Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism (Part I)

by Lorne L. Dawson

Abstract

An unusual feature of the social scientific study of religious terrorism is the erasure of religiosity as a significant motivational factor. This article systematically delineates and criticizes the presence of this peculiar interpretive preference, demonstrating that it is methodologically suspect and theoretically and empirically unhelpful. There are two parts to the critique. Part I (this article), discusses three foundational aspects of the argument: (1) it delineates ten conditions of the critique, to avoid predictable misunderstandings; (2) it specifies three methodological reasons for considering the motivational claims of religious terrorists as potentially important and valid data; and (3) it surveys the history of the study of religious terrorism to identify some extra-methodological influences that may have truncated the analysis of the religious motivations for religious terrorism. Part II (the next article), examines three types of arguments commonly used to minimize the role of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism. Identifying the arguments by the primary interpretive errors they rely on, some arguments (1) mistakenly treat the religious background and knowledge of homegrown jihadists as a sound indicator of their religiosity; others (2) inappropriately apply a modern Western normative conception of religion to homegrown jihadists; and some arguments (3) rely on an overly dichotomized conception of the relationship of social processes and ideology in the process of radicalization. The critique ends with consideration of alternative perspectives, offering a more refined conception of the role of ideology, and more specifically religiosity, in the determination of the actions of religious terrorists.

Keywords: Al-Qaeda, extremism, ideology, jihadism, radicalization, religion, terrorism, Islamic State (IS)

Introduction

The title of this article may appear ironic. Yet it alludes to a very real problem.[1] Surely religious terrorism is about religion in some significant way. This is the assumption underlying much public discourse since 9/11. In many social scientific analyses of religious terrorism, however, researchers discount the significance of religion as a motivator for religious terrorism. In most cases, they do not explicitly reject the role of religiosity, though there are some prominent exceptions that more or less do.[2] On the contrary, most researchers partially acknowledge its causal role, yet they persistently minimize its overall significance by categorizing the religious motivational claims made by religious terrorists as nothing more than propaganda. They are little more than rationalizations offered by perpetrators guided by strategic thinking or driven by deeper impulses. Researchers argue, or more often simply assume that these thoughts and impulses are rooted in social, economic, and political grievances, which provide a more plausible explanation for the actions of the "religious terrorists."[3] This interpretive stance renders the authenticity and the explanatory value of the terrorists' own declarations of the key role that religious commitments play in determining their actions epiphenomenal.[4] Yet there are multiple logical and methodological reasons for doubting the validity of this tendency to eschew the evidentiary value of the religious motivational claims made by religious terrorists.

A handful of commentators and researchers have called out this interpretive problem, but their dissent is a minority view in the study of terrorism.[5] The minimization of religious motivations for religious terrorism may constitute a systemic bias in the field of terrorism studies. Its expression, however, is anything but systematic, and this makes mounting a critique challenging. The pervasive and largely implicit presence of the bias also points to the need to engage in a more systematic critical assessment of this issue. The research literature on terrorism is replete with specific statements about the limited or negligible explanatory value of

religious motivational claims. Testing the validity of these assertions, and their premises, requires the kind of close reading of the contexts in which these claims are made that rarely occurs. This study provides a more systematic analysis of the ways in which many researchers discount the religious motivations for religious terrorism, and argues, alternatively, that the religious motivational claims have a constructive role to play, theoretically and empirically, in advancing our grasp of the exact nature of the actions of religious terrorists. This interpretive turn is essential to recognizing both the behavioral and strategic consequences of the religious motivations for these actions, and hence how they also can be countered most effectively.

The following brief examples illustrate the presence, role, and significance of the bias in question. In her summary analysis of the research on "The Root Causes of Terrorism," Darcy Noricks discusses the results of a classified MI5 study of several hundred violent Islamist extremists in the U.K.[6] The findings, as reported in the media, surprised many. The MI5 analysts concluded that "a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalization," and that a "large number" of the extremists studied "were discovered to be little more than religious novices." Moreover, "few of those involved in terrorism were brought up in religious households," and finally that "there were large numbers of converts involved; and even the nonconverts were surprisingly illiterate about Islam." Overall, these findings are thought to buttress the claim that jihadist extremism is not really about religion. As I will argue, there is little warrant, in principle and empirically, for drawing such a conclusion. Such an interpretation is in line, however, with that of other prominent commentators on religious terrorism.

In the *Washington Post*, Jessica Stern, then-lecturer at Harvard Law School and author of *Terror in the Mind of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, discussed "Five Myths about Who becomes a Terrorist."[7] With regard to the third myth, "al-Qaeda is made up of religious zealots," she states:

> To the contrary, rank-and-file terrorists who claim to be motivated by religious ideology often turn out to be ignorant about Islam. The Saudi Interior Ministry has questioned thousands of terrorists in custody about why they turned to violence, and found that the majority did not have much formal religious instruction and had only a limited understanding of Islam. According to Saudi officials, one-quarter of the participants in a rehabilitation program for former jihadis had criminal histories, often for drug-related offenses, whereas only 5 percent had been prayer leaders or had other formal religious roles.

In a recent (Oct. 14, 2019) interview with Lusail TV (Qatar), Ali Soufan, a former FBI Agent, well-known global intelligence and security consultant, and author of several popular books on the war on terrorism, said:

> When I was in the FBI, I worked in counter-terrorism and I spoke with many people. Let me tell you, none of these people joined [extremist] organizations out of belief. They joined them for economic, political, and social considerations and the ideology came later. If a person is a believer and has strong belief to begin with, then nobody can take advantage of this belief and lead him [to terrorism]. So, terrorism has nothing to do with ideology. It has nothing to do with religion or ideas.[8]

The denial of the significance of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism could hardly be more emphatic. In most cases, it is less so, but the result, in terms of exerting a suppressive influence on the analytic sensibilities of researchers and officials, is much the same, even in cases where the evidence is contrary.

Take for example the following passage from Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman's frequently cited report on homegrown terrorists in the U.S. and the U.K.:

> Researchers have provided diametrically opposed views about the role of theology in the radicalization of homegrown Islamic terrorists. Five of the six factors that this study identifies can provide insight into how the individuals in this study understand their faiths (adoption of a legalistic interpretation of Islam, coming to trust only a select and ideologically rigid group of religious authorities, viewing a schism between Islam and Western society, displaying a low

> tolerance for theological deviance, and attempting to impose religious beliefs on others). These
> five factors were found present in the sample frequently enough that it is clearly premature to
> rule out homegrown terrorists' religious understanding as an important factor in radicalization.
> Indeed, while our data cannot be considered conclusive, it seems to us that the individuals'
> theological understanding was a relatively strong factor in their radicalization.[9]

The findings of this study of 117 jihadists demonstrates that most of the common and strong behavioral indicators of radicalization are religious. Yet the authors are only willing to say that the evidence indicates it may be "premature to rule out homegrown terrorists' religious understanding as an important factor in radicalization." The wording, I suggest, points to the hegemonic status of the view that the religiosity of the jihadists does not matter.

Each of these illustrative statements rests on interrelated and similar claims reflective of the discourse, and the underlying logic, I am questioning. Delineating the limitations of other more complex and more subtle arguments, which play down the significance of religious motivations, is more challenging. It is necessary, however, if we wish to elevate the discussion. Overall, we need to remember that the views of these experts constitute a denial of the evidentiary value, if not simply the authenticity, of the countless documents, videos, and testimonials authored by jihadists asserting the opposite. There is no reason we should simply believe what the jihadists assert, but before categorically dismissing their views, and in ways that are incongruent with the treatment of more orthodox expressions of religiosity or political ideology, we need to scrutinize the grounds for this dismissal more exactly.

There are two parts to this study. Part 1 (this article), delineates three initial and important aspects of the argument, systematically addressing foundational concerns rarely broached in discussions of the role of religion in motivating religious terrorism. First, to set the stage as carefully as possible, and avoid predictable misunderstandings and objections, I delineate 10 conditions of the argument. Second, three methodological reasons are provided for conceiving the motivational claims of religious terrorists as potentially important and valid sources of data. Third, I survey the shifting history of the study of religious terrorism to identify some of the extra-methodological influences that may have distorted and truncated the discussion of the role of religious motivations for religious terrorism. In Part 2 (the next article), I first examine three types of arguments commonly used, separately and conjointly, to minimize the role of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism. Then secondly, I discuss some alternative perspectives, ones that refine how we should conceptualize the role of ideology, and more specifically religiosity, in the radicalization of terrorists and their actions. I identify the three arguments used to minimize the role of religiosity in terms of the primary interpretive errors they rely on. Some arguments (1) mistakenly treat the religious background and knowledge of homegrown jihadists as a sound indicator of their religiosity. Other arguments (2) inappropriately apply a modern Western normative conception of religion to homegrown jihadists. Yet other arguments (3) rely on an overly dichotomized conception of the relationship of social processes and ideology in their conceptualization of the process of radicalization.

As should be clear, but I wish to stress, the argument being advanced is not about whether religion in the abstract or Islam specifically is to blame for jihadist terrorism. I am not offering a critique of religion or Islam by associating them with terrorism. The focus is much more specific and methodological. It is about whether a failure to adequately consider the role of religiosity—the degree of someone's commitment to the practice of a religion—is hindering the development of a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the causes of religious terrorism.

The Conditions of the Argument

Many factors are at play in the controversy over the nature of religious terrorism and the process of radicalization more generally. Therefore, it is important to qualify this argument in a number of specific ways, to minimize misunderstandings.

First, the analysis is limited to explanations of the actions of Western homegrown religious terrorists, which in the contemporary context largely means jihadists.[10] Much of the argument has larger implications, but applying it to other contexts involves consideration of significant cultural, historical, and societal differences that exceed what I can address here. Moreover, even in the context of so-called Western societies, there are discernible differences (e.g., between France and the United States) in the backgrounds and motivations of jihadists that should be kept in mind, but cannot be fully addressed in this analysis.

Second, the analysis is restricted to understanding the turn to political violence in terms of the "decisional calculus preceding potential terrorist action," rather than the "individual qualities or broad societal processes" associated with the radicalization of individuals.[11] The discussion reflects an awareness of debates about the broader contextual matters (e.g., the mental health of jihadist terrorists or the role social marginalization in fomenting jihadism), but the focus is more restrictive. My concern is how scholars have conceived the role of religiosity in becoming a potentially violent jihadist. As Horgan and others have stressed, the processes of joining the jihadist movement and deciding to cross the boundary from talk to action—to engage in terrorism, domestically or as a foreign fighter—are distinct.[12] Just because someone has become "involved" in a terrorist group does not mean they will "engage" in acts of violence. Even more specifically, talk, it seems, is a poor indicator of whether someone will engage in violent acts.[13] In arguing, the explanatory value of considering the evidentiary value of claims about religiosity, I am not challenging this differentiation. Overall, it will be important to determine the nature and the significance of the role played by religiosity in joining an extremist movement versus engaging in violence once involved. For the purposes of this initial discussion, however, my focus is more broadly on both the cognitions and behavior associated with becoming a terrorist, and the initial mobilization into extremism, as well as the decision to perpetrate acts of terrorism.[14]

Third, a great many voices have participated in the contemporary debate over the role of religion in religious terrorism, religious apologists, radical atheists, government officials, politicians, and a diverse set of academics from multiple disciplines. This has created a confusing array of arguments and positions. Elsewhere I have sought to clarify the possibilities by framing a descriptive typology of existing approaches,[15] based on two questions that are implicitly structuring the discussion: whether one thinks religion in general is responsible for this kind of terrorism (or not), or just one religion, namely Islam, is especially culpable (or not). Each of the types in the resultant fourfold typology has many further subtypes. Here attention is on the fourth type, "religion is not to blame and neither is Islam," and more specifically the third sub-variant of this type, the social scientific tendency to minimize the role of religion in terrorism. Given the confusion of voices and perspectives participating in the overall debate, though, aspects of the arguments used in the other approaches (e.g., religion is to blame, but not Islam) often find their way into the analyses under discussion, and hence my counterargument as well. The intent, however, is to keep the focus, as closely as possible, on the one type of argument—the social scientific denial of the relevance of religiosity overall.

Fourth, the erasure of religious claims from consideration in explaining religious terrorism is hard to demonstrate empirically. A systematic review of the relevant social scientific literature could be undertaken, but this would involve examining hundreds, if not thousands, of books, articles, book chapters, and reports published since 9/11. Moreover, it is far from clear that such a review would prove convincing to skeptics, since the parameters used to frame the review, and interpret the findings, are unclear at this stage. Lacking clarity in this regard, such a review may seem circular and self-fulfilling in nature. Consequently, this analysis is more preliminary and involves seeking to clarify the points of contention, and the kinds of arguments used to minimize or dismiss the relevance of the claims for the religious motivation for religious terrorism. As such, it is an exercise in consciousness raising about the issue and delineation of the parameters of the debate. This involves bringing a greater measure of analytical order to a confusing situation by delineating some of the thematic ways in which the erasure of religion happens.

Fifth, this analysis hinges on making a distinction between religion and religiosity. My concern is with the motivating role of religiosity in jihadist and, hypothetically, other forms, of religious terrorism, and not religion *per se*. The argument is not about whether religion as a social phenomenon, or any one religion, is a source of terrorism. That is a discussion pertinent to some of the other types of approaches to the issue of religious

terrorism noted above.[16] In making my argument, I refer to how scriptures and other aspects of religious ideology are used to explain and justify the actions of religious terrorists, since this demonstrates the presence of religiosity. It is irrelevant, however, whether the uses made of these religious materials, whether texts, teachings, experiences, myths, or symbols, are legitimate (i.e., meet with the approval of authoritative figures or institutions of the religion in question). My concern is with the saliency, strength, and sincerity of the beliefs motivating the actions of the terrorists. As I argue elsewhere, "[f]aulty theology is not a reliable indicator of degree of religiosity or the primacy of religion in someone's motivations."[17]

Regrettably, this key interpretive distinction is often blurred, or ignored altogether, in many discussions of religious terrorism. In Tom Quiggins' analysis of al-Qaeda's ideology, for example, he examines "eight main themes" in the discourse of jihadists, showing how each is interpreted in nine al-Qaeda books and essays, and contrastingly in more classical, mainstream sources.[18] The doctrines analyzed are *jihad*, *bayat*, *daru Islam*, *unmah*, *takfir*, *shaheed*, *al-wala wal bara*, and *hijrah*.[19] In quick succession, Quiggin considers each concept, repeatedly demonstrating that the jihadist use of these ideas deviates from mainstream views. Based on this analysis, and in the absence of any other data or argumentation, he concludes:

> the basic grievances of al-Qaeda (real and imagined) are political, not religious. The window dressing that is used in the documents is almost always religious, as are the justifications for violence. However, problems raised in the texts are those of classic identity politics: oppression, poverty, and exploitation are common themes.[20]

As even Quiggins' superficial analysis of jihadist ideology demonstrates, however, al-Qaeda consistently seeks to frame its objectives in religious terms, engaging in an ongoing and sweeping reformulation of fundamental doctrines of Islam to explain and justify its actions. Yet this effort in theological innovation is interpreted as evidence that al-Qaeda is not really motivated by religion. The logic of this stance is hard to follow. In the absence of other information, it seems Quiggin (and the reviewers of his article) think that the motivations of the jihadists could not really be religious because their views are either unorthodox or because they are poor theologians. Logically, however, that judgment is unwarranted.

Sixth, I am not arguing that religion is the cause of religious terrorism. On the contrary, like many of the researchers whose work I criticize, I have sought to understand how persons become religious terrorists in terms of a larger set of psychological and social processes focused on identity formation and change, as influenced by a variety of context-specific social structural variables.[21] My approach, however, allocates a pivotal role to ideology, and in the case of jihadists, more specifically religiosity, in focusing and consolidating the factors fomenting extremism. Its role is present throughout the process of radicalization, though in variable ways and degrees. In its absence, we would have little reason to be speaking of a process of radicalization, as opposed to other kinds of change. The precise role of religious ideas and commitments in the radicalization of each individual and group may differ and must be determined on a case-by-case basis. In doing so, an array of types of data and contextual factors need to be considered.[22] In some cases, religiosity may play an originating role in precipitating a turn toward political violence. In other cases, it may play an operative and mediating role, organizing relatively inchoate feelings and thoughts and linking them to specific actions. In still other cases, religious claims may only serve as a post-hoc justification for actions primarily driven by other motivations. This argument is not about adjudicating between these possibilities, but rather simply that we need to take the full range of possibilities into consideration.

Seventh, with others,[23] I am stressing that the religious aspect of this type of terrorism makes a noteworthy difference in the behavior of the terrorists, as individuals and groups, and hence in the consequences of their actions. Thus, we need to recognize its role in motivating the actions in order to grasp these special and specific consequences. As Juergensmeyer stresses, for example, religiously inspired acts of violence constitute ritual performances with a symbolic significance.[24]

This means such violence often fails to conform to the dictates of strategic thinking, and hence it is difficult to predict, prevent, or counter without entering into the specific mindset of the perpetrators. In the case of apocalyptic or even just world-rejecting ideologies, this means imaginatively understanding a worldview that is

relatively alien to most of us.[25] We cannot afford, then, to miss the role of this religiosity in seeking to counter this type of terrorism or rehabilitate these kinds of terrorists, no matter how difficult it can be to do so.[26]

Eighth, as stated, the actual role of religious beliefs and commitments in the radicalization of terrorists is to be determined on a case-by-case basis. It appears that no two individuals radicalize in exactly the same way and there is considerable heterogeneity in who becomes a jihadist and how. Minimally, though, we need to recognize that many terrorists think their religiosity is one of the primary reasons for their actions. In effect, then, it is, until demonstrated otherwise. If we wish to counter this type of terrorism effectively, then we must recognize the nature and implications of this self-understanding.[27] To quote an old maxim in sociology: "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[28] We cannot afford to sidestep this fact of social life for the reasons that will be delineated in Part II of this analysis.

Ninth, my objective in advancing this critique is not to speculate on why there is an interpretive bias against taking religious motivational claims seriously, and why analyses displaying this bias are accepted so readily in the field.[29] I cannot know what researchers and readers are thinking, and it is not necessary for my constructive ends. While this analysis is polemical, the objective is to improve our understanding of the phenomenon of religious terrorism by ameliorating the problem of specificity. When we seek to understand why some individuals participate in the process of radicalization leading to violence, the set of explanatory conjectures offered—such as political grievances, socioeconomic marginalization, lack of education, mental health concerns, religious beliefs, and so on—invariably apply to a wider set of individuals than the few who engage in political violence. Wide swaths of the public may hold political grievances, for instance, but only a very few will ever turn to violence to address them. Most of the common factors proffered to explain this violence lack the specificity to differentiate who will become violent. This problem is endemic to terrorism studies,[30] and Sageman suggests this issue may serve as a litmus test for progress in the field.[31] Discounting religiosity as an important and independent variable in the motivation of religious terrorism aggravates, rather than ameliorates, the specificity problem, since much of the primary motivational data available is *prima facie* religious. This applies to the countless testimonies left behind by jihadist martyrs, and the evidence of their online activity, as collected and analyzed by researchers.

In a study of the Twitter feed of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, for example, Jytte Klausen discovered that "four out of every five tweets reported from the war zone made references to jihadist dogma." "We assumed," she says, "that Twitter would lend itself to more practical communications and personal contacts to friends back home. As it turned out, this was largely not the case."[32] As she goes on to comment, "[t]heir Twitter usage is surprisingly comparable to the way jihadists used online forums in the Web 1.0 environment." Both "emphasize religious instruction and discussions of jihadist dogma," and "[t]he continuity of the messaging is striking, even as the technology has changed dramatically."[33,34] Similarly, in their dialogues with Western foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Dawson and Amarasingam found that they used "religious ideas to comprehensively frame their experiences." Their lives were "saturated with a Salafi-jihadist religiopolitical discourse."[35]

Tenth and lastly, the analysis offered in these two articles is preliminary and somewhat programmatic. Terrorism studies is still a relatively young science that could benefit from greater knowledge translation—bringing to bear information and insights from other fields of study. The objective is to encourage different and more sensitive ways of thinking about the nature and relevance of religious motivations for terrorism.[36] To this end, the first task is to establish that there is a problem with much of the current thinking in the field.[37]

Conceiving Religious Motivational Claims as Data

There are at least three interrelated methodological reasons why I am not engaging in mere sophistry in saying that much of the primary data available about the motivations of religious terrorists is *prima facie* religious.

First, the field of terrorism studies continues to suffer from a lack of primary data, and especially studies based on data obtained from interviews, most notably with terrorists.[38] In the social sciences (especially anthropology, political science, sociology, and social psychology), one of the most significant kinds of primary data available are the accounts people offer for their actions. While such accounts must always be treated with

circumspection, especially in some contexts more than others (e.g., interviewing pedophiles versus scientists), there is little realistic recourse to relying on these accounts to understand the actions of others. This holds true in terrorism studies as well.[39] The accounts are not the exclusive means for understanding someone's actions and in the face of contrary evidence, or accounts that are inconsistent or weak, they are open to questioning. The evidentiary value of these accounts cannot be dismissed, however, on some a priori basis, such as because they are religious, or they are from persons who have undergone some indoctrination. We can infer the "causes" of actions from correlations found in other kinds of data (e.g., statistical patterns, the findings of social scientific experiments or brain scans). When those inferences are at odds, however, with the accounts of the subjects of study we cannot simply assume the superior explanatory value of the indirect inferences—at least not when dealing with motivations. When faced with such divergences in data, researchers often resort, explicitly or implicitly, to "false consciousness" arguments. Arguing, however, that the actors lack a proper awareness of their motivations is invariably speculative and subject to potential interpretive biases—biases commensurate with the very biases presumed to be present in the first-person accounts the researchers are seeking to explain away.

Second, it is irrelevant whether the accounts offered are social constructs[40] or even fantastic in nature (as understood in multiple ways).[41] As indicated, what matters is whether they instigate and sustain actions. In this regard, I suspect some of the reluctance to accord religious motivations a significant role in explaining religious terrorism stems from a logical mistake implicit to many efforts to explain religious terrorism. Since most social scientists think the ultimate justifications for religious belief are inadequate, they make the epistemological mistake of assuming that such false beliefs cannot be the "real" reasons, or causes, for the actions. On this basis, they assert that there must be some other real, and probably "latent", reasons for their beliefs and actions.[42]

This type of reductive reasoning is very common in social scientific approaches to religious phenomena. It also has long been the subject of dispute.[43] While rarely explicitly stated, doubts about the reality of the objects of religious veneration undergird a skepticism about the veracity of religious claims about religious behavior. Consequently, when it comes to religious terrorism, political or even psychological explanations of the actions of these terrorists are accorded greater veracity than religious ones, without much in the way of argument, because it is assumed nonreligious ways of thinking and behaving are more fundamental and real than religious ones. When it comes to explaining human actions, however, there is no sound historical or logical reason for making such an invidious comparison, or attributing higher epistemological authority to some types of accounts over others.

In asserting this point, I am speculating, to some degree, about the motives of social scientists studying religious terrorism, and I said I would refrain from doing so. The clash of secular and religious sensibilities, however, runs through the social scientific study of religion.[44] Moreover, the arguments examined in Part II will show that many scholars of religious terrorism appear to be operating with conceptual and normative understandings of religion that are at odds with those espoused by the religious terrorists they are studying. This means that in their hypothetical dialogue they are literally talking past each other, which results in some significant misinterpretations of the data.

In stating this, I am not simply seeking to avoid reductionism *per se*. As Daniel Pals states well: "In its basic sense a 'reduction' is a form of explanation; it arises from the essential (and laudable) desire of all science for simplicity in the face of complexity, its search for singularity in the presence of multiplicity." As such, "reduction might well be called the cardinal principle of all science."[45] In fact, in the face of the problem of specificity, I am invoking this "cardinal principle of all science" to justify giving more significance to the religious professions of religious terrorists in explaining and countering this type of extremism.

Some types of reductionism, however, are more problematic—such as claims that entail asserting, explicitly or implicitly, that an entire realm of data is explainable in terms of another. "Reduction in this sense tends to presume a hierarchy both of phenomena and explanatory theories."[46] While it is common for terrorism scholars to note that the causes of terrorism are multiple, and that we need to take a multifactorial approach to

explaining radicalization, there is tendency to treat religious data as decidedly secondary, if not irrelevant, and treat other kinds of data as superior and capable of subsuming the religious data. With the evidence at hand, however, and in the light of a broader grasp of the historical nature and role of religion, the reverse may be true. Political objectives, for example, may be subservient to religious goals and expectations in the decisional calculus of religious terrorists. This should not constitute a novel insight in the analysis of religious terrorists, but the record of research shows it remains a point of contention.

Third, we need to offset any suspicions we have of the veracity of the claims made by terrorists, and religious terrorists in particular, with a reiteration of the methodological imperative to prioritize how the subjects of study conceive of their actions. We need to grasp, as sociologists say, their "definition of the situation". How people understand their social context (e.g., shopping, attending church, or going to a rock concert) informs their expectations. It influences who they interact with, how, and for what purposes. This in turn shapes their self-understanding. This is a core aspect of enacting social life, and hence creating social order and reality. With this in mind, Herbert Blumer argued:

> "… if [a] scholar wishes to understand the action of people it is necessary for him (sic) to see their objects [i.e., physical, social, and conceptual] as they see them. Failure to see their objects as they see them, or a substitution of his (sic) meanings of the objects for their meanings, is the gravest kind of error that the social scientist can commit. It leads to the setting up of a fictitious world. Simply put, people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them, not on the basis of the meaning that these things have for the outside scholar. Yet we are confronted left and right with studies of human group life and of the behavior of people in which the scholar has made no attempt to find out how the people see what they are acting toward."[47]

As Jeffrey Bale suggests, we need to guard against succumbing to "mirror imaging" in studying terrorism. Analysts, he argues, will often "project their own ways of thinking, their own values, their own frames of reference, and their own fantasies onto [terrorists], including those emanating from very different cultures with very different histories and values, instead of trying to view the world from the [terrorists'] own perspectives and points of view."[48] This form of parochialism is most conspicuous in the analysis of individuals who profess to live in accordance with a comprehensive religious worldview, and especially an "extremist" one; one which deviates dramatically from the dominant social and political norms that the analysts use to construct their own social reality.

This problem continues to loom large in the absence of a sufficient number of interviews with religious terrorists, and interviews with sufficient detail. The number of case studies of domestic jihadi terrorists and foreign fighters is too limited, and those available continue to rely too extensively on secondary sources—media reports, court records, and interviews with the colleagues, friends, and family members of these jihadists. The resultant accounts of their motives and actions are very helpful, but also quite incomplete. More often than not, materials from such accounts are used to illustrate points rather than provide strong evidence for an argument.[49] In most cases, moreover, there is substantial leeway for interpretive discretion, and this state of affairs places an even greater onus on us to prioritize and carefully interpret the limited primary data from the jihadists themselves that is available.

To reiterate, though, this does not mean substituting one sort of reductionism for another. The primary data are only one source of data and religiosity is but one aspect of a complex mosaic of motivations influencing the turn to extremist violence. Its role, in conjunction with other variables, needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. When the individuals under study forcefully declare its relevance, however, we need to be open to understanding how and why it may have a significant explanatory role.

The Shifting Focus of Attention in the Study of Religious Terrorism

To understand why there are problems with the assessment of the religious motivations for religious terrorism in terrorism studies it is important to consider the historical context of the analysis of religious terrorism

since 9/11. In this limited context, I can only present a potted history from the perspective of a social scientist seeking to understand the process of radicalization leading to violence. The excursus highlights some of the major shifts in academic attention that likely influenced the analysis of the role of religious motivations for terrorism. A more detailed analysis warrants further consideration.

In the wake of 9/11, analyses of religious terrorism were largely investigative and descriptive in nature. The focus was on gathering information about who was attacking Western targets and why. Delineating the beliefs and ideologies of the individuals and groups involved was a primary concern. This happened against the backdrop of the "clash of civilizations" thesis and a tendency to assume, too simply, that bad actions stemmed from bad ideas.[50] There were important exceptions, such as Juergensmeyer's interviews with religious terrorists and Wiktorowicz's field research with Al-Muhajiroun,[51] but much of the analysis of the motivations of the terrorists, especially the 9/11 suicide attackers, tended to focus on the influence of indoctrination, if not some kind of brainwashing.[52] Ironically, from this perspective, while the role of the ideology was front and center, the ideology itself received little attention. Often it was reduced to a simplistic narrative of irrational hostility to the rights and freedoms of Western democracies.

The onset of the wave of so-called "homegrown" terrorist attacks, such as the 7/7 London bombings in 2005, sparked interest in developing explanations with more nuance. Attention turned to multifactorial understandings of the process of "radicalization" leading to terrorist violence, since most of the perpetrators of these attacks received little in the way of systematic training and indoctrination, and probably because they were less obviously "other." The motivational histories of these domestic perpetrators seemed more complex and perplexing, and with increasing cognizance of the specificity problem, attention turned to broadening the explanatory repertoire beyond the direct influence of an appealing yet simplistic ideology of hate.

Mounting concerns with fostering Islamophobia, inadvertently or otherwise, also prompted analysts to minimize reliance on explanatory frameworks thought to imply too direct a link between terrorism and Islam *per se*.[53] This situation fostered a bifurcation of lines of analysis, separating what could have been done more beneficially in tandem. On the one hand, a handful of scholars with appropriate expertise sought to enrich our grasp of religious terrorism by more exactingly and comprehensively studying the nature and history of the Salafi-jihadist ideology.[54] On the other hand, many scholars, with a more social scientific orientation, started studying contemporary jihadism, and formulating theories of Islamist radicalization.[55]

The shift in attention to the study of the phenomenon of jihadist foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, from 2012 onward, especially those traveling from the West, delayed research on the radicalization of homegrown jihadists further. Interest and research dollars were diverted to acquiring more descriptive data on how many people were joining this jihad, from where, who was going, how they were doing it, and why. Likewise, tremendous effort was invested in understanding the nature, rise, spread, and eventual failure of the Islamic State and other aspects of the "war against terrorism" in Syria and Iraq. With time, some of the data on the foreign fighters began to enter the discussion of radicalization more generally, reinforcing and modifying existing views. This research also somewhat reignited the debate over the relevance and significance of ideology, given the unprecedented success of the propaganda of the Islamic State. Overall, though, it tended to delay theoretical developments in the study of the process of radicalization more generally.

This overall pattern of knowledge development created a somewhat schizophrenic situation in the field of terrorism studies that was counterproductive. Social scientific studies are replete with discussions of aspects of jihadist ideology, but they rarely reference the detailed analyses provided by the historical and textual analyses, and vice versa. Consequently, many studies of the process of radicalization focused on the analysis of the social and social-psychological aspects of radicalization, using overly simplistic conceptions of the nature of the ideology and the grounds for its appeal, and of the role of the ideology in driving extremism. This tendency was reinforced by the simultaneous turn away from attempts to secure a profile of the terrorists[56] in favor of investigating the influence of social structural factors, social networks, and small group dynamics in determining who radicalizes and how.[57] In key instances, this reorientation resulted in the near exclusion of ideology, and hence religion, from consideration as a significant factor in the process of radicalization.[58]

Overall, this research was instrumental in advancing our understanding of what is happening and why. Social identity theory in particular, or more precisely uncertainty-identity theory, came to the fore as a key explanatory framework for radicalization.[59] In several influential instances, however, its ascendance marked the furthest swing of the pendulum away from the earlier and simplistic stress placed on bad ideas causing bad actions. This certainly is the case, in terms of religiosity, with some of the more reductive manifestations that will be analyzed in Part II of this study. Only a handful of scholars have called for reconsideration of the pivotal role of ideology[60], and more recently, for the fuller integration of insights from the vast literature on the nature and functions of ideology.[61] In diverse ways, these authors have started to argue for the integrated study of the coevolution of the social and ideological aspects of radicalization leading to violence, both for individuals and groups.[62] How this is the case will be traced in Part II of this analysis.

The study of radicalization has long been impacted negatively by a "hermeneutics of crisis management".[63] In many ways, the effort to understand the process has been truncated repeatedly by the emergence of new government priorities. In recent years, this has happened again with the understandable demand to develop programs to counter and prevent violent extremism (CVE and PVE). In this context, the need to partner with affected communities heightened the fear of inadvertently fostering Islamophobia, and the flow of government funds generated a large array of studies designed to formulate solutions to the prevention problem well before a clear-enough conception, empirically and theoretically, of the process of radicalization was in place. In this way, the urgency of the practical demand for CVE/PVE exercised a distorting influence on radicalization research, especially with regard to the role of religiosity. It somewhat stigmatized efforts to address this issue, and diverted attention from seriously examining the claims made about the primary motivational role of religiosity by the terrorists themselves. Attention, quite literally, went elsewhere, and inadequate arguments minimizing the role of religiosity passed muster without question.

Concluding Remarks

The stage is set, then, for a serious consideration of the specific types of arguments commonly used by social scientists and other experts on terrorism to dismiss the relevance of religion, and more particularly religiosity, in the explanation of religious terrorism, at both the individual and group levels. Such a lengthy preliminary analysis is necessary, given the continued reluctance to treat religiosity as a significant factor, and because the grounds for entertaining this idea are often misunderstood. Empirically the salience of religiosity is an open question that researchers can investigate and debate for every instance of "religious terrorism"; but, theoretically and methodologically, there are no strong reasons for accepting Soufan's assertion that "terrorism has nothing to do with ideology. It has nothing to do with religion or ideas." Similarly, while I agree with Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko[64] that "radicalization and terrorism cannot be reduced to the prevalence of bad ideas," it is misleading to further assert "that the 'center of gravity' of the jihadist threat is not a radical form of Islam."[65] The precise limitations of such arguments, however, will be the focus of Part II of this analysis.

In closing, I would like to indicate a few of the curious logical binds faced by those who choose to downplay the role of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism. If, as the MI5 study cited in the introduction states, and Soufan reiterates, "a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalization," then clearly beliefs and ideas matter. One cannot have it both ways, choosing, on some unstated basis, when they matter and when they do not. Similarly, it is common to observe that ex-jihadists rarely abandon their religious beliefs and commitments altogether, even when they disengage. It is also common to argue that countering violent extremism programs should aim to achieve disengagement rather than full deradicalization, since it is so hard to change the ideology of participants. How, then, is it logical to assume that these same religious commitments played no significant role in motivating their actions? The evidence in hand, to this point, from case studies and large datasets[66], is insufficient to determine, in any precise or generalizable way, when and how religious beliefs and commitments are instrumental in the process of radicalization. Are they merely post-hoc rationalizations for violence, as McCauley and Moskalenko[67] and many others repeatedly assert, or is it more common for some kind of personal religious quest, as conjectured by Dawson and Amarasingam and

others[68], to precede the turn to political violence?

About the Author: **Lorne L. Dawson** *is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies and the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada. He is the co-founder and co-director of the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society (www.tsas.ca).*

Notes

[1] It also alludes to a long list of "Bringing Back In" articles, an academic genre going back to at least George C. Homan's classic critique of functionalism, "Bringing Men Back In," *American Sociological Review* 29 (5), 1964: pp. 809–818.

[2] For example, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[3] In *Terror in the Mind of God*, Mark Juergensmeyer differentiates religious terrorism from other forms by saying it refers to acts of terrorism "for which religion has provided the motivation, the justification, the organization, and the world view" (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003, p. 7). This simple and inclusive definition serves my purposes as well. He does not provide a further definition of what he means by religion. Researchers working on religious terrorism rarely provide such definitions. Yet, as we will see, much depends on the implicit conceptions of religion they use.

[4] This orientation is displayed in some media discussions as well, for example Paul Marshall, "Religion and Terrorism: Misreading al Qaeda"; in: Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Roberta Green Ahmanson (Eds.), *Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 31–46; David Gibson, "Does Religion Cause Terrorism? It's Complicated," *The Christian Century*, 11 Sept., 2011; URL: https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-09/does-religion-cause-terrorism-its-complicated; and Christopher Massie, "Is ISIS a faith-based terrorist group?" *Columbia Journalism Review* (17 Sept., 2014); URL: https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/is_isis_a_faith-based_terroris.php.

[5] For example, Mark Juergensmeyer and Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "A Sociotheological Approach to Understanding Religious Violence"; in: Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and* Violence (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jeffrey M. Bale, "Denying the Link between Islamist Ideology and Jihadist Terrorism: 'Political Correctness' and the Understanding of Counterterrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7 (5), 2013, pp. 5–46, and "Introduction: Ideologies, Extremist Ideologies, and Terrorist Violence"; in: Jeffrey Bale (Ed.), *The Darkest Sides of Politics, I* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1–4; William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015); Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Sociotheology: the Significance of Religious Worldviews"; in: Luke M. Herrington, Alasdair McKay, and Jeffrey Haynes (Eds.), *Nations under God: The Geopolitics of Faith in the Twenty-First Century* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015); Shadi Hamid, "Shadi Hamid on Islamic Exceptionalism," *Foreign Policy Concepts*, 2016; URL: http://foreignpolicyconcepts.com/shadi-hamid-islamic-exceptionalism/; Andrew Lebovich, "How 'religious' are ISIS fighters? The relationship between religious literacy and religious motivation," Rethinking Political Islam series, 2016, Brookings Institution: URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Andrew-Lebovich_FINAL-2.pdf Lebovich 2016; Rüdiger Lohlker, "The 'I' of ISIS: Why Theology Matters," *Interventionen* 7, 2016, pp. 4–15; Lorne L. Dawson, "Trying to Make Sense of Home-Grown Terrorist Radicalization: The Case of the Toronto 18"; in: Paul Bramadat and Lorne Dawson (Eds.), *Religious Radicalization and Securitization in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 64–91; Lorne L. Dawson, "Discounting Religion in the Explanation of Homegrown Terrorism: A Critique," in James R. Lewis (Ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 32–45; Lorne L. Dawson, "Challenging the Curious Erasure of Religion from the Study of Religious Terrorism," *Numen* 65 (2–3), 2018, pp. 141–164; Graeme Wood, "True Believers: How ISIS Made Jihad Religious Again," *Foreign Affairs* (Sept./Oct., 2017); URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2017-08-15/true-believers; Adam Hoffman, "The Religiosity Challenge in Analyzing Islamist Movements," *The Forum for Regional Thinking* (07/09/ 2017); URL: https://www.regthink.org/en/articles/the-religiosity-challenge-in-analyzing-islamist-movements; Maarten Boudry, "Disbelief about Belief: Why Secular Academics do not Understand the Motivations of Religious Fundamentalists," *New English Review* (May 2019); URL: https://www.newenglishreview.org/Maarten_Boudry/Disbelief_About_Belief/; Megan K. McBride, "Unforced Errors: ISIS, the BAATH Party, and the Reconciliation of the Religious and the Secular," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 20 (2), 2019, pp. 170–191; Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen, "The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes," *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, first online publication 5 May, 2020; Beatrice A. de Graaf and Kees van den Bos, "Religious Radicalization: Social Appraisals and Finding Radical Redemption in Extreme Beliefs," *Current Opinions in Psychology* 40, 2021, pp. 56–60.

[6] Darcy M.E. Noricks, "The Root Causes of Terrorism"; in Paul K. David and Kim Cragin (Eds.), *Social Science for Counterterrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation 2009), p. 39.

[7] Jessica Stern, "Five Myths about Who becomes a Terrorist," *Washington Post* (Jan. 10, 2010); URL: https://today.law.harvard.edu/stern-in-the-washington-post-myths-about-terrorists/.

[8] Ali Soufan, "Former FBI Agent Ali Soufan: Terrorism Has Nothing to Do with Ideology or Religion; People Join Extremist

Organizations for Political, Social, Cultural Reasons," MEMRI (The Middle East Media Research Institute), 2019; URL: http://youtube.com/watch?v=Yx6waSfXoOc.

[9] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and the U.K.: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization* (Washington: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2009), p. 55.

[10] By "Western", I most specifically mean Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and Australia. In referring to "homegrown", I am addressing persons born or long residing in the West who have undergone a process of radicalization leading to violence. "Jihadists" refers to individuals subscribing to a Salafi-jijhadist ideology. I am including both domestic terrorists and foreign fighters, those plotting attacks in the countries in which they reside and those who have traveled abroad to join various jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and the Islamic State.

[11] Max Taylor and John Horgan, "A Conceptual Framework for Addressing Psychological Process in the Development of the Terrorist," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, 2006, p. 598.

[12] John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2014 and others (e.g., Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4 (4) 2011, pp. 7–36).

[13] Marc Sageman, "The Turn to Political Violence in the West"; in: Rik Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011), p. 117; Randy Borum, 2011, op. cit., p. 30; Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, 2012, pp. 1–21; James Khalil, "Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions Are Not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 37, 2014, pp. 198–211; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Opinion to Radical Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (1), 2014, p. 72; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two Pyramids Model," *American Psychologist* 72 (3), 2017, p. 211; Bart Schuurman and Quirine Eijkman, "Indicators of Terrorist Intent and Capability: Tools for Threat Assessment," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8 (3), 2015, pp. 7–8; Marc Sageman, 2017, op. cit., pp. 80–81, 136.

[14] Lorne L. Dawson, "Clarifying the Explanatory Context for Developing Theories of Radicalization: Five Basic Considerations," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (Spring 2019), pp. 50–87; Lorne L. Dawson, "Taking Terrorist Accounts of their Motivations Seriously: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13 (5) 2019, pp. 65–80.

[15] Lorne L. Dawson, "Debating the Role of Religion in the Motivation of Religious Terrorism," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 31 (2) 2018, pp. 98–117, and Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and Terrorism"; in: Robert Segal, (Ed.)., *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell), forthcoming in 2021.

[16] Lorne Dawson, 2018, op. cit. and Lorne Dawson, "Religion and Terrorism," forthcoming, op. cit.

[17] Lorne Dawson, 2017, op. cit, p. 40.

[18] Tom Quiggan, "Understanding al-Qaeda's Ideology for Counter-Narrative Work," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3 (2), 2009, pp. 18–24.

[19] Ibid., p. 21.

[20] Ibid., p. 20.

[21] Lorne L. Dawson, "Sketch of a Social Ecology Model for Explaining Homegrown Terrorist Radicalisation," The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Research Note 8 No. 1, 2017; URL: https://icct.nl/publication/sketch-of-a-social-ecology-model-for-explaining-homegrown-terrorist-radicalisation/; Lorne L. Dawson, "The Social Ecology Model of "Homegrown" Jihadist Radicalization"; in: Akil N. Awan and James R. Lewis (Eds.), *Radicalisation in Comparative Perspective* (London and New York: Hurst and Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[22] Lorne Dawson, "Sketch" 2017, op. cit.

[23] For example, Bruce Hoffman, "'Holy Terror': The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 18 (4) 1995, pp. 271–284; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

[24] Mark Juergensmeyer, 2003, op. cit.; see also Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (3), 2003, pp. 1–34.

[25] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Study of New Religious Movements and the Radicalization of Home-grown Terrorists: Opening a Dialogue," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (1) 2010, pp. 1–21; Sheikh, 2015, op. cit.; de Graaf and van den Bos, 2021, op. cit.

[26] Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[27] Lorne Dawson, "Debating" (2017), op. cit., pp. 42–43.

[28] William I. Thomas and Dorothy S. Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Knopf, 1928), pp. 571–572.

[29] In each case, after all, the arguments have passed muster with the editors and reviewers of the journals that published the studies, and they failed to attract much in the way of a critical response from readers.

[30] Max Taylor, *The Terrorist* (London: Brassey's, 1988); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 69; John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 74 and 101.

[31] Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (4) 2014, pp. 565–580.

[32] Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, 2015, p. 10.

[33] Ibid., p. 10.

[34] Klausen cites two studies in support of this claim: Edna Erez, Gabriel Weimann, and A. Aaron Weisburd, "Jihad, Crime, and the Internet: Content Analysis of Jihadist Discussion Forums," (Washington, DC: USDOJ, 2011; URL: https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/236867.pdf, and Edna Reid, "Analysis of Jihadi Extremist Groups' Videos," Forensic Science Communications (Washington, DC: FBI, July 2009).

[35] Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40 (3), 2017, p. 206.

[36] Arguing that social scientists studying religious violence must take the social implications of theology seriously, Mona Kanwal Sheikh similarly states that in studying activists who support violent actions "the main question relates to how they viewed the world in a way that would allow these actions to be carried out. What is being examined … is a way of looking at social reality that enables certain action: an 'epistemic worldview'" (2015), op. cit., p. 138).

[37] I may be more sensitive to the issue because of my academic training in the study of religion. I recognize, however, that this also means I bring a bias to the debate, since I have a professional interest in promoting the significance of religion in the study of terrorism. My argument, however, should stand or fall on its merits.

[38] Andrew Silke, "Research on Terrorism: A Review of the Impact of 9/11 on the Global War on Terrorism"; in: Hsinchun Chen, Edna Reid, Joshua Sinai, Andrew Silke, Boaz Ganor (Eds.)., *Terrorism Informatics Knowledge Management and Data Mining for Homeland Security*, (Boston: Springer, 2008), pp. 27–50; Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32 (5), 2020, pp. 1011–1026; Lorne Dawson, "Clarifying," 2019, op. cit., pp. 164–166.

[39] John Horgan, "Interviewing Terrorists: A Case for Primary Research"; in: H. Sinchun Chen, Edna Reid, Joshua Sinai, and Andrew Silke and Boaz Ganor (Eds.), *Terrorism Informatics: Knowledge Management and Data Mining for Homeland Security*. Boston: Springer, 2008, pp. 94–96; John Horgan, "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4 (3) 2012, pp. 198–201; James Khalil, "A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42 (4) 2019: 429–443; Lorne L. Dawson, "Taking Terrorist Accounts of their Motivations Seriously: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13 (5) 2019, pp. 65–80.

[40] C. Wright Mills, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive," *American Sociological Review* 5 (6) 1940, pp. 904–913; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967); Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, "Accounts," *American Sociological Review* 33 (1) 1968.

[41] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, 2002, pp. 91–124; Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers'," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (3), 2003, pp. 1–34; John Calvert, "The Mythic Foundations of Radical Islam," *Orbis* (Winter 2004), pp. 29–41; Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," *Anthropological Theory* 6 (3), 2006, pp. 322–344; Mark Juergensmeyer, "Religious Terrorism as Performance Violence"; in: Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Scott Atran, "The Devoted Actor: Unconditional Commitment and Intractable Conflict across Cultures," *Current Anthropology* 57, 2016 (Supplement 13): S192–S203; Simon Copeland, "Telling Stories of Terrorism: A Framework for Applying Narrative Approaches to the Study of Militant's Self-Accounts," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 11 (3), 2019, pp. 232–253; Pieter Nanninga, "'Cleansing the Earth of the Stench of Shirk'": The Islamic State's Violence as Acts of Purification," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 7 (2), 2019, pp. 128–157.

[42] Edward J. Larsen and Larry Whitman, "Scientists and Religion in America," *Scientific American*, 281 (3), 1999, pp. 88–93; Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, "Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics," *Social Problems* 54 (2), 2007, pp. 289–307.

[43] For example, Daniel Pals, "Is Religion a Sui Generis Phenomenon?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55 (2), 1987,

pp. 259–282; Thomas Idinopulos and Edward Yonan (Eds.), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994); Russel McCutcheon (Ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[44] For example, Benton Johnson, "Sociological Theory and Religious Truth," *Sociological Analysis* 38, 1977, pp. 368–388; Donald Wiebe, "Beyond the Sceptic and the Devotee: Reductionism in the Social Scientific Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, 1984, pp. 157–165; Lorne L. Dawson, "On References to the Transcendent in the Scientific Study of Religion: A Qualified Idealist Proposal," *Religion* 17 (4), 1987, pp. 227–250; Eileen Barker, "Presidential Address: The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must Be Joking!" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (3), 1995, pp. 287–310; Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[45] Pals, 1987, op. cit., p. 261.

[46] Ibid., p. 262.

[47] Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 50–51.

[48] Jeffrey Bale, 2013, op. cit., p. 6.

[49] For example, Petter Nesser, "Joining Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe: Exploring Motivational Aspects of Recruitment and Radicalization," in Magnus Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalization: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 87–114; Lorenzo Vidino, "The Buccinasco Pentiti: A Unique Case Study of Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (3), 2011, pp. 398–418; Daan Weggemanns, Edwin Bakker, and Peter Grol, "Who Are They and Why Do They Go? The Radicalisation and Preparatory Processes of Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8 (4), 2014, pp. 100–110; Marion Van San, "Lost Souls Searching for Answers? Belgian and Dutch Converts Joining the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9 (5), 2015, pp. 47–56; Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," Program on Extremism, George Washington University, 2015; URL: https://extremism.gwu.edu/isis-america; Francesco Marone, "Italy's Jihadists in the Syrian Civil War." The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Research Paper (August 2016); URL: https://icct.nl/publication/italys-jihadists-in-the-syrian-civil-war/; Amarnath Amarasingam and Lorne L. Dawson, "'I Left to be Closer to Allah': Learning about Foreign Fighters from Family and Friends." London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2018; URL: http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Families_Report.pdf; David Thomson, *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They're Back*, translated by Gregory Flanders (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); Amir Rostami, Joakim Sturup, Hernan Mondani, Pia Thevselius, Jerzy Sarnecki, and Chistofer Edling, "The Swedish Mujahideen: An Exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Iraq and Syria," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 43 (5), 2020, pp. 382–395.

[50] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3), 1993; Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," *The New Yorker* (Nov. 19, 2001); URL: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/11/19/the-revolt-of-islam ; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Random House, 2006).

[51] Juergensmeyer, 2003, op. cit.; Ouintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

[52] Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," New York City Police Department, 2007; URL: https://seths.blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf; Lorne Dawson, 2010, op. cit.; Simon Cottee, "The Zoolander Theory of Terrorism," *The Atlantic* (May 12, 2015); URL: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/zoolander-terrorists-brainwashed-isis/393050/.

[53] Jeffrey Bale, 2013, op. cit.

[54] For example, Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (3), 2006, pp. 207–239; Shmuel Bar, *Warrant for Terror: Fatwās of Radical Islam and the Duty of Jihād* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Joas Wagemakers, "The Transformation of a Radical Concept: al-wala'wa-l-bara in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi"; in Roel Meijer (Ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 81–10; Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism"; in Roel Meijer (Ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 244–266; Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst, 2016); Juan Carlos Antunez Moreno, "Salafism: From a Religious Movement to a Political Force," *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional* 3 (1), 2017, pp. 11–41.

[55] For example, Marc Sageman, 2004, op, cit.; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* (Feb.–Mar., 2005), pp. 161–169; Quintan Wiktorowicz, 2005, op. cit.; Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, 2007, op. cit.; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 2011, op. cit.; Rik Coolsaet, "Terrorism and Radicalization: What Do We Know?" in Rik Coolsaet, (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge* 2nd ed. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 259–268; Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Angela Rabasa and Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies*

in Conflict and Terrorism 38, 2015, pp. 958–975; Arie Kruglanski, David Webber, Katarzyana Jasko, Marina Chernikova, and Erica Molinario, "The Making of Violent Extremists," *Review of General Psychology* 22 (1), 2018, pp. 107–120.

[56] Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (1), 2005, pp. 3–4; John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618 (1), 2008, pp. 80–94; Jonathan Rae, "Will it ever be Possible to Profile Terrorists?" *Journal of Terrorism Research* 3 (2), 2012, pp. 1–6.

[57] Marc Sagemen, 2004, op cit. and Marc Sagemen, 2008, op. cit.; Wiktorowicz, 2005, op. cit.; Horgan, "From Profiles to #Pathways and Roots," 2008, op. cit.; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, 2008, pp. 415–433 and Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 2011, op. cit.

[58] For example, Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); Andrew Silke, "Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization," *European Journal of Criminology* 5 (1), 2008, pp. 99–123.; Arie W. Kruglanski, Xiaoyan Chen, Mark Deschesne, Shira Fishman, and Edward Orehek, "Fully Committed: Suicide Bombers' Motivation and the Quest for Personal Significance," *Political Psychology* 30 (3), 2009, pp. 331–355; Robert Agnew, "A General Strain Theory of Terrorism," *Theoretical Criminology* 14 (2), 2010, pp. 131–153; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 2008, op. cit., 2011, op cit., and "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two Pyramids Model," *American Psychologist* 72 (3), 2017, pp. 205–216; Michael A. Hogg, "From Uncertainty to Extremism: Social Categorization and Identity Processes," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23 (5), 2014, pp. 338–342; Olivier Roy, "What is the Driving Force behind Jihadist Terrorism? A Scientific Perspective on the Causes/Circumstances of Joining the Scene." Speech delivered to the BKA Autumn Conference (Bundeskriminalamt [German Federal Police Agency]), 18–19 November, Fiesole, Italy; URL: www.bka.de/nn_256982/…/herbsttagung2015RoyAbstract.pdf, and Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst, 2017); Manni Crone, "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics and the Skills of the Body," *International Affairs* 92 (3), 2016, pp. 587–604; Bart Schuurman and John G. Horgan, "Rationales for Terrorist Violence in Homegrown Jihadist Groups: A Case Study from the Netherlands," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27, 2016, pp. 55–63; Marc Sageman, 2017, op. cit.; Bart Schuurman, Edwin Bakker and Quirine Eijkman, "Structural Influences on Involvement in European Homegrown Jihadism: A Case Study." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30 (1), 2018, pp. 97–115.

[59] For example, Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, 2009, pp. 537–559; Michael Hogg, 2014, op. cit.; Lorne L. Dawson, "Sketch" 2017, op. cit.; Marc Sageman, 2017, op. cit.; J. M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Arie Kruglanski et al., 2018, op. cit.

[60] Alessandro Orsini, "Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism: The STAM Bond," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35, 2012, pp. 665–692; Lorne Dawson, "Sketch" 2017, op. cit.; Lorne L. Dawson, "Debating the Role of Religion in the Motivation of Religious Terrorism," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 31 (2), 2018, pp. 98–117; Arie Kruglanski et al., 2018, op. cit.

[61] Donald Holbrook and John Horgan, "Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13 (6), 2019, pp. 2–15; Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen, 2020, op. cit.

[62] Fernando Reinares, Carola Garcia-Calvo, and Álvaro Vicente, "Differential Association Explaining Jihadi Radicalization in Spain: A Quantitative Study," *CTC Sentinel* (July, 2017), pp. 29–34; Lorne Dawson, "Clarifying" 2019, p. 168; Lorne Dawson, "The Social Ecology Model" forthcoming, op. cit.

[63] David W. Brannan, Philip F. Esler, N. T. Anders Strindberg, "Talking to Terrorists: Towards an Independent Analytical Framework for the Study of Violent Substate Activism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 24 (1), 2001, pp. 3–24.

[64] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 2011, op. cit.

[65] Ibid., p. 221.

[66] For example, PIRUS, "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States"; URL: https://start.umd.edu/data-tools/profiles-individual-radicalization-united-states-pirus

[67] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 2011, op. cit., p. 220.

[68] Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, 2017, op. cit.