

BOOK REVIEWS

The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence. Edited by Andrew Murphy. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 632 pp. Hardback \$223.95, ISBN: 978-1-4051-9131-9. eBook \$179.99.

A notable aspect of *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (hereinafter the *Companion*) is that it is almost decisively “post” both the late René Girard’s sacrifice model and Rodney Stark’s assertion that religiosity mitigates or prevents violence. Political Scientist Andrew Murphy has assembled forty-four scholars whose previously unpublished contributions (with some key works synopsized) represent the study of religion, scriptural studies from distinct traditions, history, media studies, political science, sociology, economics, anthropology, philosophy, peacebuilding, and theology. The secondary literature referenced and the writing vary accordingly. The *Companion*’s contributors and their chosen subjects are globally diverse—East and South Asia, Africa, the U.S., an essay on Brazil, and another on the Pacific Islands. The volume displays varied but sustained focus on distinct aspects of the larger religious traditions. Particular strengths of the book include attention to terms, structural violence, psychological treatments of violence, and history and memory.

The *Companion*’s five sections are: terms and relationships, disciplinary approaches, religious traditions and movements, contemporary and historical case studies, and responses to violence. The first section is devoted to debates over the deployment of religion and violence as terms, better still, in most chapters, the authors have specified how they are defining religion and violence in context and with respect to their specific disciplinary approach or subject. The topics range from the neurological and psychological aspects of violence, interpersonal and structural violence, *coups d’etat*, religious boundary maintenance, colonialism, “clash of civilizations” discourse, and genocide. In the first chapter, John Carlson, citing Bruce Lincoln, Hannah Arendt, William Cavanaugh, and Janet Jakobsen, lays out the conceptual issues of interpreting religion, secularism, power and violence—setting up a flexible connective frame for the chapters that follow. Cavanaugh and Jakobsen ask scholars to look at secular violence as well as religious violence, designating the former as decisively more violent. Their concern as to how a fixation on religious violence obscures other modes of causation is shared by other scholars throughout this volume. Hector Avalos expands on *Fighting Words* to talk about contemporary scholarship with trenchant

critiques of Wilfred Cantwell-Smith and Cavanaugh (who synthesizes his 2007 *The Myth of Religious Violence*) and their definitions of religion.

In the section on disciplinary approaches, Jakobsen, in her chapter on feminism, calls for a focus on overt violence and structural violence against women beyond domestic abuse. She also challenges the utility of a border between violence and social regulation. Helpfully to this end, it happens that structural violence through social regulation is well developed across the *Companion*, especially as it manifests as violence against women through assaults on the agency of women and people of color and through colonialism and its legacy. Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda documents the “Indianization” of British social controls through selective reading and enforcements of *shastras*. Bhattacharya-Panda notes that the property and inheritance rights of Hindu women in Bengal were more advanced than in England. The British used *shastras* to exalt *Sati*; disrupt local customs to disinherit women; and reassign their property to men to better “extract[ing] the maximum amount of land revenues from Bengal for . . . investment in Far Eastern trade and territorial conquest in other parts of India and “to Indianize and express colonial ideologies and paradigms on women.”

Documenting another tactic of colonization, Marion Maddox observes that the Christocentric assessment “they had no religion” was a rationale for mass slaughter, sexual trafficking, and a series of punitive policies aimed at the indigenous of Australia. Further, Maddox captures the convoluted situation of missionaries who in their way defended the indigenous, or saw themselves as their protectors, but were complicit or even active in the seizure of children, the perpetuation of racist thinking and the programs directed toward the exploitation and erasure of the indigenous and their culture. Maddox captures the complexities of colonial dynamics and the issues she identifies are extensible to other situations of Christian colonization of indigenous populations. Yannick Fer’s contribution captures another vital issue for understanding the history of indigenous groups and colonialism. Fer outlines how Christian missionaries and national colonial powers impacted various modes of pre-existing violence among those Pacific Island groups vying for political and religious control. Bhattacharya-Panda’s, Maddox’s, and Fer’s respective chapters signal that more work remains to be done to capture the legacies of religion and violence against indigenous populations and the complexity of religion, social regulation, and violence within these distinct groups globally. While there is a focused and sustained attention to gender and race in the book, there is no specific attention to the intersection of either sexual orientation, or gender identity, and religion and violence.

Of the chapters focused on disciplines, Bettina Schmidt outlines the ethical debates facing ethnographers managing field work where violence is a

pressing issue. Regrettably, Anthony Gill's chapter on economics is confined to Rational Choice Theory, suicide bombings, and spiritual market places. Forced labor as a mode of violence is taken up by Yolanda Pierce's treatment of the religious rationales for American slavery. Similarly, Thia Cooper looks at the structural violence of poverty through Liberation Theology and Brazil's mid-twentieth-century history. Regarding the psychology of religion, Ariel Glucklich provides a lucid introduction, crossing from neuro-psychological to group psychology as factors that may have offered survival advantages in human development. The other chapters on psychology address how reactions to trauma, failure and indications of potential mental illness (e.g. binary thinking) can manifest through religious language and how violence can be rationalized and ritualized as a sacralizing act targeting those within and outside of religious communities. James W. Jones synthesizes portions of *Blood that Cries Out from the Earth* to introduce the set of psychological issues that tend to be observed among religious terrorists. Jones very helpfully points to other authors in the *Companion* who have elaborated points made within his chapter and offers a cogent critique of the rational choice model for violence. Jones specifically criticizes Gill's contribution to the volume to argue that rational choice theory should not be the basis for policy, since agents of government and law enforcement may miss avenues of de-escalation if they are not equipped to engage the cultural and religious language through which perpetrators express motives and rationales. Ian Reader's chapter on *Aum Shirikyô* and failure ponders mental health issues alongside religiously rationalized assaults, murder, and terrorism. The chapters by Glucklich, Jones, Reader, and Carlson could introduce the psychology of religion and violence for undergraduates and ground further readings.

In the section "Traditions and Movements, Concepts and Themes," Kathryn McClymond clarifies how Girard's sacrifice model, fixated on animal bodies and death, is an incomplete accounting of Vedic, Chinese, and Judaic (Girard's model for the scapegoat) sacrifice and oversimplifies sacrificial violence. McClymond also outlines key considerations for future work on the relationship between violence, sacrifice, and social order. Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz looks at the escalating legalized structural violence that culminated in the Holocaust and how Jewish women responded by upholding practices of religious identity and acts of empathy.

Within the same section, the chapters on historical incidents, studies of allegorically derived religious violence, and memory and identity are additional strengths of the book. Ellen Posman's chapter on history, humiliation and subordination, and Jewish and Hindu nationalist identity dynamics bridges with James Jones's and Ian Reader's chapters. So too does Jonathan Ebel's overview of the formative role of violence in various phases of Christian history.

Ebel's account could move undergraduates past simplified narratives of early Christian martyrdom, designations of heresy and religious wars. Elliott Horowitz's focus on Genesis 34 draws attention to historical particularity and discursive shifts. Horowitz demonstrates that a clear pattern of invocations of history and canonical texts compels us to look at how religion is invoked to rationalize acts and sustain campaigns of violence. Matthew McCullough also deploys this replicable technique of tracking religious invocations in his chapter on the Spanish-American War. Robert Weinberg takes up the history of anti-Jewish religious violence and state agency in Imperial Russia and the Russian Civil War; he notes that eruptions of violence across social strata (within Russian Orthodox communities) is a vital context for the social and political instability conducive to pogroms. Bernard Faure's discussion of Buddhism focuses on tangible evidence of violence through Tantric Buddhist iconography, mythologies of triumphs over armies and demons, and accounts of ritualized violence and subjugation; he refuses to entertain the notion that Buddhists who commit violent acts while enforcing religious boundaries are (somehow) not Buddhists. South Asian Studies scholar Yasmin Khan clearly lays out the complexities of political and religious violence across and within Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka, where the range of immediate triggers and structural factors run the gamut from localized memories of prior violent incidents, intra and inter religious group conflicts and state actors. Beyond the Partition and its legacies, Khan notes that some of the most serious violence has been *within* religious groups over issues of identity or deference. She provides a valuable introduction to the debates among political scientists that must be accounted for in scholarship on religion and recurring large-scale violence in South Asia.

Islam is addressed in varying degrees of depth and detail in several chapters. The array of chapters focused on the historical and contemporary complexities of violence in Islamic contexts can be used to chip away at stereotypes. Valentine Moghadam explores how hyper-masculine sensibilities within Islamist discourse in Iran, Afghanistan and Algeria have driven overt violence against women and a fixation on regulating them, but has also sparked a feminist backlash in the Muslim diaspora and the emergence of women Qur'an scholars. Jok Madut Jok's treatments of Southern Sudan and Sudan respectively are commendable for laying out the history of colonialism, the contemporary politics of tensions between Islam and distinct modes of Christianity, and peacebuilding. Jok notes the emergence of Christianity in 540 CE, the subsequent rise of Islam, and the complications that emerged with the restoration of Egyptian rule in the late nineteenth century. In their respective chapters, Jeroen Gunning and Beverly Milton Edwards elaborate the consequences of fixating on religious violence at the expense of noting potential

secular modes of causation, which coincides with Jakobsen and Cavanaugh's critiques. Beverly Milton Edwards takes up problematic representations of Islam that reduce the public understanding of Islam to an alignment with *Al-Qaeda*, point away from scholarly arguments regarding the colonialist and post-colonial roots of our contemporary situation, and allow us to look away from similarly rationalized violence in other religious traditions. Gunning offers an extended critique of Orientalism (in agreement with Edward Said) and secularism as frames for understanding the relationship between religion and violence in the Middle East. Gunning states that these approaches obscure conflict resolution efforts and the role of politics, class, and clan codes crucial to any assessment of causation. David Cook unpacks and contextualizes *Jihad* and martyrdom through history; he specifies the internal conflicts that problematize any simple accounting of these terms. The *Companion's* treatments of suicide, self-killing, or actively allowing oneself to die outside of specific acts of martyrdom, or murder-suicide outside of terrorism are addressed in Christopher Key Chapple's chapter on Jains, McClymond's discussion of self-sacrifice, Reader's exposition of Heaven's Gate, the Order of the Solar Temple and the Peoples Temple, and Ebel's chapter on Christianity.

For those developing syllabi focused on non-violence, Ira Chernus's history of non-violence in the U.S., Christopher Chapple's exposition of *ahimsa* as Jainism's defining practice, and Thia Cooper's discussion of the response of liberation theology to mid-twentieth-century political violence in Brazil present contrasting case studies. Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz's chapter, as an exposition of personal agency in a situation of acute violence and Maria Pilar Aquino's introduction to the secondary literature in peacebuilding studies would complement Chernus, Chapple, and Cooper. Similarly, Chernus's concise intellectual history of Protestant theologies of nonviolence and its development in North America can be joined to Andrew Murphy's chapter on Puritan violence, and Pierce's chapter on slavery to ground a segment on religion and violence in American history. Alternatively, the three chapters could be used at the outset of a chronological general survey course on American religious history. Beyond an introduction to Puritan violence, Murphy's chapter also presents a digested summative integration of the issues raised across the volume that bookends Carlson's chapter at the outset.

The diverse subjects and scales of the case studies in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* are of value to general scholars of religion, human rights, women's studies, law, culture, and violence as well as to analysts of social and political groups, and state or nationalist structures. Social scientists and critical humanities scholars of violence who may or may not have training in the study of religion will find useful concepts, case studies, and delineations of religious language and well-grounded points of departure

for other interdisciplinary work originating in fields outside of their own. Those designing syllabi for introductory courses for most religious traditions, or more focused classes on religion and violence, or violence and social conflict as a part of a methodology and research design course (especially where discourse analysis is a component) would do well to engage the *Companion*.

Ipsita Chatterjea
Vanderbilt University