

Shiv Sena Party, who responded to the nuclear tests with the comment that they proved that Indians were "not eunuchs."<sup>67</sup> In testing the bomb, India's BJP leaders were not only asserting their national power but also rejecting the colonial dominance of the West and its accompanying sense of emasculation.

Although supporters of the Christian militia in the United States have not had the Indians' experience of being a colonized people, their attitudes toward modern liberal government is similar to those of neoconservative Hindu nationalists. Both would agree with the characterization offered by William Pierce that liberal government expects an obedience that is "feminine" and "infantile."<sup>68</sup> These are fears not only of sexual impotence but of government's role in the process of emasculation. Men who harbor such fears protect themselves, therefore, not only by setting up veiled defenses against the threats of powerful women and unmanly men, but also by attempting to reassert control in a world that they feel has gone morally and politically askew.

In Israel, the Jewish activist Avigdor Eskin, who accused Yasir Arafat of having a sexual penchant for boys, meant this as not so much a character assault as a political criticism. Eskin offered the example of Arafat's alleged bisexuality to show that the Palestinian leader could not even control his own passions, much less the destiny of a geographical region that Eskin regarded as sacred.<sup>69</sup> Eskin, a somewhat effete musician and philosopher, might have gained encouragement in his attitudes from the American religious right, for whom antihomosexuality is something of a virtue, and with whom Eskin had frequent contact. Raised in Russia, Eskin for a time traveled through the United States appearing on the television programs of evangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as a spokesperson against the Soviet oppression of the Russian Jewish community. Eventually emigrating to Israel, he became politically active among the Russian Israeli community and was once regarded by Russian immigrants as the fourth best-known person in the country. When I visited him at his home in Jerusalem, he was deeply involved in anti-Arab political activism and was under detention for charges of planning to toss a pig's head into the quarters of the Muslim shrine the Dome of the Rock, charges he denied. Whether or not the charges were true, however, his comments confirmed that Eskin's main social concern was not homosexuality but politics and the restoration of what he regarded as righteous biblical order.

The point I have been making is that the homophobic male-dominant language of right-wing religious movements indicates not only a

crisis of sexuality but a clash of worldviews, not just a moral or psychological problem but a political and religious one. It is political in that it relates to the crisis of confidence in public institutions that is characteristic of postmodern societies. It is religious in that it is linked with a perception of the loss of spiritual bearings that a more certain public order provided. When the lead character in *The Turner Diaries* saw on television the horrific scenes of mangled bodies being carried from the federal building he had just demolished with a truckload of explosive fertilizer and fuel oil, he could still confirm that he was "completely convinced" that what he had done was necessary to save America from its leaders—these "feminine," "infantile" men "who did not have the moral toughness, the spiritual strength" to lead America and give it and its citizens a moral and spiritual purpose. From his point of view, his wretched act was redemptive.

Trivializing the effect of their violence, this character and his real-life counterparts Timothy McVeigh, Anders Breivik, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mahmud Abouhalima, and many other calculating but desperate men have tried to restore what they perceive to be the necessary social conditions for their sexual and spiritual wholeness. Their rhetoric of manhood has been a cry to reclaim their lost selves and their fragile world by combining a rogue masculinity with a monastic piety. These are often not just lone actors but also ad hoc armies of randy religious warriors. What they have in common, these movements of cowboy monks, is that they consist of anti-institutional, religio-nationalist, racist, sexist, male-bonding, bomb-throwing young guys. Their marginality in the modern world is experienced as a kind of sexual despair that leads to violent acts of symbolic empowerment. It could almost be seen as poignant, if it were not so terribly dangerous.

#### FIGHTING FOR THE RULE OF GOD

This conceptual shift from a feeling of loss of personal integrity and sexual potency to an anger directed at public authorities may be a distinctively male trait. Men, after all, gain much of their sense of self-identity from the public roles they play. Men are more likely than women to feel diminished when public order does not perform properly. Polls taken during the 2016 presidential elections indicated that men more than women felt that the country was going in a wrong direction, and blamed political leaders for it. In the 1998 crisis of the U.S. presidency when President Bill Clinton was publically confronted over

his affair with a White House intern, polls indicated that it was American men more than women who felt betrayed by the actions of the president.

It is understandable, then, that such men could focus their anger on the state. After Paul Hill killed an abortion clinic doctor and his escort, he said that he had “cast off the State’s tyranny.” Hill said that in the weeks prior to the shooting he had felt burdened with “the oppressive feeling” that he was “not free.” His act, which gave him “inner joy and peace,” was therefore aimed not just at the abortion clinic staff but at the government that he thought was responsible for the staff’s actions and for his own sense of humiliation.<sup>70</sup>

It is also understandable that in a time when public authority is discredited, one looks for alternative sources of leadership. In a situation where it is believed that public morality is amiss, leaders are degenerate, and even laws are based on shaky ethical footing, one may retreat to the only authority that one can easily grasp: the direct confidence of a respected person. Similarly, one may look for a familiar basis of public legitimacy in religion. This is a reversion to what Erik Erikson has described as “basic trust”: the sense of self-assurance that comes from a solid personal relationship. In Erikson’s understanding of an individual’s psychological development, a bedrock of trust is established in a child’s relationship with his or her parents; it is “the first component of a healthy personality.”<sup>71</sup> When early bonds of trust are lost or outgrown later in life, they must be supplanted by something else that is trustworthy. “Religion, through the centuries,” Erikson observed, has provided this bedrock of confidence. In times of crisis it has served to “restore a sense of trust.”<sup>72</sup>

This need to create a climate of public trust based on personal relationships explains in part why so much of the efforts of groups within cultures of violence have been spent on building and maintaining their own communities. The most dramatic example is the creation of an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq in the military conquests of ISIS in 2014. For a time the movement set up an apparatus of government that ruled over villages, towns, and cities as large as Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, often with the expertise of old Baath Party officials who had administrative roles in the regime of Saddam Hussein. In other cases groups established separate communes, such as Osama bin Laden’s headquarters in the caves of Afghanistan; the Christian Identity communities of Elohim City; the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord; and the Freeman Compound. In Japan, Aum Shinrikyo formed its own towns administered by its own governments. Extremist Jewish

groups established settlements in Palestinian Arab territories, and Meir Kahane spoke of creating an independent state of Judea on the West Bank. At a rally of radical Jewish settlers held in the ballroom of the Sheraton Hotel in Jerusalem, I saw Kahane unfurl a flag designed to accompany this new state. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's command center in India was also in locations claimed by his movement, based first in the Damdami Taksal ashram and then in the Sikhs' Golden Temple in Amritsar.

Even groups that did not physically live together, such as the far-flung jihadi network involved in the 9/11 attack, developed such an intense relationship and such tight bonds of association that it was impossible for outsiders—including government informants—to penetrate them. Yet even in such groups, the bonds that held them together could become strained, and only strong leadership and ideological commitment enabled them to cohere. And even these ties were frayed at times. The far-flung network of ISIS supporters faced such a challenge when the movement's territorial control began to crumble under the military assaults of the Iraq and Syrian governments and their allies. Quite likely their acts of violence—though targeted at the cosmic enemy—were conducted to pull the group together. In these instances—undetected by the public who is baffled at the purposes of such terrorists acts—their acts have been directed at an internal audience, especially wayward or schismatic factions, that needed demonstrations of power to be held in line. As I noted earlier in this book, this was why many of these terrorist acts have not been proclaimed to the world: the intended audience had already received the message.

The internal dynamics of a movement can affect its stance toward the surrounding society. In fact, one can look at terrorist movements organizationally, as Martha Crenshaw has, and argue that the internal tensions in the movement are greater predictors of the group's actions than its interactions with its sworn enemies.<sup>73</sup> As we have seen, some of ISIS most vicious beheadings and acts of torture have been undertaken against the movement's own members, punishing those who have been proclaimed as apostates or turncoats if they challenged the authority of ISIS leaders. Similarly, the leaders of the radical Sikh group the Khalistan Commando Force regularly ordered killings of its own or a rival group's members whom they felt had gotten out of line. If individuals in the groups were using their military power "to get money, drugs, or women," one of the former members told me, the KCF "would sometimes eliminate them to keep the whole movement more respectable."<sup>74</sup>

In other movements also, as we have seen, recalcitrant members were disdained as much or more than their enemies. Ashin Wirathu despised Buddhist politicians who he claimed were unable or uninterested in what he regarded as their duty to protect Buddhist culture in Myanmar. The Protestant firebrand in Belfast, Ian Paisley, said that "we have no respect at all for the system of Romanism [Catholics], and we have less respect for the system of apostate Protestantism."<sup>75</sup> Rabbi Meir Kahane was said to have welcomed the idea of a Jewish civil war and predicted the political assassination of secular Jewish leaders, and he told me that he disliked secular Jews more than Arab Muslims. We earlier noted the rumors that Mahmud Abouhalima was involved in the murder of a moderate Muslim leader who rivaled Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. Thus many acts of terrorism undertaken by a group have been aimed not at a wider audience but at its own members.

Michel Wieviorka has taken this idea of organizational causes for terrorism a step further and argued that terrorism is the result not only of a movement's internal dissension but also of its collapse. He has claimed that violence comes only when a splinter group is alienated from a larger movement and it—or the larger movement itself—has abandoned its ideology.<sup>76</sup> Wieviorka argues that what he calls "the organized practice of indiscriminate and irredeemable violence" is a "substitute for a movement which has either become imaginary or has fallen out of sync with the hopes pinned on it."<sup>77</sup> If Wieviorka's argument has merit, then one might see terrorism as a sign of a breakup within a political movement, rather than a sign of its strength.

There is some evidence in Wieviorka's favor. When the Islamic State began to lose both territory and volunteers, the number of terrorist attacks around the world arose considerably. Members of Aum Shinrikyo released nerve gas into the Tokyo subways only when the police were closing in on them. Some of the most violent actions of Hamas came after the signing of the peace accord between Israel's Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine's Yasir Arafat, signaling to the leaders of Hamas that they would be peripheral to the Palestinian leadership. The Sikh explosion that killed Chief Minister Beant Singh came two years after the movement had been virtually eradicated from the Punjab. And the incident that killed the greatest number of civilians in the years of troubles between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland occurred after the peace settlement that ended the conflict.

These cases indicate that terrorism has been a response to desperation and humiliation—a point that I have made throughout this book.

While they also show that Wieviorka has been right in some cases and violence may have come with the dissolution of a movement's purpose, other examples show that this is not necessarily the case. With regard to ISIS, the leaders called upon supporters around the world to take up the cause and attack through terrorist actions wherever they were. So when the number of ISIS-related terrorist attacks rose, the ideological motivations appear to have been consistent with the movement's goals, at least in those incidents when the attackers articulated them. The actions of Hamas and of Jewish activists such as Dr. Goldstein have also been justified in terms of the primary ideologies of the groups. When Mike Bray attacked an abortion clinic, he explained to me, he was showing his disappointment, not only with the moderate policies of the prolife movement, but with those of the American government. He said that the attacks on clinics were also attacks on the government that stood behind them and on the secular values that supported such institutions.<sup>78</sup> Religious violence may indeed come as a result of internal tensions, schisms, and a sense of failed momentum, but it is usually justified in terms of cosmic war and the primary struggle with an external foe—the satanic enemy.

In fact, activist groups have often made some effort to be consistent in their struggle and not just attack for the sake of attacking. Some acts of violence, such as the bombings of the U.S. embassy in Africa, were intended to show that when threats were made they would be honored. In this regard, the Kashmiri rebels who killed their American and European hostages were said to have found themselves in a dilemma: they did not necessarily want to murder the young men, they said, but felt they had an obligation to be true to their word after they had publically threatened to kill them if their demands were not met. ISIS has taken the same stand when it has made demands and then, after there was no response to them, decided that they had to carry out their threats to torture and kill in order to be credible. Mike Bray told me that Paul Hill was goaded into shooting abortion clinic staff by people such as Flip Benan, the head of Operation Rescue, who allegedly told him that if he believed in the moral necessity of such acts, he should carry them out.<sup>79</sup> Sikhs in the Punjab did not want to lose face with the Indian government; hence, according to Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, they felt obliged to kill Hindus and government officials once they had threatened to do so.

Although it may appear as if these acts were meant to win the respect of opponents, they also signified something else: the movements were attempting to demonstrate that they could be their opponents' equals.

In a display of what René Girard has described as mimesis, they were not only imitating their rivals but also showing their superiority in terms that they believed their rivals would understand. Many activists have used their courtroom trials as arenas to convey the message that through their acts they were sparring with the government and taunting it by accusing it of abandoning the very values it professed. As we have seen, Timothy McVeigh cited Justice Brandeis in implying that the U.S. government had set a bad example; Anders Breivik admitted responsibility for his killings but pleaded “not guilty” since he thought that he rather than the Norwegian government had taken the moral high ground; and the World Trade Center defendants called the U.S. Department of Justice the department of “injustice.” The Pensacola abortion clinic attacker, Paul Hill, during his trial also said the government that was convicting him of murder was “unjust.”<sup>80</sup> In the same vein, one of the ISIS supporters’ Twitter accounts that I have observed compared the deaths caused by ISIS with those caused by its enemies. The young supporter said that Americans will “kill you and then make a movie about how hard it was for them to do it,” while the Shi’a would “kill you and then use your tragedy to attract sympathy.”<sup>81</sup> The suicide bombings perpetrated by the Hamas movement in residential neighborhoods of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were, as one leader described them, “letters to Israel,” intended as interactions with their foes. They were invasions of the most domestic of their rival’s quarters, with messages intended to show that “Hamas cannot be ignored” and “the security for Israel’s people is zero.”<sup>82</sup> In that sense the message was the medium in which it was sent: the bombing provided a moment of chaos, warfare, and victimage that the Hamas movement wanted Israeli society to experience. It made the point that war was at hand by providing a bloody scene of battle in Israel’s own quiet neighborhoods. What Hamas tried to buttress in these acts of symbolic empowerment was not just the credibility of its leadership and its equality with government officials, but also the legitimacy of its ideology of religious social order. Through the currency of violence it was drawing attention to what it thought was significant about the social arena around it. In the language of Bourdieu the Hamas leaders were creating a perverse “habitus,” a dark world of social reality, and forcing everyone—Israelis and Palestinians alike—to take stock of their perception of the world.<sup>83</sup>

To some extent the empowerment worked, in that these symbolic events did affect the wider social and political arena. Mike Bray, in responding to my suggestion that bombing abortion clinics did not have

any practical effect, gave the example of the IRA's Gerry Adams, who was visiting the White House at the time. "Look at Adams," Bray said, "winning and dining with Bill Clinton." Bray said that the public accepted this "as long as there was some distance between that moment and the time the last bomb went off." Bray concluded that whatever else the IRA's bombings achieved, they enabled Adams "to get the ear of people."<sup>84</sup> Adams, like most activists, was aware that such displays of power not only elevated his movement's credibility but also advertised its sociopolitical agenda. Adams and other activists also know that performing violence in public is a political act which announces that the power of the group is equal or superior to that of the state. In most cases this is exactly the message that the group wants to convey.

In Israel, for instance, the Jewish right has long accused the secular government of using its devotion to democracy as an excuse for not fully embracing the idea that Israel is a Jewish religious entity. Years before his attack on innocent Muslims at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, wrote that "Israelis will soon have to choose between a Jewish state and a democratic one."<sup>85</sup> Goldstein's massacre, I was told by one of his followers, displayed how serious he was about that choice. The supporter went on to tell me that now "Jews will have to learn to worship in a national way."<sup>86</sup> Yoel Lerner agreed with this position, telling me that in his opinion Israel should not be a democracy but a "Torahcracy"—a society based on the principle of Jewish law.<sup>87</sup>

This idea of a nation based on religious law is on the minds of Christian religious activists as well. Activists associated with Christian Identity advocated the creation of a Christian Republic.<sup>88</sup> White supremacists from throughout the United States and Canada met in Idaho allegedly to plot the forcible overthrow of the federal government and to create a separate Aryan nation within the United States. A government indictment based on information gleaned from this meeting stated that they planned to "carry out assassinations of federal officials, politicians and Jews, as well as bombings and polluting of municipal water supplies."<sup>89</sup> Mike Bray, reflecting a Christian Reconstruction perspective, advocated for a return to "Christian law and order."<sup>90</sup> The models he had in mind were not only European Christian monarchies and Roman Catholic canon law, for which he had a certain respect, but also the Protestant governments of the early American colonies. Bray believed that the way that they grounded their constitutions in biblical law could set a precedent for a new kind of Christian government in the

United States, though he recognized that not everyone in the country would be enthusiastic about such a development. For that reason, Bray advocated state's rights, a radical federalism that would allow for different forms of political rule in each state. Bray suggested a "translocation" of power that would allow "Christian civilization" to flourish in some states and "other civilizations" in others.<sup>91</sup> States would need to be bound together only for their common military defense. It is a proposal not unlike the "10 percent solution" offered by the Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler, who advocated that 10 percent of American territory—such as the states of Idaho and Montana—be dedicated to white Christians.

The establishment of a rule based on religious law is the primary aim of many Muslim groups, such as the caliphate proclaimed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in instituting the Islamic State. Every issue of the ISIS magazine, *Dabiq*, contained articles about how righteous society should be ruled under its understanding of sharia law. Members of Hamas regard their acceptance of sharia as the main difference between their organization and secular groups such as the Fateh organization associated with Yasir Arafat's Palestinian Authority. A similar argument has been made by activists in Egyptian movements and during the year that the Muslim Brotherhood led the government in Egypt as the first democratically elected government after Arab Spring, both friends and foes of the regime expected it to rule in ways that would be consistent with their understanding of sharia. Earlier, Egyptian activists such as Mahmud Abouhalima had told me that President Hosni Mubarak could not be a true Muslim because he did not make sharia the law of the land.<sup>92</sup> A cleric in Cairo's conservative Al-Azhar theological school told me he resented his government's preference for western law. "Why should we obey western laws when Muslim laws are better?" he asked me.<sup>93</sup> It is this position that is assumed by many Muslim activists: western political institutions and the ideology on which they are based should be banished from their territories. They want to rebuild their societies on Islamic foundations.

In some cases activist groups have carried this critique to an extreme. They have not only rejected secular political authority but also created alternatives to it. The Islamic State has been, after all, a state. The Japanese radical Buddhist movement Aum Shinrikyo also created an alternative government, designating the leaders in its organization with government administrative titles such as minister of defense, minister of intelligence, minister of internal affairs, and minister of science and tech-

nology. The idea was not only to show that their organization could do the government's job but also to prepare the movement for actually doing that job after the arrival of the global catastrophe predicted by Shoko Asahara. When that dark day came, the government of Aum Shinrikyo would be the only one remaining to administer civil order. In India, during the height of the Sikh rebellion, militants were treated as if they possessed an authority rivaling that of police and other government officials. Villagers in terrorist zones around the Punjab cities of Batala and Tarn Taran were unwilling to report violent incidents to officials, and radical youths set up their own courts and governmental offices. "Politics can be beautiful," I was told by a former head priest of Sikhism's central shrine,<sup>94</sup> "but it must be the right kind of politics." By this he meant a politics infused with religion, where "religion dominated politics" rather than the other way around.<sup>95</sup> When the country of Khalistan was created and Sikh rule established, one of the leaders of the movement told me it would be a rule of law that would bring justice to all, not just Sikhs, in a regime that lauded the tenets of the Sikh scriptures as supreme.<sup>96</sup> Exactly how this would differ from the secular form of political organization in India, however, remained obscure.

This goal of righteous rule is sometimes touted by members of activist groups as the singular purpose of their terrorist acts. Yet in fact, with the exception of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and the Taliban in Afghanistan, no governmental apparatus has been created through the means of terrorism. And even in the case of ISIS and the Taliban, and to some extent the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon, their militia has been as disciplined as any army; only their tactics were extreme. When other religious regimes have been established—such as the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the brief ascension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran—they entered power by means of peaceful democratic elections or through well-organized military coups, not through the sporadic and extreme performances of power that characterize guerrilla terrorist acts. In fact, despite their bravado, most groups associated with terrorism have largely shied from politics and eschewed elections. When given the opportunity to run for office, they have usually rejected it, as radical Sikhs did in Punjab in 1992. When they did attempt to win at the polls, as did Meir Kahane's Kach party in Israel and the Aum Shinrikyo movement in Japan, they usually failed miserably. Though it never won a national election by itself, Hezbollah's share of the electoral votes in Lebanon has improved over the years, and its support was decisive in electing Michael Aoun as president in the 2016 elections. Hezbollah has developed a fairly

impressive militia though not on the size or strength of a national army. In general, however, aside from ISIS and the Taliban, religious-related political movements seldom attempt to develop effective fighting forces other than those needed for hit-and-run terrorist bombing.

Hence most religious-related political movements are not poised to assume the reins of power even if they were handed to them. The images of political order that they yearn to create have been deliberately fuzzy. Sometimes they have appeared to be democratic, sometimes socialist, sometimes quasi religious-oligarchic. Sometimes they have been nationalist or international in scope. Islamic movements especially have projected the illusion of waging a global struggle. Osama bin Laden was fond of portraying himself as the great leader of the United Muslim world in its warfare with the satanic power of America. In his televised proclamations on Al-Jazeera television following the 9/11 attacks, he is pictured almost like the Prophet, a general encamped in combat. Yet the political order for which he is struggling is unclear—it is a shadowy transnational entity not fully described. The Hamas leader Abdul Aziz Rantisi told me that what distinguished his organization from Yasir Arafat's was that the Palestinian Authority was waging a "national struggle" whereas Hamas was "transnational."<sup>97</sup> But what did that mean politically? Although it is clear who these transnational activists hate, nowhere in their program have they given a design for a global political entity—Islamic or otherwise—that could actually administrate the results of a victory over American and secular rule and the emergence of a religious revolution, should they ever achieve it.

My conclusion is that although ISIS and a few other movements for religious nationalism have indeed been serious alternatives to secular rule, most proponents of religious terrorism have had a less tangible goal. Their acts have often been devices for symbolic empowerment in wars that cannot be won and for goals that cannot be achieved. The very absence of thought about what the activists would do if they were victorious is sufficient indication that they have not expected to win, and perhaps did not even want to do so. They represented a peculiar corollary to the advice of the French theorist Frantz Fanon during Algeria's war of independence some years ago, when he advocated terrorism as the Algerians' mobilizing weapon. Fanon reasoned that even a small display of violence could have immense symbolic power by jolting the masses into an awareness of their own potency.<sup>98</sup> What Fanon did not realize is that for some activist groups the awareness of their potency is all that they desire.

Yet these acts of symbolic empowerment have had an effect beyond whatever personal satisfaction and feelings of potency they have imparted to those who supported and conducted them. The very act of killing on behalf of a moral code is a political statement. Such acts break the state's monopoly on morally sanctioned killing. By putting the right to take life in their own hands, the perpetrators of religious violence have made a daring claim of power on behalf of the powerless, a basis of legitimacy for public order other than that on which the secular state relies. In doing so, they have demonstrated to everyone how fragile public order actually is, and how fickle the populace's assent to the moral authority of power can be.