

INTRODUCTION

For many decades, social scientists and other academicians subscribed to an overly-simplistic notion of secularization, a triumphalist narrative in which the influence of religion was gradually disappearing in the face of secular rationality. Though the most facile variants of the secularization thesis had long been abandoned by the end of the twentieth century, the 9/11 attacks provided the final, emphatic rejection of the notion that the influence of religion in the world was fading.

Because the 9/11 incident was engineered and carried out by Muslims, people in Western societies immediately began to ask questions about Islam. This curiosity about all things Islamic was only amplified by the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As a consequence of this new interest, scholarship on Islam exploded and many religious studies departments expanded to include Islamic specialists. In a parallel development, terrorism studies came into its own as a recognized field of study, and new graduate programs in terrorist studies proliferated, particularly within the UK.

Religion and Violence was yet another distinct area of specialization that received new impetus in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but less so than Islamic Studies and Terrorism Studies. In fact, in terms of relevant reference volumes and other forms of academic recognition, religion and violence has only recently emerged into its own. Thus, for example, Jeffrey Ian Ross's *Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present*, the first encyclopedia to focus on this topic, was not published until 2011. Additionally, both Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts's *Princeton Reader in Religion and Violence* and Mark Murphy's *Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* did not appear until 2011.

It should also be noted that it was not until earlier this year that Comparative Approaches to Religion and Violence was recognized as a program unit within the American Academy of Religion. With respect to academic periodicals, there are peace studies journals that have published religion-and-violence articles and terrorism studies journals. There was also a *Journal of Religion and Abuse* that was published for eight years, up until 2008. In light of these developments, it seems natural that a new

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journal exploring the various topics treated under the religion-and-violence rubric should appear. In this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Religion and Violence*, we cast a wide net to bring in a diverse spectrum of articles on different subspecialties within this expanding field of study.

Our lead essay for this first issue is “Speaking of Violence,” by Faisal Devji, who is currently Reader in Modern South Asian History at Oxford University. He is the author of *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (2005), *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (2008) and *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptations of Violence* (2011). “Speaking of Violence” is an extended meditation on the futility of deriving an understanding of violence from historical analyses of war and conflicts that boil down to strictly causal frameworks of explanation. Myth, in fact, provides a more adequate framework for reflecting on conflict than history.

This year’s Boston Marathon attack makes Kjersti Hellesøy’s “Radical Islam as a Weapon of War: The Radicalization of Chechen War Lords During the 1990’s” an exceptionally relevant piece. In her article, Hellesøy examines recent developments in Islam in Chechnya with respect to the growth of Salifism, a form of Islam alien to traditional Chechen culture. She especially focuses on understanding the radicalization of Chechen Islam in terms of the conflicts in the 1990s. In addition to providing an overview of this historical development, she utilizes Monica Duffy Toft’s discussion of the conditions that increase the probability of a civil war becoming a religious war, and of the role religion can play in such conflicts. Though useful for sorting out some of the issues involved, Hellesøy does not utilize all aspects of Toft’s analysis. And in the latter part of the article, Hellesøy argues that Toft’s essentialization of religion and its connection with violence is misconceived.

Maria Leppäkari’s “Apocalyptic Scapegoats” analyzes the impact of endtime representations on representations of an apocalyptic enemy, specifically focusing on Jewish Temple activists, Christian Zionists, and Islam. Though violence is always a theme in endtime representations, it does not necessarily entail physical confrontation. René Girard refers to violence as a two-edged sword, which can be oppressive as well as

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liberating. Leppäkari addresses the role prescribed by Christian Zionists with respect to the Jewish Third Temple activists and vice versa in terms of Girard's theory of the scapegoat as presented in *Violence and the Sacred* and in terms of Leppäkari's previous studies, such as *Apocalyptic Representations of Jerusalem* and *Hungry for Heaven*. Here the double nature of violence accounts for the fact that violence can stain or cleanse, contaminate or purify, drive humans to fury and murder or appease their anger and restore them to life.

In "Christianity and Revolution: Catholicism and Guerrilla Warfare in Argentina's Seventies," Enzo Gustavo Morello examines Catholic participation in the Argentine revolution. Morello builds his discussion around an analysis of the journal *Cristianismo y Revolución* (published in Buenos Aires, 1966-1971). His article focuses on the situation which made cooperation between certain Catholic groups and revolutionary movements possible during the Sixties. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church had begun to examine structural social problems, which was the issue that prompted certain Catholics to move to the political Left. Moral concern with the poor, the success of the Cuban Revolution and the political situation in Argentina and throughout Latin America laid the foundation for revolutionary activity.

In "States of Exception: The Violence of Territoriality, Sacrality, and Religion in China-Tibet Relations," Michael J. Walsh examines the complex relationship between sovereign violence, constitutional language, territorial claims and such human rights as freedom of religion in the interface between China and Tibet. China's constitution claims Tibet and its people as part of its "sacred territory." This sort of claim renders the process of territorialization a form of sacralization, thus mythologizing the People's Republic of China's territorial claims and justifying sovereign violence. This claim is, however, complicated by China's provisions for human rights, especially the claim of freedom of religion in the country's constitution.

The final article, "Sects and Violence: The 'Standard Model' of New Religions Violence" by James R. Lewis, provides an overview of the study of violence and new religious movements (NRMs), which has tended to

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focus on a small set of incidents involving the mass deaths of members of controversial NRMs. Various interpretations of such incidents have been offered – some focusing on the psychological make-up of the leaders; others on the near approach of the new millennium. Scholars of new religions violence eventually settled on what might be called the ‘Standard Model’ of NRM violence, a model that takes into account internal factors, external factors and the dynamic polarization between these two sets of influences.