Critical Perspectives on Religion in International Politics

In recent years, the discipline of International Relations has undergone a religious renaissance. The distinction between the religious and the secular has been brought into question by a resurgence of interest in religion, culture and identity in the context of international politics, forcing mainstream theories to take religion seriously. Furthermore, efforts to 'provincialize' IR by bringing in voices from 'outside' the West have stimulated interest in other religious traditions which have hitherto been marginalized in the discipline. Attempts have also been made to free IR from its dominant secular orientation through an encounter with the 'postsecular' which can open up productive avenues of inquiry. This series, therefore, opens up space for critical scholarship on Religion and International Relations and 'postsecular' approaches to global politics.

Titles in the Series

The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question, edited by Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson

The Refugee Crisis and Religion

Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question

Edited by
Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
INTERNATIONAL
London • New York

Published by Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.
Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB
www.rowmaninternational.com

Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd. is an affiliate of Rowman & Littlefield
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706, USA
With additional offices in Boulder, New York, Toronto (Canada), and Plymouth
www.rowman.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: HB 978-1-7834-8894-0
PB 978-1-7834-8895-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Mavelli, Luca, editor. | Wilson, Erin K., editor.
Title: The refugee crisis and religion : secularism, security and hospitality in question / edited by Luca Mavelli and Erin Wilson.
Description: London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, [2016] | Series: Critical perspectives on religion in international politics | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016030373 (print) | LCCN 2016049283 (ebook) | ISBN 9781783488940 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781783488957 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781783488964 (electronic)
Subjects: LCSH: Refugees—Government policy—Europe. | Religion and social problems—Europe.
Classification: LCC HV640.4.E85 R44 2016 (print) | LCC HV640.4.E85 (ebook)
DDC 362.87/561094—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016030373

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Acknowledgements ix

1 The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries 1
Erin K. Wilson and Luca Mavelli

2 Refugees, Migrants and World Order 23
Richard Falk

PART I: QUESTIONING THE SECULAR/RELIGIOUS DIVIDE 35

3 Challenging the Discourse on Religion, Secularism and Displacement 37
Alastair Ager and Joey Ager

4 Praxis Community Projects: A Secular Organization? Exploring the Boundaries between Religious and Secular in Migration Support 53
Bethan Lant

5 How Religion and Secularism (Don't) Matter in the Refugee Crisis 61
Renée Wagenvoorde

PART II: CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING THE MUSLIM REFUGEE 75

6 No Mosque, No Refugees: Some Reflections on Syrian Refugees and the Construction of Religion in Canada 77
Lori G. Beaman, Jennifer A. Selby and Amélie Barras

7 Muslims and Others: The Politics of Religion in the Refugee Crisis 97
Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

8 Sharing Stories 109
'Gabriel' with Vicki Squire

9 Miresevini ne Amerike! Spiritual Response to the Suffering of Kosovar Refugees 119
Elżbieta M. Goździak

PART III: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF HOSPITALITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE 129

10 Pilgrim City or Belonging beyond the State: St. Augustine, Pope Francis and the Refugee Crisis 131
Mariano Barbato

11 The Refugee Experience as Existential Exile: Hospitality as a Spiritual and Political Response 145
Jean-Marie Carrière

12 A Right to Neighbourhood: Rethinking Islamic Narratives and Practices of Hospitality in a Sedentarist World 157
Tahir Zaman

13 The Limits of Hospitality: Finding Space for Faith 175
Sadia Kidwai

14 Religious Justifications for an Overlapping Consensus on Palestinian Refugees' Human Rights 187
Claudia Baumgart-Ochse

PART IV: AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH, GENDER, SEXUALITY AND ASYLUM 205

15 The Faith-Gender-Asylum Nexus: An Intersectionalist Analysis of Representations of the 'Refugee Crisis' 207
Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

16 Loving God versus Wrathful God: Religion and LGBT Forced Migration 223
Siobhan McGuirk and Max Niedzwiecki

Bibliography 241

Index 281

About the Contributors 299

Chapter 7

Muslims and Others

The Politics of Religion in the Refugee Crisis

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

On the morning of the German Wings 9525 crash in March of 2015, I awoke to an email from a journalist asking me to comment on the debate over the religious identity of the pilot. My thoughts travelled quickly down a predictable path: if I were to say that the pilot was not Muslim, could I be sure that was the case? Would this not imply that had he been Muslim, this information would somehow explain an otherwise inexplicable tragedy? Would I then be asked if he was perhaps preparing to convert? Or whether he had secretly converted without telling his friends and family? In an effort to avoid these questions, I responded by saying that 'this line of questioning makes no sense to me whatsoever. I find it disturbing and depressing that at a time like this some people feel compelled to search desperately for explanations that presume religious causation' (Winsor 2015). My statement was quoted in *IBTimes* and reposted in a handful of other obscure websites. In response, I was bombarded with hateful tweets, phone calls and threatening emails accusing me of being an apologist for Muslims, violence and Islamist terrorism. It became clear that my words were unacceptable to some segment of the US media and American public. To some people, whether the pilot was Muslim was the first question that had to be asked. For a subset of those, the pilot simply *had* to be Muslim – whether he himself knew it or not – to explain an unthinkable act. Those who claimed otherwise, like me, were seen as hiding something and cast as suspect. Among many commentators, this moral panic led to a focus on Islam that overshadowed other factors that may have led to the crash, such as psychological, familial or professional stresses on the pilot, spur of the moment loss of control and so on. The presumed all-powerful ability of 'Islam' to dictate actions and behaviours carried the day. My attempt to question the assumption of Muslim guilt and non-Muslim innocence was met with white-knuckled anger and threats, testament to the fear that surrounds and

sustains this narrative. One harasser on Twitter made reference to one of my daughters, suggesting that had she perished in the crash I would see things differently. That night I combed through my online presence to remove all references to my family. After receiving an aggressive phone call at the office, I worked from home for the rest of the week.

The violent Muslim perpetrator and non-Muslim victim narrative resurfaced after the November 2015 attacks in Paris, with the 'Muslimness' of the perpetrators dominating international coverage. This time it had more staying power. In the days that followed, its capacity not only to frame public debates but to shape public policy became clear. Several leading American Republican presidential candidates came out in favour of a religious test for refugees from Syria seeking asylum in the United States, and some called to ban Muslims from entering the United States altogether (Hurd 2015a). Senator Ted Cruz introduced legislation that would ban Muslim Syrian refugees from entering the country. Cruz added that Christians should be allowed to enter the United States because 'there is no meaningful risk of Christians committing acts of terror' (Zezima 2015). Jeb Bush suggested that 'our focus ought to be on the Christians who have no place in Syria anymore' (Blaine 2015). Conservative media mogul Rupert Murdoch tweeted his support for a special exception to the refugee ban for 'proven Christians'. A large contingent of mostly Republican governors across the United States said that their states would no longer accept Syrian refugees, although legally they had no power to stop it. In a 2015 speech on the refugee crisis, Cruz accused Democrats of 'pretend[ing] there is no religious aspect to this' (Zezima 2015). And in December, Donald Trump called for a 'total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on', a statement he repeated constantly on the campaign trail in 2016. He had support for these statements. According to a Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted in December 2015, nearly 60 per cent of Republicans supported Trump's proposal. Exit polling after the South Carolina Republican primary in February 2016 found that three-quarters of Republican voters supported a temporary ban on Muslims entering the country (Johnson 2016).

The claim that screening out Muslim refugees would prevent individuals with violent tendencies from entering the United States is premised on the assumption that those responsible for the attacks in Paris, Beirut and elsewhere were motivated by an essential part of them that is beholden to Islam. That particular fragment of these individuals is said to cause the violence. To be Muslim, in this view, is to harbour a propensity for violence. This presumption has found fertile ground in the United States, where the indiscriminate attribution of violent tendencies to the grip of Islam or Islamic beliefs over individuals and entire communities has become increasingly common. According to the Public Religion Research Institute's 2015 American Values

Survey, 'Americans' perceptions of Islam have turned more negative over the past few years. Today, a majority (56%) of Americans agree that the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life, while roughly four in ten (41%) disagree. In 2011, Americans were divided based on their views of Islam (47% agreed, 48% disagreed)' (Public Religion Research Institute 2015). The numbers are significantly higher among Republicans and Tea Party members – 76 and 77 per cent agree with that statement, respectively, while 43 per cent of Democrats agree (Graham 2016). The presumption at the heart of this alleged incompatibility between American and Muslim values is that among religionists, Muslims are particularly violent, intolerant, incompletely Americanized and/or beholden to non-American legal and religious authorities. Of course, such narratives about particular groups, including Catholics and Mormons, have a long history in the United States (Hamburger 2004; Gordon 2002). As Nadia Marzouki (2014) has shown, these assumptions also animate the anti-sharia movement, which has been active in the United States over the past several years. Anti-sharia lobbyists such as Newt Gingrich and David Yerushalmi not only associate Islam with violent terrorism but depict it as a comprehensive political and legal system – not a religion – that is exempt from First Amendment protections (Marzouki 2014: 37).[1]

Anti-Muslim discourse is not unique to American discussions of the refugee crisis. A related discussion unfolded in government and media circles north of the border as Canadian discourse also became increasingly 'religionized' in response to the crisis. For some Canadian commentators and public officials, the religious identities of prospective Syrian refugees, and specifically whether or not they were Muslim, were transformed into their most salient and relevant personal characteristics (see also Beaman et al.'s chapter in this book). Rather than view individuals as Syrians, Iraqis, lawyers, engineers, mothers, soccer fans, chefs, Kurds, plumbers, musicians, machinists or artists, refugees were classified as Muslim or not Muslim. This classificatory scheme was supported at the highest levels of government. In late 2015, the then prime minister Stephen Harper stated that he wanted to 'make sure that we are selecting the most vulnerable bona fide refugees . . . with a focus on the religious and ethnic minorities that are the most vulnerable' (Press Progress, 2015). Harper's Conservative Party website 'juxtaposed a graphic warning of the ISIS threat to religious minorities alongside a video of Harper shot in a Toronto-area Coptic church surrounded by Christian iconography' (Press Progress 2015). Indicating that the Party would 'accept 10,000 additional refugees from the region over the next four years who are facing religious persecution and death', the website provided a list of who the Conservatives considered to be persecuted religious minorities, including 'Alawites, Bedouins, Christians, Druze, Ismailis, Shi'a [and] Yazidis'. CTV News reported that a temporary halt to the processing

of some Syrian refugees had been ordered earlier in 2015 to 'make sure the types favoured by the Prime Minister's Office were being prioritized'. Citing the investigative work of Robert Fife, CTV noted that 'Department of Citizenship and Immigration insiders told CTV's Ottawa Bureau Chief Robert Fife that PMO staff went through the files to ensure that persecuted religious minorities with established communities already in Canada – ones that Conservative Leader Stephen Harper could court for votes – were being accepted. Insiders say PMO actively discouraged the department from accepting applications from Shia and Sunni Muslims' (CTV News 2015). While Conservatives defended the halt, claiming that an audit was being undertaken to protect public safety, the co-director of the FJC Refugee Centre in Toronto, Loly Rico, told CTV that 'she believes the temporary halt on applications was an attempt to not bring in as many Muslims to Canada' (CTV News 2015). Following a December 2014 Geneva conference on Syria convened by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, CBC News reported that 'sources close to the discussions say Canada is seeking to resettle only refugees from Syria's religious minorities, something that would likely be difficult for the UN's refugee agency to accept' (Lynch 2014).

One could dismiss all of this as no more than election year posturing on both sides of the border. And to some extent, it was. Opponents of those calling for the exclusion of Muslims loudly condemned the rhetoric on both sides, with President Obama calling out the Republicans' anti-Muslim rhetoric as 'shameful' and Hillary Clinton tweeting that it represented 'a new low'. Speaking from the campaign trail, soon-to-be Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau described the halt as 'an example of how Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's actions are not aligned with those of Canadians' (CTV News).

But there is more to the story than partisan disagreement or campaign vitriol. To suggest that Muslims are fuelling the violence *because* they are Muslim, and that Christians are inherently non-violent, taps into and feeds a powerful discourse casting Muslims as perpetrators of violence and non-Muslims as their innocent victims. Part of the power of this discourse lies in its resilience in the face of numerous scholarly accounts that attest to the limitations of explanations that rely on Islam – or any religious tradition – as the 'cause' of particular political outcomes, whether violent or peaceful. It matters little to the success of this narrative that neither the war in Syria nor the motives and identities of those fighting or fleeing it can be reduced to religion in general, or Islam in particular. It seems to matter little that to reduce the causes of the violence to religious intolerance and tensions actively misconstrues it by obscuring the multiple local, regional and global drivers of the conflict, including violence perpetrated by the United States over many years in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. These points have been

made (Doostdar 2014). The narrative persists, creating a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. As Robert Wright (2015) describes it:

> When people think of extremism as some kind of organic expression of Islam, the belligerence of radical Muslims starts to seem like an autonomous, intrinsically motivated force – something whose momentum doesn't derive from mundane socioeconomic and geopolitical factors. It's something that you can stop, if at all, only with physical counter-force. In other words: by killing lots of people. I don't think it's a coincidence that commentators who dismiss attempts to understand the 'root causes' of extremism tend to be emphatic in linking the extremism to Islam, and often favor a massively violent response to it.

There are other ways to talk about religion and politics. Scholars of religion, society and politics have shown that both historically and in the present religious subjects are conditioned, but never fully defined, by the structures that surround them. Religious subjects are never fully constituted or captured by orthodoxy or tradition. Instead, as Sullivan argues, they are 'eclectic, adaptive and acculturating', mixing and borrowing not only from other religious traditions but also with practices from the broader cultures that surround them (2010: 117; see also Squire's and Baumgart-Ochse's chapters in this book). Religion cannot be singled out or cleanly distilled from other aspects of human activity and history, and yet also cannot simply be identified with these either. What do we have, locally, nationally and internationally if we have neither complete religious autonomy from the political, nor religion's complete absorption into the political? This approach, as historian Sarah Shortall explains,

> demands an appreciation of the way in which religious discourses interact with, but are not exhausted by, the political, social, and cultural contexts of their production. In some cases, these utterances may reinforce existing power relations, but in other cases they may resist or transform them, and indeed they can do both at the same time. This transformative power arises from the fact that religious discourses emerge in conversation both with the particular historical context of their production, and with the manifold internal resources of a much longer religious tradition. It is the conjunction of these two contextual forces that lends religious phenomena their irreducible ambivalence and renders them excessive to the particular historical moment in which they are uttered. (Shortall 2015)

As I have argued elsewhere, Islam does not cause violence. Nor does it cause peace. Islam is better understood as are other intersected categories such as gender, race and class: it is deeply enmeshed with legal and other modes of collective governance in complex and context-specific formations. Neither 'Islam' nor 'Muslim political actors' are singular, agentive forces

that can be analysed, quantified, engaged, celebrated, condemned or divided between good and bad. References to 'Muslim political behaviour' are meaningless. There is no singular Islam, just as there is no single Christianity or Hinduism. As Daryl Li (2015) observes, 'No doctrinal position or school can be identified as causing the actions of jihadi groups.' There simply is no such thing as 'Muslim political behaviour' (Hurd 2015b). As the anthropologist Samuli Schielke explains, 'Islam, like any major faith, is not simply something – it is a part of people's lives, thoughts, acts, societies, histories and more. Consequently, it can be many different things – a moral idiom, a practice of self-care, a discursive tradition, an aesthetic sensibility, a political ideology, a mystical quest, a source of hope, a cause of anxiety, an identity, an enemy – you name it' (2010: 2).

Why is the narrative of Muslims as violent perpetrators largely immune from such insights? In part, it is because it draws sustenance from a much broader and deeper well of support than is often acknowledged by North American critics of far-right anti-Muslim politics.[2] It enjoys the tacit support of a range of constituencies, including some liberal internationalists. The politicization of Muslim difference domestically, I will suggest, cannot be disentangled from a series of related legal and political initiatives that politicize religious difference internationally. As discussed in my recent book *Beyond Religious Freedom*, these initiatives have become increasingly common in recent decades due to the intensification of a global restorative 'religion agenda' that is shaping foreign and international public policy and programming in North America, Europe and elsewhere. One initiative not discussed in the book is recent calls for the international community to officially declare genocide in Syria. While intended to mobilize the international community to protect innocent lives, a laudable cause for sure, in the context of the present war such declarations serve to both presuppose and produce a social and political world populated by Muslims perpetrators and non-Muslim victims. As discussed below, calls to declare genocide obscure other causes and perpetrators of the violence in Syria while enabling and engendering exclusionary forms of nationalist and anti-Muslim politics domestically. The mutually supportive relation between these different regimes of institutionalized discrimination speaks to the importance of exploring relations between national and international regimes of religious governance.[3]

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE AND THE POLITICS OF GENOCIDE

The summer of 2015 saw heightened attention in the American media and among policymakers to violence against Christians and Yazidis at the hands of the Islamic State (ISIS). Frank Wolf's twenty-first-century Wilberforce

Initiative and the International Religious Freedom Roundtable called on President Obama and the United Nations to officially declare that ISIS is committing genocide. Public figures across the US political spectrum, from Democrat Martin O'Malley, to Hillary Clinton, to Republican Presidential hopeful Ted Cruz, all endorsed an official declaration of genocide to draw the world's attention to the plight of persecuted individuals and groups in the region. In early 2016, the US House of Representatives, led by Nebraska Republican Jeff Fortenberry, began marking up legislation to express Congress's judgement that the Islamic State's targeting of Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Kurds and other ethnic minorities constitutes 'war crimes', 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide' (Rogin 2016).[4] Senator Marco Rubio co-sponsored the Senate companion to the Fortenberry bill, which passed in the House on 14 March 2016 (H.R. Con. Res. 75, 2016) and was received by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the next day.

My intention here is neither to establish whether genocide is occurring in the region nor is it to minimize the violence that is taking place in Syria. By all accounts the situation is horrific. My point is twofold: first, that in the context of the current war in Syria calls to officially recognize the violence as genocide serve to amplify and legitimize the global discourse of violent Muslim perpetrators and non-Muslim victims while obscuring other causes and perpetrators of violence. Such calls obscure a broader field of violent perpetrators and exonerate those whose acts of violence are illegible to international authorities whose attention is riveted on particular actions or actors deemed to be essentially 'religious' or 'ethnic' in nature. Calls for official recognition of genocide against Christians and Yazidis, then, intensifies and legitimizes the discourse of violent Muslim perpetrators and non-Muslim victims while obscuring and protecting other perpetrators of violence. Second, such calls also serve to bolster the Muslim perpetrator narrative in other contexts including North American debates over the status of refugees who are fleeing the conflict. The insistence on responding to the horrific violence in Syria *in these terms*, though appealing at first glance, entrenches and politicizes the social salience of religious difference while blinding outsiders to other dimensions of the conflict and victims of the violence. To identify religion as the cause of the violence renders us incapable of apprehending the broader political and social contexts in which discrimination and violence occur.

This may be endemic to the Convention Against Genocide. Like several other international legal instruments, the Convention relies on religion, and religious identities, reasons, actions and actors and their presumed differentiability from their secular counterparts, as legitimate and legible categories of international legal protection. They are not. International legal instruments that privilege religion do not innocently reflect religious realities on the ground. Rather, they actively bestow identities and categorizations, shaping

individual and communal self-understandings in the process. In the words of philosopher Ian Hacking, 'Counting is no mere report of developments. It elaborately, often philanthropically, creates new ways for people to be. People spontaneously come to fit their categories' (1986: 223). As the editors to the book in which Hacking's essay appears explain further, 'These emergent categories or recategorizations do not determine identity; rather, they open up spaces where both autonomous development and varieties of control are possible' (Heller and Wellbury 1986: 13). In the case at hand, such protections elicit and single out for international legal protection individuals and groups who are designated by the authorities as essentially, and before all else, religious. Sociologically, such classifications shape individual and collective self-understandings on the ground. Social and political space is transformed to reflect and emphasize cultural and religious rather than economic or other attributes (Yilmaz 2016). Politically, such classifications empower the parties to the conflict who profit the most from the international politicization of religious difference. This includes Bashar al-Assad. It also includes ISIS. At the same time, and of equal significance, calls to declare genocide silence actors whose forms and modalities of oppositional politics are illegible or invisible, viewed through a secular-religious classificatory prism. That is, if individuals or groups are not legible as 'religious' for whatever reason, they fail to qualify for such protections. An example is the 2016 US Congressional debate over a genocide resolution. The sponsor of the House version of the legislation told reporter Josh Rogin 'that he believes that Assad's atrocities, while horrendous, do not meet the legal definition of genocide because they do not target the systematic elimination of a religious or ethnic group' and 'the narrow tailoring of this is because we believe this meets the criteria for genocide and this is the appropriate use of this vehicle' (2016).

Is there an alternative international legal framework that would protect vulnerable individuals and communities from mass atrocities without reproducing the 'problem-space of secularism?' (Agrama 2012) Is it possible to avoid the pitfalls of transforming religion and religious difference into objects of international legal governance and political intervention? This may require re-writing the Genocide Convention. Genocide is a special category of international crime, defined in the 1948 Convention Against Genocide as systematic killing or other atrocities 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'. From Raphael Lemkin after the Holocaust to the International Criminal Court today, it puts a word to a specific act: mass extermination of identifiable communities. The Convention deliberately does not criminalize mass killings of political opponents – these do not qualify as genocide under international law. The term genocide speaks in the language of race, religion and ethnicity. It treats individuals as first and foremost carriers of an ethnic or religious identity. For the individual

living in Aleppo under siege, this means that prospects for help from outside may depend on how outside powers label her religious affiliation. Those whom outsiders deem are being killed because they are Christian would be protected and privileged, while those whom outsiders see as being killed because they oppose the Assad regime would not. This legal institutionalization of religious discrimination also shapes the Canadian asylum application proceedings discussed earlier, in which the PMO privileged individual applications identified as non-Muslim while 'setting aside' those identified as Shi'a or Sunni. A political climate that construes religious affiliation as politically determinative incentivizes governments and activists to focus on some victims at the expense of others according to religious or other group affiliations (see also Beaman et al.'s and Wagenvoorde's chapters in this book).

ISIS is killing Christians and Yazidis. The group is also killing Kurds, Shi'a and Sunni Muslims and anyone who stands in their way, including in some cases their own family members. The Assad regime, the Russians, Americans, Iranians and others are also perpetrating extraordinary violence in Syria and on the Syrian people. In specifying that some of these killings qualify as a matter of exceptional international political and legal concern, while others do not, the discourse of genocide endows racial, religious or ethnic boundaries and designations with legal and political consequence. In Syria, this discursive framing excludes Assad's massacres because they target political opponents rather than an ethnic, racial or religious community. It blinds observers and international authorities to the worst perpetrators of violence. In early 2016, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights released a study concluding that the Syrian government was responsible for 'massive and systematized violence', with the *Independent* reporting that 'the crimes against humanity committed by the Assad regime, according to the UN, far outnumber those of ISIS militants and other jihadist groups' (Withnall 2016). As Rogin found in reporting on the 2016 US Congressional resolution, 'The Syrian opposition is already troubled that a Congressional resolution or an administration designation – regardless of whether they include Christians as victims – could exclude Assad as a perpetrator. His foes have long held that one of Assad's main strategies is to portray his regime as the protector of Syrian Christians, as a means of appealing to Western leaders.' To frame the violence in Syria as genocide perpetrated by Muslims against non-Muslims privileges a reading of the conflict as fundamentally religious or ethnic in nature. This not only obscures other causes of the violence but underwrites the Assad regime's continuing crackdown on anyone it defines as a terrorist: that is, anyone who defies or questions the legitimacy of Assad's rule. It masks the broader motivations that have driven the war in Syria from its inception in 2011, which has involved local, regional and international disputes over justice, dignity, land, resources, power and status. These factors

become increasingly inaccessible the more intensively and exclusively the international community focuses on the allegedly unique threat posed by ISIS. But ISIS is not unique. As Li explains, ISIS is 'best thought of as a sectarian double secessionist movement that has skillfully seized the opportunities available to position itself as an enemy to all but a priority to none, with the possible exception of the Syrian Kurdish rebels who have similarly exploited power vacuums to carve out an autonomous zone. This dynamic makes ISIS distinct and interesting, but not unique or apocalyptic' (Li 2015).

Extreme violence against particular groups is inseparable from the conflict in Syria. This includes not only the actions of ISIS but also the efforts by Assad and his supporters to generate social and political fault-lines that correspond with ethnic and sectarian identities, and to exploit them relentlessly. It includes dramatic state failure in Iraq and Afghanistan. It includes a vicious proxy war driven by outside interests, including arms industries and the deeply interdependent military and security establishments in the United States, Turkey, Europe, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. It includes the partial collapse of the government of Iraq, the emergence of a semi-sovereign Kurdish entity in the north, and the escalating tensions between the government of Turkey and representatives of the Kurdish people inside and beyond Turkey's borders. It includes Russian, US, Turkish, French and other players engaged militarily in the name of a shifting and seemingly endless catalogue of deeply entangled state, military and corporate interests.

An effective response will account for all of these factors. To focus on Muslim perpetrators as the problem, and rescuing non-Muslim victims as the solution, pushes such a response further out of reach of the international community while reinforcing a toxic cocktail of nationalism, racism and anti-Muslim politics in North America, Europe and elsewhere. This connection between global and domestic (mis)representations of the causes of the crisis is evident in a statement by Mouaz Moustafa, executive director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force, an American non-governmental organization that supports the Syrian opposition. According to Moustafa, 'To condemn ISIS with no mention of the Assad regime plays into the hands of a regime that helped create the terrorist group and empowered ISIS's recruitment efforts. . . . Congress would mirror the White House's misguided policy by focusing on the symptom and not the cause' (quoted in Rogin 2016).

CONCLUSION: 'WE NEED TO MAKE THESE PEOPLE FEAR US'

In *Varieties of Religious Establishment,* Winnifred Sullivan and Lori Beaman describe a tendency among contemporary social and political theorists and decision-makers to overemphasize religion as a key identity

marker and basis of rights claims (see also Beaman et al.'s chapter in this book). They describe this as 'cornering' religion (Beaman and Sullivan 2013: 7). As Beaman explains, 'Rather than normalizing religion as one identity point among many, or as a complex category that often defies easy characterization, it becomes fetishized such that the identification of religion becomes the beginning point from which social relations are enacted and from which institutional policy is developed' (2013: 147). The language of genocide corners religion. It reduces multidimensional affiliations, actions and forms of sociality to a question of religious or ethnic identity and community. It attaches unique significance to that which the authorities identify as religious and politicizes the processes through which such determinations are made. Social divisions become defined in religious terms. Some groups are protected and privileged, while others are not. Politics takes shape around secular–religious and religious–religious distinctions. Governments and international organizations become unwitting, and at times unwilling, arbiters of religious authenticity and orthodoxy (see Hurd 2015c: 109–15).

Domestic narratives that reduce complex historical and contemporary events to stories of Muslim perpetrators and non-Muslim victims also corner religion. Like their international counterparts, such narratives flourish in an environment in which religion has been established as the starting point from which social relations are enacted and institutional policy is developed. Cornering religion enables representations of Islam as a standalone 'cause' of violence, discrimination and social tension. It enables statements such as Senator Cruz's that 'there is no meaningful risk of Christians committing acts of terror' (Zezima 2015). Emphasizing the ability of 'religion' to determine 'politics' as this statement does obscures the complex realities of human action, agency, community and subjectivity (see also Squire's chapter in this book). Social, legal and political worlds become structured around and saturated by perceived distinctions between 'Muslims and others,' both at home and abroad. Discussions of ISIS become dominated by what Li describes as 'a secularized form of demonology' that 'stem from a place of horror that shuts down serious thinking about politics' (2015). Reporting from a Trump rally in northwestern Arkansas in 2016, Jenna Johnson confirms Li's point in her description of a conversation with Newt Livesay, a 73-year-old veteran, custom-knife maker and Trump supporter. Livesay told Johnson that 'he has known many Muslims over the years, including his doctor, who is "as nice and as good a doctor as I've ever had"'. But, he said, he distrusts Muslims living in the Middle East who could have ties to the Islamic State. He told Johnson: 'Somebody said, "Well, we ought to make them our friend". No, we need to make these people fear us'.

NOTES

1. Marzouki (2014: 36) draws attention to the limitations of recent studies that foreground Islamophobia in favour of a more historically contextualized analytical lens privileging the simultaneous separationistist and evangelical tendencies and contexts in which First Amendment claims have been adjudicated in the United States: 'Ce type d'analyse fait en effet preuve d'une forme de présentisme et d'anhistoricisme en s'intéressant seulement à la dimension exceptionnelle de la présence musulmane aux États-Unis et des réactions à cette presence. Il nous semble analytiquement plus productif de replacer les débats actuels sur l'islam dans le contexte d'une société américaine qui se caractérise à la fois par un attachement très fort à l'idéal de séparation et par une culture évangélique importante.'

2. Marzouki (2014: 46–7) cautions that the influence of far-right anti-Muslim groups in the United States should not be exaggerated: 'Le mouvement anti-*charia* est avant tout un réseau qui unit certains acteurs centraux de l'activisme chrétien conservateur (tels les Sekulow) à des personnages beaucoup plus marginaux (B. Gabriel, P. Geller, D. Caton). Si célèbres soient-ils, du fait de leur capacité à occuper la scène médiatique, les leaders du mouvement anti-*charia* sont souvent des seconds couteaux au sein du Parti républicain et du mouvement conservateur' ('Le mouvement contre le droit islamique').

3. See 'The Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad' project co-directed by Winnifred Sullivan and myself: http://buffett.northwestern.edu/programs/religion-home-abroad/

4. Several groups that advocate on behalf of Christians in the Middle East, including In Defense of Christians, the Family Research Council, the US Council of Catholic Bishops, the International Association of Genocide Scholars and the Knights of Columbus support Fortenberry's bill (Rogin 2016).