefs serves to avoid committing the fallacy of reductionism, for instance, of reducing religion to belief.

3 Whither Materiality in the Study of Religion?

To study religion only through the lens of ideas and beliefs results in locating the motivation of religiously articulated conflict and violence inherently in religion. Modernists deploy rationality, at least neglect or at most charge

objects, feelings, and bodily performances with negativity, for instance, that they are absolutist, irrational, and divisive (Cavanaugh 2009). Hence the necessity of Johan Strijdom's argument that a systemic critique of power relations that are at work in the uses of objects in religions, the comparison of religions, and the comparative study of religions (Strijdom 2014). This argument resonates with Tomoko Masuzawa's assertion that the comparative study of religions is replete with power and political interests (Masuzawa 2005, 73). Birgit Meyer traces this trend to the colonial period and the project of "Christian outreach" in the second half of the nineteenth century, a time during which a huge quantity of data about other religions was being gathered that formed the basis for a systematic comparison and evolutionary approaches. The hierarchies of religious development moved from 'fetishism' and 'animism' to 'monotheism,' which was posited as intellectually and morally ahead of and superior to religions (Meyer 2012). Chief among the wrongheaded negativity is that the actions of those whose religions are understood as material are not strategic but are generated by fanaticism, religious fundamentalism, indoctrination, and psychological instability. Religious traditions which uphold materiality are charged with irrationality and absolutism, rigidity, and lack of flexibility, and hence dismissed as irrational instigators of violence which must be sloughed off before real work on peacebuilding and reconciliation can begin. Secularist approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation consider religion, especially religious traditions that are materialistic, as a factor to be cleared out of the way before positivist work and the realpolitik of peacebuilding can begin. To bring materiality and things to the centre of the discourse on conflict and violence as well as to healing and reconciliation is not to confirm the modernist assertion that the materiality and rituals of non-Christian religions are the cause of conflict and violence. Rather, it is to show that the negativity levelled against materiality and things in connection with violence that is religiously articulated is not a given but is constructed and has a power-laden historical genealogy. Accentuating the centrality of materiality and things brings them back from the periphery to the centre of analysing and addressing conflict and violence, as well as healing and reconciliation.

In treating violence with religion as a variable, the first port of call for analysis has been religious beliefs, doctrines, theologies, and macro-narratives, while materiality has been undermined (van Liere 2020). However, materiality, rather than being peripheral, is central to the motivation for engaging in conflict and violence. While there might be narratives behind violent conflicts, it is their enactment, as well as materiality and things, that prompts conflict. Focusing on materiality and things in the pursuit of reconciliation and healing foregrounds victims' lived experiences of broken limbs, houses razed to

the ground, women raped, livelihoods destroyed, and people killed and disappeared, and brings the process to their everyday lives (see Žarkov 2007). In the next section, I use concrete examples to argue that, despite the effort of conflict-analysis scholars and practitioners who are influenced by modernity to marginalize things and materiality, conflicts and violence, including those which are religiously articulated, are replete with objects, feelings, and bodily performances.

4 What Matters Is Matter: The Material Grounding of Religiously Articulated Violence

Fighters professing religious motives like those belonging to Islamic State have perpetrated many gruesome attacks, including suicide attacks, to the extent that it might seem counterintuitive to contest the proposition that Islamic fundamentalism is inherently violent and a cause of violence. However, it is not Islamic fundamentalism's alleged inherent violence – a characterization which this article disputes – but the visualities of violence that instigated the violence. Think, for example, of the executions of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and the British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning in August and October 2014 respectively. The Islamic State's media outlet, *al-Furqān Media*, released four videos that showed a captive kneeling in the sand dressed in an orange jumpsuit with his hands tied behind his back, being executed by a masked executioner known as 'Jihadi John'. What we observe here is that these gruesome activities are material and visual through and through and may in their turn again spark fear and violence. Although these videos were framed within an Islamist discourse, the message was predominantly submitted through material aspects like clothing as a symbolic reference, body positions, and weapons (van Liere 2020). However, the argument that so-called Islamic terrorism derives from Islamic doctrine and belief has resulted in the crafting of domestic and foreign policies that not infrequently worsen the situation of Muslim migrants, as in France, and that harm religious people needlessly. It has also led to the proposal to reform or transform Islam, calls for a moderate Islam and the binary divisions of good and bad religion (see Pape 2005). This kind of thinking thus addresses terrorism by focusing on the alleged irrationality of the act of terrorism, parallel to the irrationality of belief, from the perspective of the individual, attributed to the sort of religious indoctrination or psychological predispositions that might drive individual attackers. This perspective is wrongheaded. The attackers might hear their religion denigrated often but do not necessarily act because of ideological denigration. Evidence shows that, when conflicts

become material and visual through photography and videos, interpretations of what is going on are framed, and actors are more motivated to justify or even commit violence (see van Liere, this volume).

Although the leading causes of suicide attacks have been identified as material and as things external to *religion*, this material side still constitutes a missing link in understanding violent conflict. This includes the foreign occupation of lands and places, an expression of the suicide attackers' desire for liberation and ridding their territories or their homeland of foreign occupiers. In a detailed and extensive study of suicide terrorism, Robert Pape (2005) shows that on the one hand suicide terrorists want to get foreign armed troops, police and tanks out of their territories. This was the main objective of Al Qaeda. On the other hand, they often want to secure *matter* – their land and their holy places – and they want to get *matter* off their land – armed soldiers, police, tanks. What matters here is matter. Religious terrorists do not attack because they are religious. 'Religion' is rarely the sole cause. It has no agency. It is how it is mobilized and connected to materiality or things that may lead to violent conflict or otherwise. The material turn thus challenges perceptions of religion as a pure realm of ideas or beliefs that are translated into material signs. In so doing it avoids reifications that identify ideas or dogmas or individual people as the irreducible core of religion (Meyer et al. 2010). What is of religious significance in religiously articulated conflict and violence is the religious difference (not religion as such) which functions to harden the boundaries between communities and makes it easier for terrorist leaders to portray the conflict in zero-sum terms, demonize the opponent, and gain legitimacy for martyrdom within the local community (Pape 2005). Materiality charges that religion is inseparable from a matrix or network of components that consist of people, divine beings or forces, institutions, things, places, and communities (Meyer et al. 2010), which in this case is or may be expressed in the hardening of boundaries between national communities, demonizing opponents, and winning legitimacy within the local community (Pape 2005). To demonstrate the significance of materiality and things in violent conflict, healing and reconciliation, the chapter will proceed by reviewing some of the best-known case studies in the history of conflict and violence that have religion as a variable, namely those of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and the Sikh attack on Amritsar in India.

5 Hezbollah

Hezbollah grew out of Harakat al-Mahrumin, the Movement of the Deprived, established by Musa al-Sadr in March 1974. When Israeli troops invaded

Lebanon in 1982, a group of clerics and laymen established a militia to resist the Israeli occupation. This group became the core of Hezbollah, which formally announced itself in February 1985 with a manifesto entitled "An Open Letter: The Hezbollah Program", addressed "to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the world" (El Husseini 2010). Although the material presence of Israel Defence Forces' troops, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers occupying large parts of the south of Lebanon are the cradle of the movement, the most common explanation for the emergence of Hezbollah is that its foundation was based on radical Islamic principles following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 (Pape 2005, 129). The community around Hezbollah encouraged individuals to become suicide bombers through its support of martyrdom. Subsequently, suicide bombers were often concerned about how they would be remembered; they left material evidence of their intentions and faith in writing or on videos, expecting these to be made public after they died, in newspapers, or as items in local markets. The materials carried strong statements that were meant to capture the emotions and feelings of the community.

Following Israel's actions during Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996, which included the massacre of refugees at the UN compound in Qana, Christians and Muslims in Lebanon united in a nationalist stance against the Israeli occupation. In November 2009, Hezbollah issued a new manifesto entitled "The Political Document of Hezbollah", in which some of the Islamist rhetoric they had used before was left out. The manifesto also dropped any reference to an Islamic republic in Lebanon, which seems to reflect the group's 'Lebanonization'. However, it retained its perception of the US and Israel, especially the claim that they are bent on domination and show hegemonic tendencies (Assi 2009). These two developments clearly dislodge the idea that Hezbollah' terrorist attacks are necessarily embedded in Islam. The reference to domination and hegemonic tendencies in the manifesto also confirms the centrality of the hurt and woundedness inflicted by occupiers. After the withdrawal of Israeli troops in 2000, there remained controversy over a fifteen-square mile border region called the Shebaa Farms. Lebanon and Syria asserted that the area was Lebanese, while Israel declared it a part of Syrian territory – though occupied by Israel (El Husseini 2010). In 2006, Hezbollah killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others in an ambush with the aim of using them in a prisoner exchange, a move to which Israeli forces responded with massive attacks against Lebanon which led to more than 1100 dead – mostly civilians, with several thousand injured, roughly one million displaced, and economic losses estimated at $12 billion (El Husseini 2010). What emerges from this recurring conflict between Israel and Hezbollah since the early 1980s is that it is not

Islamic beliefs and doctrines that trigger the violent conflicts, but material harm like occupation of the land, the killing of people or the kidnapping of soldiers, whether by Hezbollah or Israeli forces, that contributes to violence and its justification.

6 Tamil Tigers

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), known as the Tamil Tigers, started carrying out suicide attacks after the Sinhalese government started a series of large agricultural projects that asserted new and uncontested rights to Tamil lands. In the 1970s, Tamil lands were occupied by people who had been resettled by the government (Pape 2005, 141). Small Tamil militant groups resisted this development, but the Sri Lankan army descended on them with a heavy hand. Consequently, in 1987, the Tamil Tigers unleashed their first suicide attack when 21-year-old Captain Miller (Valipuram Vasanthan) drove a truck full of explosives into a Sri Lankan army camp and exploded the vehicle and himself near a military barracks, killing and wounding scores of people. In step with one of the arguments of this chapter that religion is not inherently violent, and thus not necessarily bent on violent extremism, it is worth noting that LTTE was a secularist group that was not motivated by religion (Frydenlund 2018). The chapter uses this case to show that suicide bombing does not necessarily originate in religion. Interestingly, non-religion-based suicide attacks or violence often have similar material objectives. However, Tamil Tiger suicide bombers are commemorated as martyrs. Their deeds are recorded in the group's commemorative albums. Every member, male or female, is required to wear a vial of cyanide on a leather thong around the neck. At the moment of capture, the Tamil Tiger is supposed to bite on the vial. The shards of glass lacerate the gums, which send the deadly poison directly into the bloodstream, causing death almost immediately. Tamil Tigers also carry on them a laminated identity card with the picture, name, and designation as a Tiger. The card reads "I am filled with huge explosive. If my journey is blocked, I will explode it. Let me go" (Pape 2006, 143). After their deaths, their identity is displayed in commemorative events, their stories are published in newspapers and commemorative albums. Public ceremonies are also held for the martyrs, with their pictures on posters (see van Liere 2020 on pictures and materiality) and public processions are held with them with pomp, pageantry, and singing in their honour. The Tigers also have their monuments with memorabilia sometimes surrounded by a small pond or park and fence to provide space for the community to get closure,

that is, to realize acceptance of the deaths of the martyrs by laying flowers in their honour. However, due to the impact and mobilizing power of monuments and in the act of erasure of memorialization, the Sri Lanka government destroyed the monuments and the cemeteries where the fallen LTTE fighters were put to rest under neat rows of tombs (Hyndman and Amarasingam 2014; PEARL 2016).

The Sri Lankan civil war ended in May 2009 with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers by the Sri Lankan state. The military campaign to eliminate the Tamil Tigers began in 2008 and represented a new 'no holds barred' strategy after three failed peace talks. The Tamil Tigers forced thousands of civilians to march with them, and in return, the state bombed hospitals and areas it had declared no-fire zones before allegedly using illegal cluster bombs (Thiranagama 2013). The battles were both highly public, as they were reported in global newspapers, and shrouded in secrecy as casualties piled up in what came to be called a "bloodbath on the beaches of northern Sri Lanka" (Holmes 2009), while international agencies and journalists were banned from the war zone. The battle finally ended in May 2009. The documentary *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields* shows highly disturbing mobile-phone footage from soldiers (the state disputes its authenticity) with what looks like mass executions of bound and kneeling people, along with the naked and violated dead bodies of Tamil women, among other violations. An estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians died between January and May 2009. When the war ended 285,000 Tamils from the war zone were interned by the state, and thousands of Tamils also disappeared from the camps into detention with no notification to families of their return. In pursuit of transitional justice and reconciliation, the Sri Lankan president announced the formation of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in 2010, which from the very beginning was denounced as a farce (Thiranagama 2013). What emerges from this almost three decades of civil war are various forms of materiality implicated in the war ranging from the occupation of the Tamil land, the killings by the Tamil Tigers, to the bloodbath by the Sri Lankan state, but also the material tangibility of death the Tamil Tigers were wearing on their bodies, the pictorial portrayals of suicide-bombers as martyrs, and the monuments that become a point of concern for the Sri Lankan government. After the deaths of the Tamil fighters, they were commemorated, and memorials were used to mobilize their communities physically and emotionally. Also, what makes the case of the Tamil Tigers comparable with the Hezbollah case discussed above is that the violence was committed not to spread ideology or religion, nor to defend them, but to create a 'safe space' and fight for a land 'to be'. Land, place, and violence done to members are thus material sources with which to kindle attacks, as well as to

come to terms with violent conflict. On the other hand, the materiality that emerges out of this is seen as endangering social stability or contesting the state's narrative.

7 The Amritsar Attack

Sikh suicide attacks in India began following the Indian army's massive attack – part of Operation Blue Star to root out Sikh militants – on the Golden Temple in Amristar in 1984, the sacred heart of the Sikh religion and an important symbol of the Sikh homeland, and on other Sikh temples in the Punjab (Pape 2005). The Indian government saw this as the only possible response to militant violence and as an endeavour to 'flush out' militants who had taken sanctuary within the Golden Temple Complex and fortified it since 1982 (Pape 2005). The military attack left hundreds of civilians, militants, and government troops dead. Chopra (2010) observes that this event is cited most frequently as the source of 'hurt' of the Sikh community and that it stands apart as an exemplar of 'hurt.' As a term in everyday speech, 'hurt' signals a sense of deliberate offence or injury to individual or community sentiment. The architectural mutilation of the Akal Takht, an important building at the temple that represented the site of political authority and autonomy for the Sikh community, by a rocket-propelled grenade launcher represented the 'hurt' that struck at the heart of the sacred community (*sangat*). Two sources of hurt and a material nature stand out here: people died, and the temple was devastated. As in the case of the Tamil Tigers, the Sikh communities held public ceremonies to celebrate fighters such as Bhindranwale who had died defending his community and who was celebrated as a martyr. His portrait now hangs in numerous Sikh homes. These ceremonies were advertised in newspapers. The attack on the temple in June 1984 also resulted in the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31 by two of her Sikh bodyguards as a reprisal for the attack on the temple (Pape 2005, 156). As a result, two representative deaths equally mired in violence, remembrance, and representation are wedged between forbidden and authorized memorials of two lives positioned as the antithesis of each other: Bhindranwale the 'terrorist' and a 'threat to the nation', and Indira Gandhi, the putative 'mother' of modern India (Chopra 2010).

What is instructive here is that commemoration is mired in what this chapter calls the ambivalence and material politics of commemoration. What is commemorated by some as a way to heal and reconcile can be a source of pain and hurt to others. In the same vein, Forty (1999) contends that an "inevitable feature of memorials is that they permit only certain things to be remem-

bered, and by exclusion cause others to be forgotten" (9). The construction of monuments inevitably involves a struggle over narratives of the past. Commemoration of conflict and war does not take place in a political vacuum (Evans 2006; Ashplant et al. 2000; Park 2014). It is often materially framed to produce simplified stories about chosen glories and traumas, as well as powerful political and ideological narratives about heroes and villains, martyrs and oppressors, allies and enemies (Howard and Ashworth 1999; Assmann 1995).

From the preceding, it can be argued that the motivation for violence does not lie primarily in religious ideas, but in what is seen, felt, and experienced. The violence of the response is often performative, intense, vivid, catastrophic, and horrifying in its effect on the intended audience (Juergensmeyer 2000; Nanninga 2017). Blood is shed for the message to sink in. It looks easier to ignore propaganda, polemic, and threats than insecurity enacted in material and grisly attacks. The more material and visual violence becomes, the closer it comes to the victims, and the more it calls for responsive action. Despite criticisms of the simplified articulation and conceptualization of 'religion' by some scholars of religion and violence such as William Cavanaugh (2009), the perspective of religion as absolutist, divisive, and irrational has survived into the present and has become one of the critical sources of exclusion and conflict in today's diverse society, due among other things to migrations and crossings-over, to the traversing of boundaries. Here too, feelings of security and insecurity become entangled with perspectives on 'good and bad' religion which predominantly relates to land as the possession of including and excluding communities and as a material object in power struggles. The next question is what the presence of materiality and things in violent conflict mean for reconciliation and healing, as it entails such a prominent place in conflict situations. In what follows, the chapter demonstrates the potential of materiality and things in relation to the dynamics of healing and reconciliation, which subsequently strengthens my argument that focusing merely on theologies, macro-narratives, and abstract ideas does not lead to sustainable reconciliation and healing.

8 Reconciliation, Healing, and Materiality

The pain of conflict and violence is often very physical and place-based (Orjuela 2019). As we have seen in the above case studies, this includes "the smell of dead bodies, the unbearable bodily grief of losing a child or a parent, the traces of blood, the bullet holes left in the walls, the piece of clothing that helps someone identify a close family member in an opened mass grave"

(439). The pain, woundedness or hurt that engenders the need for healing and reconciliation is tied to matter and to place, both during and after a tragedy.

Consequently, just as conflict and violence are anchored not in abstract ideas, theologies, or meta-narratives, but in the physical, so is healing and reconciliation in various ways, such as remembrance and mourning (Orjuela 2019; Stengs 2009). Reconciliation and healing mean restoring and transforming relationships that have been harmed by conflict so that they reflect a shared humanity and seek a shared future based on truth, justice, mercy, and peace (Lederach 1997, 30). This also means coming to terms with the hurt, wounds, and trauma of the violent past. In this section, I discuss the key dimensions of reconciliation and healing, especially justice and reparations, truth-telling and repentance/apology, and forgiveness, showing how these important aspects of conflict-resolution place significant emphasis on material harm.

To heal or come to terms with the past, victims of violence want to see *justice* – restorative and retributive justice – to be done following the tragedies they have experienced and witnessed. That justice 'has to be seen' to be done, for example, through punishment for war crimes and serious human rights abuses, shows how what matters for sustainable reconciliation and healing is what victims 'see' and how they 'feel,' rather than mere lectures on abstract and distant ideas about justice. The failure to 'see and feel' justice done might wound victims further or make them resort to extremist violence. The articulation of abstract ideas about justice will not heal Hezbollah fighters who see the occupation of their land by Israeli soldiers with troops, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers as unjust, Sikh fighters who see the Indian army's attack of their temple as injustice, or the Tamils for whom the occupation of their land for large agricultural projects is an act of injustice. Even in cases where religion has been perceived as instigating violence, it is the colonial subjugation of space that is primary. Relatedly, during anticolonial wars too, 'place' and 'space' became much more important signifiers than religion.

Retributive justice, whose material dimension is enacted in the reparations discussed below, refers to the repair of justice through the unilateral imposition of sanctions or punishment in order to restore a moral balance that was disturbed by wrongdoing (Wenzel et al. 2012). It contributes to the healing of victims in so far as it is connected to the dignity and self-value of the victim. It is important that society does not downplay the suffering of victims by failing to act against the perpetrator. To do so might be understood as dismissing the victims. It is crucial to ensure that the victim is given equal status to everyone else by society. Retributive justice thus can persuade the victim that whatever his, her or their position in life is, they are recognized by society as someone whose dignity is affirmed (Villa-Vincenio 1999). Those

who perceive their land as occupied or whose infrastructure has been violated, like the Lebanese people, the Sikh fighters or the Tamil Tigers, seem to suggest that reconciliation means restoration and recognition of their dignity achieved through retribution. The dignity of those whose land has been occupied is undermined by the occupation of their land and/or by the attacks on their sacred buildings, like a temple. Restorative justice must be seen not as a mode of punishment but rather as a means of restoring the moral order of society and seeking to restore the perpetrator as a moral agent in society (Villa-Vincenio 1999). It can thus be a way to communicate to the offender the evil they have committed in the hope that they will come to positive remorse. Punishment, often by the courts, acknowledges the dignity of the victim and makes reconciliation an outcome that does not come cheap (Philpott 2006, 21). In the cases discussed above, the chapter hazards the suggestion that Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers, and the Sikh violent extremist attackers see themselves as meting out justice on the Israelian government, the Sri Lankan government, and the Indian government respectively. Likewise, the Israelian, Indian, and Sri Lankan governments may be convinced of their own actions in the same way. The destruction both sides undertake is perceived as an enactment of retributive justice and demonstrates competitive victimhood between the two camps, with both sides claiming to have suffered much more than the other.

Reparations in the form of medical care and economic relief in response to the destruction of persons and sources of livelihoods and investments can help to heal the victims of brute physical, psychic, economic, or emotional harm. In some cases, reparations are perceived as retributive justice. They are a way of punishing offenders by making them pay their victims. Reparations require real tangible actions that address social and material structures. It is such visible actions that address feelings, emotions, and the body that matter for healing and reconciliation. These actions include a psychological medical intervention to address the trauma, stress, and anxiety that inhibit agency, reparations and compensations, and strengthening social networks and family support (Murphy 2010, 138). Following the 2006 capture of soldiers by Hezbollah and the heavy-handed and indiscriminate response by Israeli forces, feeling the responsibility to protect the citizens against Israel, the Lebanese government put together a reparation programme not only to address the immediate needs of the victims but also to acknowledge their status as 'victims'. The government developed a project, *Rebuilding Lebanon*, which had two aspects: to *directly compensate* victims of the war, and an *adoption scheme*, whereby individuals, institutions or foreign states could adopt an area and directly contribute to its reparation and reconstruction. Direct com-

pensation addressed three types of harm: human indemnity (i.e., those who had been injured or whose family members had been killed), housing indemnity, and loss of income (Ghosn and Khoury 2013).

The three-decade-long civil war between the Tamils Tigers and the government, which destroyed livelihoods, ended with a decisive government victory against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009. The families of the victims of enforced disappearances, frustrated by numerous government commissions that provided no answers to the fate of their loved ones, have been holding street-side vigils for well over a year. A case in point is the LLRC (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission), established in 2010, which analysts have characterized as a state performance (Ganguly 2018). The state represents itself in Sri Lanka using rhetoric that is not grounded in victims' lived experiences. An Office of Missing Persons (OMP) established in 2018 published a report in which it recommended some interim relief measures to alleviate the hardship until there are answers, justice and, reparations (Ganguly 2018).

In the Sikh case, many commissions have been set up to deal with post-conflict reconciliation. The Ahooja Committee was given the task of establishing how many Sikhs had been killed in the riots and recommending compensation to the victims and their families. Official figures claim that almost three thousand people were killed and many more injured or displaced in the four days of rioting aimed at the Sikh population of Delhi in 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. However, despite multiple commissions of inquiry, compensation schemes and a prime ministerial apology, India is still struggling to do justice to the victims (Jeffrey and Hall 2020).

Truth-telling is one acclaimed aspect of reconciliation and healing because it is conceived to be cathartic (Brounéus 2007, 12). It takes the process of reconciliation from knowledge to acknowledgement that harm was done. It is engendered by numerous material aspects, ranging from secrets about missing and disappeared bodies, which remain unknown due to misinformation or falsehoods peddled by the perceived enemy, to ignorance about various developments during the violent conflict. After the violent death of a family member or friend, the survivors have to deal with the reality or imaginations of the brute harm perpetrated on the dead. Relatives want to know what happened to their loved ones, how exactly they died, how violent their death was, who pulled the trigger if the dead victims have gun wounds, and where the bodies are. They need to know how the army, police, and secret services operated. Truth-telling thus heals wounds of ignorance (Philpott 2006, 17). Not knowing the truth creates a wound within the bereaved. In violent conflicts, some deaths are shrouded in mystery. People are blown up, disappear or are

killed in secrecy, only to be discovered as decomposed and abandoned bodies, if they are found at all. Such abandoned bodies are sometimes found with grievous scars and bruises which merely speak of how violently they were violated and liquidated. This therefore raises many uncomfortable and unsettling questions. Ignorance of how a family member or friend died is in itself torture for the survivor (Hayner 2011, 151). In cases of disappearances and abductions, the absence of a body to bury is a source of trauma and internal wounds to relatives and friends because burial is a vital material aspect of closure following the death of a family member. The gravesite is an essential truth aspect of dealing with the loss of a dear one towards healing and consolation. It provides the focal point for the burial ceremony and the attendant rituals. It is, so to say, the material manifestation of truth. In cases where graves are not found, healing is compromised because of the absence of closure.

Concerning the surviving victims of violence, truth-telling makes violence a part of the historical record and restores a sense of dignity and worth to people who have often been brutalized, whose self-esteem has been reduced to the minimum. It provides an opportunity to say: "I am somebody. I matter". The victim regains some sense of worth, recognizing that their suffering has been taken seriously (Villa-Vincencio 1999). The need to tell one's story of victimhood and heroism is seen in how violent extremists develop websites through which they tell their narratives when they feel they are not being given an opportunity to be heard. These websites show both their victimhood – how they have been brutalized – and their heroism (Nanninga 2017). No wonder most of the websites are a collage of pain or great bravery with graphics and pictures that are meant to capture the emotions and feelings of the audience (see Guenther 2021; Nanninga 2017; Armstrong 2014). The Tamils and Sikh tells their victimhood story, as well as describing their heroic acts through public displays of commemoration and publishing stories of martyrs in newspapers and commemorative albums, creating a visual culture of commemoration. They see this as a restatement of their dignity and worth, as well as of their position as martyrs.

Public memorials and monuments are self-referential sites for remembrance that establish a more permanent memorial structure. Concerning healing and reconciliation, the assumption is that the "very materiality and design of memorials has the power to shape the ways people relate to a difficult past" (Orjuela 2020). As shown above, to cement their embeddedness in the communities and to facilitate healing and reconciliation with the violence, suicide organizations carry out commemorative activities. In the suicide attacks of the 1980s, Hezbollah commemorated 'martyrs' who had killed themselves in order to kill American, French, and Israeli troops. Such ritual practices facilitate the

closure of the death of their martyrs, a crucial dimension of dealing with the death of martyrs in post-violent conflict situations. No wonder the absence of a body to mourn creates a scar or wound for surviving friends and family. In the case of disappearances, missing victims are denied a place among either the living or the dead because their families and friends do not know whether they are dead or alive, and thus have no focal point for carrying out death rituals. Yet, ritual practices are a common phenomenon in the search for healing and in coming to terms with violent situations. In the absence of actual remains, memorials become reminders to be looked at, touched, and prayed beside (Mitchell 2012), a focal point for rituals for the dead. This is the reason why the Tamils and the Sikh built monuments so the community could acquire closure over the deaths of their martyrs by laying flowers in honour of the departed.

Major streets were named in honour of these fallen 'heroes'; their pictures being widely used as positive symbols in political discourses (Mitchell 2012). Reconciliation and healing are about memory and remembering. The feeling of keeping faith with the dead, that is, of respecting and honouring a society's martyrs, brings calm and satisfaction. It makes society feel that it is not betraying the martyrs. The self-sacrifice of the Sikh suicide attackers was recognized through the widespread practice of holding public ceremonies in celebration of the 'heroic' fighters (Mitchell 2012). However, the way commemorations are undertaken can create anger, disintegration, tension, resentment, and enmity, rather than the social cohesion and reconciliation needed in a society, especially when one party frames the tragic events of the war in a form that legitimizes its rule and justifies its actions while delegitimizing those of its perceived enemies. The controversy over the commemoration of two lives positioned as the antithesis of each other – Bhindranwale the 'terrorist' and a 'threat to the nation', and Indira Gandhi, the putative 'mother' of modern India (Chopra 2010), which we noted above – is a case in point. Some political powers choose either to erase or control memory by allowing the memorialization of specific figures or activities but not others. This is what this chapter calls ideological memorialization because it is not focused on reconciliation and healing but on political control. Monuments can thus have a double or ambivalent function.

Apology and forgiveness are another important set of healing and reconciliation dimensions following a violent conflict. Through an apology or by showing repentance, the offender expresses contrition and sorrow and assumes responsibility for the violence. The apologizer names the exact offence or at least how they remember it, for which they are apologizing, which often turns out to be the violation. A well-known case in point is the amnesty process

during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Perpetrators could receive an amnesty upon confessing and making full disclosure of the offence they committed during the conflict in South Africa (Tutu 1999). Repentance is an inward act which an offender can be encouraged to make. However, it is more than an apology, remorse or regret. It includes all of these, but also a deliberate turning away from patterns of behaviour that led to those past wrongs and that often involves attempts to make appropriate reparation or restitution for the past. In this way, it is linked to reparations. To apologize and to forgive are strenuous exercises which sometimes require some inducement. To facilitate and persuade perpetrators and victims to apologize and forgive, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was the chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, employed Christian metaphors and ritual practices (Campton 2008, 12; Shore 2012). During the meetings and hearings, candles were lit and crucifixes were used, accompanied by church hymns and prayers in the act of consecrating space. Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers, and the Sikhs might want the Israeli government, the Sri Lanka government, and the Indian government to apologize for the violence committed against them, and vice versa. However, an apology has a political risk for the apologizer. If the government of Sri Lanka were to apologize for marginalizing Tamils from the late 1940s to the onset of the civil war in 1983 and beyond, it would clear the air. But it also might have complicated the government's attempt to arrange a permanent cessation of hostilities with the Tamil Tigers (Rotberg 2006). However, apologies that arise out of a detailed forensic (read 'material') examination of the bloody grievances and hurts are more potent than mere executive utterances in healing the wounds of a traumatized people (Rotberg 2006). However, corporate apologies – for example, by a government – remain contested because they sound abstract and distanced, and the victim is not individually identified. Bentley (2016) argues that state apologies tend to reconfigure the patterns of domination. The apologies advance the state's particular interests and are laden with tropes and narratives that are remarkably reminiscent of the core legitimizing tenets of domination and oppression. The chapter argues that state apologies that are divorced from the real lived experiences of the people in the sense of bloody grievances and hurts generate suspicions that they are not effective as a reconciliation gesture that stands alone.

9 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that interrogating conflict and violence, and facilitating healing and reconciliation, cannot be fully undertaken without reference to objects, feelings, and bodily performances. This is despite the preponder-

ance of ideas, beliefs, and metanarratives that are seen as the main features of 'religion'. Certain trends in modernist thinking accentuate beliefs and doctrines while marginalizing materiality and 'things' in the conception of conflicts and violence, as well during processes of healing and reconciliation. The material and everyday turn in critical security studies confirms the centrality of materiality in conflict and violence. The igniters, processes, and consequences of conflict and violence are often seen, felt, and experienced. While accentuating the centrality of materiality and things, the chapter does not mean to deny that ideas are also significant in mobilizing people and in instigating conflict and violence, including those with a religious dimension. Instead, it sees the two as constitutive of each other. It maintains that there is a sense in which materiality is an expression of underlying ideas, ideologies, and narratives, while at the same time speaking back to the ideas, ideologies and narratives. With the aid of concrete examples, the chapter has argued that conflict and violence, including that which is religiously articulated, are replete with objects, feelings, and bodily performances. In the examples discussed, place, land, and sites are important elements creating social perspectives on the legitimacy of using violence against 'oppressors' and 'occupiers.' For this reason, healing and reconciliation must also take materiality and things as their points of departure. Focusing only on belief will not lead to sustainable healing and reconciliation because the motivation and effect of conflict and violence lie in materiality and things as well as in belief. This chapter thus has articulated the following points: religious ideas are not the source of conflict, materiality is the first port of call in understanding both conflict and violence, and materiality (things, bodies, money, land) should be taken into account during healing and reconciliation processes.

References

Armstrong, Karen. 2014. *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. London: The Bodley Head.

Asad, Talal. 2006. "Trying to Understand French Secularism." In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, edited by Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, 494–526. New York: Fordham University Press.

Ashplant, T.G., Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper. 2000. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*. Routledge: New York.

Assi, Al Mannar. 2009. "Hezbollah New Manifesto: We Want a Strong, United Lebanon." https://realisticbird.wordpress.com/2009/11/30/hezbollah-new-manifesto-we-want-strong-united-lebanon/. Accessed: 12-03-2021.

Assmann, Jan. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." Translated by John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65: 125–33.

Brounéus Karen. 2007. *Reconciliation and Development*. Dialogue on Globalization Occasional Paper. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Available at http://library.fes.de/pdf-les/iez/04999.pdf. Accessed 17-03-2011.

Campton, David. 2008. "Divine and Human: Nurturing a Spirituality and a Culture of Forgiveness." In *Divided Past, Shared Future: Essays on Churches Addressing the Legacy of the Troubles*, edited by David Campton and Nigel Biggar. Belfast: Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

Casanova, José. 2000. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Cavanaugh, William. 2000. *The Myth of Religious Violence: The Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chopra, Radhika. 2010. "Commemorating Hurt: Memorializing Operation Bluestar." *Sikh Formations* 6 (2): 119–152. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2010.530509.

El Husseini, Rola. 2010. "Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria." *Third World Quarterly* 31 (5): 803–815. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502695.

Evans, Martin. 2006. "Memories, Monuments, Histories: The Re-Thinking of the Second World War since 1989." *National Identities*, 8 (4): 317–348.

Forty, Adrian. 1999. "Introduction." In *The Art of Forgetting*, edited by A. Forty and S. Kuchler, 1–18. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Frydenlund, Iselin. 2018. "Tamil Militancy in Sri Lanka and the Role of Religion. Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Religion." Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ganguly, Meenakshi. 2018. "Transitional Justice in Sri Lanka Fall Short." https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/20/transitional-justice-efforts-sri-lanka-fall-short. Accessed: 22-03-2021.

Ghosn, Faten and Amal Khoury. 2013. "The Case of the 2006 War in Lebanon: Reparations? Reconstruction? Or both?" *International Journal of Human Rights* 17 (1): 1–17. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2012.688507.

Hayner, Priscilla B. 2002. *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. London: Routledge.

Holmes, John. 2009. "Sri Lanka: Let them decide – Civilians trapped with Tamil Tiger fighters must be offered an exit before a bloodbath ensues," *Reliefweb*. https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-let-them-decide-civilians-trapped-tamil-tiger-fighters-must-be-offered. Accessed: 02-07-2022.

Houtman, Dick and Meyer, Birgit, eds. 2012. *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. New York: Fordham.

Howard, Peter. and Gregory. J. Ashworth, eds. 1999. *European Heritage, Planning and Management*. Exeter: Intellect Ltd.

Hyndman, Jennifer and Amarnath Amarasingam. 2014. "Touring 'Terrorism': Landscapes of Memory in Post-War Sri Lanka." *Geography Compass* 8 (8): 560–575. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12149.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2000. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. California: University of California Press.

Lederach, John Paul. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Lundy, Patricia and Mark McGovern. 2008. "Whose Justice? Rethinking Transitional Justice from Bottom up." *Journal of Law and Society* 35 (2): 265–292.

Mani, Rama. 2002. *Beyond Retribution: Seeking Justice in the Shadows of War*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Meyer, Birgit. 2012. *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion*, https://www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/gw_meyer_birgit_oratie_definitief.pdf.

Mitchell, Jolyon. 2012. *Promoting Peace: Inciting Violence: The Role of Religion and Media*. London, Routledge.

Murphy, Colleen. 2010. *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nanninga, Pieter. 2017. "Meanings of Savagery: Terror, Religion and the Islamic State." In *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*, edited by James Lewis, 172–190. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orjuela, Camilla. 2020. "Remembering Genocide in the Diaspora: Place and Materiality in the Commemoration of Atrocities in Rwanda and Sri Lanka." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (5): 439–453. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1644529.

Pape, Robert. 2006. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House.

Park, Hyung yu. 2014. *Heritage Tourism*. New York: Routledge.

PEARL. 2016. *Erasing the Past: Repression of Memorialization in North-East Sri Lanka*. Washington, DC: People for Equality and Relief in Sri Lanka.

Philpott, Daniel. 2006. "Beyond Politics as Usual: Is Reconciliation Compatible with Liberalism?" In *The Politics of Past Evil*, edited by Daniel Philpott, 11–44. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Philpott, Daniel. 2009. "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (1): 183–202.

Rotberg, Robert I. "Apology, Truth Commissions, and Intrastate Conflict." In *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, edited by Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn, 33–49. Stanford University Press.

Salter, Mark, B, and Can E. Mutle, eds. 2013. *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sheringham Michael. 2006. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Shore, Megan K. 2012. "Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission." In *Ashgate Research Companion on Religion and Conflict Resolution: Religion, Secular Democracy and Conflict Resolution in Zimbabwe*, edited by L. Marsden, 279–296. Farnham: Ashgate.

Stengs, Irene. 2009. "Death and Disposal of the People's Singer: The Body and Bodily Practices in Commemorative Ritual." *Mortality* 14 (2): 102–118.

Strijdom, Johan. 2014. "The Material Turn in Religious Studies and the Possibility of Critique: Assessing Chidester's Analysis of 'the Fetish.'" *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70 (1): 1–7. Doi: https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2116.

Tarusarira, Joram. 2019. "The Anatomy of Apology and Forgiveness: Towards Transformative Apology and Forgiveness." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13 (2): 206–224.

Thiranagama, Sharika. 2013. "Claiming the State: Postwar Reconciliation in Sri Lanka." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4 (1): 93–116. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2013.0011.

Tutu, Desmond. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider.

Van Liere, Lucien. 2020. "The Image of Violence and the Study of Material Religion: An Introduction." *Religions* 11 (7): 370. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070370.

Vaughan-Williams, Nick and Daniel Stevens. 2016. "Vernacular Theories of Everyday (in)security: the Disruptive Potential of Non-Elite Knowledge." *Security Dialogue* 47 (1): 40–58. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615604101.

Villa-Vincencio, Charles. 1999. "The Reek of Cruelty and the Quest for Healing: Where Retributive and Restorative Justice Meet." *The Journal of Law and Religion* 14 (1): 165–187.

Wenzel, Michael, Tyler Okimoto, and Kate Cameron. 2012. "Do Retributive and Restorative Justice Processes Address Different Symbolic Concerns?" *Critical Criminology* 20 (1): 25–44.

Žarkov, Dubravka. 2007. *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

CHAPTER 9

A Ring of Peace around the Oslo Synagogue

Muslims and Jews Expressing Interfaith Solidarity in Response to the Paris and Copenhagen Attacks

Margaretha A. van Es

1 Introduction

On Saturday evening 21 February 2015, the small Jewish community of Oslo held its weekly *Havdalah* ceremony to mark the end of the Sabbath and the return to everyday life. This time however, they did not perform their rituals inside the synagogue, but in the open air just outside the main entrance. They were surrounded by a human chain of young Muslim men and women, who were again surrounded by a much larger crowd of Muslims and other Oslo citizens that filled the whole street. The 'Ring of Peace' (*Fredens Ring*), as it was called, had been organized by a group of seven young Muslim men and one young Muslim woman, in response to recent terrorist attacks targeting Jewish communities in Paris and Copenhagen. The organizers explained that they wanted to express their solidarity with the local Jewish community, make a statement against religious intolerance, and counter prejudices against Muslims and Islam. The event was warmly embraced in Norwegian society as a 'historical turning point' where Muslims made a clear statement against antisemitism, and it received broad media coverage in Norwegian and international media. *The Huffington Post* even included the Ring of Peace in its top fifteen of "religious moments in 2015 that gave us hope for the new year" (*Huffington Post*, 18 December 2015).

This chapter provides a case study of the Ring of Peace, with the aim of demonstrating the value of a material approach to the study of peace and conflict, and more specifically the study of interreligious public events that are organized in response to violence. Whereas materiality seems to be a blind spot among scholars working in the field of peace and conflict studies, scholars who take a material approach to the study of religion have only recently begun to pay attention to violent conflict and interfaith peace efforts (van Liere 2020). Inspired by the sociologist Mar Griera (2019), I argue that the act of making the Ring of Peace can be seen as a ritual in which imaginations of interfaith solidarity and peaceful coexistence are being enacted and embod-

FIGURE 9.1 Norwegian Muslims making a "Ring of Peace" around the Oslo synagogue
PHOTO: ØISTEIN NORUM MONSEN, DAGBLADET, WITH PERMISSION

ied, reinforced, and transformed. In this chapter, I combine Birgit Meyer's work on religious mediation (2008, 2016, 2020) with Sara Ahmed's work on affective economies (2004) to analyze the relationship between materiality, sensory experiences, and affects with regard to the Ring of Peace. I argue that understanding this relationship is crucial to grasp how communities are made and remade in relation to violent conflicts.

The Ring of Peace makes an interesting case study for at least two reasons. First, it was a grassroots initiative taken by young Muslims. Contrary to many interreligious public events, it had not been propelled by the authorities or by established religious organizations. Second, it can be considered a successful event in the sense that it attracted a large number of participants and was highly celebrated in Norwegian and international media. My main question with regard to this case study is: how should we understand the relationship between materiality, sensory experiences, and affects in this public performance of "peaceful togetherness" (Griera 2019, 53)?

Answering this question will help to explain, among other things, why this particular event received such a warm welcome in Norwegian society and even in international news media. However, I will also examine the hidden tensions and paradoxes underlying the Ring of Peace. The event took place in a context where Muslims – as well as Jews – experience that their belonging in Norway is continually questioned, where Muslims are more easily seen as terrorists and as antisemites rather than as peace activists, and where Muslims are frequently pressured to distance themselves from violent extremism (Liebmann 2018; van Es 2021). How did the Ring of Peace disrupt or reinforce the unequal power relations between people of different faith groups in Norwegian society, as well as preconceived notions of Muslims and Jews as each other's 'natural enemies'?

My research lies at the interface of religious studies, oral history, and anthropology. The research material comprised: (1) semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the organizers of the Ring of Peace,[1] (2) my own observations of the event, and (3) a collection of news reports and opinion pieces about the event that were published in Norwegian newspapers.[2] I participated in the event not simply as an observer, but as a Muslim who wanted to express her solidarity with the Jewish community in Norway and make a statement against violence committed in the name of Islam. While participating, however, I became more and more intrigued by the politics surrounding the event and its enthusiastic reception. I soon came to the conclusion that the Ring of Peace deserves a critical analysis that goes beyond the celebratory tone of most news reports and opinion pieces that appeared at the time.

In the following sections, I will first outline the context in which the Ring of Peace took place, with a special focus on the different historical trajectories of antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism in Norway, and on contemporary discourses about Muslims as the 'new antisemites'. I will then give a more detailed description of the event and the motivations of the organizers. I turn to Meyer's notion of the "sensational form" (2008, 2020) to analyze how different material aspects of the Ring of Peace together created a "wow-effect" (2016) and enabled particular imaginations of a 'new Norwegian we' to become tangible in the here and now. Building on Ahmed's ideas about the circulation of affects, I then analyze how an imagined community of 'ordinary' Muslim, Jewish, and (post-)Christian Norwegians became materialized in relation to imagined outsiders who threaten the social cohesion between them. Last but not least, I reflect on the 'backstage' frictions and frustrations, as well as the limitations of interreligious events such as the Ring of Peace.

2 Dealing with Diversity in 'the New Norway'

In Norway, religious diversity is a fairly recent phenomenon. Today, about seventy percent of the Norwegian population is registered as baptized members of the Lutheran Church of Norway (Statistics Norway 2019). From the sixteenth century until 2012, Lutheran Christianity was the official state religion. The Norwegian constitution of 1814 strongly reinforced the religious monopoly of

1 All interviews were conducted in Norwegian. Quotations were translated by the author. As full anonymization is not possible in this context, all interview respondents are presented with their own name. All of them have been given the opportunity for a citation control.

2 I collected these articles by means of a keyword search in the online database Atekst Retriever, as part of a larger research project on Muslims condemning violent extremism.

the Church of Norway, despite otherwise being one of the most liberal constitutions of its time. It prohibited Jews and Jesuits from entering the country and forbade the establishing of Roman Catholic monastic orders. Since then, the rights of religious minorities have gradually improved. The Dissenter Act of 1845 gave a certain degree of religious freedom to Christians not belonging to the Church of Norway. The clause against Jews was lifted in 1851, but Jesuits were not allowed to enter the country until 1956. Freedom of religion became guaranteed by the Norwegian constitution only in 1964 (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Hoffmann and Moe 2020; Ulvund 2021).

Since the late nineteenth century, and especially since the late 1960s, Norway has witnessed a growing religious and cultural diversity as a result of immigration and globalization. During the last decades, the government has facilitated a certain degree of cultural diversity instead of demanding full assimilation from new citizens. An important aspect has been the funding of ethnic minority organizations (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Liebmann 2018). Moreover, significant efforts have been taken to give minority religions the same rights and privileges as the Lutheran Church. For example, all registered faith and world view communities receive public funding equivalent to their membership numbers. The Norwegian government and the Church of Norway have also taken important steps to initiate interfaith dialogue activities (Leirvik 2015; Liebmann 2018).

In Norwegian public discourse, the terms "the new Norway" (*det nye Norge*) and "the new Norwegian we" (*det nye norske vi*) are often used to describe the religious and cultural diversity that characterizes contemporary Norwegian society (Alghasi 2011; Eriksen and Næss 2011). Ideas about what it means to be Norwegian have changed. A form of ethnic nationalism based on perceptions of a shared ancestry and a shared cultural heritage has increasingly given way to a different form of nationalism based on a strong identification with Norway, enthusiasm for Norwegian traditions (whether one grew up with them or not), and support for secular, liberal values that are seen as "quintessentially Norwegian" (Eriksen and Næss 2011).

Often, the terms "the new Norway" and "the new Norwegian we" are used to celebrate (imaginations of) an open and inclusive society where people stand together as one nation while giving room for religious and cultural differences (Alghasi 2011; Eriksen and Næss 2011). Such discourses became especially salient in the aftermath of the 22/7 terrorist attacks in 2011 in Oslo and Utøya, where the right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people. Hundreds of thousands of Norwegians – with and without a recent family history of immigration – participated in commemorative public events across the country, the most well-known being the "rose march" (*rosetog*) in Oslo on 25

July 2011 (Lödén 2014; Stordalen 2015). Nevertheless, hostile attitudes towards Jews and Muslims (as well as many other minorities) do exist in Norway, and are not limited to the far Right.

3 Jews and Antisemitism in Norway

The first traces of Jews living in Norway date back to the seventeenth century, when small numbers of Sephardi Jews from Portugal entered the country. Jewish immigration became more substantial in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when pogroms in the Russian empire (especially in the Baltics, Poland, Ukraine and Belarus) forced growing numbers of Jews to flee to Norway, among other places. Jewish communities began to emerge in Oslo and Trondheim. In 1892, the first Jewish congregation in Norway (*Det Mosaiske Trossamfund* or DMT) was formally established in Oslo. In 1920, DMT opened a purpose-built synagogue at Bergstien 13, which is still in use today. By the outbreak of World War II, approximately 2,100 Jews lived in Norway (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Hoffmann and Moe 2020).

While Jewish community life began to flourish in Oslo and Trondheim during the pre-war period, antisemitism also grew in Norwegian society. It prevailed on the level of popular attitudes, cultural expressions and among the authorities, and played an important role in the prohibition of kosher slaughter in 1929 and the rejection of Jewish refugees in the 1930s. Antisemitism was also part of the political platform of the Norwegian Nazi party (*Nasjonal Samling*) that was founded in 1933, but the party had only marginal support. The German occupation of Norway began on 9 April 1940. On 26 October 1942, Jewish men were arrested and Jewish assets were liquidated, with the active collaboration of the Norwegian police. The arrest of women and children followed one month later. About 1,000 Jews fled to Sweden during the war to escape persecution. A total of 773 Jews were deported from Norway, almost all of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 38 of them survived the Shoah (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Hoffmann and Moe 2020).

Today, the Jewish community in Norway consists of an estimated 1,500–2,000 people. Some members of the community and their families have lived in Norway for several generations (with the exception of the years 1942–1945), while others migrated from Denmark, the USA, or Israel to Norway during the post-war period. Most Norwegian Jews live in Oslo or Trondheim. In the year 2000, Jews were officially recognized by the state as a national minority. However, negative sentiments towards Jews have never fully disappeared, and Jewish practices such as kosher rules and circumcision continue to appear in

public debates about "what belongs in Norway" (Døving 2016). During the last two decades, antisemitism has again become an issue of public concern. There are few registered incidents of antisemitic hate crime in Norway (as compared to many other European countries), but antisemitic expressions can regularly be found on the internet and have also repeatedly surfaced in connection to anti-Israel demonstrations (Hoffmann and Moe 2020). According to quantitative surveys conducted in 2011 and 2017, a small but yet significant minority of the Norwegian population scores high in terms of negative sentiments and prejudices towards Jews.[3] In Norwegian public debate, however, antisemitism is first and foremost attributed to Muslim immigrants (Hoffmann and Moe 2020). I will return to this later.

4 Muslims and Anti-Muslim Racism in Norway

Muslims began to arrive in significant numbers during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Migrants from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Turkey, Morocco, and Yugoslavia were looking for work in the unskilled labor market. Most of them were young men. Since then, the number of Muslims in Norway has increased as a result of family-reunification, marriage migration, and the arrival of refugees from Iran, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014). At present, about five percent of the Norwegian population has his or her origins in a country with a Muslim majority population. Many of them are living in the capital of Oslo (Østby and Dalgard 2017).[4] Altogether, this superdiverse population forms a significant minority in contemporary Norway.

During the last decades, Muslims have become hyper-visible as a problem category in public debates about a variety of topics, such as gender equality, LGBT rights, freedom of religion and freedom of speech. Muslims are often

3 The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies conducted a quantitative survey on antisemitism in 2011, and another quantitative survey on antisemitism and Islamophobia in 2017. The results show that 11 percent (in 2011) and almost 8 percent (in 2017) of the respondents agreed to a greater or lesser extent with the statement "I have a certain dislike of Jews". Furthermore, about 20 percent (in 2011) and about 13 percent (in 2017) believed to a certain degree that "Jews have too much influence on the global economy" and that "world Jewry is working behind the scenes to promote Jewish interests", and about 18 percent believed that "Jews consider themselves to be better than others" (Hellevik 2020).

4 It is unknown how many of them believe in Islam and/or self-identify as Muslims. Besides, it is estimated that a few thousand Norwegians (with and without a family history of migration) have converted to Islam (Østby and Dalgard 2017).

presented as a more or less homogenous group that is fundamentally different from the majority population, fails or even refuses to integrate, and hence poses a serious cultural and political threat to Norwegian society and its secular, liberal values. The Progress Party has been a driving force in Norwegian public debates about Muslims and Islam since the late 1980s. Party leader Carl I. Hagen and his successor Siv Jensen have repeatedly warned against the "stealthy Islamization" of Norwegian society (Bangstad 2014, Bangstad and Helland 2019; Døving 2020). Few topics receive as much coverage in Norwegian mass media as Islam, and this news coverage is mostly negative (Liebmann 2018). Negative sentiments towards Muslims are fairly widespread among broad layers of society. Statistics show that more than one third of the Norwegian population believe that Muslims do not fit in modern Western societies and pose a threat to Norwegian culture.[5]

5 Norwegian Muslims as the 'New Antisemites'

Muslims also feature as a problem category in Norwegian debates about antisemitism. Since 2000, the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has triggered numerous anti-Jewish and anti-Israel offences in several West-European countries that were committed by young Muslims. In 2006, the religious extremist (and former member of a criminal youth gang) Arfan Bhatti fired shots at the Oslo synagogue with a machine gun. In 2009, street protests in Oslo against the Israeli bombing of Gaza ended in violent riots, with some protesters (many of them having a Muslim background) shouting antisemitic slogans. In the subsequent public debates, Muslims were increasingly blamed for the spread of a 'new' antisemitism in Norway. In 2010, the Norwegian broadcasting corporation (NRK) aired a report where teachers spoke out against antisemitism among Muslim pupils, which stirred much debate and led to a governmental action plan against racism and antisemitism in 2011 (Døving 2016; Bergmann 2020). In 2012, the Pakistani-Norwegian politician Abid Raja sparked a new controversy when he argued in an opinion piece that "Muslims

5 The quantitative survey conducted by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies in 2017 revealed that over 30 percent of the respondents agreed to a greater or lesser extent with the statement "I have a certain dislike of Muslims". Moreover, 36 percent of the respondents thought that Muslims do not fit in a modern Western society, 39 percent held the view that Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture, 30 percent believed that Muslims want to take over Europe, and 29 percent were convinced that Muslims are more violent than others (Hellevik 2020).

suckle hatred against Jews with their mothers' milk" (*Aftenposten*, 30 September 2012).

Statistics show that Norwegian Muslims indeed more often hold negative views of Jews than the dominant majority population in Norway, and that they are more often ready to justify harassment or violence against Jews.[6] However, the same statistics show that the majority of Norwegian Muslims do not hold negative views of Jews at all, and that many of them want to cooperate with Jews in a fight against prejudice and discrimination (Bergmann 2020). Nevertheless, in public debates, Muslims are often collectively held accountable for antisemitism (Døving 2016; Lenz and Moe 2020). Some scholars (Silverstein 2007; Özyürek 2016; Romeyn 2020; Topolski 2020) argue that the contemporary fight against antisemitism in Europe entails a process of boundary drawing between a tolerant European 'Self' and an antisemitic Muslim 'Other'. They warn that the singling out of Muslims as the main contemporary antisemites serves to question the belonging of Muslims in European societies, or to raise alarm about a 'war of civilizations'. In Norway, this is exemplified by the far-right opinion maker Hege Storhaug, who argued in her 2015 book 'Islam: The Eleventh Plague' that "Islam is at war with women, Jews, homosexuals, freedom-loving Muslims and anyone unwilling to submit to its doctrines" (Storhaug 2015, in Bangstad and Helland 2019).

Such discourses indirectly put enormous pressure on Muslims to show that they are loyal citizens of Norway who support peaceful interfaith coexistence. This pressure is further enhanced by repeated demands on Muslims to distance themselves from terrorism and other crimes committed in the name of Islam. Such demands have been made by politicians and opinion makers at least since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, often with the argument that the 'silent majority' of Muslims should take more efforts to show that they do not support such violence (cf. *Aftenposten*, 11 November 2001; *Dagbladet*, 27 July 2005;

6 The quantitative survey conducted by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies in 2017 indicated that Norwegian Muslims agree somewhat more frequently with the statement "I have a certain dislike of Jews" than members of the dominant majority population (9 percent versus almost 8 percent). Muslims believe significantly more often in anti-Jewish stereotypes than members of the dominant majority population, such as that "world Jewry is working behind the scenes to promote Jewish interests" (28 percent versus 14 percent), "Jews have too much influence on the global economy" (42 percent versus 13 percent) and "Jews consider themselves to be better than others" (33 percent versus 18 percent). Furthermore, about 21 percent of the Muslim respondents agreed to a certain extent with the statement "considering how Israel treats the Palestinians, harassment and violence against Jews are justifiable", versus about 12 percent of the respondents belonging to the dominant majority population (Bergmann 2020).

Vårt Land, 15 August 2014). During the last two decades, the Islamic Council of Norway, as well as many other Muslim organizations and individuals, have condemned terrorism and antisemitism on many occasions.[7] They have also regularly participated in interfaith dialogue activities (Leirvik 2015; Elgvin and Bangstad 2016; Liebmann 2018).

Nevertheless, the pressure on Muslims to stand up against antisemitism became even stronger after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. On 7 January 2015, two Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists fatally shot twelve people and injured eleven others at the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. On 9 January, a *Hypercacher* kosher supermarket was sieged by an armed young man who claimed to act on behalf of ISIS, and who was in close contact with the *Charlie Hebdo* shooters. He killed four Jewish civilians and held fifteen other hostages, until the police stormed the supermarket and killed the perpetrator. One month later, on Saturday 14 February 2015, a 22-year-old ISIS sympathizer shot and killed one man during a debate about freedom of speech in Copenhagen. Later that night, the same perpetrator killed the 37-year-old Jew Dan Uzan, who was on security duty outside the Great Synagogue during a *bat mitzvah* celebration. A few hours later, the perpetrator was fatally shot by the police (Elgvin and Bangstad 2016; Titley 2017).

Although these were neither the first terrorist attacks linked to ISIS, nor the first attacks targeting Jewish communities in Europe, the Paris and Copenhagen attacks were widely covered in international media and sent shock waves throughout Europe (Elgvin and Bangstad 2016; Titley 2017). In Norway, members of the Mosaic Faith Community expressed their fear and asked for more police protection around the Oslo synagogue (*Dagen*, 13 January 2015; *Dagbladet*, 16 February 2015; *Klassekampen*, 16 February 2015). Meanwhile, calls were made for a strong and broad movement among Muslims against religious extremism and intolerant attitudes. These calls came from the side of non-Muslim commentators with a critical attitude towards Islam (cf. *Dagen*, 12 January 2015; *Aftenposten*, 14 January 2015; *Vårt Land* 16 February 2015), but also from the side of Muslim individuals and civil society organizations (*Dagsavisen*, 8 January 2015; *Dagsavisen*, 10 January 2015; *Aftenposten*, 14 January 2015). These pressures, in combination with public discourses about a

7 These statements have not always received much press coverage, but many of them can nevertheless be traced in Norwegian newspaper archives. An event that did gain a lot of attention in Norwegian (and international) media was a protest march against ISIS organized by young Muslims in Oslo in August 2014, which counted more than 5,000 participants (van Es 2021).

'new Norway' where people stand together in dark times despite their differences, formed an important part of the context in which the 'Ring of Peace' took place.

6 Making a 'Ring of Peace' around the Oslo Synagogue

The 'Ring of Peace' (*Fredens Ring*) was organized by a group of seven young Muslim men (Ali Chishti, Zeeshan Abdullah, Morad Jarodi, Hassan Raja, Mudassar Khan Mehmood, Atif Jamil and Thomas Holgersen Daher Naustdal), and one young Muslim woman (Hajrah Arshad). Until the Copenhagen attacks, they had only known each other online as fellow moderators of the Facebook page 'Injustice Revealed' (*Urett Avsløres*). This was a closed community page where they shared news reports that they thought were not receiving enough attention in the mainstream media, such as Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians, hate crimes against Muslims in Europe, and cases of animal abuse. Some of them had also organized protests together against the Israeli bombardments of Gaza. The day after the Copenhagen attacks, the moderators contacted each other via Facebook messenger to discuss whether they should do something. Although they were highly critical of the continuous pressure on Muslims to distance themselves from terrorism, they wanted to express their solidarity with Norwegian Jews (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017; Morad Jarodi, interviewed on 5 June 2017; Ali Chishti and Zeeshan Abdullah, interviewed on 2 March 2018). Hajrah Arshad still remembers the horror and anger that she and the other moderators felt after the attacks. They did not know any Jews themselves, but with the violence coming geographically closer and closer to Oslo, they sensed how threatened the small Jewish community must feel at that time. Additionally, they were worried about how the attacks would reflect on Muslims and Islam: "We also felt deeply hurt. Just the idea that our religion was put in such a bad light!" (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017).

Spontaneously, the idea came up to form a human ring around the Oslo synagogue. In the middle of the night between Sunday the 15th and Monday the 16th of February, Hajrah Arshad created a Facebook event page titled 'Ring of Peace', with the following text:

> Islam means to protect our brothers and sisters, no matter what religion they belong to. Islam means to rise above the hatred, and never sink to the same level as the haters. Islam means to defend each other. As Muslims, we want to show that we strongly condemn all forms of anti-

> semitism, and that we are here to support Jewish people. Therefore, we will create a human circle around the synagogue on Saturday 21 February.[8]

The next day, hundreds of people had already signed up for the event, and Arshad received the first phone calls from journalists who wanted to make news reports about the initiative. She remembers that she was totally surprised about how well the event caught on (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017).

Only then the group began to think about the practical aspects of their initiative, such as contacting the synagogue and applying for a permit from the Oslo police. Fortunately, the Mosaic Faith Community responded positively and proposed to perform the *Havdalah* ceremony in the open air, so that everyone could join the closing of the Sabbath. On Wednesday, three of the young Muslim initiators had a preparatory meeting in the synagogue with representatives of the Jewish community and the Oslo police. Their initial plan to make a full circle around the synagogue turned out to be impossible, as the synagogue is not a stand-alone building. Instead, they planned to let a small group of Muslims make a semicircle in front of the synagogue, while all other participants could stand in a larger semicircle on the street and observe the ceremony from a short distance (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017; Morad Jarodi, interviewed on 5 June 2017; Ali Chishti and Zeeshan Abdullah, interviewed on 2 March 2018).

Meanwhile, the growing number of Facebook sign-ups and the extensive media coverage fueled each other. News reports appeared in Norwegian media outlets such as *TV2*, *Aftenposten*, and *Vårt land*, but the upcoming event also caught attention from foreign news channels such as *Al Jazeera*, the *Jerusalem Post*, the *Washington Post*, *Fox News*, *BBC* and *CNN*. Within a few days, the number of Facebook sign-ups rose to over two thousand. To bring as many people together as possible, and to prevent debates about the Israel-Palestine conflict from overshadowing the event, the organizers tried to sideline these debates as much as possible. They announced that all possible references to Israel or Palestine (whether in the form of protest banners, clothing, or otherwise) would be banned during the event. In interviews, the organizers made it clear that they were highly critical of the Israeli state policy towards Palestinians, and that they were aware of the fact that many DMT members openly

8 The event page is no longer available. The text has been retrieved from various news reports (*Framtida*, 20 February 2015; *NA24*, 21 February 2015; *ABC Nyheter*, 21 February 2015).

supported the Israeli government. However, they considered this irrelevant. The 'Ring of Peace' was not about Israel, they said, but about supporting Jews as a minority group in Norway (*Framtida*, 20 February 2015; *Aftenposten*, 20 February 2015; *TV2*, 21 February 2015).

7 Between Fear and Hope

Ultimately, more than 1300 people participated despite the winter cold. The event was live broadcasted by different news channels across the world. People of different origins and religious affiliations stood shoulder to shoulder. Everyone in the tightly packed crowd gazed at the synagogue, listening to the *Havdalah* song sung by members of the congregation and the speeches given by representatives of DMT and the organizers. It was dark outside, but strong lights were aimed at the small platform near the synagogue entrance. Arshad addressed her speech to the Jewish community. She spoke about the importance of standing up for each other, while she also criticized the continuous pressure on Muslims in wider society to denounce violent crimes committed by others:

> It is unfair to be held accountable for everything that other Muslims do. We are not here to say sorry for what happened in Copenhagen, but to show that we stand with you. (…) We feel the same fear as you do, and we will take the blows together with you. (…) Together, as a nation, we shall break the prejudices we have against each other (TV2, 21 February 2015).

Ali Chishti addressed the antisemitic statements he had made during a panel debate in March 2009, and that had given him a highly controversial reputation in Norwegian society (cf. *Aftenposten*, 23 March 2009; *Aftenposten*, 4 April 2009). In his speech, he contrasted the ideas he had back then with his current views:

> Five years ago, I stood in front of a large audience at the House of Literature in Oslo, and gave a speech titled 'Why I feel hatred against Jews'. It was a long and angry tirade full of conspiracy theories and pure antisemitism. Today, five years later, I am standing here, and I want to protect my Jewish fellow citizens, with my words, with my presence, and most of all with my Islamic beliefs. In the course of these five years, I have read and reflected a lot about Islam, history, and politics. The world is not black and white.

He then explained that Islam promotes peaceful interfaith coexistence, and that Jews and Muslims have been living peacefully together for many centuries.

The speech that seemed to move people the most, and that became frequently cited in Norwegian media, was that of Rabbi Michael Melchior. He spoke about his meeting with Dan Uzan's father in Copenhagen, who had said to him:

> Tell those young Muslims in Oslo that they have given me hope. They have given me a reason to continue to live. Perhaps my son's death had a meaning after all. Perhaps it will be a source of life in the future.

Upon hearing this, many participants got tears in their eyes. Some of them cried out loud. Rabbi Melchior then said to the organizers: "By making a circle, you have broken another circle. By making a circle of friendship, love and solidarity, you have broken a circle of fear, hatred, mistrust and murder". Finally, he discussed how religious language is abused by violent extremists. He then shouted "Allahu Akbar" as loud as he could, and said:

> God is great! Our common God is everywhere in the world, but most of all God is where rings are formed and bridges are built between people. That's where God wants to be. That's where the future of humanity is secured.

While his words echoed through the street, the crowd burst into applause (*TV2*, 21 February 2015).

In his closing speech, Ervin Kohn said:

> Your presence here today is a strong signal to our community that we are not alone. (...) The fear is there. (...) It is not easy to work against this fear on our own. To work against this fear together with others is much easier. We are grateful to be with so many of you today. (...) It is unique that Muslims stand up against antisemitism this way, and it fills us with hope. Honor is due to the entire Norwegian society for the fact that this is possible. Namely, that young people have taken this grass roots initiative on their own. We can again say 'look to Norway' after what has happened here tonight.[9]

9 The phrase "look to Norway" refers to the Norwegian response to the 22/7 July attacks by Breivik in 2011, and especially to the slogan "more openness, more democracy, more diversity", which received much praise internationally.

FIGURE 9.2 The Ring of Peace around the Oslo synagogue
PHOTO: FREDRIK VARFJELL, AFP/GETTY IMAGES, WITH PERMISSION

8 The Public Reception of the Event

The responses to the Ring of Peace were overwhelmingly positive. Already before the event took place, the initiative was warmly welcomed on social media by people across the world, especially by Jews (Vårt Land, 19 February 2015). Zeeshan Abdullah and Ali Chishti remember meeting an elderly Jewish woman outside the synagogue during the preparation week, who was moved to tears when she discovered that the two were among the organizers of the upcoming event (Ali Chishti and Zeeshan Abdullah, interviewed on 2 March 2018). The organizers also received many enthusiastic responses from Norwegian Muslims in their own social environment and on social media, both before and after the event. Arshad remembers many Muslims expressing their relief that "finally some people were speaking on behalf of them" (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017).

During the days after the event, news reports, opinion pieces and full-length interviews with the organizers appeared in Norwegian and international media, often illustrated with photos of the event featuring young, hijab-wearing women standing hand in hand in front of a white building with a Hebrew text above the front door. All reports shared the same celebratory tone, emphasizing how the event had managed to "bring people together", "break

prejudices" and "strengthen social cohesion" (cf. *Klassekampen*, 23 February 2015; *Vårt Land*, 23 February 2015). Later that year, the organizers of the Ring of Peace received the *Fritt Ord* Honorary Award, an annual prize to encourage freedom of speech (NRK, 17 April 2015). The then US Secretary of State John Kerry praised the Ring of Peace, saying "this is the kind of solidarity that inspires the world" (TV2, 15 May 2015).

Not everyone was equally enthusiastic about the event. Arshad received hateful messages and death threats from *Profetens Ummah*: a small, but infamous group of Norwegian Muslims who openly supported ISIS, and said that Arshad "would do anything for a shoulder pat from the infidels" (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017). The Norwegian Muslim convert Trond Ali Linstad remarked in an interview that Muslims had "made a mistake" by "expressing support for a Zionist organization such as DMT" (VG, 23 February 2015). At the same time, far-right activists and opinion makers tried to present the organizers as crypto-extremists. Max Hermansen, leader of the newly established anti-Islam movement Pegida Norway, referred to the Ring of Peace as "trickery" and a "solid dose of *taqiya* (dissimulation)" (*NA24*, 22 February 2015). The aforementioned Hege Storhaug speculated that there were very few Muslims among the participants and contrasted this with the "large crowds" of Muslims protesting the anti-Islam movie *Innocence of Muslims* in 2012. Furthermore, she commented that the organizers only wanted to "whitewash Islam instead of rising up against those who legitimize violence" (*HRS*, 22 February 2015). Elsewhere (van Es 2021), I argue that the very fact that the Ring of Peace triggered such negative responses from different parties reveals the political impact of the event.

Overall, the Ring of Peace gained an iconic status in Norwegian society as a strong example of Muslim-Jewish solidarity. Ervin Kohn has warm memories of the event, and he observes that many Norwegian Jews look back positively at the Ring of Peace (Ervin Kohn, interviewed on 20 December 2021). This is confirmed by Claudia Lenz and Vibeke Moe (2020) in their study of Jewish-Muslim relations. They discovered that several years after the Ring of Peace, many Norwegian Jews and Muslims still remembered the event and had positive associations with it.

9 The Ring of Peace as a Ritual Performance

Whereas the *Havdalah* ceremony is a well-known religious ritual, the Ring of Peace can be analyzed as a meta-ritual in which an ideal of interfaith solidarity and peaceful coexistence is being enacted and embodied. In her work

on interreligious public events, the sociologist Mar Griera (2019) observes the recent emergence of rituals where believers belonging to different faith traditions come together for worship, celebration, or commemoration in response to specific events, such as a terrorist attack. Since the 1990s, and especially after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, these interreligious rituals have gained popularity across the world as vehicles for 'interfaith harmony' in increasingly pluralized societies. According to Griera, such rituals momentarily turn imaginations of peaceful coexistence into reality, and emphasize the capacity of religious groups to be peacebuilders and peacekeepers. As such, they can be seen as "dramatizations" or "public choreographies" of a counternarrative against public perceptions of religious diversity as a threat to social cohesion, and, more specifically, of Islam as a security threat. Put differently, these interreligious rituals serve to "enact togetherness" and to "create public representations of a plural 'we'" (Griera 2019, 43).

Similarly, the Ring of Peace can be seen as a ritual that allowed participants to momentarily turn their imaginations of 'the new Norway' – and also of a more global interfaith coexistence – into an embodied reality, and it allowed Muslims to emphasize their capacity to make a positive contribution to Norwegian society. In fact, the Ring of Peace went a step further than a performance of mere peaceful coexistence. As an enactment of interfaith solidarity, Muslim and other participants expressed their willingness to protect Jews even if this meant putting themselves as risk. The big question, however, is *how* exactly the Ring of Peace worked to enact an imagination of peaceful coexistence and interfaith solidarity?

Answering this question will also help to understand why this particular event received such a warm welcome in Norwegian society and even in international news media. It seems that part of the answer lies in the fact that the Ring of Peace was not organized at the initiative of the authorities or established organizations, as is usually the case with public interreligious rituals (Griera 2019), but by a group of 'ordinary' young Muslim citizens. This element was explicitly mentioned by Ervin Kohn in his speech, and it was also emphasized in several Norwegian news reports (cf. *Framtida*, 20 February 2015; *Dagbladet*, 21 February 2015; *VG*, 21 February 2015). It also seems that the Ring of Peace filled an emotional need that was felt by many different people across the world at that time. As Morad Jarodi says: "The situation was so dark that as soon as there was a glimpse of light, everyone jumped on it" (Morad Jarodi, interviewed on 5 June 2017). However, this does not offer a full explanation.

10 Materiality, Sensory Experiences, and Affects

To answer the questions raised above, I combine Birgit Meyer's work on religious mediation (2008, 2009, 2016, 2020) with Sara Ahmed's work on affective economies (2004). Building on Émile Durkheim (1912), Meyer raises the question of how sensory experiences induced by collective rituals can invoke feelings of awe and create a sense of togetherness among people. She introduces the term "sensational form" (2008) to analyze how particular configurations of buildings, objects, spaces, sounds, images, light and darkness, flavors, odors, clothes, and/or corporeal practices of touching and being touched, appeal to – and tune – the senses and create a "wow effect" (2016).[10] These shared, embodied experiences produce what Durkheim (1912) calls "collective effervescence": a "feeling of being brought out of oneself into something larger and more powerful" (Collins 2011, 2). Hence, Meyer (2008, 2009) points to the important role of sensational forms in making "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) such as the Catholic Church, the Islamic *ummah* or the nation tangible outside the realm of the mind. It is important to note that these imagined communities are not merely represented or enacted through these collective rituals, but also remade. Meyer proposes the term "aesthetic formation" to create a more dynamic understanding of how communities are made (Meyer 2009).[11]

Analyzing the Ring of Peace as a sensational form makes it possible to see how different material aspects together invoked feelings of awe: the large crowd of people looking at the nearly hundred-year-old synagogue with its turret, its glass-stained windows and the Hebrew text above the front door; the human (semi)circle in front of the synagogue, with female participants being clearly recognizable as Muslims because of their headscarves; the visible presence of Norwegian and foreign journalists; the narrow street that compelled participants of different national origins and religious affiliations to stand at a close distance from each other and form a tightly packed crowd; the contrast between the darkness outside and the lights aimed at the synagogue; the contrast between the ice-cold weather and the warmth coming from other human bodies; the soft voices of members of the Jewish community singing the *Havdalah* song; and the strong and determined voice of Rabbi Melchior shouting "Allahu Akbar", with the sound of his voice echoing off the high

10 The word "sensational" here refers to the senses as well as to the breathtaking effect that is being produced.

11 The value of the "sensational form" and the "aesthetic formation" as analytical tools go far beyond the study of collective rituals, as showcased on the research website www.religiousmatters.nl.

walls of the surrounding buildings. Together, they allowed particular imaginations of 'peaceful interfaith coexistence' and of 'the new Norway' to become materialized in the here and now. Besides, some of these aspects made the event highly photogenic, which seems to have contributed to the high media exposure. News photos circulated widely of women with headscarves holding hands in front of the synagogue, with its Hebrew letters visible in the background. This helped the Ring of Peace to make an impact even on people who were not physically present.

However, in my view, it is important to note that events such as the Ring of Peace are never only about those who are there (or even those who follow the event with positive interest through mass media), but also about those who are *not* there. Ahmed's work on affective economies (2004) helps to understand how affects work to produce a 'new Norwegian we' in relation to outsiders who threaten this 'we'. Like Meyer, Ahmed goes beyond the domains of imagination, rhetoric, and ideology, and stresses the importance of strong emotions in the making and remaking of communities. Ahmed raises the question of how emotions such as hate and fear align some subjects with other subjects against a common object. Instead of assuming that affects simply emerge within an individual, she argues that affects circulate among people, and also between people, texts, and objects. Affects *do* something: they align individuals with communities, and create the very outline of a common threat. Fear and hate create the very effect of 'that which I am not'. In her analysis of public responses to the 9/11 attacks in the US, Ahmed writes: "Fear does not involve the defense of borders that already exist. Fear makes those borders by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can stand apart" (2004, 127–128). She then argues that this circulation of fear and hate constitutes a community of "ordinary" people that is under threat from an imagined "other".

Such a circulation of affects can also be observed in relation to the Ring of Peace. Hajrah Arshad, Rabbi Melchior and Ervin Kohn referred to fear in their speeches, and Melchior directly contrasted fear, hate, and mistrust with friendship, love and solidarity. Both Arshad and Kohn explicitly referred to the Norwegian nation. The establishing of a community of 'ordinary' Norwegians through this circulation of affects can perhaps best be observed in the words of Zeeshan Abdullah. When asked for his motivations, he remembers:

> There was so much hatred in the air. We thought that a symbolic ring would pinch a hole in that bubble. During the last years, two opposite poles have been feeding each other: the extremists, on both sides [jihadists and right-wing extremists]. And then you have the large majority of ordinary people – whether they be Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or atheist – and they are negatively affected by this. (…) We wanted to take

> the power of definition away from these extremists and give it to the masses, to the common people in the streets. It is actually up to us to define what Islam is. It is up to the ordinary Jews to define Judaism, and it is up to the ordinary Christians to define what Christianity is about. (Zeeshan Abdullah, interviewed together with Ali Chishti on 2 March 2018)

Here, 'ordinary' Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists are aligned together against not one, but two 'others': jihadists and right-wing extremists. It is the shared fear of, and the perceived hate from these two 'others' that produce an imagined community of 'ordinary' Norwegians, and that contribute to the circulation of positive affects among them. This is enhanced by the impossibility to pin these two 'others' down to specific individuals or groups: the fear of terrorism is a fear of future terrorists who are still unknown (Ahmed 2004).

11 Muslims and Jews as 'Ordinary' Norwegians

The aligning of Muslims and Jews together with (post-)Christians as 'ordinary' Norwegians, however, is a precarious endeavor. Muslims, Jews, and Christians are not equally positioned in Norwegian society, and interreligious events are not level playing fields (Liebmann 2018). The Ring of Peace took place in a context where Muslims (and also Jews) experience that their belonging in Norway is continually questioned. It is also a context where Muslims are much more strongly associated with terrorism than other Norwegians, and where Muslims are more easily seen as terrorists than as peace activists. The Ring of Peace could make a big impact precisely *because* it was counter-intuitive. This is why the organizers made sure to position only Muslims in the first semicircle around the synagogue, why news photographers zoomed in on women with headscarves, and why some critical commentators scrutinized the relative number of Muslim participants in the event.

Here, we can see an interesting paradox. On the one hand, Muslims have to invoke their Muslim identity and visibly mark their difference in order to be recognized as Muslims, and to enable a performance of peaceful interfaith coexistence. On the other hand, this emphasis on their 'Muslim-ness' makes it all the more difficult for them to be perceived as 'ordinary' Norwegians. Moreover, while the event challenged stereotypical perceptions of Muslims as antisemitic and aggressive, and of Muslim-Jewish relations as always loaded with conflict, it also highlighted the violence that the organizers and participants reacted against.

This precarious status as 'ordinary' Norwegians also applies to Jews, albeit in a different way. In their study of Jewish-Muslim relations in Norway, Lenz and Moe (2020) recount:

> In the first group of Jewish interviewees (J1), ambivalence was related to how the event necessarily pointed out the minority identity of the Jewish participants. One of the interviewees said her goal was that a Jewish identity would be seen as something ordinary, 'like hair color or a hobby'. In contrast to that desired normality, the Ring of Peace had underlined that the minority was 'different, small, protected and special'. (Lenz and Moe 2020, 312)

It is noteworthy that while Muslims and Jews were almost compelled to participate *as* Muslims and Jews in the event, members of the dominant majority could participate as unmarked individuals instead of as Christians or atheists.

It is not surprising, then, that the Ring of Peace was not free of 'backstage' frictions and frustrations. In private conversations with the organizers, some Muslims explained that they did not want to participate in the event. They did not disagree with its message of solidarity towards Jews, but they were fed up with having to defend themselves, and they wanted to avoid making any sort of statement that could be interpreted as "Muslims saying sorry for terrorism" (Morad Jarodi, interviewed on 5 June 2017). Frustrations can also be found among some of the organizers. Although Hajrah Arshad is generally very positive about the Ring of Peace and the impact it made. She regrets that she did not lash out more strongly against anti-Muslim racism:

> Whether you wear a kippa or a headscarf, it is the same sh*t. (…) I wished I had used this platform more to show how difficult it is for Muslim youth in contemporary society. Regardless of how 'liberal' or 'moderate' you are, you are being judged no matter what you do! (Hajrah Arshad, interviewed on 12 February 2017)

This points to an important limitation of interreligious events. Whereas the Ring of Peace can be seen as a powerful critique of jihadists and right-wing extremists alike, the overall focus on 'togetherness' leaves little room to criticize mainstream society or the political midfield.[12]

12 Similar observations have been made by other scholars regarding efforts for peaceful interfaith coexistence in Norway (Liebmann 2018) and Kenya (Meinema 2021), for example.

Nevertheless, the Ring of Peace managed to disrupt a problematic pattern in contemporary discussions about Jews and Muslims. Lenz and Moe (2020) point out that public discourses about Muslims as the 'new antisemites', as well as competing discourses about Muslims as the 'new Jews', can contribute to a competition of victimhood between Jews and Muslims, and to a public "prioritization between the two minorities when it comes to measures fighting prejudice and discrimination" (2020, 298–299). The Ring of Peace built on neither of these two discourses. Instead, it emerged from a perception of similarities between the contemporary experiences of Jews and Muslims. In expressing their compassion, the organizers opened a door to mutual solidarity in a shared struggle against stigmatization, hatred and exclusion. Moreover, during the last few years, Ervin Kohn has witnessed young Jews and Muslims taking more and more interfaith initiatives together. In his view, the Ring of Peace has paved the way for these initiatives (Ervin Kohn, interviewed on 20 December 2021).

12 Conclusion

Focusing on materiality proves to be a beneficial approach to the study of peace and conflict, and more specifically the study of interreligious events that are organized in response to violence. In this chapter, I have explored the relationship between materiality, sensorial experiences, and affects in such public performances of peaceful togetherness. I argue that this relationship can best be understood by combining Birgit Meyer's concept of the "sensational form" (2008, 2009, 2016, 2020) with Sara Ahmed's notion of "affective economies" (2004). Each in their own way, Meyer and Ahmed go beyond the domains of imagination, rhetoric, and ideology in their analyses of how communities are continually made and remade, stressing the importance of strong emotions as well as particular configurations of material elements (including our own human bodies). Meyer explains how the different material aspects of a collective ritual induce sensory experiences that result in feelings of awe. This "wow effect" allows particular imaginations of a community to become materialized in the here and now. Ahmed's work reminds us that this happens in relation to outsiders who are not part of the ritual. Ahmed explains how the circulation of affects such as hate, fear, and love produces a community of 'ordinary' people that is under threat from one or more 'others'. Combining these analytical frameworks creates a fruitful ground to analyze how communities are made and remade in relation to violent conflicts, and how unequal power relationships between people of different origins and beliefs are challenged as well as reproduced through efforts for peaceful interfaith coexistence.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article was supported by the H2020 Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions (Grant Number 703071), and an NWO Spinoza Prize awarded to Professor Birgit Meyer at Utrecht University. The author wishes to thank the editors of this edited volume for the collaboration, which has been a great pleasure. She also wants to express her gratitude to Birgit Meyer and the Religious Matters research team at Utrecht University, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. Special thanks go to the interview respondents, without whom this research would not have been possible.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. "Affective Economies". *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–139.

Alghasi, Sharam. 2011. "Norges Nye 'Vi': Den Iranske Diasporaen og den Norske Utenrikspolitiske Dynamikken" [trans.: Norway's New 'We': The Iranian Diaspora and Norwegian Foreign Policy Dynamics]. *Internasjonal Politikk* 69 (4): 645–676.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso Books.

Bangstad, Sindre. 2014. *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. London: Zed Books.

Bangstad, Sindre, and Olav Elgvin. 2016. "Norway." In *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* 7, edited by Oliver Scharbrodt, 436–449. Leiden: Brill.

Bangstad, Sindre, and Frode Helland. 2019. "The Rhetoric of Islamophobia: An Analysis of the Means of Persuasion in Hege Storhaug's Writings on Islam and Muslims." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, published online on 17 April 2019.

Bergmann, Werner. 2020. "How Do Jews and Muslims in Norway Perceive Each Other?" In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice: Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Norway*, edited by Christhard Hoffmann and Vibeke Moe, 211–253. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Brochmann, Grete, and Knut Kjeldstadli. 2014. *Innvandringen til Norge 900–2010*. [Immigration to Norway 900–2010]. Oslo: Pax.

Collins, Randall. 2011. "The Micro-Sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual." Association of Religion Data Archives. Available online at: http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/collins.pdf. Accessed: 2-10-2020.

Døving, Cora Alexa. 2016. "Jews in the News: Representations of Judaism and the Jewish Minority in the Norwegian Contemporary Press." *Journal of Media and Religion* 15 (1): 1–14.

Døving, Cora Alexa. 2020. "A Growing Consensus?" In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice*, 76–107.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, and Hans Erik Næss. 2011. *Kulturell Kompleksitet i det Nye Norge* [Cultural Complexity in the New Norway]. Oslo: Unipub.

Griera, Mar. 2019. "Interreligious Events in the Public Space: Performing Togetherness in Times of Religious Pluralism." In *Interreligious Relations an the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality*, edited by Marianne Moyaert, 35–55. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hellevik, Ottar. 2020. "Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Norway." In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice*, 108–154.

Hoffmann, Christhard, and Vibeke Moe. 2020. "Introduction." In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice*, 7–25.

Leirvik, Oddbjørn. 2015. "Policy toward Religion, State Support, and Interreligious Dialogue: The Case of Norway." *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 25 (1): 92–108.

Lenz, Claudia, and Vibeke Moe. 2020. "Negotiations of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Group Conversations among Jews and Muslims." In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice*, 297–323.

Liebmann, Louise Lund. 2018. "Media, Muslims and Minority Tactics: Compelling Dialogues in Norway." In *Contesting Religion: The Media Dynamic of Cultural Conflicts in Scandinavia*, edited by Knut Lundby, Chapter 11. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Lödén, Hans. 2014. "Peace, Love, Depoliticisation and the Domestic Alien: National Identity in the Memorial Messages Collected after the Terrorist Attacks in Norway 22 July 2011." *National Identities* 16 (2): 157–176.

Meinema, Erik. 2021. *Regulating Religious Coexistence: The Intricacies of 'Interfaith' Cooperation in Coastal Kenya*. PhD Thesis. Utrecht: Utrecht University.

Meyer, Birgit. 2008. "Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience: An Introduction." *Material Religion* 4 (2): 124–134.

Meyer, Birgit. 2009. "Introduction – From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding." In *Aesthetic formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, edited by Birgit Meyer, 1–28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Meyer, Birgit. 2016. "How to Capture the 'Wow': R.R. Marett's Notion of Awe and the Study of Religion." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (1): 7–26.

Meyer, Birgit. 2020. "Religion as Mediation." *Entangled Religions* 11 (3) 1–21.

Østby, Lars, and Anne Berit Dalgard. 2017. "4 Prosent Muslimer i Norge?" [trans.: 4 Percent Muslims in Norway?]. https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/4-prosent-muslimer-i-norge–351303. Accessed: 18-07-2019.

Özyürek, Esra. 2016. "Export-Import Theory and the Racialization of Anti-Semitism: Turkish- and Arab-Only Prevention Programs." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58 (1): 40–65.

Romeyn, Esther. 2020. "(Anti) 'New Antisemitism' as a Transnational Field of Governance." *Patterns of Prejudice* 54 (1–2): 199–214.

Silverstein, Paul. 2007. "Comment on Bunzl." In *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe*, edited by Matti Bunzl, 61–68. Chicago: Prickley Paradigm Press.

Stordalen, Terje. 2015. "The Trail of Roses: Time, Media and Space in Memory Practices in Oslo after 22 July 2011." In *The Formative Past and the Formation of the Future: Collective Remembering and Identity Formation*, edited by Saphinaz Amal-Naguib and Terje Stordalen, 315–344. Oslo: Novus Press.

Titley, Gavan. 2017. "Introduction. Becoming Symbolic: From Charlie Hebdo to 'Charlie Hebdo'." In *After Charlie Hebdo: Terror, Racism and Free Speech*, edited by Gavan Titley et al., 1–27. London: Zed Books.

Topolski, Anya. 2020. "Rejecting Judeo-Christian Privilege: The First Step Towards Semitic Solidarity." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27 (3): 298–318.

Ulvund, Frode. 2021. *Religious Otherness and National Identity in Scandinavia, c. 1790–1960: The Construction of Jews, Mormons, and Jesuits as Anti-Citizens and Enemies of Society*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Van Es, Margaretha A. 2021. "Norwegian Muslims Denouncing Terrorism: Beyond 'Moderate' versus 'Radical'"? *Religion* 51 (2): 169–189.

Van Liere, Lucien 2020. "The Image of Violence and the Study of Material Religion: An Introduction." *Religions* 11 (7): 370–388.

Afterword

Things for Thought

Birgit Meyer

This ambitious volume is situated in between the scholarly fields of 'conflict studies' and 'material religion'. Both are quite different kinds of fields, the former characterized by a thematic focus on occurrences of conflict and violence, the latter referring to an approach in the study of religion aimed to redress the longstanding, structural neglect of materiality. The volume arises from a discontent with how conflict and violence are conceptualized and approached in relation to religion. As the editors point out in their thoughtful introduction, conflict studies tend to purport a mentalistic approach that privileges (religious) concepts, ideologies and worldviews as the prime factors that fuel conflict and violence, while materiality is neglected empirically, and above all, conceptually. This critique matches the critique launched by scholars with regard to the conventional study of religion who champion a material approach to religion (e.g. Morgan 2021). Doing so does not imply a simple switch from a mentalistic to a materialistic take on religion. The point is to develop an approach that develops a synthesis of the mental and the material, thereby leaving behind the straitjacket of the facile dualism of mind versus matter in which the study of religion has been trapped for a long time. As a scholar who has been active in fleshing out a material approach to religion, I think that it is necessary to foreground materiality by way of critique, with the aim to ultimately fold it back into the study of religion.

Current work in the field of material religion pays much attention to the importance of material and corporeal forms in religious practice. In my own work, cited by the editors, I have called attention to the materiality of mediations between humans and the professed unseen – the divine, the realm of spirits – and tried to develop a deeper understanding of how the unseen is imagined and imaged, rendered present through images and artefacts that may be taken to operate as some kind of access points for the unseen by believers. On my part, this implied a keen interest in struggles around the use of images and objects in and within various religious traditions. The editors of this volume acknowledge the importance of this work but wish to expand our scholarly attention beyond iconoclasm and offensive images. I find their call to apply the material approach to religion to the field of conflict studies very important; it makes me realize my own shortcomings in paying attention to

the multiple ways in which religion is implied in conflicts and violence. Just as materiality has been pushed to the centre of the study of religion in the wake of the material turn, Lucien van Liere and Erik Meinema make a case for taking conflict and violence as being at the core of research on religion.

They do so by launching the notion of thing of conflict, for which they offer a non-substantive definition: "A thing of conflict can be anything that is part of the religious infrastructure and contributes to understandings of social networks" (p. 24). This statement comprises the gist of their project. Situating things of conflict in grounded religious infrastructures, they propose that a focus on such things offers a pathway to a better understanding of the social networks that comprise not only different kinds of people, but also other actors, including things. The non-substantive definition of things of conflict resonates with Émile Durkheim's open definition of the sacred. But while his idea of the sacred – which can also be anything – focuses on the cohesive effects of the shared worship directed towards a 'totem', which we might call a thing of cohesion, Meinema and van Liere make another move. They, firstly, broaden our take on how and what things matter in a religious setting from a focus on collective worship to all sorts of other collective acts, and secondly, call attention to tensions and conflicts, which are at the flipside of cohesion.

In my view, this important move is of great help for our attempts to study conflicts within and about religion/s in contemporary plural societies, in which people with different ethnic and religious affiliations coexist with each other. It cannot be stressed enough that this plurality is to be taken as the default in our research, rather than as an exception that digresses from an assumed homogenous group that worships itself and maintains its boundaries and identities. Even with regard to Europe with its long history of nation-building, such an idea of a bounded national community with its own space and temporality, as highlighted by Christoph Baumgartner (this volume), is not given. This idea is a product of longstanding processes of synchronisation orchestrated by the nation-state that preserves and protects Christian feast days, while not granting other religious traditions the same rights and even vexing secular citizens with this Christian bias. Attention to things of conflict leads us to the intersections or in-between spaces in which people clash with each other as well as about and with each other's' material forms and raises many questions with regard to the ways in which nominally secular states regulate religious plurality. It is important to realize that potential for conflict, and violence, thrives everywhere, and that states play a lead role not only in appeasing, but also in triggering it. Since conflict is enshrined in any form of living together, as scholars we do well to spot it in its nascent material forms, even before certain full-blown clashes arise that hit the news and form the core business of conflict studies.

1 Things of Conflict from the Angle of Theory

The editors propose "that more emphasis on the materiality of conflict situations, conflict dynamics, and conflict effects, could contribute to a sharper analysis of how, when, and why conflict turns violent" (p. 9). In his programmatic reflexion, Joram Tarusarira endorses this point and extends it to peacebuilding and reconciliation. For all three, materiality is omnipresent and yet often overlooked in scholarly analysis. To redress this shortcoming, they take things as entry points or guides to access broader networks and infrastructures that engender nascent and full-fledged conflicts. In this sense, the focus on things is a methodological move towards a recognition of materiality as an unalienable dimension of everything, religion included, and hence indispensable for a full analysis of conflict situations. In terms of method, as I will point out below, this is a viable, eye-opening pathway.

The question arises where "more emphasis" on materiality will take us in a theoretical and epistemological sense. How will it impinge on the ways in which knowledge about the conflict-religion nexus is produced? The editors clearly invoke materiality to criticize overtly mentalistic or mere discursive approaches, but in their appraisal of things they do not end up as proponents of New Materialism or Object-Oriented Ontologies. They reject the reduction of things to human intentions (reason why they prefer the term thing to object), yet still write about things as charged with meaning and as employed in negotiating social relationships. Things are granted some degree of "agency", but for the editors this is ultimately an effect of human attribution. "Thus, things may be special, but they are not alone" (p. 14), they insist, stressing that things, while made out of matter, are subject to human signification and are situated in socio-historical contexts and networks. Their point is to transcend the tension between the "agency" and the "meaning" of things so as to work towards a synthesis of discursive and material approaches, and thus to acknowledge that words and things are to be taken as entangled. How to conceptualize the relation between both is not only an empirical question. It is also a major conceptual issue of how to synthesize theoretical strands geared to explore the construction of meaning (discourse analysis, hermeneutics, semiotics), on the one hand, and strands such as New Materialism, Actor Network Theory and Speculative Realism that place the material above the discursive, on the other.

While most of the contributors are less outspoken about their theoretical stances towards this thorny question, Younes Saramifar offers an elaborate critique of the reduction of things to mere carriers of "meanings, functions and attributes" (p. 38) in approaches to conflict in anthropology. Advocating Speculative Realism, he is up against "prioritizing human perceptions and

meaning-making systems over everything else" (p. 38) and introduces things, such as weapons, as collaborators with a certain autonomy "that remains independent of human minds and socialities" (p. 42). His position is a welcome provocation to think harder about how words and things, discourse and materiality, intersect. How far to go in our 'emphasis' on materiality? Is there a limit? And how much power and agency to grant to things in general, and to things of conflict in particular?

Personally, I find it difficult to think about matter and things in-themselves. Even in stating that they 'remain independent', it is me who thinks that this is so. The question of how to know matter beyond a human bias is dazzling and huge. My own position (Meyer fc) is that we can only know the material world of which we are part through culturally and socially constituted forms that function as signs. These are themselves material (see also Krech 2021), yet can refer only to particular aspects of the material world. Matter always exists in excess of what humans can apprehend of it. I take the current emphasis on materiality as a reminder of the material dimension of everything and, given that it exists in excess of what we can say about it, also as a reminder of the gap between matter as it is, and our always limited understanding of it. The potential and limits of materiality in the construction of knowledge will certainly occupy us for years to come. For now, like the editors of this volume, I endorse a pragmatic stance that strives for grounded theory, based on fresh empirical research.

2 Things of Conflict from the Angle of Method

The current, long overdue emphasis on things of conflict is an incentive to locate materiality in spheres and situations in which it has conveniently been overlooked. This is the main concern of this volume. Indeed: "How does discursive attention, the arrangement of things at places, and social projection create a 'thing of conflict' out of matter?" (p. 15). Foregrounding the "how"-question, the main merit of the volume is that it offers a method to the study of conflicts related to religion that transcends the reduction of conflicts to religious ideologies and processes in human minds. Opening up to things offers surprising insights and directions for further research. Five issues stand out here.

One, as noted, anything can become a thing of conflict. But this is not all. The call to scrutinize conflict situations from a material angle also shows that things relate to conflicts in multiple ways. Of course, there are things that destroy (weapons, bulldozers) and things targeted for destruction (material

expressions of religious identities), things that represent conflict (war photographs) and things hidden from view (such as certain markers of religious identities under siege), as well as things that irritate (as the imposition of silence on Good Friday) and things for making peace (as the Ring of Peace formed around the Oslo synagogue by Muslims). What is designated as a conflict is made up of many different elements, and what I appreciate about the volume is that it invites us to think about how all the things, through which conflicts become tangible, interrelate.

Second, the rise of things of conflict is tied to the ways in which states govern religious plurality and regulate how, and the extent to which various religious groups can express themselves materially and build material infrastructures. This is the point made by Christoph Baumgartner's analysis of the silent holiday of Good Friday as a thing of conflict in a secular, democratic society as Germany. Things of conflict arise even more markedly in settings in which states assume a stronger grip on the public environment. There is a "real-world material politics at play" (Oostveen, p. 63) that must be grasped before scholars turn to internal religious ideologies and potentials for conflict and violence. A secular state as China that officially recognizes different religious traditions still privileges Buddhism above Islam, enabling Buddhists groups to gain state support in developing their religious infrastructures, whereas Muslims – especially Uyghurs – are systematically hampered in materializing their worship in public space. Similarly, Tammy Wilks places the bulldozing of the Kibera neighbourhood in Nairobi, Kenya, as an instance of state violence, through which the state renders "itself real in society" (p. 73), overruling a living religious infrastructure by constructing a bypass cutting through the area. Things of conflict, these examples show, are to be situated against the backdrop of the material politics of a state and its structural violence.

Third, things of conflict may be systematically avoided so as to eschew suspicions of witchcraft and terrorism, as is the case in Malindi, Kenya, where Giriama traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians coexist in a hierarchized configuration. While state actors profile Christianity as a "civilized religion that is compatible with modern statecraft" (Meinema, p. 130), the other two groups are regarded as potential threats. Meinema's analysis offers a powerful reminder that things of conflict may not be immediately present to the researcher's eye, yet are to be looked for so as to crack the politics of revelation and concealment that underpin political hegemonies and bar certain things of conflict from the public eye.

Fourth, a focus on things of conflict such as Jawad's weapon or Nasad's framed three-quarter portrait employed for his future remembrance as a mar-

tyr alerts us to how people are socialized "*in* violence" (Saramifar, p. 38) and decide to fight, as is the case with the Shia armed combatants in Iraq and Syria. The research done by Saramifar in the heat of actual war zones is incredibly difficult and involves high safety risks for the researcher. While such research is not an option for most anthropologists, its insights are of great importance to understand how conflict and violence are normalized in the many war zones in our contemporary world, alerting us to the shortcomings of scholarly perspectives that tend to regard violence as exceptional. His first-hand analysis contrasts markedly with the ways in which conflict and violence are mediated towards audiences far away from the actual situation. As pointed out by Lucien van Liere, representations of conflict and violence require much more attention to the ways in which war photographs, as iconic actors, rely on basic structures of victimhood and rescue, and trigger sensations by tapping into a longstanding archive of religious images of pain and suffering.

Finally, if things matter in the rise of conflict and violence, they also matter in attempts to achieve peace. As pointed out by Joram Tarusarira, projects aiming at reconciliation tend to be geared to abstract ideas, and thus fail to be grounded in "the materiality of people's lived experiences" (p. 166). For post-conflict healing to occur, this failure must be avoided. Hence his plea to take materiality, which for him also encompasses emotions and affects, much more seriously both in policy and scholarship. Margaretha van Es also focuses on a material performance, the Ring of Peace performed around the Oslo synagogue, intended to "enact an imagination of peaceful coexistence and interfaith solidarity" (p. 202). Her detailed case study shows in an exemplary manner how a focus on the material, corporeal and affective dimensions of this ritual performance spotlights the potential and limitations of interreligious events for the position of the Muslims and Jewish minorities in relation to mainstream society. A thing of peace, such as the Ring performed, may easily be a thing of conflict at the same time.

To conclude, in this afterword I have spelled out the things for thought that I, as a scholar working in the field of material religion, carry away from this stimulating volume. Obviously, scholars from the field of conflict studies would bring to the fore other remarkable aspects. While I am used to study religion from a material angle, the lessons learned for me lie in the realization that things of conflict (and peace) are the basic stuff that shapes how humans live and relate to each other.

References

Krech, Volkhard. 2021. *Die Evolution der Religion: ein soziologischer Grundriss*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. https://www.transcript-verlag.de/media/pdf/65/19/a7/oa9783839457856.pdf. Accessed: 20-10-2021.

Meyer, Birgit. "Religion and Materiality: Food, 'Fetish' and Other Matters". In *Step Back and Look Beyond: Studying Religion After 2020*, edited by Maren Freudenberg & Martin Radermacher, Brill under review.

Morgan, David. 2021. *The Thing about Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religion*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press.

Index