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The *Journal of Religion and Violence* is pleased to offer three more contributions to the discourse on religion and violence. The first two articles address religious expressions in Kenya, and the third is a theoretical exposé on the use of the term “apocalyptic violence.”

First, in “The Transfiguration of Lukas Pkech: *Dini ya Msambwa* and the ‘Kolloa Affray,’” Zebulon Dingley describes the transformation of a tragic and protracted anti-colonial resistance movement among the Pokot peoples of Hyanza and Rift Valley Provinces in Western Kenya in the 1940s, into a salvific memory wherein the battle’s leader, Lukas Pkech, becomes a Christ-like figure whose death at the hands of British whites marks the transition between a time of suffering and conflict to one of peace and cooperation. Despite the optimistic and forward looking vision of what is now named the *Mafuta Pole* movement, its origins are rooted in a massacre wherein the prophet Arususu—a.k.a Lucas Pkech, a.k.a Son of God—was killed along with eleven others (and sixteen wounded) in what was seen as a British attempt to suppress a revitalization of the Suk religion of long ago. Hundreds of people participated in the march against colonial forces, with a clear anti-white message and atavistic longings. According to historical reports, millenarian and nationalist themes pervaded the movement, or at least white fears of the movement, which was and remains heavily ritualized, color-coded, musical, and infused with biblical symbolism. The ongoing tradition is fascinating today because of the way it has transformed a historical wrong—not just the casualties of people but the seizing of thousands of cattle by the British—into a narrative of hope. For instance, it has diffused the expectation of British reparations by emphasizing the “selfless sacrifice of a prophet whose death made the logics of violence and compensation obsolete.” The pacification of
the *Dini ya Msambwa*'s militarism into the more conciliatory thinking of the *Mafuta Pole* is attributed to a prophecy of Lukas Pkech, who said “[t]he Word will be bitter, but then it will be sweet.”

Next, Robert Blunt ponders western Kenyan nightrunners, who are said “to engage in a variety of ludic behaviors about which Kenyans have an uneasy, but healthy, sense of humor.” Such ludic behaviors include running while naked at all hours of the night with the intent to annoy neighbors, by throwing rocks or sand on top of their houses or just knocking on doors, even with their buttocks, when couples are expected to be in bed. Nightrunning is not just playful, however; it is linked in part with a remedial fertility in that, by preventing other people from having sex, a nightrunner is said to be able to have successful procreative sex with his wife the next day, as if commandeering the reproductive potential of others. Yet nightrunning is more than a response to infertility. There are occult dimensions, at least in Western Kenyan imaginations. Although local languages vary in the degree to which they affiliate nightrunners with witchcraft, the author points out a few shared qualities, as both tend to be secretive, linked with shrouded motives, and to some degree nocturnal, although witches are potentially sinister also at any time of day. The symbolism of nightrunning entails a whole host of associations in a rich Bukusu imaginary, involving darkness, sleep, nakedness, trust (and its lack), the marital home, sacrificial blood, male circumcision, patrilineal rebirth and the restriction on maternal influence, and a nocturnal unsettling of gender binaries. Nor can it be separated entirely from the legacy of the slave trade and the consequent deprivations to family integrity, as discussed by Robert Baum, Rosalind Shaw, Pieter Geschiere, and Adam Ashforth, among others (see sources within). For that reason the author focuses on dark anthropology, as the term was coined by Sherry Ortner, and on the dark side of kinship, as coined by Pieter Geschiere, to describe the destabilization of familial trust that inevitably followed from narratives about selling kin and familial betrayal during the slave trade. Thus, the significance of nightrunning extends far beyond superficial entertainment and failing fertility. Instead it engages a complicated history and profound cultural legacy.

Lastly, Justin Meggitt offers a theoretical exposé on the concept of apocalyptic terrorism. In scholarly reckoning, terrorist studies has undergone a major shift since David C. Rapoport’s seminal essay in 1984,¹ which marked a discursive turn from ethno-nationalist, anti-colonial and political terrorism to religiously inflamed movements with murkier teleologies. Apocalyptic terrorism is part of this new nomenclature. But, despite the contemporary

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¹David C. Rappaport, “Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions.”
popularity of the term, apocalyptic terrorism obscures more than it reveals. The author delineates three common but problematic connotations for the terrorism deemed apocalyptic: apocalyptic is used as a mere synonym for catastrophic; apocalyptic indicates catastrophic plus world ending or existentially threatening; and lastly, it indicates a genealogical and ideational relationship with ancient apocalyptic literature. All of these have been used hyperbolically and imprecisely in scholarly discourse. The first misuse is obvious: apocalyptic is often substituted for “religious” to refer to a destructive event on a grand scale. In this case, the term tends to be used polemically by positivists or by popular authors such as the new atheists, who want to stress the injurious, irrational, and totalizing nature of religion. As for the second misuse, world-ending or existentially threatening apocalypticism rarely refers actually to a broad emptying out of existence on earth, other than for the precise victims who die. In contemporary terrorist incidents, this number is typically under 100, a statistically inconsequential number compared to fatalities from other means outside of war zones. We may assume that few “apocalyptic terrorists” intend the elimination of life on earth, not even IS, whose geographical aspirations are patent. As for the third, while we may recognize what we consider apocalyptic themes in ancient literature such as the book of Revelation, contemporary uses of ancient literature to ground apocalyptic discourses often overlook how heterogeneous are our sources, even the ideas within a single text; instead these uses tend to view apocalyptic literature as a single and simple genre. The author explores the uses and misuses of the term, and in so doing shows how so-called apocalyptic movements have been both creative and destructive and are varied so much as to elude simple categorization. He advocates a number of refinements for the use of “apocalyptic terrorism,” and along the way offers an excellent bibliography of work on the subject.

We hope to continue to bring research such as this to our readers. Updates to the *Journal of Religion and Violence* can be found at https://www.pdcnet.org/jrv/onlinefirst.

**References**


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