UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Performing One's Own Death: Martyrdom, Sovereignty and Truth

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

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September 2016

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ABSTRACT

Performing One's Own Death: Martyrdom, Sovereignty and Truth

by

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This work develops a new understanding of the socials significance of martyrdom through a comparative analysis of the concept's deployment in three distinct settings. Beginning by critically assessing the linguistic provenance of the term "martyr," from the Greek word for a court witness, combined with a discussion of how such deaths are discursively shaped in opposition to the victim, soldier or suicide, I argue for a heuristic that centers on the opposition of interpretive frames at work in conflicts that create martyrs. To support such a model, I proceed by analyzing collected sets of texts said to be written by martyrs where they frame their intention and link their death to larger political and symbolic complexes. To establish a common lens through which to investigate deaths that occur in radically different contexts, I introduce the concept of the sovereign imaginary: a coherent ideal of cosmic order that configures moral judgments of right and wrong, delineates social boundaries, and provides processes of establishing legitimate authority. The contemporary political and religious authorities who rely on and propagate such imaginaries are responsible for shaping life for the communities under analysis, and their words are considered in tandem with those of the martyrs themselves.

The concept of the martyr as we understand it today originates in early Christianity, which has largely determined the contours of the term's usage today. Second century Christianity in Asia Minor – the so-called cradle of martyrdom – provided much of the context for Christian martyrdom, and is the first case analyzed here. This area boasts members like Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, two significant voices that shaped the understanding of martyrdom in early Christianity. By examining the socio-political context between the early Christian communities, their Jewish counterparts, and the Roman state, I trace the developing conflict around the true sovereign authority in the world, and show how harm against the body was used as a means of shoring up such authority. Armed with their own ideas about legitimate suffering, and refusing to capitulate to the coercive measures of the Roman State, Christian martyrs gave their lives in a show of affiliation to the true power in the world and thereby became exemplars of the true way to live.

A similar dynamic exists within the second case under study, the Shi'a Islamists of 1980s Iran and Lebanon, from whence the modern phenomenon of "martyrdom operations" or "suicide bombings" springs. Looking explicitly at the Iran-Iraq war – where huge numbers of young men walked willingly into bullets to overwhelm their enemy – alongside Hizbollah's resistance to Israel's invasion of Lebanon where human bombs were first employed as a tactic toward Islamist ends, I show how the repeated invocation of mytho-historical persons led to the experience of re-living history. Attending to the Shi'a roots of what will largely become a Sunni phenomenon, I show that the self-sacrificial violence was seen to be a necessary act in order to bring about the only truly just rule of God, one incumbent upon all true Muslims. The ability of one group to determine the requirements of a social group, I

argue, resulted in the willingness of young men and women to place the ends of community over their own lives.

My last case leaves the Abrahamic context to examine the way martyrdom discourse is employed in regards to the self-immolations that have been occurring in twenty-first century Tibet. Though an explicitly Buddhist culture, here too I discover conflicts around legitimate sovereignty and political self-determination – issues at the heart of all cases under analysis – compel a discourse that encourages self-sacrifice through reference to sacred narratives. By tracing the language employed by the self-immolators in tandem with the ways the struggle with the People's Republic of China is framed by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, I demonstrate how the same dynamic is evident in labeling the auto-cremations martyrdoms: a historic, political, and religious truth is expressed and cemented in the bodies of those willing to die rather than act against it.

In conclusion I articulate a new theoretical model by which to understand martyrdom as performance suffering, acts of voluntary affliction – contextualized in a symbolic world – that are seen to have the potential to change the situation on the ground by remaining true to the larger cosmic goals that would bring about a just existence. Maintaining that the operations of martyrdom occur on both personal and social levels simultaneously, I show that these deaths are used as pieces of evidence in support of a particular interpretive vision of truth, and that these deaths are particularly powerful and provocative due to the spectacular nature of a sovereign imaginary appearing in the flesh of those who suffer for it.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Concerning Martyrdom

Standing before a camera in a quiet room, a man finished his videotaped testament saying "God is the greatest," before strapping on an explosives-filled vest and going to die. Standing before an angry Roman judge condemning him to death, a man answered all questions by saying "I am a Christian," before being devoured by wild animals. Standing still as flames engulfed her robes, a woman prayed "all-knowing Chenrezig (a term for the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara), Tenzin Gyatso, may you stand firm until samsara ends," before collapsing to the ground. Each statement was a confession of devotion, each spectacle horrifying to onlookers, and each person a voluntary participant in their own violent demise. Each individual is celebrated by their community as a paragon of virtue while being condemned by outsiders as irrational.

And each person is a martyr.

Martyrs appear throughout human history in a wide variety of contexts. Some have become firmly ensconced in our imaginary, like Joan of Arc, the maid of Orléans who battled against gender roles as well as the British and was burned at the stake when she was only nineteen. Others strike us as deviant or illegitimate, like Mohammed Atta who flew a plane into the North Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, killing himself along with thousands of civilians. Both have been labeled martyrs, though they cause radically different reactions depending on who considers them. We respect and identify with some, while condemning and discounting others. The questions surrounding martyrdom can likewise both appear self-evident and startling: What cause these people to seek their own

destruction? Why are these deaths celebrated as models of ethical action? How do they differ from suicides? Why do such disparate contexts share such provocative similarities? What, ultimately, is martyrdom? Answering these questions will aid our understanding about what it means to speak in terms of martyrs, to say someone sacrificed themselves for something that exceeded them.

The specific label of "martyrdom" comes out of early Christianity, and the term "martyr" originally meant a witness who provided testimony during a legal trial.[1] Greek texts used the term in reference to Christians sentenced to die by adversarial power structures – be they Rome or the Jewish *Sanhedrin* – referring to these individuals as witnesses, *martys*, to Christ. Speaking of martyrdom in terms of "bearing witness" or "testifying" recalls this early character. As those texts were translated as they spread through the Roman Empire, the term was transliterated, signaling that suffering and death in service to something was early on a distinctive category. First millennium Syriac and Arabic scholars returned to the root for "witness" for their terms, *sohaido* and *shahid* respectively.[2] The latter is etymologically close to *shahada*, the confession of faith required of all Muslims and first pillar of Islam. Had the concept of the legal witness continued to suffice for the complex of meanings that characterized the martyr in these settings, we might be left without such a label today.

Ultimately, martyrs are not found, they are made, constructed by a hermeneutic move that connects martyrdom to a wider complex of symbols and practices aimed at providing meaning for these deaths. It is a death contextualized, a death interpreted. Martyrdom is a way of speaking about death by reference to power relations, informed by particular knowledges about the right way to live in the world. While our current idea of martyrdom has largely been determined by its original Christian context, its language is deployed in

settings completely removed from Christianity. Any study of martyrdom must therefore allow for the Christian form while attending to the ways other communities use the term to make death meaningful. Doing so will avoid formulating a normative definition that declares some necessary and sufficient conditions for "authentic" martyrdoms, which would thereby exclude others thereby constructed as deviant. As Paul Middleton has shown, such attempts serve only to replay historical disputes without advancing our understanding of the concept.[3] The goal of this analysis will not be to protect one particular usage, but rather understand why the term is used in such a variety of settings.

Traditionally martyrdom has been articulated through religion: a martyr is one who dies for their religion.[4] However that relationship depends on what we mean by religion. As scholars have repeatedly shown, the category of religion has been created in Western contexts as something set apart from the sphere of power, separating religious concerns from political considerations and forming the category of religion on the model of Western Christianity.[5] Moreover, relying on 'death for religion' as determinant of martyrdom excludes dying on behalf of a nationalist configuration, which disregards some stridently atheistic settings where the term has found great purchase. Mao Zedong's revolution for instance saw the creation of sprawling "Martyr Memorial Cemeteries" found in urban settings throughout the People's Republic of China. So if we resign martyrdom to the realm of religion alone, we predetermine its character.[6]

The Oxford English Dictionary (whose definition is taken for granted by too many studies of martyrdom) recounts the Christian context first, marking martyrdom as a death for the Christian faith, then offers the more general "one who undergoes death (more loosely, one who undergoes great suffering) on behalf of any religious or other belief or cause, or as a

consequence of his devotion to some object."[7] Not only does this inherently equate sacred and secular causes and beliefs on the level of devotion, but it places the emphasis on the why of the deaths. Martyrs die on account of something: they are *attached* deaths.[8]

At the same time a host of questions are left open, both logistical and conceptual. How does one suffer on behalf of something? What kind of devotion leads to death? The term "cause" can be so broad as to nearly lose meaning, and could include ideological goals as much as material ones, social as well as personal. Could any cause create martyrs? If so, what would precipitate it? If not, what are the core differences between those that can and those that cannot? Moreover, there is an open question as to the means by which death is seen to serve the cause. Are they necessary for the cause to continue? Are they martyrs like cogs in a larger machine, with their blood providing the oil? Such assertions tell us less than we might like.

With this in mind, this work will attend to the significance of martyrdom by first examining cases where the discourse of martyrdom is used. Attending to the variety of contexts that employ the concept of martyrdom, I will compare cases ancient and modern, theistic and non-theistic, coming from settings constructed as "political" and "religious." Looking for common patterns of usage over diverse contexts, we can come to a better understanding of martyrdom's import in social affairs. Rather than focusing on the theological promises or discussions surrounding martyrs, I will look to what social significance is drawn from these deaths, and how their form connects to existing symbolic complexes. Drawing on discussions of religious violence, I will approach martyrdoms as performances that are purposefully reaffirming sacred scripts laying at the core of their communities.

At the same time, I will treat martyrdom as a composite concept that sees multiple components revolving constantly in symbiotic tension, mutually exerting influence and never appearing in isolation. Individual consciousness is shaped by social expectations; people seek martyrdom but require the group to determine martyrs; political situations are read through religious frames; the past reappears in the present, which in turn is built on projections into the future. These levels are all heavily interrelated, and changes to one effects both. Only by attending to both levels simultaneously can we illuminate what we mean by calling someone a martyr.[9]

Introduction to Cases

The three cases that will occupy me are: 1) Christian martyrs from the area of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) during the second century C.E., the period and place from which the concept of martyrdom originated; 2) those engaged in "martyrdom operations" (a.k.a. "suicide bombings") around the Middle East during the last decades of the twentieth century, when this tactic first appeared in groups inspired by a burgeoning pan-Islamic identity and reconstruction of the concept of *jihad*; and 3) the self-immolations that have been occurring throughout the traditional lands of Tibet (now placed within the geographic boundaries of China), an area with no culture of martyrdom as such, but which sees the term widely used in reference to these individuals. These cases were selected by identifying diverse settings where the terminology of martyrdom has been employed, intentionally selecting cases that appeared to differ radically from one another in hopes of determining what gives the concept

unity in all sites. As different as they appear, each context sees some deaths labeled explicitly as martyrdoms.[10]

Early Christian martyrs have had the biggest impact on how martyrdom has been conceived, so to begin I will examine the context that spawned the concept. Early Christianity was far from a unified theological field; it is better described as what Peter Brown has called a network of "micro-Christianities," each having its own philosophical nuance and authority structure.[11] Rather than try to unify such a diverse field of interpretations and political experiences, I will concentrate on what has been called the cradle of martyrdom: the province of Asia Minor, which existed on the margins of power during the early Roman Empire and spawned noteworthy martyrs like Polycarp and Ignatius of Antioch. These men not only provided a model for martyrdom that would gain ascendancy during Christianity's formative years, but also helped shape the way contemporary Christian communities made meaning from these acts.

The main data for this chapter will come from the quasi-historical accounts of martyrdoms found in the *acta Martyrum* – martyr acts, short stories recounting the trials of martyrs before Roman authorities. Though such texts are of questionable historical accuracy, they will be read for the way they present these individuals confronting a power structure that demanded their obedience. I will also look to the letters of Ignatius of Antioch composed on the way to his own martyrdom in Rome, where he reflected on his impending death and its significance for him. These letters and acts were circulated to a network of churches throughout Christendom, resulting in their broad influence. This place and period saw a Christian group still engaged in distinguishing themselves from their Jewish roots, which led

to a feeling of being entitled to determine life based on a reconceived covenant with God. Those same bases also produced a means of seeing dying as an act of the highest devotion.

The next chapter examines those who die in *istishhad*, the Arabic word meaning a martyr's death and routinely applied to *jihadis* who kill themselves while killing others. The most well-known such attack took place on September 11, 2001, perpetrated by the transnational terror organization known as al-Qaeda. However by that terrible day the strategy of "martyrdom operations" – which are better known as "suicide bombings" or "human bomb attacks" – were already firmly established. This stratagem originated in the Islamist[12] context of the mid-twentieth century, first employed by Hezbollah (whose name translates as "Party of God") against Israeli soldiers invading southern Lebanon. Soon after a number of other groups, most notably Hamas and later the so-called Islamic State, began routinely employing human bombs as a strategy toward their political goals. Those goals can be both national and supranational, but are always anchored in the need to reimagine society in line with the dictates of Islam.

The doctrine of *shahid*, martyrdom, was invoked to explain the self-sacrificial nature of such an attack, which was in turn linked to a larger reimagining of the doctrine of *jihad*, a term meaning the striving for God but is often understood as violent holy war. Many young men and women left wills and videotaped testaments before their deaths speaking to their hopes for their families, their people, and Islam itself. The evocation of these concepts resulted in the sacred character of political activity, and a new batch of popular intellectuals promoting *jihad*– such as Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Maududi and Ruhollah Khomeini – led to the spread of an identity rooted in Islam that transcended political boundaries. I will trace the parallel trajectory of the anti-colonial forces seeking to regain self-determination for Muslims

throughout the Middle East and South Asia, and the development of the *istishhad* discourse. Only by moving beyond the organizational boundaries of participating groups, I contend, can we appreciate the ways martyrdom takes hold of the imagination of people sharing an experience of defeat and humiliation.

My last case investigates the rash of self-immolations[13] that have taken place in the lands of Tibet in the twenty-first century. Beginning in earnest in 2009, over one hundred and forty men and women have set themselves on fire throughout the Tibetan plateau. Their act has widely been recognized by Tibetans as altruistically performed on behalf of Tibet, and self-immolators are referred to as *pawo*, a word translated consistently into English as martyr. Tibetan Buddhism has no tradition of martyrdom as such, but the stories connected to the *pawo* highlight Buddhist forms of self-sacrifice that serve the community and Buddhism itself.

Most reports on these acts tell of self-immolators shouting slogans demanding the return of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama from exile, and a number have left written and recorded testaments that echo such calls while lamenting the suffering they experienced under Chinese rule. During his exile the Dalai Lama has remained both the political and spiritual head of the Tibetan people; in Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is seen to be an incarnation of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, whose presence is crucial for life in the world. His absence from Tibet is seen to pose an existential threat to the people, the country, and the very existence of Buddhism. The act of self-immolation does not have a significant tradition in Tibet, but it is what Tibetans have repeatedly turned to in hopes of righting what they see as a significantly out of order situation.

Delineating the Martyr

These cases have been selected based on a predetermined characteristic – each sees a group using the appellation of martyr to label some who have died. Martyrdom is a social construction, a communally established representation of death that appears differently in different contexts. There is no single form of martyrdom, no essence that determines its shape above cultural considerations. However examining how the discourse of martyrdom is employed in diverse settings will illuminate congruencies between situations where the term finds traction, congruencies that form a network of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called family resemblances: groups of phenomena that are related not on the basis of essential characteristics but on account of overlapping similarities where no single characteristic may be evident in all cases.[14] No single set of necessary and sufficient conditions can determine a martyr. Martyrdom is a multifaceted and multivalent concept, taking different forms for different groups at different times.

That being the case, it will serve at the outset to draw some conceptual boundaries around the type of martyrdom that will concern me here, not in order to determine or exclude forms of death that might be labeled martyrdom, nor even to assert a "core form" of martyrdom, but merely to orient the discussion that will follow. While this project begins by looking at where this label is used, certain congruencies amidst these cases help distinguish a martyr's death from others, such as that of the victim, the suicide, etc. I stress that these distinctions remain dynamic and fluid, and are meant only to sketch the conceptual shape of martyrdom in service to my theoretical goals.

The martyr's death is linked to contexts of power. These deaths occur in situations defined by politics. Two groups seeking to determine the form of life of a group come into

conflict, and one group is able to marshal much more force than the other. In the cases considered here, a dominant power that opposes the martyr's collective has the ability to use violence and inflict suffering in service to its ends. The resources available to the martyr are usually vastly outmatched by their opponents, leading to a common theme of labeling their enemy as oppressors, persecutors or colonizers, intent on – and capable of – utterly exterminating the martyr's way of life. Were there equivalent recourse to force, we might see war, both sides attempting to batter the other into submission.

This characteristic can establish a distinction between the martyr and the **soldier**. While soldiers often bear numerous resemblances to martyrs, particularly on missions from which they likely will not return, those similarities stem from the overwhelming power the soldier faces in the moment. Dying in service to others is certainly part of the martyr discourse, and the soldier who knowingly brings about his death (e.g. throwing himself on a grenade to save the lives of his comrades) may act as a martyr in that moment, as acting selflessly is certainly an attribute ascribed to the martyr. They face an enemy that has them overpowered, and they stand firm nonetheless; they do not surrender, they do not flee, they accept their death. However the martyr enters the situation that will result in his death with awareness that he will not emerge, that his life will be lost. It is not a mere possibility as it is for the soldier, it is a certainty due to the overwhelming imbalance of coercive power. Rather than bowing to those coercive measures, the martyr refuses to comply, preferring to suffer and die rather than continue life under an unjust regime.

The martyr has agency in their own death. The need for a martyr to choose their fate is central to the way those analyzed here speak of martyrs. Choice is a broad spectrum; complicity may be as little as refusing to defend themselves knowing it would lead to their

death (as in the Christian case) or as great as physically performing acts that they hoped would result in death (like exploding a bomb strapped to one's body), but some intention must have been the catalyst for their suffering and death. We can consider this to distinguish them from the **victim**, who has no desire to suffer and die and would choose otherwise if given the chance. The victim, if given a choice, would choose life.

Consider Cassie Bernall, the young woman who was murdered during the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado. Confronted by the shooters, Cassie was asked whether she believed in God, and when she replied yes, she was killed. She has been recognized as a martyr by some Christian congregations, who link her confession of faith to her murder.[15] Like the martyrs that form the foundation of the Catholic Church, Cassie chose death rather than betray her faith. This issue of agency, however, would here place Cassie into the category of victim, as she undoubtedly would have desired to live through that horrific day. Moreover, the other students who were murdered that day did not appear to owe their deaths to an affirmation of their religious persuasion, ruling out a program of murder based on such concerns. None of this is to challenge her status as martyr, nor to belittle in anyway the extraordinary courage she showed in her final moments, only to help clarify the conceptual relationships at work in this particular form of martyrdom.

Another issue worthy of note in this vein is the point Jewish philosopher Arthur A. Cohen made when he argued that the deaths during the Holocaust are not generally considered martyrdoms, not out of a lack of tragedy but because the Nazis based their murders on biological factors, not cultural ones.[16] One *was* Jewish, Romani, or Polish, no other option was available to them. Their death was not brought about by an intransigent decision to be part of a collective, their belonging was seen to be determined by genetics.

Those who were murdered at the camps were prohibited from choosing a martyr's death (which is certainly not to say they did not live or die nobly) because they were not offered any way to avoid their annihilation by giving up the identity that defined their lives.

The martyr intends to die. Death appears as the specific goal of the martyrs under examination. They do not use their suffering in a coercive way, which sets them apart from **hunger strikers** who die as a consequence of their voluntary suffering. For example, Bobby Sands, the famous member of the Irish Republican Army who wasted away in a British prison, was willing to die, but hoped his suffering would be end once the ruling power was moved by his determination.[17] Had he been recognized as a prisoner of war as he wished, Sands would have had no reason to continue his starvation. The obstinacy of the British authorities led to his death, and due to that he was able to foist responsibility onto England; though Sands brought about his own demise, this colonial power could have prevented it at any time, making them responsible. Some have recognized him as a martyr, because his voluntary death was certainly linked to a political cause, but his death was not explicitly intended.

Alternatively, those under analysis here aimed to die. While like Sands they hoped their deaths would change the situation of their collective, continued life would be perceived as a failure. Death seals their sacrifice, it appears as their goal. Such is certainly not a ubiquitous characteristic of martyrdoms, but is common to the cases under study.

These few borders help shape what will concern us going forward. The preceding discussion sought to delineate an ideal type of the martyr, which is more or less evident in the "real-world" examples of martyrs upon which it is based.[18] The early Christians, Islamist *jihadis* and Tibetan self-immolators all share these similarities: they are political in nature,

active agents in their own demise, and intend to die. What I have delineated here serve as some of the family resemblances they share, but it must be remembered that ultimately the decision on who qualifies for martyrdom is the prerogative of the group, not the scholar.

On Suicide

As these martyrdoms incorporate an intentional, active courting of death, in many cases it is discussed as a type of or at least alongside the concept of suicide. Martyrs often face accusations of suicidal behavior, which takes on even greater importance since the same traditions that celebrate martyrs condemn suicide. In the scholarship too this distinction is at issue. Some, like Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, hold that martyrdom is merely a category used by communities seeking to "glorify acts of suicide and homicide," an attempt to disguise these repellent acts.[19] Carole Cusack and James L. Lewis, the editors of a volume entitled *Sacred Suicide*, argue that martyrdom is a species of the genus suicide.[20] It will be productive then to briefly take a moment and consider the conceptual relationship between martyrdom and suicide.

Emile Durkheim's sociological study of suicide offers a starting point. In what is perhaps the best known treatise on the topic, Durkheim labels as suicide "all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result," certainly pertinent for martyrs.[21] Moreover, he outlines a three-fold typology of suicide: anomic suicide, which stems from a lack of social regulation regarding activity, due to the loss of a purpose that guides activity;[22] egoistic suicide, which springs from "excessive individualism" on account of an individual's lack of integration into

her society; and altruistic suicide, coming from the opposite pole where the individual is so integrated into the society that they do not adequately appreciate themselves as possessing self-worth apart from the group. Durkheim and those who follow his work place martyrdom in this last, a kind of egoless suicide that springs from altruistic roots.

Perhaps the crux of Durkheim's study is also most problematic when it comes to the treatment of martyrdom. The categories he evinces stem from his attempt to establish "productive causes" of suicide separate from their individual instantiations. He articulates his stance thusly: "Disregarding the individual as such, his motives and his ideas, we shall seek directly the states of the various social environments (religious confessions, family, political society, occupational groups, etc.), in terms of which the variations of suicide occur. Only then returning to the individual, shall we study how these general causes become individualized so as to produce the homicidal results involved."[23] Explicitly excluding the agent's own reasoning for their death as merely an "apparent cause" is troubling for discussions of martyrdom as well as Durkheim's own analytical consistency. For the latter, it necessitates a normative move, as it seeks to understand the act solely through an assessment of the individual's level of incorporation into their social group which must be judged against a level considered "normal" integration. Suicide is therefore impossible for those "appropriately" integrated with those around them, and the act of suicide necessarily marks one as aberrant in terms of integration. For Durkheim, suicide is ontologically a deviant act.

Speaking about martyrdom within this frame is troubling. It may be the case that martyrdom, as a form of altruistic suicide, does stem from an embeddedness in a "collective conscience," to use his language. However his next interpretive move to assert that the act intrinsically ignores self-worth does not follow; it only allows for a determination of self-

worth based on worldly aspects, excluding the possibility of taking religious conceptions seriously. Each of the martyrs under discussion here understand their act as serving their true "self" that is understood to extend beyond the physical realm, and the act of martyrdom merits a positive existence after death. In that way, they are egoistic actions.

Furthermore, the act itself is highly valued by their social cohort, showing how self-worth is conditioned by the group. Another French theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, saw this occur in the *habitus* of the agent, those structured structurings that give shape to our experiences of self and other.[24] Durkheim composed his text within a liberalist French society that demanded individuals participate fully in the social project but remain free individuals. Losing oneself in the group is asserted to be no better than those who cannot be integrated into society at all.[25] Hence his study seeks to impose categories of 19th century French society upon all human social groupings. It may be that our current neoliberal society based in the global North will, like Durkheim, judge all such actions to be deviant since they do not operate within an individual-focused frame. That may be, but such judgments are culturally situated and open to the same critiques that are made against the groups studied here who disagree.

Like its siblings homicide, regicide, or genocide, suicide denotes criminality. Joining the Latin suffix *–cida*, indicating a killer or cutter (and related to *caedō*, *caedere*, to slaughter, strike, or cut to pieces, with some connections to sacrifice) to the reflexive *sui* (as in *sui generis*, created of itself), it represents an *inappropriate* killing. Rather than a killing of self, the full weight of suicide may better be understood as a *murder* of oneself, which places the death within a moral and juridical structure. The charge of murder can be administered

and prosecuted by the legal authorities, since the act transgresses the prohibitions codified in law.

In this vein, the negative connotations that accompany suicide are in part determined by the term's implicit construction of the death as transgressive. This negative construction is not stable across time, as evidenced by contexts as varied as the 18th century Romantic Movement in European literature, or ritualized *seppuku* in 17th century Japan, both which found something laudable in suicide. Its negativity is likely a consequence of the biopolitical care for all life that is understood as the domain of modern institutions of government, but such concerns hide the fact that those regimes likewise hold places for legitimate suffering and death. The execution of criminals and the loss of life during war are only two examples of such sanctioned deaths (and both can resonate with martyrdom). This will be further explicated below.

Suicide, then, is not wrong because it results in the loss of life, but is wrong because it results in an *unauthorized* loss of life. Martyrdom, on the other hand, is a label for a self-induced death that is authorized, even celebrated, by the guiding system of valuation. In each case under analysis, there is a conflict around which is the appropriate term: the Romans were baffled by the Christians' apparent love of death, the People's Republic of China designates the self-immolators as tragic suicides, and the ubiquity of the term "suicide bombers" discloses the same concerning frame in Western discourse. Such appellations necessitate judgment, a taking of sides to determine a) whether these deaths ought to be sanctioned at all, and b) which institution has the ability to make such determinations, revealing our own biases around who has sovereignty over the life in question, necessarily inculcating us into issues of power.

The role of judgment points to the fact that a hermeneutic distinction lies at the core of this discussion. The readiness of religious traditions to condemn suicide in the same breath that celebrates martyrdom shows that they perceive these deaths as ontologically different. The phenomenon of a self-induced death *becomes* suicide or martyrdom through an interpretive act.[26] Two people commenting on the same death can and do assign radically different labels. In fact, I will contend it is in part the very ability to determine such hermeneutical frames that lays at the core of the martyrdom discourse.

In keeping with such insights, throughout this work I will use the labels of the martyr's group, save when I examine the opposing side's discourse. I will refer to martyrs and not suicides while being aware that such determinations mean that the analysis will thereby appear flawed to a significant portion of people. At the core of martyrdom is a conflict about how to categorize the person, the person's obligations, and who has the ability to make such decisions. However this is a study of martyrdom, so in order to understand how these deaths are made meaningful and significant, I will look to those who create that meaning rather than those who oppose it.

Performing Martyrdom

As martyrdom is a concept in tension, issues of social categorization have their counterpart in individuals who seek their own martyrdom. For these, martyrdom is a performance, aiming to impress through their spectacle of suffering and death. These acts of theater are meant to draw their audience into the narrative world they inhabit by conforming their lives in line with their tradition, which provides the model of right action during trying

times. Gavin Flood uses the phrase “the performance of tradition” to describe how a cosmology is internalized by, and demonstrated through, the actions of religious ascetics, but the concept works just as well for martyrs.[27] By interiorizing the cosmologies of their textual traditions and forming their subjectivity in conformity to the origins and *teloi* those traditions promote, martyrs likewise conflate the real and symbolic worlds. Their strategy for dealing with their social situation is anchored in religious symbolism.

Along with asceticism, martyrdom shares significant similarities to the terrorist acts analyzed by Mark Juergensmeyer in *Terror in the Mind of God*, which he labelled performance violence: acts that are both performative in that they react to the situation on the ground, and performance events in their attempt to make a symbolic statement.[28] The martyrdoms analyzed here actively resist a political institution that seeks dominance, while promoting the tradition-based interpretive frames through which they understand their predicament.

When we speak of performance, it may suggest individuals who take up a certain role during certain moments. What martyrs present, in the words of Eugene and Anita Weiner,

> is not an actor, someone 'who comes forward to play certain parts on the stage of society,' [but rather] 'someone irretrievable within the play.' The character lives within the play, and the play comprises the essence of his or her reality. 'The actor leaves the stage; the character really may not do so. The actor belongs to the same world as the author, and participates in the making of a fiction; the character is in a closed world.[29]

The analogy of an actor that has no existence outside the play syncs nicely with a person whose very existence is bound up in an ideological framework. The closed world of the martyr forms the boundaries of their understanding and provides the rationales for their action. To understand them, we must not attempt to discover how the play can seem so real, but look to the logics that guide the performance.

Those logics are often spoken in terms of scripts, or in anthropologist Victor Turner's terms, root paradigms of action. Turner highlights moments of social upheaval (which he terms times of "anti-structure" or "communitas" following Arnold Van Gennep),[30] and believes we can discover not only when actors will look to these scripts but also the function they are meant to serve. In doing so he takes a significant step forward in comparative work, resulting in a statement that sounds very much like his contemporary Pierre Bourdieu:

> actors nevertheless guided by subjective paradigms – which may derive from beyond the mainstream of socio-cultural process with its ensocializing devices such as education and limitation of action models in stereotyped situations… Actors who are thus guided produce in their interaction behavior and generate social events which are non-random, but, on the contrary, structured to a degree that may in some cultures provoke the notion of fate or destiny to account for the experienced regulation of human social affairs.[31]

Reference to notions of fate and destiny move the register of discussion to the symbolic realm, and point to the way subjective interpretations of existence can dictate action.

Hans Kippenberg takes up Turner's basic stance in his examination of the connection between religion and violence. Recognizing that "a religious community has more than one practical paradigm at its disposal [when it faces] a practice that it regards as evil," he argues that the framing of the events is decisive in the decision of the actors.[32] Kippenberg's *Violence as Worship* uses the language of scripts, stating "the situation of one's own religious community is defined with the help of traditional eschatological scripts. In keeping with this, believers were told that they must find orientation for their action in scripts about how to acquire salvation and in exemplary fighters for the faith."[33] I will follow his focus, but argue that his emphasis on the eschatological presents an argument that only applies to traditions with some corresponding mythic – or in Gavin Flood's terms, cosmological – discourse.[34] I think this is unnecessary, and relies on the belief in an afterlife as a driving force. Instead, I argue the projection into the future is secondary to the need for orienting

scripts at hand in the moment that death threatens, and that a variety of future hopes could serve the same purpose.

These related discussions all see cultural scripts housed especially in sacred narratives, which provide both the framing for action and divine or semi-divine models of behavior.[35] John R. Hall explained narratives construct reality "by enveloping people in accounts of events beyond their own personal knowledge."[36] These cultural scripts help determine the way situations are understood and what the appropriate reaction should be, while also marking them as culturally recognizable actions that resonate with others.[37] Where the appropriate response is to choose death over life, such narratives are reaffirmed by a powerful public sentiment that interprets the current moment in terms of a sacred past.

By approaching martyrdom as a culturally structured performance, my work will offer a better method of apprehending and understanding actions that seem at odds with basic human inclinations. Seeing martyrs as ultimately defined by roles that are based in their cultural heritage and brought on by their social, political and cultural contexts illuminates the practical ways they dealt with the conflicts they experienced, and what they hoped their deaths would accomplish. With this in mind, I will use the category of *performative suffering* to acknowledge where pain and death are mobilized in service to a political goal by orienting the conflict through symbolic frames and perceptions – who is the aggressor and who the oppressed – and making a statement about the reality of the interpretive frames through which they perceive the world. Their goals, the forms of pain and death, and the frames that are reorganized all vary with context, but this dynamic consistently appears in all types of martyrdom under examination.

The Politics of Martyrdom

These martyrdoms all stem from conflict; they are contextualized in violent conflicts that are part of political struggles where one institution claims dominance over the martyr's group, and seek to establish that authority through a deployment of overwhelming force.[38] At the same time, the martyr's group bases their opposition and their very constitution in an imagined cosmic authority that holds the power of life and death and established codified ethical systems defining sanctioned and forbidden behavior in the world. They are subjects of a different sovereign power, and it is from this place that they launch their resistance.

There is no single kind of collective that creates martyrs. Apart from the need to combine aspects we would label "religious" with those that appear more "political," the social configuration of groups varies. Early Christian communities were spread around the Roman Empire, but recognized a common identity with others that saw Jesus as the Messiah (however his appearance and the covenant he established were understood). The Islamist martyrs saw themselves connected in national (Hezbollah in Lebanon), subnational (Hamas and the Palestinian cause), and transnational (on the basis of submission to God inherent in Islam) levels. The Tibetans recognize themselves as a common people bound by common culture and language, but now exist partially inside the political borders of China. These forms of imagined communities[39] all share a self-understanding, and a sense that they should enjoy self-determination based on their own laws.

In order to discuss the significance of martyrdom, we need to appreciate that it is not merely a matter of *who* rules, but who can *legitimately* rule. Greater force does not equate to legitimacy, as it can only ever be a temporary measure hoping to coerce through fear, which risks anger and opposition.[40] However where physical force is placed in a frame of

legitimacy – such as self-defense or just punishment – it ceases to be perceived as coercive. Hence Weber's well-known assertion that the state claims the monopoly on legitimate violence.[41]

However, in referring to this insight, too many scholars omit that Weber saw this as a *claim* made by the state, not an inherent attribute of statist institutions. The state does not *possess* this monopoly, it *declares* it alone can use violence legitimately, a contention it backs with that very violence. That claim is contested in these cases. The associations that define the martyr's identity have at their core assertions about who can impose suffering in what situations. For example, Christians may oppose Rome's violence, but see the pains of hell as right recompense for evil actions. The Islamists refuse the authority of any state not based in Islam, but have no trouble exercising violence they see to be in defense of their religion. What we have in these cases a disagreement about the ends towards which force could be an acceptable means. It is a contest of sovereignties.[42]

Sovereignty has of late become an increasingly contested term. Modern interpreters have eagerly resuscitated the discussion of Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt (shorn of its particular context) in trying to understand our commitments to national governments.[43] Michel Foucault famously contended against sovereignty as appropriate for our current experiences of state authority, and more recently Dmitris Vardoulakis has discussed three separate forms of sovereignty operative throughout history.[44] This last text contains an axiom that my analysis will also rely upon: sovereign power consists in the ability to justify the imposition of suffering.[45]

The political contests that create the ground for these martyrs revolve around the particular institutions of power, but more centrally they revolve around the ideological

structures supporting authority. As it is a matter of ultimate authority, discussions of sovereignty have been taken up in terms of political theology, in order to recognize the political issues at stake along with their basis in metaphysical assertions. Here again we are faced with martyrdom's hybridity, operating simultaneously on both levels, making political theology a useful frame for its analysis. These acts conflate the "real" and the "symbolic," where the symbolic provides the imagined structure through which to understand and act within the world.[46]

For that reason, I will use the phrase *sovereign imaginary* to refer to imagined coherent framework that gives meaning and shape to experiences, by providing ethical guidelines for right action in the world, and is seen as the ultimate font of authority.[47] These imaginaries offer a vision of order – social, political and cosmic – that would ultimately result in a world of peace, stability and fellowship if enacted. It is always a project to be completed and actualized through human activity, but it serves as the organizing principle for living an authentic life.

These imaginaries are what come into conflict during periods of imperial conquest and colonization. Those who die as martyrs do so through an act of resistance shaped by their sovereign imaginary against another sovereign imaginary. The Christian imaginary faces that of the Roman Empire, the Tibetans the People's Republic of China, and the Islamists the neo-liberal order of the West. Each has a conception of order that discloses how people should act and why, and in these moments both attempt to determine individual action along their guidelines by coercion, discipline or inspiration. Understanding the rationales that led martyrs to die in service to a sovereign imaginary necessitates investigation into the ways

these imaginaries are constructed within particular settings, how they come to be perceived as legitimate, and why the norms they espouse exceed the drive for self-preservation.

Approach – Comparative Sociotheology

Taking into consideration the tension that martyrdom is a goal sought in ways conditioned by cultural understandings and practices, and that the ultimate avowal of martyrdom relies on a social group that extends beyond the martyr, any analysis of martyrdom has to be a dialogical reading between the ways martyrs orient their action, and the ways the group gives its approbation. At the same time, the designation of "martyr" needs to be understood within the context of power relations that creates it. Attending to these issues means considering a series of interrelated questions about our conception of martyrdom and its deployment in various contexts. Why do martyrs choose to die? How is the category of martyrdom constructed symbolically and socially? What criteria is used to determine martyrs? What situations see recourse to the discourse of martyrdom, and what are some common attributes of those contexts? How are these deaths structured by cultural ideas, and how do they structure those systems in turn?

By taking seriously the words ascribed to martyrs within their social, cultural, political and religious context, I will bring to light the *performative logics* behind self-sacrifice that makes sense of how such disparate phenomena as executions (Christians), acts of war (*jihadis*) and fiery protests (self-immolators) can be drawn together into an identifiable group. By performative logics I mean the rationales by which such extreme acts appear as reasonable and appropriate to their agents, guided by interpretive moves that read a current situation in terms of a sacred past. Delineating the imaginative landscapes that anchor

the identity affirmed by martyrs in the face of death, I will seek to understand the social and symbolic significance attached to these deaths, by which I mean the ways these acts in turn structure the experiences of others, and contribute to the same hermeneutic frame that shaped their performative logics.[48]

Dealing with these issues means understanding the interplay of social, cultural, political and symbolic realms, which necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. At the same time, in order to have explanatory power beyond their particular contexts requires a comparative framework that can speak to similarity without obfuscating difference. To do so, I approach martyrdom through the lens of religious violence, as a death performed with reference to cosmological understandings and engrained in questions of power. The overall strategy I will employ to attend to such a complex object of study will be a comparative worldview analysis combined with a focus on practice and performance.

The comparative endeavor has a troubled history in the academic study of religion. While the earliest attempts can be traced back at least as far as James G. Frazer's 19th century *Golden Bough*, the process of comparing religious beliefs, rituals and myths often served to promote the superiority of Christianity in service of missionizing and colonial campaigns. Reducing cultural expressions to common characteristics often resulted in symbolic hierarchies that reinforced political structures. In the words of Wendy Doniger, "essentialized difference can become an instrument of dominance,"[49] where members of the theorist's culture are thereby coded as appropriate ruling agents, as they are seen to represent a "better" way of life.[50] Lifting phenomena out of their particular contexts for comparison resulted in some provocative theses, however those theses relied on methods that overrode specifics in preference of surface similarities.

The perception of similarity often initiates comparison, but cultural differences are as informative and cannot be elided in responsible scholarship. Claims to universalism must be avoided while at the same evading the nihilism that comes from absolute cultural particularity.[51] Comparison requires what Gavin Flood described as dialogical, attending to "the particularity of voice while acknowledging what is common for the theoretical, moral or political task at hand in a specific comparative study."[52] Only by holding both the general and particular in tension can comparison yield the kind of mutual understanding sought.

Modern interpreters of comparative religious violence who form my own intellectual genealogy, particularly Juergensmeyer, Kippenberg and Flood, attend to these concerns by firmly anchoring such phenomena within their socio-political context.[53] Their studies derive common dynamics about how religious symbols and practices interact with, support, and oppose power relations through the legitimation of violence against self and other. Politics is not treated as a sphere separate from religion, but rather the two are considered in their ongoing interaction; religious sentiment channels political action, and politics can determine the context for religious voices. Moreover, politics and religion both operate through symbolic language which captures hearts and provokes passions, resulting in similar public expressions. By recognizing this, the comparative work modeled by these scholars more fully describes and explains those social worlds that are created, and the momentous consequences they engender.

I approach these cases in a "sociotheological" mode, a methodology outlined by Mark Juergensmeyer and Mona Sheikh.[54] This method understands social reality through religious eyes, moving the level of analysis from the specific people, actions or beliefs to their epistemic worldviews, the structures that form the basis for an understanding of – and

perspective on – reality.[55] Epistemic worldviews blend Foucault's idea of an *episteme*, a set of understandings about the basis of true knowledge, and Bourdieu's *habitus*, the structured structurings that give shape to the interpretive frames through which we perceive the world.[56] In sociotheology, "an epistemic worldview is a framework for thinking about reality and acting appropriately within a perceived understanding of the world."[57] For a study that looks to comprehend how an imagined structure can be seen to hold a legitimate claim over life that individuals willingly seek their own destruction, looking to the structures that frame experience and guide behavior must be central.

At the same time, both method and subject require genealogical inquiry into the nature of each group's operative concept of self-sacrifice and the narratives that contain models of such action. Historical and anthropological inquiry must be combined with a social scientific analysis of the modes of power operative at the moment of martyrdom. Those who become martyrs see themselves obliged to absolute resistance, while those in the opposing camp see these acts as unconscionable and even wasteful. The job of the analyst of martyrdom is to try to comprehend the meaningfulness of these actions, even where we vigorously disagree with the act itself.

The practice of placing religious actors within their interaction with political, social and historical context has also been called "neo-Weberian" by Ceclia Lynch,[58] who argues that to understand acts of religious violence "we must first assess what religious guidelines suggest for particular situations, and then look more deeply into how religious actors interpret those guidelines – how they bridge the gap between religious rules and particular situations to decide how to act."[59] Such has been developed further in the work of Hans Kippenberg, who looks to the idea of "situation" as described by Hans Joas and the Thomas-

Theorem to argue that in order to understand an act of religious violence, we must both recognize the model by which it is engendered, and the way the situation is understood by the actor.

> Every action presupposes a definition of the situation. This is not generated of necessity by the situation itself, however, but is 'imposed' on the situation by the subjects. If they then act in accordance with this definition, this 'imposition' has real effects. It is true that routine usually save subjects from having to come up with a definition on their own. When a definition becomes less plausible, however – for instance, as a result of disappointed expectations – the actors can suddenly become conscious that they have still further possibilities of defining the situation in which they find themselves… When they undertake a new 'framing' of the situation, one criterion of its success is whether it is communicable and recognizable. Here, the availability of the various scenarios plays a role. Esser speaks of 'framing' or 'the selection of the referential framework.' When the actors create a definition, they rely on established concepts of action and choose one of these as binding. The choice of an 'action' can be oriented to purposive rationality, to tradition, or to feelings. The framework can also be established in accordance with vales whose validity is based on its opposition to a completely different reality, as it happens above all in the constitution of individual or communal identity.[60]

Several things are worthy of note in this passage. First, there are multiple models available to any social actor. These can spring from religious texts, histories, or legends; what Ivan Strenski calls "cosmic dramas," stories that contain sacred models of action.[61] These narratives encode appropriate modes of behavior by offering imaginative settings where the ethical values of a tradition are played out. We are never confined to a single interpretation, but rather choose our path based on a number of considerations, including political context and chance of success, which serve to promote one form of action. In Lynch's words, "people's ongoing development of phenomenological and hermeneutic understandings – their melding of experience and consciousness, and interpretation of sacred texts and text-analogues – becomes an integral part of the process of deciding what is required to do for the common good."[62] Actions and significance are only made sensible through an appreciation of

the way the actor understands their situation, their goals, and the symbolic world they inhabit.

In what follows I will (a) look to the last statements given by, or at least attributed to, martyrs prior to their death, where they explain in their own words their reasons for dying, offering insight into the ways they made sense of their situation. To understand that interpretation, I will begin each case study by (b) examining the historical trajectory of the conflict within which these deaths take place, in order to appreciate how these individuals constructed their sense of identity, and how death could appear as a reasonable choice. At the same time, the language martyrs use in these statements are heavily laden with symbolism, which requires (c) understanding the symbolic complexes that they – and those who claim them as martyrs – use to make sense of their decision to die. These complexes include but are not limited to mytho-historical narratives, ethical imperatives, and understandings of cosmic dynamics, along with bases for legitimate authority that are both political and theological.[63] In order to understand how these specific complexes are selected and mobilized to construct an understanding of their situation, I will (d) analyze the statements of contemporary religious and political authorities. Doing so will show how the martyrs were operating within a broader interpretive framework, and their decisions to die were made sensible and significant.

On Using Testaments

If we are to discover how martyrs made their situation meaningful, their actual words should drive the study. Each of the cases under study have a genre of testimony particular to

them: the early Christian churches circulated tales of trials and deaths of their martyrs – known as *acta Martyrum*, "martyr acts" – that focus on the words spoken by the martyrs in their defense against Roman authorities; many Islamist *jihadis* who embarked on martyrdom operations routinely left wills and videotaped testimonies that sought to explain their motivations; a number of Tibetans left written testaments – *khachem* – that detailed the hopes that led to their self-sacrifice. These texts will provide the core data for the following analysis.

There is a surprising lack of such material in many studies of martyrdom, particularly those attending to modern incarnations, and especially regarding martyrdom operations.[64] While John Hall was certainly correct noting that any case of self-directed violence "can be regarded as either a testament of ultimate commitment or a demonstration of how far a practitioner has fallen under the sway of psychic coercion," the implicit consensus in scholarship is that texts attributed to martyrs support the latter to the near exclusion of the former.[65] Such an absence highlights certain concerns over the usefulness of such texts, and an implicit belief that such texts do not reflect the "actual" feelings/intentions/understandings of these individuals, but rather regurgitate the language of the group.[66] Charges of brainwashing, scripting, coercion or outright dishonesty are practically taken for granted. Such apprehensions raise concerns about the extent to which we can access "authentic" motivations through such material. Most studies find it sufficient to identify the group that claims the martyr, and implement their purpose as the martyrs, serving to do exactly what they see as disqualifying the martyr's words.

In the extant scholarship, these concerns appear with varying intensity depending on the case in question. Early Christian studies take as given that we cannot trust the words

attributed to martyrs in the martyr acts, considering the millennia of redrafting and translation they have undergone.[67] Constant filtering erodes historical reliability. For Islamist martyrs we have precisely the opposite case, in that we possess the filmed words where we can see and hear the words coming from the soon-to-be martyr's own mouth. Concerns here revolve not around alterations after the fact, but rather prior procedures that homogenize such statements, resulting in accusations of the organization speaking through the individual.[68] The critique is the same however, namely that in both cases we cannot take for granted the words accurately reflect the inner mental states of the individual. Tibetan *khachem* do not suffer from such concerns in the scholarship (an uncritical acceptance which suggests an orientalist perception of naturally trustworthy Tibetan Buddhists), though political attacks by the People's Republic of China echo accusations of brainwashing and see these self-immolators as victims of the Dalai Lama's separatist programs.[69]

Such charges are always the result of a particular belief about what is appropriate in these circumstances. Consider for example the deaths of members of the People's Temple, better known as Jonestown: many commentators were all too keen to explain these suicides (a term I use intentionally, as no one currently claims them as martyrs) as the effects of brainwashing, because it seemed impossible that rational, thoughtful individuals would want to end their lives in such circumstances.[70] Such assertions stem from a position that sees no moral substance in the claims of the group, utterly denying Jim Jones' doctrines possessed any merit whatsoever. We likely agree with such a perspective, however such judgments always come from a situated place. Had Jonestown spawned an ongoing tradition, we – or at least some – might have very different memories of the events of 1978, and see those who perished as martyrs. What one group sees as inappropriate activity, another sees as necessary

and obligatory. Claims of brainwashing are therefore normative claims, seeking to impose a single evaluative framework on such cases.

In response to these worries, I would begin by stating that this is not a study of self-killing in general, but of martyrdom in particular. While individuals can seek martyrdom, it is ultimately those who remain alive that apply the label of martyr to the deceased. That being the case, it is important to recognize that groups label certain deaths martyrdoms in large part based upon the alignment of the martyr's intent with the groups goals. This aspect will be further explored below, but at the start it would seem self-evident that if the martyr's words did not align with the expectations of the group, they would not be considered a martyr. I know of no cases where the label is applied reluctantly. Therefore it is not a problem that certain words, phrases, and complexes repeat and reflect ideals promoted by the group – it is precisely these commonalities that help us see their significance as martyrdoms.

Ultimately (as my psychotherapist wife reminds me), we can never hope to perceive the "true" motivation of these actors, because our real motivations are rarely fully evident to us. Few of us are completely self-aware. What these texts do offer is the opportunity for these individuals to create the persona they want people to see – to write themselves as they wish to be seen. This self-writing provides a way of manifesting oneself to others, of offering a delineation of their reasoning that would otherwise remain invisible to the onlooker, shaping a public face by drawing attention to certain aspects of the self while disguising the others.[71] To what extent such a façade can be construed as "true" is largely left to individual judgment, and resonates with aspects that will become central to this study.

It is difficult to ascertain someone else's intention. The only way to be sure of intention is where action follows to verify it. A private, "real" self that tells the truth about

the person regardless of their actions is a constructed idea of identity, an in opposition to the public persona that is created and verified through public activity. The story they choose to tell about who they are is certainly framed within structures that are meaningful to others, and undoubtedly shaped to gain positive regard from those they respect, and such interestedness can certainly raise questions to the "authenticity" of the statements given. However here, there words are supported – proven – by the most extreme actions conceivable. The severity of these acts mark them to some extent as self-verifying as the person's very being is expended in support.

Previous Approaches to the Question of Martyrdom

Martyrdom has been approached in a number of veins through a host of disciplinary perspectives. A brief search of academic databases brings up over three thousand articles alone, excluding books, with nearly eight hundred coming from the last five years. Moreover, in the last decade academic journals as varied as *Social Research* (2008), *Mortality* (2014), and the *Journal of Religion and Violence* (2013) have all published volumes focused explicitly on martyrdom or religious suicide. Yet understanding this concept has proven a challenge for social analysts. Rational choice theory is baffled by choices that do not seem to be rational in worldly calculations but have a far more distant time horizon and a more imaginative sense of rewards than most materialist calculations support. Strategic analyses flounder when the strategies do not seem to yield immediate benefits. Organizational theories falter when the communities of support are diffuse, unstructured, and lack a palpable chain of command.

The vast majority of studies focus solely on particular contexts. Early Christianity certainly leads the way, with other eras of Christianity following in a close second.[72] Those latter include examinations of martyrs in various locales from modern Chechnya to the creation of martyrs by the National Socialist party in the 1940s.[73] Appropriate studies will be addressed in their place, but by remaining focused on individual contexts of martyrdom and generalizing from there has led to seeing martyrdom in radically different ways. Such results in assertions about the concept of martyrdom similar to the way the blind men describe an elephant: those feeling the legs describing it as a tree, those with the trunk as a snake, with no one gaining an accurate picture of the whole. This shortcoming has inspired my approach of intentionally bringing together disparate cases to understand our concept of martyrdom that can be so variously applied. Here I will deal with several broad categories, acknowledging that there is a great deal of overlap in the studies discussed.

Honor and Noble Death

Many have treated martyrdom as determined by traditions of noble death, pointing to a desire for honor as the martyr's driving motivation.[74] Such honor depends of a culture of sacrifice that shape the life of those who would be martyrs, something that certainly seems to be present in the cases under consideration here. The celebration of such deaths require at least a selection of the collective seeing self-destruction as an honorable act. These studies are noteworthy in their recognition of the crucial importance of a surrounding culture that can identify with and encourage such self-sacrifice, and the recognition that numerous collectives construct such a culture. However, they do not sufficiently explain how one goes from a participant in such a culture, of which there are necessarily many, to actually becoming a

martyr, of which there are few. Nor does this give any insight into the aims of martyrdom apart from reconstituting the same culture that formed them.

A batch of studies that deal with cultural representations of pain share many similarities with this group, while articulating a stance that has more cross-cultural promise.[75] These often only deal peripherally with martyrdom, approaching it as but one type of representation. Scholars like Talal Asad and Judith Perkins detail the ways particular shaping of painful experiences, largely through narrative framing, contributes to individual understandings of self and appropriate uses of pain. Martyrdom is certainly a matter of representing suffering in order to make pain meaningful, however it merits treatment as a special case that exceeds other forms of pain-centered activity. The martyrdoms under analysis here have death as their goal, not mere suffering, which marks them as ontologically different (though related to) other representations. Many may be willing to suffer in a meaningful way, but voluntarily losing one's very life is markedly different, and should be treated as such. In doing so, I will not lose the connection to nobility that these studies highlight, but rather reveal how that connection is developed in radically different ways in different cultural arenas.

Secular vs. Religious Self-Sacrifice

Many others look at martyrdom from the perspective of a sharp distinction between religious and secular spheres. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi exemplifies this stance when he argues that the label of martyrdom gives death "a cosmic meaning, while death in the service of a secular ideology, national or supra-national, can only have a historical meaning."[76] Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin reflect this sharp distinction of religious and secular self-sacrifice, asking "what sets dying for faith apart from dying for freedom, dying for one's

country, or dying for the moral values of a secular democracy."[77] This position has led some like Lacey Baldwin-Smith to treat it as an archaic institution that will vanish as secularization slowly continues its unstoppable march across the world. Ignoring the data that has shown religion reasserting its power as a social force has resulted in analyses that treat martyrdom as a way of cloak to disguise more fundamental political motivations and a means of "making death easier."[78] Ultimately, these scholars see martyrdom as a label that hides the reality of a conflict that costs lives by talking about it in religious terms. As a result, they contend a) martyrdom will vanish as religion does and more reasonable minds take over, and b) liberal societies will find no place for martyrs.[79]

Some scholars have maintained those distinctions while approaching those who die for secular causes through the lens of martyrdom. Suffragette Emily Winding Davison,[80] President Abraham Lincoln[81] and those who fell during the French Revolution[82] are just some who have been treated as secular, political martyrs.[83] While laudable, these texts too often rely on and impose a conception of martyrdom taken directly from Christianity, leading them to draw broad conclusions about the category of martyrdom from a Christian perspective. I contend more could be brought to light as treating martyrdom as something both fully religious and fully political, showing that the boundaries between the religious and secular spheres are unstable and can be drawn in different ways in different contexts, often disappearing entirely (this latter has been taken up by scholars like Emilio Gentile and Carolyn Marvin along with David Ingle).[84] Here I will contribute to such a destabilization of spheres by carefully attending to the political concerns referenced by martyrs, their communities and their opponents in the context of the symbolic worlds they inhabit.

The Ethics of Suicide Bombers

Thanks to the perceived close relationship between martyrdom and suicide discussed above, many have approached the topic through an ethical lens, seeking to determine the conditions for a moral self-killing.[85] These have become legion in the years following the attacks of September 11, 2001 which brought to light a tradition of violent martyrdom seemingly disassociated with the more Christian passive and peaceful constructions.[86] Many of these works will be engaged with in chapter three, but a few things can be articulated at the outset. Recent volumes like Diego Gambetta's *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* and Dominic James and Alex Houen's *Martyrdom and Terrorism* focus largely on the legitimation of violence and suffering and how discourse can construct two different people (the martyr and the terrorist) upon the same body.[87] Where the nation-state claims to be the only institution that can sanction violence, terrorist organizations engage in attacks condemned by their opponents but seen as legitimate to their allies. The very term "martyrdom operations" carries the means of its own interpretation, and causes many commentators to seek a way to distinguish these vile acts from the high ethical standard ascribed to martyrs.

These studies point to something fundamental to understanding martyrdom's social significance, but too often they let the question of violence dictate the terms of the discussion spawning an implicit acceptance of nonviolent/passive self-sacrifice and a discrediting of violent/active ones.[88] Martyrs are not really martyrs, these contend, if they're killing others, especially noncombatants and civilians. Not only does such a move impose normative categories upon the discussion, but it creates a hierarchy of action which can be typologically useful but can obscure the overall significance of martyrdom by discounting certain forms.

My hope in explicitly including the martyrs of groups that have earned their "terrorist" label is to discover the significance that marks a martyr as a martyr, no matter the religious or political setting. Moreover, while studies in this vein provide useful insights into how morality is articulated in troubled circumstances, I will demonstrate that either sides ethical perspective is understandable if we appreciate the long history that has led to the conditions that create martyrs.

Psychological Approaches

After those dealing with Christian martyrs and suicide bombers, those looking at martyrs from the perspective of psychology may be the most numerous. A majority treat martyrdom as a form of suicide, seeking to detail the conditions for the recruitment and mobilization of these ultimately unhealthy individuals.[89] Both G.E.M. St. Croix and Glen Bowersock saw pathology and abnormality in the actions of martyrs, and the eminent historian W.H.C. Frend characterized the zeal for death martyrs seemed to display as a kind of "mania."[90] Rona Fields' work sought the "psychodynamic engine that drives" self-sacrifice, asserting that the martyr's level of commitment "obscures [the] perception and sensation of noxious experience."[91] Yuval Neria and colleagues rely on the social psychological construct of the Authoritarian Personality to explain martyrs' behavior, which includes a set of motivational needs and a cognitive style in which feelings of being threatened, intolerance for ambiguity, dogmatism and religiosity are determinants of individual beliefs.[92] Such studies often assert that religious language, affect and symbolism serves as a means of allowing individuals to overcome their innate opposition to violence and self-preservation. By and large this is seen as a problem to be solved, rather than an expression of a "normal" human activity.

Worth special mention in this context is Adam Lankford's recent *The Myth of Martyrdom*, where he contends that martyrdom gives a cover for those who already want to die.[93] All those who offer themselves through martyrdom operations, Lankford contends, were already seeking a way to end their life and simply latched onto a socially approved means of doing so. Using a technique he refers to as "psychological autopsy," which examines the mental states of the deceased after they have already died (which makes it very easy to disregard their words and supplement your own), he argues those considered martyrs were in fact mentally ill. Consider his diagnosis of Mohammed Atta, one of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks: "psychological autopsy has revealed that Atta's struggles with social isolation, depression, guilt and shame, and hopelessness were very similar to the struggles of those who commit conventional suicide and murder-suicide."[94] Martyrs have fooled everyone according to Lankford's treatise, and simply found a way to serve their own self-destructive tendencies without incurring disapproval from others.

By lumping martyrs – solely those who die in suicide bombers – in with rampage shooters and other "self-destructive killers" Lankford predetermines the conclusions he can draw by the selection of cases,[95] and exclusively considers psychological factors to the utter and open disregard of socio-cultural factors including religion, ideology and experiences of oppression.[96] This way of thinking about martyrdom revels in the liberal demand to place the individual in their isolation at the core of any researches, allowing him to discount any positive aspect of such self-killing. Lankford, like many others approaching martyrdom through psychology, assumes a constant appreciation of the individual at the core of understandings of the self, ignoring the numerous places, historical and modern, where the community is placed at the center of self-understanding.[97] Moreover, he argues that the

sacrifice inherent in discourses of martyrdom is absent because these people do not value their lives, and sacrifice means giving up something of value.[98] He does not assess these assertions by speaking to those who have failed to die in such operations, but one gets the sense that even if he had he would approach the issue with an already determined conclusion. Lankford's reasoning ultimately appears circular: suicide bombers are mentally ill because they seek their own death. Though he deals with only one form of martyrdom in suicide bombings, his work seems aimed at discrediting certain individuals rather than coming to terms with understanding a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

The major flaw in psychological approaches is the attempt to generalize mental structures between cultures and time periods. Treating psychological aspects as identical across time and culture alleviates the necessity of understanding particular cultural logics operating at different historical periods. In Bourdieu's terms, it is to imagine a single psychological *habitus* that all people exist within. Such arguments rely heavily on the liberalist environment that spawned them. The focus on the individual that pervades political and psychological discourse in the West makes it difficult to deal with self-destructive activities, leading to the assertions of deviancy that are rampant in these treatments.[99]

The sheer volume of settings where the discourse of martyrdom finds traction, I would contend, is reason enough to challenge these assumptions. While there are certainly mental illness and self-destructive tendencies evident in all cultures, the dynamic of martyrdom continually appears, and is consistently celebrated. To simply designate it a form of mental deviancy or manipulation is to implicitly aver that all people who see in martyrdom something laudable are fools. If we can imagine a scenario where our own death would

confront us as a viable, even preferable option, we must attend to martyrs as rational actors who find their own good in the ending of their life.[100]

As a Rational Choice

Remaining in a liberal frame, some sociologists have attempted to use rational choice theory to come to grips with martyrs, particularly Rodney Stark.[101] In the past economic models have been troubled by actions that intentionally cause death, as they complicate understandings about what constitutes a good being sought; rational action, according to Stark, means "weighing the anticipated costs and benefits of an action and then seeking to act so as to maximize new benefits."[102] Theorists of this bent have sought to integrate metaphysical benefits into their models to help understand the individual rationales of those willing to die.[103] To over-simplify, an eternal afterlife of bliss is a benefit which could reasonably merit the cost of life.

Treating martyrs as actors following particular rationales is an important step in the right direction, though the economic model simplifies the multiple considerations that go into the martyr's choice to die.[104] But I want to acknowledge a bigger concern at issue with such attempts, one that appears repeatedly in discussions of martyrdom operations in the popular media. Wherever martyrdom is invoked by a group, including those considered here, it is seen as an altruistic act done on behalf of or in reference to something that exceeds the individual, be it cause, faith, or social group. Rational choice eliminates that possibility, because it reframes everything in terms of the individual seeking their own good. Even this act that appears to so radically disregard one's own concern becomes self-serving. Such an approach is most evident in colloquial discussions of suicide bombing that look to the

Quran's promise of seventy-two dark-eyed virgins awaiting martyrs in the afterlife as a driving reason for their acts.

Two main issues stem from this. First, in order to understand why some people seek their extinction as their good when the majority of others in their culture do not necessitates asserting a high level of conviction, which is not measurable as a mental process or characteristic. "They just believe more" is not analytically productive, and recalls a Pascalian type of wager: my goal is heaven, martyrdom is the way to that goal, therefore I choose to die. Such ideas are ultimately tautological as they confirm that martyrs place a high value on the afterlife because they will die for it, and since they die for it they must have placed a high value on it. All this ignores the fact that heaven is the compensation for a *selfless* act, therefore to kill oneself in order to gain heaven as one's own end would forfeit heaven since it would not be done with the correct intention, a theological paradox.

Second, and more importantly, articulating martyrdom as a self-serving act serves many to delegitimize them as a morally commendable act. If it is done to gain heaven or virgins, aiming to trade momentary pain for eternal pleasure, they are not worthy of respect; if they are altruistic acts, they are respected above all precisely because they are at odds with inclination but done out of duty.[105] To use the language of this study, if the act is motivated by personal interest, it cannot be a sacrifice, and it is the sacrifice that is celebrated. The sacrifice is made impossible by cost-benefit rationales, not because those rationales are not part of the actors' understanding of the cosmic dynamics and the consequences of their action, but because by promoting them as the catalyst for these actions highlights only the selfish nature of such acts, rather than the necessary tension that exists between the individual desserts and the selfless act.

Some scholars have begun productively reexamining assumptions of rational actor theory based on the ways such acts of self-destruction are made sensible in particular worldviews. Robert Brym has led the way in considering how actors operate with multiple rationalities dependent of historical and cultural valuables.[106] Catalina Kopetz and Edward Orehek reorient ideals of goal-oriented behavior by examining martyrdom not as self-defeating behavior but rather as a form of self-realization that requires an accurate appraisal of ideas of the self.[107] These scholars revitalize theories of rational choice through an appreciation of such acts, rather than imposing normative values of individualism upon them or excluding them altogether. Without taking on the same categories that drive the work of these scholars, I agree with their determination to not dismiss martyrdom as necessarily resulting from unstable minds; in fact, I will take as axiomatic that it is in part the resonance individuals of any social group feel with acts of martyrdom that inspires the celebration of martyrs, and aver that martyrdom looms as a possible requirement of any group member if the times call for it.

Collective Memory-Making

As opposed to those who look to the martyr as an individual, numerous scholars in recent years have looked to explain martyrdom as a way to explicitly shape the collective memory of a group.[108] (The framework for collective memory is most associated with Maurice Halbwachs and echoed in the work of Daniele Hervieu-Leger.)[109] To approach martyrdom through the vein of collective memory is fundamentally to attempt to discover how social groups constitute their identity by recalling a common past of suffering and relating it to the present. The social memory of a collective becomes the lens through which the present is made meaningful. Elizabeth Castelli argued that early Christians placed their

martyrs into a wider framework of meanings drawing upon metanarratives of sacrifice coming from the cultural context of their time. This led her to focus on the retelling of the narrative around the martyr's death, its interpretation and the meaning-making activities associated with the community.[110] Michaela DeSoucey and her colleagues look to the reclamation and use of the martyr's physical remains, by what they call "reputational entrepreneurs," who manipulate the history and the body of the martyr to intentionally create a collective history for the group.[111] Texts of this sort largely look to the way the title of martyrs can be manipulated or become a locus of contention between rival factions of an ideology.[112]

Such considerations of the role of martyrdom in social formation resonate with scholars who place the drive to convert as a main impetus for martyrs.[113] This idea of the martyr dying to convert stems, I believe, in part from attempts to grapple with the ascent of Christianity from a Roman cult to the religion of the empire.[114] Origen's famous assertion that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church focuses on the inspiration quality of martyrs; the martyr's death shows that the ideals they 'died for' are worthy of respect and allegiance.[115] In contrast to those who rely on collective memory as a way to guard social boundaries, scholars focusing on conversion see martyrdom as overcoming those boundaries due to their perceived nobility. Such moves rely on a common appreciation for self-sacrifice, regardless of specific cultural content.[116]

The attempt inherent in such studies to overcome a sharp bifurcation of "memory" and "history" is necessary, as it recognizes that all history is perceived through a frame of interpretation.[117] The way scholars have used the frame of collective memory to show how martyrdom serves to construct social and political boundaries have proven exceedingly

instructive.[118] However such only attends to one side of martyrdom, the social establishment of a martyr, without adequately attending to the ways the actor themselves understood their act. Are we to think that because the rhetorical representation of martyrdom so effectively serves to shore up social boundaries that such was the intent of the martyr? One would have to say no.

I would agree that there is something about self-sacrificial actions that transcend cultural milieus, in fact that is a central idea of the comparison that motivates this work. Nor would I challenge the contention that the purpose of martyrdom texts were often circulated in hopes for bolstering allegiance for those suffering at the hands of foreign elements. But while martyr narratives likely were *effective* in gaining adherents, the idea that conversion provided the *motivation* for martyrs seems unlikely. Conversion aims outward to gain adherents, while I will argue one of the main functions of martyrdoms was to strengthen the loyalty and resolve of those within the group.

Whether the focus is on internal boundary-strengthening or external inculcation into the group, the studies in this category all only focus on the social consequences of the martyrdom discourse without attending to the impetus behind such acts. This is not to contend that the martyr's intention and the group's purpose be one in the same; surely they are not. However, an analytical frame for understanding martyrdom as a concept should attend to both aspects. By looking at martyrdom as a cultural performance, this work will consider the reconstitution of the social mores that takes place in martyrdom without ignoring what provokes martyrdom.

Cosmic War

Most studies of religious violence that analyze martyrdom do so through the frame of cosmic war, made famous by Mark Juergensmeyer in *Terror in the Mind of God*. There and elsewhere, Juergensmeyer develops the idea that religious people engaged in conflict link their current political situation to a sacred history, resulting in the perception of a political engagement as the latest battle of a war of good versus evil that has raged since the dawn of time, and likely will continue beyond the warrior's life. Through this symbolic alignment, those who commit religious violence partake in a Manichean existence, demonizing their opponents and accepting that though they may die in the attempt, their side will ultimately be victorious. Conflict thereby becomes a sacred duty rather than a struggle over resources, and partaking in that conflict offers a way for the humiliated to regain their lost honor. "The idea of cosmic war is compelling to religious activists because it ennobles and exalts those who consider themselves a part of it – especially those who have been desperate about their situations and defiant in resisting them" according to Juergensmeyer.[119] The modern cases of religious violence Juergensmeyer examines see a religious group dominated by a political structure seen as explicitly hostile to the resisting group. These groups, and by extension all groups fomenting religious resistance, see the world in severe disorder, and yearn to return the world to order by declaring war on the oppressive regime they are engaged with.

Cosmic war provides Juergensmeyer the frame for understanding the sacrifice of the martyr; as he says, "War is the context for sacrifice."[120] The worldview of the martyr creates a sharply divided world of good and evil, and those who are evil have brought about the current situation of denigration. By aligning him or herself completely with the side of good to the point of their death, the martyr is endowed with a sense of purpose and destiny that

empowers them. Many scholars have taken up the cosmic war framework and applied it to a diverse number of cases.[121] Stuart Wright talks about the importance of frames of "war framing" that elevate violence to a moral imperative.[122] Bruce Hoffman argues this linkage to a sacred narrative makes the religious warrior more dangerous than their secular counterparts, who battle solely in history, as it is the religious beliefs of the terrorist that allows them to overcome the psychological barriers to mass murder and suicide.[123]

These also link to the significant number of studies that explain martyrdom by reference to an impending apocalypse, an orientation inaugurated by John R. Hall.[124] Those that understand themselves facing the imminent end of the world are less willing to allow for compromise and see only victory and/or their own glorious deaths as an acceptable outcome.[125] When confrontations leads to or uses violence, the more likely such groups would respond with violence and at the last collectively take their lives in a final act of refusal to submit to another authority.[126]

Both models have a great deal of usefulness, as they attend to the ways religious sentiment can change the stakes of confrontation. Moreover, both serve as a useful means of comparing diverse cases, as most religious traditions have a concept of the ends times and ways of determining good and evil. I am also taken by the suggestion that seeing the current moment in terms of sacred time changes how time itself is experienced, though that can rather refer equally to the situation of war, divinely caused persecution or the like. In such moments ethical requirements shift, which I believe is inherent in the arguments of such scholars. And I follow both models in seeing such actors not as irrational, but operating amidst particular rationales.

War and apocalypse as absolute determinants of religious violence seems incomplete, however, particularly when addressing acts of dying rather than killing. Many early Christian martyrs had their actions explained in the hagiographic and theological texts without reference to a cosmic battle, focusing instead on the necessity of abiding by the dictates set out by God. A contest was certainly still evident, but it was not framed as a war, neither were they considered to be soldiers. Likewise, the Buddhist tradition has a series of means to validate self-sacrifice, some but by no means all of which look to war as a guiding metaphor. As we will see, the groups under consideration here did see their opponents as posing a threat to the coherence of the group and its founding principles, but that does not result in war. War is *a* context for sacrifice, but not the *only* context for sacrifice.[127] Conflict is evident throughout these cases, but we must look beyond the frame of war to appreciate the way the groups themselves understand the predicament that can lead to dying in service to the cosmic order.

Sovereignty and Political Theology

The question of sovereignty – the ability to determine the shape of life, the laws that serve as guidelines for that life, and the conditions under which those laws are enforced – will be a central concern of this work. This stems not only from the base contest over self-determination that appears as a central feature of each case examined here, but also from the necessity to contend with institutions seeking authority over the life and death of a discrete group. Not only has sovereignty been routinely placed at the heart of modern discussions of power, but it has also spawned a revitalization of the concept of political theology which places sacred ideals at the core of our political existence. Certainly the most well-known

theorist of political theology is Carl Schmitt, whose work done in 1920s Germany asserted that "sovereign is he who decides on the exception."[128] Schmitt defines the exception as where the law is determined to not apply, where its operations are suspended due to the will of certain individuals, individuals thereby labelled sovereign. Dimitris Vardoulakis, author of the exemplary *Sovereignty and Its Other* which examines and analyzes various historical incarnations of sovereignty (though largely remaining within Western European imaginations) articulates, "the operation of sovereign power consists in the justification of violence."[129] It is a question of what forceful means of harm are seen as legitimate mechanisms of justice, not transgressing law but directed by and in support of law, and how violence upon bodies can be seen as appropriate means towards certain ends. Both Schmitt and Vardoulakis see sovereignty as a question of state rule, violence, and the means to justify deployments of force in service to a particular ideological pursuit.

Vardoulakis, like Michel Foucault before him, showed that the shape of sovereignty varies with cultural context and character of the collective at issue, but in all cases revolves around the question of legitimate authority and the foundation of such authority. Foucault contrasts ancient sovereignty displayed upon the scaffold of capital punishment – where the state's power was deployed against an individual body for all to see – to the disciplinary mode of power that attempts to force the internalization of mores through a system of surveillance seeking to transform "docile bodies" through a discourse of improvement and normalcy.[130] Vardoulakis extends Foucault's discussion through a close analysis of three historical constructions of sovereign power distinguished on the basis of their means-end relation: ancient sovereignty that looks first to violent means to determine appropriate ends; modern sovereign power where the means of power themselves justify particular ends, and

finally biopolitics (a label he takes from Foucault) where the justification of violent means is formed in reference to further means that promise a better life for all. On top of Vardoulakis' nuanced and important distinctions, legal theorist Paul Kahn further developed the contours of sovereignty as it is exercised within post-modern democratic nations, where sovereign power is bound in a Constitution and (ideally) only exerted through processes expressing popular will. Kahn goes on to show that all political orders see their Constitution fundamentally based in an exception to law that is interpreted as a revolution.[131] Kahn's insight about the central role interpretation plays when vying sovereignties come into conflict forms the backbone of this study's theoretical approach, and fruitfully expands the revitalized category of political theology.

In Schmitt's *Political Theology*, he argues:

> All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development - in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver - but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries.[132]

While Schmitt's simplistic historical trajectory incorrectly essentializes "secular" and "theological" spheres, and suggests an uncomplicated evolution from the latter into the former, he does identify a crucial dynamic at the core of our juridico-political institutions. The similarity between the political and divine lawgiver leads Schmitt to see our political commitments to be based in theological assertions, since authority over life and death relies upon ideas of cosmic order that directs human life. Decades after Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben elaborated on these ideas by examining the figure of the *homo sacer*, a figure of Roman religious law (lacking extensive historical evidence) who is able to be killed but not

murdered, a body excluded from both the physical order that administers murder as a crime and from the divine order to which sacrifice is offered. Such a person exemplifies the operations of sovereignty as they are created in relation to – or included in – the social order while excluded from the juridical protections that define such an order (which he calls the "sovereign ban"). Such a life, Agamben asserts, that is open to the whims of sovereign power can be a political subject, thereby forming the basis of the sovereign order.[133]

Taking up this trend, I will look to political theology as the necessary frame through which to understand martyrdom. The tendency of studies to look at the religious aspects of martyrs to the exclusion of political considerations err in not taking into consideration the necessary relationship between the two spheres in the conditions of sovereignty. Furthermore, the martyr will be seen to be the counterpart to the *homo sacer*, complementing the body vulnerable to sovereign decision in a body voluntarily exposing itself and taking on the violence forming the foundation of state institutions. By attending to these insights, I will show that communal life organized around a common identity and recognition of authority over life and death requires an appreciation for the place of the sacred in our political life. Only sacred categories can make possible an adequate appreciation of what is at stake when seeking to understand constructions of legitimate power over life and death. Ultimately, I contend understanding a willing act of self-sacrifice necessitates an appreciation of how institutions of power achieve a legitimacy that is based in and concurrently exercised upon bodies. Rather than earlier discussions of sovereignty that focused on killing technologies, the reimagination of sovereignty made possible by these theorists will show that power depends on individual acceptance, and where people refuse to accept authority no matter the outcome monumental shifts of rule can take place.

Volume Outline

The next chapter begins the analysis of particular cases by investigating how martyrdom comes to be used in the Christianity of second-century Asia Minor. I begin by delineating the social and political situation within which Christianity was practiced, a context that saw the Roman Empire reaching its greatest expansion to date, accompanied by a sharp increase in demands for displays of obedience. Amidst these circumstances, Christians were relegated to the social periphery on account of their perceived deviant and dangerous doctrines. Their unwillingness to show allegiance to Rome marked them as public threats, and I will proceed to expose the ways the legal system was used as a tool against these marginalized individuals. The *acta martyrum* (which often take the form of trial transcripts) along with the letters of Ignatius demonstrate the ways Christian communities appropriated the violence inherent in Roman systems of justice for their own ends, framing it as serving injustice and fulfilling the promise that followers of Christ must suffer. Doing so, I conclude, provided Christians an opportunity to assert themselves as a self-determining faction, and frame their deaths as a piece of evidence in support of their perspective on the world and their place and rights therein.

Chapter three applies this same heuristic to the context that spawned the tactic known as suicide bombing or martyrdom operations. While Sunni groups later become the majority employers of this strategy, it originates in the Shi'a awakening of the 1970s with the emergence of Ruhollah Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution. The first human bomb attacks take place in Lebanon, but the chapter begins by demonstrating the inherent links that connect the coastal country to the nation of Iran through networks of religious schools and

scholars. I will proceed to show the reconstruction of doctrines in this context, and the way *jihad* takes on a militaristic bent due to the ubiquitous experience of Western imperialism and oppression. By reading the wills left by Iranian martyrs of the Basij in tandem with the transcripts of Hezbollah's martyr wills, I show how the giving of life in seeking to overcome enemies became a celebrated means of resistance that lent personal and social dignity. Those same wills disclose a common goal of bringing about a state governed on Islamic principles and symbolized by the millennial Mahdi, the hidden Imam who will institute such an existence. The chapter closes with an examination of how martyrdom exceeded its context within *jihad* to become a means of averring the truth of a perspective on existence and justice.

The same frame guides the analysis of Tibetan self-immolators comprising chapter four. Beginning in a similar vein as the previous chapters, I begin by examining the long relationship between the Tibetan people and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Relying on the testaments of self-immolators along with modern reports, I go on to discuss how the programs of the PRC have led to the experience of a state of siege in Tibet, and how the traditional boundaries of the country led to different experiences for Tibetans in different areas. All experiences are based, I show, in a common sensibility of a right to self-determine their life in alignment with Buddhist teachings that place the Dalai Lama as the guardian of justice on earth. Such a sensibility encompasses appropriate means of suffering, including models of sacrifice that form the understandings of the act of self-immolation. I conclude by looking to describe the way self-immolators and the larger Tibetan community understand the act as attempting to firmly establish the truth of Tibet as a sovereign nation.

In the final chapter I look to pull from the preceding analyses what congruencies can be drawn from all cases to determine a new theory of martyrdom that looks to performance and a sovereign imaginary as the guiding structures. Beginning by elucidating what results from comparing discourses of martyrdom, I go on to formulate an idea of performance suffering and what I term a fundamental ontology, a mode of life that is asserted above all others in the midst of a contest between institutions seeking to determine what life looks like in an area and over a people. I conclude the fundamental contest is over a hermeneutic truth, the basis upon which to determine justice and right action in the world, and these deaths serve as the most effective means of providing evidence for one interpretive frame over others. An epilogue examines what this theory of martyrdom offers our understanding of sovereignty and political theology, since all cases operate amidst spheres that are both fully political and fully religious. Second century Christianity provides the first instance of such a blend, and it is to there we now turn.

Chapter 2

Witnesses to Christ: Constructing Christian Martyrdom in Second Century Asia Minor

Introduction

In the New Testament book the Acts of the Apostles, the story is told of Stephen, a learned man and deacon in the Jerusalem church. As a result of his teachings about the messiah, Stephen was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the governing council of the Jewish community, where he delivered an elaborate history lesson on the patriarchal line from Abraham to Solomon. To this lineage he appended the name of Jesus, whom Stephen saw as continuing and completing the project of revealing God's law (Acts 7:2-50). In doing so, Stephen aligned God with the Christians, while chastising his Jewish audience for deviating from the law of God (Acts 7:52-53). Furious, the Jewish council had Stephen dragged out of the city and stoned to death for his hubris and dangerous speech. As he died, Stephen prayed for those who killed him in words reminiscent of his savior: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60; cf. Lk. 23:34).[134]

This tale is said to describe the creation of the first Christian martyr. Stephen is often referred to as the "protomartyr," an odd term apparently first used by the theologian Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century (*Encomium in sanctum Stephanum protomartyrem* 2), suggesting that his was the model all Christian martyrs would follow. Experiences of persecution define the first four centuries of the Christian tradition, and those who were killed during these persecutions are remembered and celebrated by nearly every significant theologian, including Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Thomas Aquinas. "The blood of

martyrs is the seed of the Church" according to Tertullian, the influential theologian writing in North Africa at the close of the second century (*Apologeticus*, 50). With Stephen, this core doctrine begins; however, if this is where the concept of martyrdom begins, it is striking that the general understanding of martyrdom as "dying for a cause" does not seem to make sense in reference to Stephen. It is not a cause, but rather his knowledge that is the catalyst for his death. The first martyr, then, does not fit the commonplace idea of a martyr.

Stemming from the Greek *martys*, a term meaning a witness in a court, martyrdom is a multifaceted phenomenon that has resonated with Christianity from its birth to its present. For the first four centuries of the Common Era, stories circulated about individuals tried in Roman courts for the crime of being Christian, and being executed when found guilty. Those who suffered and died while maintaining their Christianity were heralded by their communities as martyrs, ideals of morality celebrated for their "nobility, their courage, [and] their love of the Master" (*M. Poly*. 2.2). Some hold the first martyr was Jesus of Nazareth, but it is more commonly used to refer to those whose death was seen to be in imitation of their savior's.[135] W.H.C. Frend, for instance, held martyrs "were seeking by their death to attain to the closest possible imitation of Christ's Passion and death."[136] The death of a Christian witness is one that is performed in a way that brings to mind the model of their Savior himself.

Deaths of martyrs riddle the pages of early Christian texts. No conclusive number of early Christian martyrs exist, and nearly all tales about their creation come from religious texts of questionable historical accuracy. We do know that concerns about Christians are evident during Nero's rule (c. 54-68 C.E.), but that the most concentrated persecutions of Christian happened during the reigns of Decius in the third century and Diocletian at the start

of the fourth. These latter operated as sanctioned, empire-wide institutional attempts to discover and execute all Christians who would not sacrifice to the emperor. Under such programs, Christians were encouraged not to lose faith, but to remain constant and loyal throughout suffering, just as Jesus, the apostles and those martyrs who followed them did.

Scholars have largely defined early Christian martyrdom in terms of connection and conviction, be it Elizabeth Castelli's characterization as "willing, self-sacrificing death on behalf of one's religion, one's political ideals or one's community,"[137] or Joyce Salisbury's assertion that martyrs are "people who held fast to their faith and were killed for refusing to renounce their principles."[138] In order to recognize the interpretive move necessary in distinguishing martyrdom from other deaths, some like Candida Moss speak of martyrdom as "a set of discursive practices that shaped early Christian identities, mediated ecclesiastical and dogmatic claims, and provided meaning to the experience described by early Christians as persecution, and in doing so produced a new economy of action."[139] Or, in Daniel Boyarin's more direct formulation, martyrdom is "a practice of dying for God and talking about it."[140]

Some scholars, such as de Ste. Croix and E.R. Dodds, have approached martyrdom as an issue of pathological death-seeking, akin to psychological deviancy and mental illness.[141] In these studies martyrs desire to die, and seek a meaningful way to satisfy such a craving. Such approaches have difficulty separating martyrdom from its phenomenological neighbor suicide, distinctions that have continued to demand space in modern texts on the subject.[142] Others, like Joyce Salisbury and Rodney Stark likewise look to the inclinations of the individual striving to gain the promised rewards for martyrs.[143] Stark goes as far as to explain acts of martyrdom through rational choice theory, arguing that "religion supplies

compensators for rewards that are scarce or unavailable,"[144] and the high value of religious rewards (i.e. heaven, life everlasting) justifies – moreover, creates – the high "cost" (here, death) necessary to gain them. Stark sees in martyrs the "most credible exponents of the value of a religion," in that they believe so much in the promised rewards they see it as necessary to give their lives for them.[145]

While I agree with Stark on the weight given to the martyr's testimony through their deaths, I disagree with the emphasis he places on the "religious goods" being sought. Much like de Ste. Croix and Dodds, he seeks to understand an act of martyrdom only through reference to what it gains for the individual. Such perspectives reduce the social aspect of martyrdom to the act of an individual seeking her own benefit, thereby privileging the personal over the communal aspect. The act is reduced to self-satisfaction, which seems inadequate to understanding such a phenomenon. Not only do such theories require assertions about the mental state of such people, but they also fail to appreciate that the label of martyr comes from the community, and not on the basis that they adequately sought their own good.

Many academic discussion of martyrdom move beyond the focus on individual intentionality to look at martyrdom through the lens of noble death, a cultural ideal borrowed from the Greek and Roman cultures that bred Christianity. Scholars like Arthur Droge and James Tabor have used an evaluative framework to portray martyrdom as a valorous choice to die, linking the Christian martyrs to a tradition going at least as far back as Socrates.[146] G.W. Bowersock too, in his well-known Wiles lectures, placed martyrdom in the noble death trope, contending that it was thanks to this cultural heritage that martyrdom occupied such a high place for Christianity.[147] His "archaeological analysis" led him to insist that the term

"martyr" first abdicated its root as witness during this period, coming to refer to something irredeemably Christian.[148]

Such arguments however tend toward absolutizing a single cultural context, which a) makes it difficult to treat such phenomena cross-culturally and b) tend to establish unconditional boundaries around ideas like "religion," which are then always and forever opposed to spheres of "secular" power.[149] Such is evident in Bowersock's contention that the concept of martyrdom had a "clear sense of death at the hands of a hostile secular authority,"[150] and in the work of Friedrich Avemarie and Jan Willem van Henten. These latter categorize martyr texts based on an explicit religion/secular dichotomy, looking at the "cosmic orientation" where pagan confronts Christian, obfuscating the substantial overlap between those identities and characteristics.[151] Anachronistically and inconsiderately applying a single understanding of religion and religious identity outside its immediate context colors our understanding of relationships between other social groups and institutions of power.[152] Moreover, arguments that favor cultural explanations often treat the political circumstances of these events as unimportant, merely an opportunity for these cultural forms to appear.

W.H.C. Frend, in his magisterial *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* likewise preferred a cultural argument to political ones and operating on a sharp distinction between religious and secular social arrangements. The result is his contention that martyrdom is a death for a religious faith stemming from apocalyptic concerns.[153] While the Christian focus on the imminent Parousia certainly was evident, such a narrowing of martyrdom significantly limits the cases to which the term can be applied, reducing I believe the explanatory power of the term in expressly secular cases that rely on universal claims but

remain focused on the here and now. However, the way he articulates the situation of persecution the Christians faced as at heart a contest between equally universal claims about theocratic sovereign orders will be central to this study as well.

Frend's focus on competing sovereignties and their attached social identities appear fundamental to understanding acts of martyrdom. This latter was also analyzed by Daniel Boyarin, who deftly articulates how the Christian discourse of martyrdom helped establish a distinct Christian social group from its Jewish family.[154] He places the experience of Roman antagonism as central to what he refers to as "Jewish Christians" of the period, but while Christians prided themselves on their unswerving loyalty to God to death, their Jewish contemporaries celebrated tales where Rabbis used "trickster speech" to fool Roman authorities into thinking they were complicit with the hegemonic scripts of Roman law while in fact subverting that power.[155] Labeling this opposition as the difference between Greek/Jewish *metis* (wisdom) versus Roman/Christian *virtus* (strength), Boyarin asserts that these opposing responses to persecution did not reflect two communities but rather helped enact the boundaries separating them.[156] His conclusions make it necessary that when dealing with early Christianity, we cannot operate on the "assumption of phenomenologically, socially, and culturally discrete communities of Jews and Christians and of an absolute opposition between Judaism and Palestine on the one hand, Christianity and the Greco-Roman world on the other."[157] Like many other social identities in the Roman Empire, there is significant overlap between and among such labels.

The former lay at the center of a pair of article by Matthew Recla, whose insistence that martyrs be allowed agency in their own deaths is as compelling as his assertion that the martyr can be understood as *homo profanus,* a complement to Giorgio Agamben's *homo*

sacer.[158] The *homo profanus* confronts the Roman power structure with a symbolic interpretation of their death as resistance to sovereign power, refusing to relinquish the individual's right to determine their own modes of life and death. Such work is not only welcome for his engagement with political theology – which has too long neglected the figure of the martyr – but also in its advancement of our understanding of the ways individuals relate to structures of power. That said, Frend's analysis directs our attention to the need to see dueling sovereignties, both seeking to lay claim upon lives. In his zeal to show the opposition of the martyr, Recla did not expound on how the martyr speaks truth to power by speaking the truth of *another* power.

In that sovereignty is at least in part about the justification of violence, both Candida Moss and Elizabeth Castelli are leaders in studies that seek to establish the ways a martyrs suffering is understood and constructed in reference to larger complexes of meaning-making.[159] Castelli's examination showed how martyrdom helped shape the collective memory (a term she borrows from Maurice Halbwachs) of early Christians into a culture that interpreted their suffering through sacred narratives. She provides a detailed examination of how the Christians reshaped and refined available symbolic complexes to construct a power structure based on suffering. Moss similarly explores the ways such complexes may have been internalized by Christians through a mimetic dynamic – dying in imitation of Christ's passion – which is regularly referred to by martyrs. While the evidence supports such conclusions, Castelli relies on the analysis of exemplary figures and texts throughout the first several centuries to speak to a generalized early Christianity, and Moss' intent is to make a contribution to the history of ideas, causing her work to remain at the level of doctrine.

These are effective approaches, but the attempts to totalize martyrdom in early Christianity can neglect the political situations each faced (a methodological problem addressed in part by Moss in her *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*). In what follows I will expand upon the insights of both scholars, and provide evidence to buttress their conclusions by elaborating on one particular network of power relations in the ancient world. Doing so will allow for a greater appreciation for the ways local catalysts influence global phenomena.

Methodology and Scope

There was no single, unified "Christianity" in the early centuries of the Common Era. The Christian discourse of "one Church" long remained at the level of ideal, and understanding the Christians of the period requires appreciation for the multiple ideologies of early Christian martyrdom based in what Peter Brown has called "micro-Christianities."[160] This diversity, however, should not lead us to approach particular settings as completely independent or isolated from others. Enhanced by a steadily improving infrastructure, networks of pilgrimage and missionary activity crisscrossed the Roman world, and an extensive epistolary complex shared ideas between churches. The world was being drawn more closely together than it had ever been, reflecting several features of our current period of globalization. The Roman culture was infiltrating every locale within their broad borders, and changes to social status and hierarchy had thrown traditional understandings of identity into flux. Increased ease of travel was drawing people together in sustained contact, bringing from disparate cultures a host of new answers to questions of life and death that influenced, and were influenced by, those already present.

Therefore unlike many of these other studies seeking to elucidate a general concept of martyrdom in early Christianity, any analysis of martyrdom in early Christianity therefore needs to be focused both geographically and temporally. With that in mind, what I will investigate here is how a particular confluence of religio-political discourses and power relations led to interpretations of religious narratives encouraging individuals to seek their own death as a sacred act. This chapter will look specifically at what Moss terms the "sociohistorically grounded ideologies" of Christians in Asia Minor during the second century C.E.[161] It was during this period that Bowersock identifies the shift where the term martyr itself went from meaning a witness in a court to taking on the meaning that remains attached to it, dying for a cause.[162] That century begins with Christianity as an embattled minority and ends with the group's emergence as a notable player on the world stage (as the intense persecutions of Decius and Diocletian in the third century testify). This period is in the liminal space between the preaching of an itinerant Jewish preacher in Galilee, and the establishment of those teachings as the religion of the Roman Empire by the emperor Constantine. Accomplishing so much in a few short centuries was no doubt thanks in significant part to the stories of the religion's martyrs.

Asia Minor is often called the "cradle of Christian martyrdom."[163] Encompassed today by much of modern Turkey, Asia Minor was the site of some of the earliest Christian missions and communities. Paul is known to have visited the area and communities there were addressed in the beginning of Revelation.[164] Following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, this area became the *de facto* home of Christianity.[165]

The earliest tales of martyrs come from this era and this area.[166] Centering this study on second century Asia Minor has the added benefit of several reliable sources of information,

including the letters Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor Trajan when the former served as provincial governor in the area. Apart from those missives, the material that makes up the bulk of data for this chapter comes from two main sources: the letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, believed to be written on his way to being executed in Rome, and the so-called *acta martyrum* – tales of the trials and deaths of martyrs that were popular in the early churches. These Greek (and in a few cases, Latin) texts can tell us a great deal about the social significance these Christians bestowed on martyrdom.[167]

Of all letters ascribed to Ignatius, seven have been determined to have a high level of authenticity: *To the Ephesians* (hereafter *Ig. Eph*.), *To the Magnesians* (hereafter *Ig. Mag*.), *To the Trallians* (hereafter *Ig. Tral*.), *To the Romans* (hereafter *Ig. Rom*.), *To the Philadelphians* (hereafter *Ig. Phil*.), *To the Smyrneans* (hereafter *Ig. Smyr*.) and *To Polycarp* (hereafter *Ig. Poly*.).[168] The work of Ignatius has been approached in a number of veins, often in terms of the continuing separation of Christian and Jewish communities during his life, while others have examined his place in the battles around authority in early Christian circles.[169] Ignatius is well known for elevating martyrdom as the perfection of Christian existence, believing one's nature as a Christian was only fully established in their deaths.[170] (One can hear a certain prefiguring of Origen's thought, who himself would desire martyrdom to be perfected as a Christian.)[171]

The martyr acts that were so popular in early Christian churches were aimed at providing a frame for early Christians to understand their own lives in terms of the gospel narratives, replete with ethical obligations and a sovereign discourse about the origin and basis for those obligations. Although the gospel narratives and Pauline epistles are often treated as a class above all other texts, we must remember that the canonization of the New

Testament occurred hundreds of years after the period under consideration, and came about as a result of power negotiations between communities. The provocative, heroic tales of martyrs occupied a vital means of communicating the Christian doctrine, and were read publicly in liturgical and educational venues within the early churches.

Martyr *acta* are "quite palpably the product of the non-Jewish Graeco-Roman society of Asia Minor, Greece and North Africa,"[172] and can provide "true insight into second-century Christianity."[173] The complete collection of martyr texts span the first four centuries of the Common Era,[174] but us here I will only analyze those texts appearing to date from the second century. Those include: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (hereafter *M. Poly*.),[175] the *Martyrdom of Ptolemaeus and Lucius* (hereafter *M. Ptol*.),[176] the *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonicê* (hereafter *M. Carp*.),[177] the *Martyrdom of Justin and Companions* (hereafter *M. Just*.),[178] the *Martyrs of Lyons* or *Lugdunum* (hereafter *M. Lyons*),[179] and the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (hereafter *M. Scill*.).[180] It is possible that though dated from the second century, these texts were revised by third century editors, especially since many come from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* written at the end of Diocletian's reign, but "if we discount every martyrdom account potentially tainted by the hands of later editors, we will be left with no sources."[181] Composed in various areas around the empire, these texts all contributed to the place of martyrdom in the minds of Christians in Asia Minor.

There has long been a "historical/literary binary" that appears in the textual selections of scholars studying early Christian martyrdom."[182] Those looking for historicity – specific datum about who died, how many, where, etc. – favor trial *acta* as more reliable in transmitting these kinds of information. These texts are largely shorn of description and contain only the dialogue between the Christian defendants and the Roman authority that

conducted their trials. On the other hand, those investigating Christian ideology tend to use the more literary *passiones* due to their focus on the ethical structures that buttress power, though these were the minority prior to the third and fourth century. What follows favors neither form of martyr narratives, as both aim to communicate certain ideological truths about the Christian existence. Passion narratives like Polycarp's provide a means by which the audience can see the ethical models of their imaginary play out in the world, while the trial transcripts make powerful rhetorical use of the judicial context that attempted to discover truth in a frank and unadorned way.[183] As I will elaborate below, part of the ingenuity of martyrdom was to appropriate the power of the judicial establishment in establishing social truths for their own ends.

Seeking the ways these tales inspired others to seek their own death, we first need to set aside our own perspectives and beliefs to seek the internal logic that guided their worldview, coming to terms as much as possible with how the early Christians understood and celebrated the act of martyrdom. Toward that end, this chapter will look to contemporary Christian literature to answer several interrelated questions: How did the Christians perceive their social, political, and legal situation during the second century? To what extent are those categories exclusive in their experience? What did they see at stake in their resistance to the Roman legal and political structure? Why did they feel they needed to die to give their 'witness', and how was that need shaped by their interpretation of Christian doctrine? Finally, what significance did they attribute to the testimony of the martyr? While relying on texts will give insight mainly into the thoughts of elite, literate Christians, it will allow discovery into the perspectives of those who determined the overall shape of Christian life in this area during this period.

Rather than challenge the veracity of the claims of martyrs, I will take seriously the perception of these agents that they were speaking the truth. A situation was seen to have arisen where the maintenance of one identity superseded the need to stay alive, because to deny their identity was seen as participating in the destruction of the guiding ideology. In fact, as will become clearer throughout, I will contend that it was precisely in an affirmation of an existential and ontological truth that these individuals understood the need for them to die.

This chapter begins by examining the social, cultural and political situation amidst which the second century churches of Asia Minor formed. Considering both the centrifugal and centripetal dynamics of power in the blossoming Roman Empire, I will show how Christians were seen as arrogantly holding themselves apart from the rest of the populace, raising concerns about their character and fears about their possible subversive intent. I will proceed to analyze the legal structure that was used to address and suppress those fears, and inquire about the nature of the charge of the *nomen Christianorum*, the crime of being a Christian that led to the martyr's execution. Such understanding is necessary, I contend, to understand the use of sacrifice as a determinant of guilt, and the resilience of those who refused to perform the ritualized act of allegiance.

After looking at Rome's perspective on the Christians, I will look to what lay behind the statement "Christianus sum" – "I am a Christian" – which accompanies all martyrdoms and simultaneously served as the confession of faith and the confession of guilt. Blending concepts of ethnicity, race and nation, I show how the Christian identity revolved around not only a belief in Jesus as Christ, but more importantly the willingness to sacrifice one's own will to the will of God. Looking to an outside source that determined right action challenged

the sovereignty of Rome, which is evident in the similarity of language used in reference to both Christian and Roman imaginaries. In the face of this, Christians constructed their own sacrifice, one that took up from Jewish and Greco-Roman templates, and inverted the logic of the imperial cult. This sacrifice was based in the model of Jesus' own passion, and advanced a sense of speaking the truth of the Christian dogma during moments of extreme pain and death to prove one's commitment. I conclude by showing how the core of Christian witnessing revolved around a mode of truth-telling known in the ancient world as *parrhēsia*, a subject which was elaborated upon by Michel Foucault in his last lectures and can reorient our understanding of the function and form of martyrdom. Such speech communicated an existential truth through an ontological truth, identifying the speaker as a truth-teller due to the visible compatibility of their speech to their mode of life.

The Socio-Political World of Second Century Christianities

Following the reign of Domitian (81-96 C.E.) and the short rule of the Emperor Nerva (96-98 C.E.), Trajan became emperor and ruled to 117 C.E. Trajan was a much celebrated emperor, said to favor justice over power and known for achieving the largest area of Roman imperial control in the history of the empire.[184] He was also known for great public spectacles of death, including gladiatorial games and public executions, the latter of which likely included the Christians put to death during his reign. In the 120s Hadrian's rule reversed Trajan's expansionist policies, reimagining the empire as a commonwealth of diverse ethnic communities and resulting in a keen interest in maintaining peace between the cultures being brought together.[185] Hadrian allowed for greater cultural self-expression under the governance of Rome, and his rule saw a hiatus in the persecutions of Christians and Jews.

However when Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus ascended to the station of joint emperors in 161 C.E., "persecutions again disturbed Asia" according to Eusebius (*HE* iv.15.1). Power relations were continually shifting, and Roman subjects had to contend with an increasing centralization of power in Rome that was reproduced across the empire's provinces.

This centralization occurred both on institutional and social levels; institutionally, the presence of Roman authorities was increasing in provincial areas, bringing a concomitant rise in displays of loyalty to Rome.[186] Socially, there was a growing concentration of political power and influence into the hands of a handful of elite families, particularly in the Greek speaking Eastern part of the empire of which Asia Minor was part, where legal systems were used as a means to perpetuate that dynamic.[187] The combination of these elements resulted in periodic aggression against groups like the Christians, who existed on the peripheries of power networks.[188]

Christian communities appear to have been formed somewhat irrespective of cultural and economic considerations. According to Robert M. Grant, the socio-economic situation of Christians was as varied as the cultural contexts within which they were found.[189] Some scholars contend that literacy rates set the early Christian churches apart to some extent, allowing them both to depend heavily on scripture and participate in the epistolary networks between churches.[190] That would be particularly significant at a time when an estimated four out of five people in the empire were illiterate, thereby excluding them from the arenas of power that required understanding written Latin.[191] Literary and archaeological evidence points to congregations made of educated and non-educated, citizens and slaves, Latin and Greek speakers.[192] Polycarp speaks of his community in Smyrna as a tight knit community composed of literate and wealthy members as well as a large proportion of slaves (*Letter to*

Philip, 6 and 10), and his assertions are echoed in the writings of both Tertullian and Irenaeus (both said to be students of Polycarp). Ignatius of Antioch even suggests that true Christians should seek to free slaves who share in the faith (*Ig. Poly*. 4). Such groups would have contested against a great number of social and cultural stigmas, and likely had organized themselves on the basis of their radical social agenda.

For centuries, one's city had provided the locus for individual identity; urban centers competed for glory through elaborate games and spectacles made possible by contributions of wealthy, which elicited a sense of local pride through regional competition.[193] These city-based identities were complemented by a wider cultural distinction between Latin West and Greek East, and both were increasingly confronted by the pan-empirical identity promoted by the Roman Empire.[194] At a time when power was becoming more centralized in Rome, the people in the more rural provinces would have likely felt increasingly dislocated, and vulnerable to new understandings of self that united them with others across the expanding known world.[195] At the same time, in the urban centers where Christianity would be established, there were the same things that plagued cities in the modern era: overcrowding, filth and disease. The high mortality rate and poor health conditions of those who lived in these areas brought a willingness to look beyond the physical world. Many found in Christianity a new way to belong based in attractive ideas about the better world to come for anyone who believed, be they slave or senator.

The shape of Christian identity was being worked out in this context, where traditional conceptions of selfhood were being contested.[196] For the first three centuries of the Common Era, however, Christians by and large were understood as a Jewish sect, with the populace unaware of – or unconcerned with – what distinguished Christianity from (the

anachronistically constructed) Rabbinic Judaism. Both groups were furthermore seen as excluding themselves from traditional practices that were expected of all Roman subjects, no matter their other identities. This perceived estrangement from what it meant to live in the Empire troubled their neighbors, with significant consequences. And even within the groups who maintained a distinct Christian identity there was a great deal of diversity; the "orthodox" variety that Ignatius and Polycarp champion exists at this point as one sect among many, each vying for dominance. Understanding the context for Christian martyrdom in second century Asia Minor therefore requires that we understand the events that helped shape their experiences vis-à-vis their Jewish contemporaries, their Roman neighbors, and other Christians.

Rather than any significant distinction between the Jewish social groups and the more predominantly 'gentile' Christians, the writings of the second century repeatedly show concern over the distinction between the two groups.[197] Daniel Boyarin offers the label "Jewish Christians" for the amalgam in order to destabilize any easy distinction between the two.[198] The complete history of the Jewish people's relationship with Rome has been dealt with elsewhere,[199] but the *Iudaeorum,* Rome's name for the Jewish community, had been a distinct social group within the Empire for many years, marked by their modes of dress, dietary restrictions and tendency to live in concentrated areas apart from the rest of the populace.[200] During the first century, the Jewish community found itself beset on one side by the Christians seeking to appropriate their traditions and ideological structures, and on another by the increasingly stringent measures of the Roman Empire. They responded to the former by establishing an inviolate canon of texts meant to exclude the Christian scriptures and generally seeking to exclude Christians from participation in the community.

Large-scale revolts were the response to the latter, with the first occurring amidst protests against unfair Roman tax practices in 66 C.E. Four years later, the Temple in Jerusalem was razed by Roman forces, decentering Jewish life.[201] Jewish insurrectionists, the Sicarii, maintained a guerilla war until 72 C.E. when they were cornered in the desert fortress of Masada. When the Roman military broke the siege, they discovered that the nine hundred and sixty defenders of Masada had chosen death rather than accept defeat, establishing their place in Jewish legend and providing a seed for the developing martyr discourses (though they themselves do not seem to have been labeled "martyrs").[202] The fall of the Second Temple began the radical reformulation of Jewish existence, and the memory of the uprising would foul the relationship between Judaism and Rome – and therefore Christianity and Rome – for decades to come.

A period of relative calm followed,[203] but the situation of Jews vis-à-vis Rome continued to slowly deteriorate. Hadrian's pro-Greek programs were seen as making unacceptable incursions into Jewish geographic and ideological spaces, including a Temple Tax levied against the Jewish community and the creation of the city Aelia Capitolina atop Jerusalem replete with a temple to Zeus on the Temple Mount. These actions infuriated the Jews and fueled growing apocalyptic expectations, leading ultimately to another revolt which began in 132 C.E. under the leadership of Simon bar Kochba, who (like Jesus) was thought to be the Jewish messiah. Bar Kochba was able to establish an independent Jewish state for two years, until the Roman legion severely put down the rebellion three years later.

Following Rome's victory, Simon Bar Kochba was tortured and executed by the Roman authorities as a rebel. He is still remembered by Jewish communities as one of the Ten Martyrs (*Aseret Harugei Malchut*), whose stories are still ritually remembered during

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.[204] Their designation as *Kiddush ha-Shem*, sanctifiers of the divine name, stemmed from their willingness to suffer death rather than violate the law, as well as their efforts toward a self-governing home for the Jewish community. Such aspects certainly played a role in the development of a Christian concept of martyrdom, as the story was part of their shared tradition and the doctrinal development of Kiddush ha-Shem took place largely during the second century.[205]

The ultimate consequence of the Bar Kochba revolt was the loss of the lands of Judea until they were reestablished in the twentieth century, and an increased concern in Roman circles of separatist powers *in potentia* based in alternate social identities compounded by ideologies seen to present a rival authority.[206] Since they had determined Jesus of Nazareth to be the messiah, the Christian communities refused to participate in the Bar Kochba revolt, which did much to establish them as a separate and distinct group. However, the ongoing ambiguity around the groups is evidenced by the dual facts of the Christians exclusion from Jerusalem (alongside the Jews) following the revolt, along with the relative calm Christian communities experienced in the years after the uprising.

Following the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem, the heart of Christianity shifted from Judea to Asia Minor, which had long been a prime area of Christian proselytization resulting in a significant and long-established population of Christians as well as Jews.[207] Years of missionary success positioned Christians for greater coherence following the shift of power center after the wars. That province had a particular cultic character in those years, housing a proliferation of initiation cults focused on securing a better existence after death.[208] The Eleusinian Mysteries were for a long time the most well-established Greek cultic formation, of which Hadrian himself was said to have been an initiate and which read cosmic mysteries

into a grain of wheat which was ritually presented to the highest initiates, symbolizing the cycles of life and death evident in the cultivation of crops.[209] The deity Mithras, the Unconquered Sun, shared several attributes with Christ, including the transformational power of blood during a ritual meal, and the promise of salvation to those in its ranks.[210] Whatever claims it made to uniqueness, Christianity was part of a larger religious amalgam during the first centuries of the Common Era which influenced their ideas about life and death, and served to urge adherents to look beyond this life for the truth of their existence. The cultic landscape of Asia Minor served as fertile ground for such beliefs, rife as it was with so many lenses reflecting hope for the afterlife, keeping the gaze of its inhabitants firmly on the life after.

Within contemporary Christian circles, although there was a unity between sects on the basis of a common acceptance of Jesus as Christ, communities differed radically in their interpretations of gospel texts (and the texts they preferred, as the New Testament canon will not be established for decades), how to understand their present, and even what the Messiah's appearance meant. Apart from the proto-orthodox[211] strain of Christianity represented by Ignatius and Polycarp, a number of other schools of Christian doctrine existed in the immediate area. Of particular importance were Docetism (which Ignatius railed against) and Montanism which originated in Asia Minor and would be influential there for centuries to come. This latter, led by the eponymous Phrygian prophet Montanus – who had formerly been a priest of the goddess Cybele and therefore likely a eunuch – and his prophetesses Priscilla and Maxima, based itself in ecstatic trances and ongoing prophecies given through their leaders.

The Docetists, Ignatius' main theological opponents, held that Christ's suffering on the cross was not "real," but only "apparent." Working from the premise that speaking of the Messiah (or God himself, depending on the Christology of the group) as physically suffering was irrational, the Docetists held that Christ's passion was illusory – that he only *appeared* to suffer – turning his death into a morality tale, but not one that should be emulated. From their perspective, other Christian sects misunderstood the very nature of Christ's appearance on earth. Like their Gnostic contemporaries who sought the development and elaboration of a secret knowledge, the Docetists denied that Christian perfection could only be a result of continued moral and spiritual development.[212] These and many others sought to make sense of existence and the experience of persecution through reference to the Christian story, resulting in significant variations in doctrine and ideas of what it meant to be "Christian."

Alongside the general recognition of Jesus as Christ, apocalyptic expectations were fairly common throughout the early Christian churches. The expectation of *Parousia*, the coming Kingdom of God when the final judgment would determine who would forever reside with God and who would be cast from His sight resonated throughout the Christian world. Many had read in the gospels the promise that the kingdom would come while the apostles still lived ("Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom," [Mt. 16:28; cf. Mt. 24:34, Lk. 21:32]), and those in the second century were trying to deal with the frustrations caused by its delay. Moreover, apocalyptic expectations gave urgency to the need to act in alignment with Christian teachings, however they were interpreted.[213] Martyrdom would become seen by some to be a shortcut, a way to ascend directly to the side of God without passing the proverbial 'Go' of judgment.

At the turn of the millennium, the Roman emperor Augustus was seen by many as inaugurating a Roman "Messianic age."[214] The Imperial Cult had long existed side by side with these other cultic organizations; Smyrna in Asia Minor housed one of the earliest cults of the Goddess Rome, at least as far back as the second century B.C.E.[215] Under Domitian the cult took Caesar as its focus, but when the temple to the Emperor's genius was built in Pisidian Antioch, it merely gave architectural substance to ideas that had long been held in that part of the Empire.[216] The emperor's deification was seen as a natural metamorphosis of the *pax Deorum*, the sacred treaty between Rome's political establishment and the sacred foundation of their social order. It was also under Domitian that it became a requirement for all loyal Roman subjects to offer wine and incense in sacrifice to the emperor, a demand that will figure significantly into the discussion of Christian martyrdom.[217]

The imagined arrangement between Romans and their gods was not a matter of inward faith and conviction, but a relationship where the former performed their duties in exchange for the latter's protection of the people. The *pax Deorum* defined social life in Rome, was seen as its guarantor and enforcer, and it was not uncommon for people to see plague or pestilence as the result of angering the gods.[218] The demand for Romans to sacrifice to the emperor was part of a broader understanding of the people's obligations in maintaining peaceful conditions. As a result of its expanded place in the maintenance of social life, the Imperial Cult gained prominence as the Republic gave way to the Empire.[219] The middle of the second century saw the height of devotion to the Emperor coincide with the development of Christianity, resulting in a competition for devotion that characterizes the experience in Asia Minor.

The “religious” nature of cults combined with the cosmically anchored essence of the Roman order and the religio-nationalist concept of Judaism provided the context for Christian identity, blending a religious ideology with political commitments. Relying on their self-conception as the ‘chosen’ of the God who created the universe (*M. Carp.* 10; *M. Just.* 1.5) Christians saw themselves different than their contemporary salvation-based cults. Their attempts to distinguish themselves from the Jewish communities of the time increasingly marked them as not-Jewish. Simultaneously, faced with the increasing concentration of power in the Empire, the Christian resistance to Roman cultic practices marked them as not-Roman. They were something novel, and therefore seen by Roman subjects as potentially subversive.

Such a concern largely stemmed from their estrangement the *mos maiorum*, the unwritten assemblage of ancestral customs of the Romans that structured social life and gave shape to their sovereign imaginary. It was transgressions against this that seemed to inflame Roman passions, not on the basis of the transgressive teachings themselves but the effect those teachings were feared to have on public morality.[220] Christian anti-social tendencies combined with their unwillingness to participate in religious practices marked them as outsiders to a broader community that scapegoated such outsiders for all sorts of misfortunes. They were not the only group to suffer on account of such concerns, as Kate Cooper has shown, and the perception that they were the only minority group suffering suspicion and suppression sprang from the success of their rhetoric.[221]

This isolation was not only seen as insulting to the common sensibilities, marking them as untrustworthy, but showed them to be practitioners of *prava religio* or *religio illicita*: illegal, depraved or false religion opposed to those practices sanctioned by Rome. Any nation

or collective that had been practicing their particular traditions for many years – and whose practices did not interfere or disturb Romans – were *religio licita*, deemed acceptable once incorporated into the larger religious context and determined to pose no danger to the Roman order.[222] 'Licit' religions united people under Rome, illicit ones created a place for anti-empire sentiment and negative attitudes towards fellow Roman subjects.

'Wrong' religion was not only seen as out of keeping with contemporary metaphysical knowledges, but was seen as a direct threat to the state and proper authority according to those like Tacitus and Livy (who both designated Christianity a *prava religio*).[223] Other authorities resisted such an extreme label, such as Pliny, imperial governor in Asia Minor under the Emperor Trajan, who referred to Christianity as a "degenerate *superstitio* carried to extravagant lengths" (*Letters*, X.96.8).[224] Tacitus, writing a few decades before Pliny, also famously used *superstitio* in describing the Christians (*Annals* XV.44.5). While related to *religio*, the use of *superstitio* has led some scholars to assert that Romans thought very little of Christianity in the early Empire.[225] The murkiness is reflected the inconsistent status awarded to Christianity in texts of this period.

The conflict between the Christians and the Romans was not about religious beliefs – orthodoxy – as much as it was about proper and appropriate religious practices – orthopraxy.[226] Groups that engaged in 'illicit' religion were thought to take part in black magic, conspiracies against the state and disloyal oaths. Foreign cults were of prime concern in this regard; the Bacchanalia had been outlawed by Senate decree in 186 B.C.E due to its designation as a *prava religio* and the belief that the practices inspired a massive conspiracy against Rome. Such activity carried a sentence of death for those found guilty. When recalling the event, Livy reminds his readers that "men wisest in all divine and human law

used to judge that nothing was so potent in destroying religion as sacrifices performed by external and foreign ritual." (Livy, *History of Rome,* 39.16.9)

However, while the history of Christianity until the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. is one of repeated public anger and attacks against Christians, the extent and institutionalization of those persecutions was often exaggerated.[227] As Candida Moss has suggested, the label "persecution" relies on modern ideas of the mechanisms of violence that the state directs, and anachronistic appellations can be troublingly inaccurate.[228] That does not mean that the trials of Christians were completely imagined, only that the accusations of concentrated and systematic persecutions of Christians by Rome at the turn of the second century were likely more a result of Christian rhetoric than actual substance.[229] Or, in the words of W.H.C. Frend, the Christian claims of persecution in the early second century are met with a "conflict of evidence."[230]

Rome would engage in systematic persecution against Christians in the following centuries, particularly under Decius and Diocletian, but during this period we see decentered outbursts of anger against an isolationist group in isolated areas across the empire. We have seen that Christians had set themselves apart in numerous ways: they were intimately connected to an ethnic group that had rebelled against the Empire several times in recent memory, but insisted they were distinct from that group, which in turn excluded Christians from the allowances made for to the Jewish communities on account of their antiquity. They did not respect the cosmic order upon which the Roman order was founded, making them transgressors of the *pax Deorum* as well as the unwritten customs of the *mos maiorum.* As practitioners of depraved and illicit religion, their commitment to the social order was suspect. The centripetal forces drawing political power into the center further differentiated

any social outliers amidst a culture of ostentatious allegiance. All this resulted in regular eruptions of suspicion and anger against a group that made ready scapegoats for social ills. That anger found its release not through mob violence, but rather through the auspices of Roman law.

Legal Recourse against Christians

The tales of early Christian martyrdoms have a common setting: the legal forums of Rome. This is a site where opposing parties settled disputes, and more importantly where the legal order was reasserted and made plain on the bodies of Roman subjects. The Roman legal system distinguished between private crimes, those that were directed against an individual party, and public crimes that threatened Roman life more generally. Even crimes Western countries today would consider to be public, like theft, assault or even murder were held to be "private" offenses in the early empire of Rome. Public crimes, which apparently included the crime of Christianity, were understood to have been committed against the whole of the community, transgressions that demanded the reaffirmation of the political order's foundations.[231] All Roman subjects were thereby inculcated into the ritual of justice, since they had a stake in their order's reestablishment, and those found guilty were marked as outsiders to social order, requiring acts of atonement before being readmitted to the body politic.[232]

Trials for criminal, or "public" offenses were just that, public – held in open venues often as part of larger spectacles, which let the populace – those who were symbolically party to the suit – observe the rectification of the wrong.[233] During the trial Roman solidarity was ritually reinforced, and witnessing the penance reassured law-abiding spectators were living

rightly. The Roman arena where trials took place was a central site for reiterating the cultural and cosmic truths upon which Roman order and identity rested.[234] They were designed explicitly as spaces for the ritualized assertion of Roman power, providing what Castelli called "spatial, performative, and symbolic idioms for defining, articulating and reinscribing social identities and hierarchies, power relations and public allegiances."[235]

The trials themselves provided a physical means by which to re-enact Rome's power before a large audience. Judith Perkins notes that the public activities put on under the banners of Rome demonstrated the social hierarchy which "became reified through other public enactment… Participation confirmed the person's allegiance with the worldview and concomitant political structures"[236] They provided the scaffolds where Roman power was made visible, surrounded by rituals which produced the awe that transformed their violence into power.[237] Other displays that took place in the arena during gladiatorial contests and mock battles conflated the real and the imaginary, creating a space where the worlds flow into each other and actual events replicate the legendary. The trial settings were symbolically laden venues, where the Roman imaginary was made one with reality.[238]

Though it was the Roman imaginary given shape and actuality in these venues, a too idealized view of Roman law would be misleading. The deployment of the legal system depended on the will of provincial officials, and that will was at least as influenced by local elites and popular sentiment as it was by the central Roman regime.[239] As Cicero had asserted, "*salus populi suprema lex esto*" ("the health of the people should be the supreme law," *De Legibus* 3.8.), which allowed for a broad justification for legal action against any group suspected of harboring ill will against the Roman populace. Ramsay MacMullen affirms that those of high socio-economic status were able to manipulate the law to reaffirm

their status and its concomitant perks,[240] and Elias Bickerman has gone as far to suggest that second century innovations in Roman law contributed to a setting where Christians could be tried and convicted on that account alone.[241] His argument is persuasive especially considering the biopolitical nature of any state's interest in maintaining the health of its populace and dealing with threats to that health. Justice was directed by prevailing attitudes, and the might of Rome was deployed by the presiding authority in the name of the *populi Romani*.

While the emperor was the sovereign of the Empire, it would be a mistake to assume the power over life and death was confined to him alone. Localized provincial powers were authorized to make their own decisions on law and order, making the proconsuls, prefects and governors functionally as sovereign as the emperor. The provinces are better understood as semi-autonomous local governments that looked to encourage and evoke Roman sentiments while maintaining peace. Trial processes varied widely between Rome and the peripheral provinces[242] and criminal proceedings relied not on a professionalized prosecutorial corps, but rather on the local magistrates to inquire into the charge.[243] While recourse to the higher authorities was possible, and Roman citizens merited judgment in the capital (evidenced in both Ignatius' letter and *M. Lyons* 1.44, where the provincial authority waited on orders from Rome before executing citizens) as well as preferential means of execution (rather than being consigned to the beasts, they were humanely beheaded, see *M. Lyons* 1.47), a great deal of power remained with the provincial authorities. Smaller numbers therefore could have a significant impact on the cases brought before authorities, and exerted disproportionate pressure on those rendering judgment.

This localization helps explain how the legal structure was deployed against Christians. Though the legislative basis for trying Christians likely originated in Nero's scapegoating the group for the great fire of 64 C.E., during the second century the basis for Christianity's illegality was not entirely clear.[244] There is evidence in the writings of Pliny that the contemporary authorities knew that to be a Christian was to be a criminal, but were unclear on basis for that criminality. Pliny routinely wrote letters to the emperor Trajan about complications he faced during his administration, and in several he confessed ignorance as to how to proceed when Christians were brought before him. He was unsure, he confided to Trajan, "what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate," and even "whether the name [of Christian] itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associates with the name are to be punished" (*Letters*, x.96.2). Provincial authorities appear to have been confused by Christians who seemed exemplary citizens in one moment, then flagrantly disregarded the gods and disobeyed Roman officials.[245] Pliny was apparently faced with a plague of people being denounced as Christians, and though he was not clear on the basis for their illegality, he did affirm that their "obstinacy and unbending perversity deserve[d] to be punished" (*Letters*, x.96.4).

Trajan advised his counselor to use the courts to prove any illegal activity, but to not rely on anonymous accounts or the feeling of the crowd.[246] Not only does this support the popular rather than institutional nature of the persecution – the emperor did not demand Pliny investigate further to root out all other Christians – but the reliance on a criminal trial could be construed as an attempt to provide some protection for Christians against the mob. The emperor did not expressly affirm that being a Christian in itself was a crime, but rather focused on proving other crimes to merit punishment. The result was capital trials of

Christians, but in a very decentered and disorganized fashion, much different from the systematic persecution constructed in Christian texts. But the question remains, under what legal criteria were Christians tried?

Christian writers appear baffled by this question, showing confusion at what laws were behind Christian prosecution. Athenagoras of Athens wondered in his *Legatio pro Christianis* why Christians "are hated for our name" (1). In this text, composed around 176-177 C.E., the apologist pleads with the emperor for toleration on philosophical grounds, assuring the emperor that though they have been persecuted they harbor no ill will for the empire or its leader, and remain faithful and loyal members of the Roman community.[247] Prior his death, Lucius was reported to have questioned the arrest of Ptolemaeus, who was "merely asked whether he was a Christian" by the prefect Urbicus (*M. Ptole*. 11). Lucius asked "What is the charge? He has not been convicted of adultery, fornication, murder, clothes-stealing, robbery, or of any crime whatsoever; yet you have punished this man because he confesses the name of Christian?" (*M. Ptole*. 16-17). Urbicus responds only by accusing Lucius in words aimed at recalling the accusation of Peter in Mark's gospel: "I think you too are one of them" (*M. Ptole*. 17; cf. Mk. 14:70; Mt. 26:73). In Polycarp's *acta* the author suggests that the Romans carrying out the persecution themselves were confused by the program, even feeling pity that they had to arrest the aged man (*M. Poly*. 8.1).

Athenagoras notes that three charges are often leveled against Christians: "atheism, Thyestean feasts [eating children], and Oedipodean intercourse [incest]" (*Legatio*, 3), charges that are echoed in the second century *Martyrs of Lyons* (1.9, 14, 26; see too Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, ix.5-7). Mary Beard and her colleagues appropriately characterize these kinds of accusations as "fundamental breaches of the code of humanity," aimed at placing the

activities of Christians so firmly outside the bounds of decency that no one would consider objecting to their arrest.[248] Such excessive and acerbic accusations appeared regularly in Christian accounts. Athenagoras of course dismisses the charges with prejudice, asking the emperor to rely on his own observations of Christian character.

Since Tertullian, two main formal charges have been associated with the second century Christian trials: *maiestas* and *sacrilegium* (*Apologeticum*, 10.1). The first is often understood as treason, actions against the Roman state or emperor, but which fully meant diminishing the majesty of the Roman people.[249] *Sacrilegium* originally meant the theft of sacred things but later came to refer to those "who through ignorance or negligence confound, violate and offend the sanctity of a divine law" (*Codex Justinian* 9.29.1). Here we return to concerns around the *pax Deorum*; both *maiestas* and *sacriligium* are offenses against the divine foundation of Rome, and both were charges reserved for exceptional circumstances.[250]

The charge of *maiestas* does not appear to have been explicitly leveled against Christians prior to Decius' more concentrated persecution in the middle third century.[251] However the ways the bodies of Christians were treated is consistent with convictions for treason,[252] and in a system where "the health of the people should be the supreme law," explicit allegations of *sacriligium* can implicitly insinuate *maiestas* in the attitudes of some officials. In addition, *sacriligium* plays a role in Roman law parallel to the role played by *atheous* in Greek law: neither can be considered a strictly religious offense because both carry important political ramifications, and suggest some sort of disloyalty, even danger, to the state.[253] So even if maiestas was not a formal charge against the Christians in this era, it is

reasonable to suppose the idea exerted some influence on people's attitudes towards Christians.

Either way, the relationship between *maiestas* and *sacrilegium* and even atheism is instructive for the relationship between Christians and Rome. There was no separation of religion and politics in the Roman Empire, and religious law was treated as a subcategory of public law. Roman law, civic identity and religious obligations all overlapped in the ideology of the empire.[254] Atheism was seen as a rejection of the common basis of Roman identity and the metaphysical provisions for the maintenance of Roman order.[255] The Roman republic had long been famous for their *religio,* their devotion to their gods. As far back as the second century B.C.E., the Greek historian Polybius averred "the quality in which the Roman commonwealth is most distinctly superior is, in my opinion, the nature of their religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other peoples is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman State."[256] The relationship between religion and state authority helps illuminate the ambiguous charges against Christian identity, and the repeated appearance of charges of atheism in Christian texts (e.g. *M. Poly*. 3.2; *M. Just*. 3.4), mystifying a group that defines its core identity through religion. Believing in the Empire's gods meant accepting the state's authority, and those preaching against those gods thereby spoke against the state power. At issue was not a matter of faith in things unseen, or personal devotion to a godhead, but rather the traditions, practices, and models of behavior oriented by ascriptions to Rome's gods.

The ambiguous nature of the charges against Christians – and if the Roman authorities were unclear as to their nature how much less clear must it have been to the populace – was put to good use in Christian rhetoric. In the words of Elizabeth Castelli:

> the absence of a precise legal foundation for the prosecutions of Christians here is simultaneously, then, a likely historical reality and an ideologically useful narrative that actually serves Christian rhetorical interests. It allows for an indictment of the ruling authorities as themselves not governed by "law" and for the vindication of Christians as embodiments of innocence – hence the repeated assurances by figures in the narrative that, no matter what the accusation, Christians are always innocent of it.[257]

Castelli's assertion is certainly borne out in the writings of Tertullian, where he averred the *nomen Christianum* composed the core of the charges against Christians (*Apol*. 2.10-18, 4.11, 21.3). He repeatedly rails against the injustice of legal punishments based solely on the name, irrespective of whether or not the illicit activities associated with the name have any merit.[258]

The Roman legal authorities are repeatedly the foil in the texts that claims to recount trials of Christians, where the laws of Rome were decried as mechanisms of injustice opposing the just system of the Christian God. Polycarp's tale recounts the actions of Germanicus, who pulled a reticent lion on top of his body "to be freed all the more quickly from this unjust and lawless life" (*M. Poly* 3.1; cf. *Ig. Rom*. 5), while Polycarp himself angrily shouts at the "lawless pagans" attending his trial (*M. Poly*. 9.2). The martyr Carpus and the martyrs of Lyons both explicitly link the workings of the Roman law to the designs of the Devil (*M. Car*. 6-7; *M. Lyons* 1.5-6),[259] and the *Martyrdom of Ptolemaeus and Lucius* begins with a story of a woman who divorces her husband to avoid "becoming an accomplice in his crimes and injustices" (*M. Ptole*. 6).[260] This is unsurprising considering the place of the legal system in maintaining the Roman order, and the manner in which the legal system was used to reinforce social hierarchy.[261] Moreover, these unjust deaths could be read as confirmation of the end-time promised in Christian prophecies and fueled by apocalyptic fervor.

The Christians also made great rhetorical use of the charges of atheism. For a start, it provided a way for Christian apologists to align the martyrs with the familiar tale of Socrates,

whose noble death also came by way of charges of atheism.[262] In Plato's dialogue the charge of atheism is framed not as the absence of belief, as it is in the modern age, but rather in the *wrong* belief, not believing "in the gods the state believes in" (*Apology*, 24b). More importantly, charges of atheism allowed Christians to invert the symbolic system of Roman justice. When Polycarp is told to recant his transgressions, swear by the genius of the emperor[263] and say "Away with the atheists!" he "looked at the mob of lawless pagans who were in the arena, and shaking his fist at them, groaned, looked up to heaven, and said: 'Away with the atheists!'" (*M. Poly*. 3.2-3. See too *M. Lyons* 1.26 where the Roman and Jewish audience are referred to as "blasphemers.") The Christian affirmation of the God that "made heaven and earth" (*M. Carp*. 10) places the Christian God over those of the Romans, thereby asserting a relationship with divinity that is not subject to the *pax deorum*, or rather affirms a separate and superior *pax Deī*.

Inverting the charge of atheism gave the Christians the means to assert that they alone had access to the true *religio*.[264] The affirmation of a separate and superior relationship to divinity contributed to the social isolation experienced by both Christians and Jews. Their stubborn separateness led to a situation where, as Frend puts it, "even those who were prepared to disbelieve the popular charges against the Christians regarded their arrogant assertion of a unique God whose ear they possessed, and their demand for special recognitions as His true servants as both sacrilegious and insane."[265] Pliny's disgust in the face of their perverse obstinacy stems from this same source (*Letters* x.96.4). The foggy nature of the crime of Christianity provided Christian apologists with a symbolically charged legal setting by which to affirm the truth of their own *pax Deī* by inverting the existing dynamic that established the Roman political and theological system.

Tales of Christian trials came to a crescendo with the demand to sacrifice, a ritualized demonstration of allegiance to Rome meant to settle the charges of separatism and anti-Roman sentiment. In a letter to Trajan, Pliny describes the place of sacrifice in the process he used when those accused of being Christian appeared before him:

> I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed… Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, *offered prayer with incense and wine to your image*, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ – none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do – these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. *They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods*, and cursed Christ. (*Letters* x.96.3-6, emphases added)[266]

Pliny thus creates the quintessential situation for martyrdom. Those confessed Christians see themselves faced with a command to transgress divine law and live, or remain constant and perish. The Romans, on the other hand, saw the requisite sacrifice as "signal[ing] one's commitment to the shared enterprise of collective life and one's participation in and submission to the complex bonds of allegiance and protection that linked the social and political world to the realm of the divine."[267] It was a literal embodiment of the system that guided an individual's action, giving reality not only to the 'fact' of an individual's belief in the system, but to the system itself within the bodily movements of the accused.

The requirement that Christians sacrifice also helps illuminate the kind of threat the group was seen to pose. Roman *religio* was centered on the act of sacrifice; the Roman philosopher Macrobius went as far as to define Roman piety as the knowledge of how to sacrifice.[268] In its performance, the relationship between the gods and the social system was established in full view of citizenry; it was a credo expressed in action, an action that *showed* what one *believed*.[269] Sacrifices in Rome were always accompanied by prayers for the

Roman people, reaffirming the divine nature of their social connections through reference to a shared Roman identity. In times of war and crisis, particularly, sacrifice was linked to the need for unity among Roman subjects, serving as a powerful symbolic reminder that the many were in fact one.[270] It demonstrated the consenting actor who recognized the divine nature of the social order, helping further inculcate it into the minds of the populace.[271]

This is what necessitated the public nature of the sacrificial performance. Witnessing an individual destroying something in accordance with a perceived obligation communicated through an authority of cosmic order demonstrates that the one sacrificing a) believes such an agent controls their destiny and b) that their relationship to the cosmic authority supersedes their relationship to their own physical desires.[272] Through the visible practice of sacrificing, Roman domination was cloaked in voluntary submission. Power ceased appearing as being determined by threats of physical violence, and was instead perceived as operating on the basis of consent.

As Rome's relationship with the gods lay at the foundation of their system of justice, it is unsurprising that sacrifice appeared as the means of rectifying accusations like those against the Christians. Condemnations of opposition to the social order could be alleviated by a public acceptance of the order's legitimacy; the public nature of the crime demanded a public confession. Roman sacrifice, then, served as a religious ritual of allegiance that reaffirmed anthropological concepts (linking man to the gods), sociological concepts (reaffirming status and class) and the symbolic system itself (reinforcing the values attached to the gods).

While the requirement to sacrifice was generally applied to the populace of the empire, it should be noted that on account of their antiquity, Jewish communities enjoyed an

exemption from sacrificing to the emperor's genius. Because of their traditions established for generations, some Jewish communities enjoyed a level of self-governance under their own laws. The Roman civil law, the *ius civile*, applied to all Roman subjects, but some groups in the bricolage of ethnic communities were allowed to settle issues on the basis of their traditional laws, their *ius gentium* (N.B. where the two systems collided Roman law would still take precedence). Sacrificing in the Roman style would be transgressive of Jewish religious obligations, so a substitute was arranged where the emperor would be honored in the Temple sacrifice rather than in Rome's sacred spaces. The act of sacrificing itself was still a requirement of loyal subjects; it was in fact the refusal to continue sacrifices honoring Caesar that established the Jewish people as in revolt.[273] Christians therefore likely felt they too should enjoy such an exemption, but they were excluded thanks to their blatant efforts to distinguish themselves from their Jewish contemporaries, leaving them without a history or acceptable alternative practices.[274] The novelty of Christianity meant they had no means of avoiding their obligation to publicly honor the emperor.[275]

At the directive to sacrifice, Christian martyrs uniformly refused. In the *Acts of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonicê*, Papylus proudly states that in his long service to God he "never offered sacrifice to idols," (*M. Carp*. 34), while Carpus avers "it is not possible (*adūnaton*) for me to sacrifice to these demons with their deceptive appearances. For those who sacrifice to them are like them" (*M. Carp*. 6). It is not the case that he *chooses* not to; he *cannot*, it would be against his identity as a Christian, which fundamentally defines him.[276] He has his life through Christ, and "the living do not offer sacrifice to the dead" (*M. Carp*. 14). The religio-political obligations of Romans were confronted with the commitments of Christians; to uphold one meant rejecting the other. Those Christians that decided to forego

their responsibilities to Christ and sacrifice as Roman authorities demanded (as many did, see *M. Lyons* 1.11-12, *M. Poly.* 4.1),[277] perpetuated the hegemony of Rome.

Polycarp acknowledged that Christians were commanded to "pay respect to the authorities that God has assigned us" (*M. Poly.* 10.2), following the Apostle Paul's recognition of the basic, but not ultimate, authority of the state (e.g. Rom. 13:1-7) and Jesus' ambiguous statement "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21; cf. Mk. 12:17, Lk. 20:25, 1 Pet. 2:17). But the position of the Christian martyrs may be better described by the martyr Speratus, who asserted that his community does not "recognize the worldly empire" of the Romans, because his ruler is the "emperor of kings and all peoples" (*M. Scill.* 6). Sacrificing acknowledged authority, and the martyrs denied Roman legitimacy by demonstrating that while any agent of Rome could impair the body, action itself could not be forced. Rome may have the ability to punish, but that does not equate to the right to command.

Added to the command to sacrifice was the requirement to "curse Christ."[278] As Pliny noted, Christians were thought unable to do these things; a person could not simultaneously curse the supreme authority of their group and continue to be considered a member of that group.[279] Two outcomes were possible: either the accused would perform the sacrifices, curse Christ and thereby eschew their Christian identify, or they would not and show that the accusation is valid and merit their punishment. When this demand was issued in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the eponymous martyr responds by confirming Pliny's belief. Remaining unmoved by the Roman officials' plea to sacrifice and curse Christ, Polycarp tells them that it is not in his power (*dūnemai*) to blaspheme against his king and savior (*M. Poly.* 9.2-3). This appears in the Acts of Carpus too, where Carpus responds that it is "impossible,"

(*adūneton*; *M. Carp*. 6, 21, 22). Blending the religious and political rule of Christ, this use of *dūnemai* is instructive: the term not only points to strength, but more so to ability. Such actions are outside the realm of activity available to Polycarp *as a Christian* – he could not do as they say and consider himself a Christian, and Polycarp in this moment is asserting himself as ultimately defined by his obeisance to Christ. It is not something he *chooses* not to do, it is something he *is fundamentally unable* to do.[280] These affirmations of impossibility have a relationship to Paul's assertion that "no one speaking by the Holy Spirit ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed'" (1 Cor. 12:3). The demanded denial would demonstrate the separation of the speaker from the Holy Spirit.[281]

When Christians were confronted with the demand to sacrifice to the emperor and curse Christ, two outcomes were possible: either the accused would do so, thereby reaffirming their identity as a Roman, or they would refuse and confirm themselves as Christian, validating the charges against them and earning their punishment. We are faced with what Elaine Scarry called the fundamental political situation, "one in which two locations selfhood are in a skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or be worked, against one another."[282] By not participating in the ritualized reaffirmation of the social order, Christian martyrs attempted to assert their own conception of order, one based in the symbol of Christ whose voluntarily suffering and death corrected the situation made out of order by the first man's sin against god. In both cases the logic involves the correction of an act that has transgressed the world's order. Just as the Roman gods anchored the Roman order, the Christian God and his sacrifice established the Christian order. And just as the individual Roman benefited from an act that heralded his loyalty to

Rome and solidarity with his fellow Romans, so the Christian sacrifices demonstrate their allegiance to their God and the ultimate act of solidarity with their fellow Christians.

Constructing Christian Martyrs

In tales of Christian martyrs, the refusal to sacrifice was not the end of the story. Rather it served as the catalyst for the vivid descriptions of torture that befell those that refused. Pliny's missives to Trajan do not mention using torture – his bureaucratic turgidity would likely have been repulsed by such a suggestion – and while there would have been a good deal of freedom at the local level for torture to be applied, the ferocity attributed to Roman authorities was likely largely a rhetorical tool of Christians. Tales of torture make a good story. Not only do the gory details rivet listeners (a technique that resonates with John Foxe's medieval *Book of Martyrs* or the fictive *passio* of William Wallace in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*), but descriptions of torture illustrate the lengths of suffering the martyrs endured without recanting their allegiance to Christ, precisely what traditionally was seen to characterize these tales as "martyrdoms" in the eyes of Christians.

Many martyrs were portrayed as remaining utterly silent throughout the ordeal, seemingly unmoved by the machinations of torture. Papylus remained completely silent during his ordeal (*M. Carp*. 35), as did Alexander (*M. Lyons* 1.51) and many martyrs recalled by the author of Polycarp (*M. Poly*. 2.2). Polycarp's chronicler interestingly asserted that their silence stemmed from their being "not present in the flesh," likely an attempt to assure those Christians hearing these tales that were they themselves to be tortured they would not actually suffer.[283] Their ability to control what comes out of their mouth while enduring the greatest pain imaginable was a central trope in these tales.[284]

While audience can marvel at the resilience of the silent martyrs, most martyrs had something to say before and during torture. If there is a common thread joining all of the martyr *acta*, aside from a painful death, it is the declaration of identity that accompanies every martyr's death, most simply affirming "I am a Christian." The martyr Sanctus falls into this category, repeating "Christianus sum" over and over while being tortured (*M. Lyons* 1.20, 39) as did Carpus (*M. Carp.* 23). The declaration was even said to reverse the effects of torture for Blandina, whose affirmation of Christian identity "brought her refreshment, rest, and insensibility to her present pain" (*M. Lyons* 1.19).[285]

"I am a Christian" functioned as a kind of slogan for Christian martyrdom. *Christianos eimi* appears in nearly every act written in Greek, while the Latin phrase "Christianus sum" appears almost like an incantation throughout early Christian churches. The Greek text *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne* goes as far to record the martyr Sanctus responding to questions about his birthplace, nationality and name by repeatedly affirming his Christianity using the Latin formulation (*M. Lyons* 20, 39; cf. *M. Carp.* 29-34). Justin and his companions each profess that identity in turn (*M. Just*., 3.4, ff.), as does Polycarp (*M. Poly*. 10.2), and the martyr Carpus declared his "primary and highest name is Christian" (*M. Carp*. 3). Being recognized as a Christian was clearly the most important aspect of the self-understanding of individuals, supplanting any other social identity.[286] Their ability to control their speech amidst agony demonstrated that no amount of pain could bring these martyrs to speak against the truth of who they were; they *are* Christian, they will either live as a Christian or dies as a Christian. This ability to maintain speech through agony is a common part off the martyrdom trope, and gives some insight into why martyrdom is often thought to

be death for a belief; it is not the belief itself, however, but rather the public confession of that belief that is at issue.

The question then needs to be asked: what is this identity? What did it mean to be Christian in the second century? This may appear to have a simple answer: Christians are followers of Jesus. But who it a follower of Jesus, or to phrase it as a second century Christian would, who is a *true* follower of Jesus. Such is neither a simple nor a straightforward question. If we rely on the level of dogma, "Christian" immediately fragments into Docetists, Montanists, Gnostics, Marcionites, Manicheans, along with what will become "orthodox." The first few centuries of Christian history are defined by power struggles over who can determine what it is to be a true "Christian." The ecumenical, 'catholic' nature of the faith is still only a hope. Who was the appropriate agent of God's will, and who spoke with Christ's authority were contentious issues until the Roman bishop was able to achieve dominance (and for many years following).

Moreover, social identities are in flux during the second century. Terms used to socially classify early Christianity vary widely in primary texts, as well as scholarly literature. In Greek texts we regularly find *ethnos* and *politeia*, while Latin texts often use *genus* or *natio*. In today's terms these could reference ideas of an ethnicity, political community, nation, or class. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* describes the Christian community as a "pious and devoted race,"[287] (*genou*; 3.2) and Aristides' *Apologia* uses the same term (2:1-15). Many scholars have likewise approached the burgeoning community on the basis of ethnicity and race, arguing these concepts best capture self-understanding as part of a group, particularly one with such close ties to the Jewish community.[288] However we are again faced with the problem of splintering. Aristides' idea of race places Christians alongside

Greeks and Jews, Africans and Egyptians and even Barbarians. None of these flush easily with any of our social classifications, blending as they do cultural, political, religious and national identity, all which would give us a different view of how people in the second century understood themselves to be "Christian."

Moreover, most of these labels rely heavily on geographic locale as a main determinant. Yet Christian texts make it clear that was not a factor in their community. As one recension of the *Martyrdom of Justin and His Companions* makes clear, "the saints did not have the same native city… their only city was God's, the free city, the heavenly Jerusalem" (*M. Justin*, rec C, 1.2-3; cf. Rev. 7.9). Space and one's relation to space was shifting in its relationship to identity, allowing for the idea of an omnipotent and omnipresent God who could not be "circumscribed by place" (*M. Justin* 3.1). Such a move was only possible after significant shifts in the understanding of 'place' resulted from the imperial Roman imperial conquest.[289]

As the Roman Empire spread throughout the Mediterranean world, people found themselves having to reimagine their place in a much wider context, adjusting their self-understanding to account for expansive new networks and their accompanying relationships.[290] Nascent Roman subjectivities had to locate themselves in a cosmopolitan space very similar to 21st century identities, no longer anchored in a single locale. While today it has become common to speak of "transnational" identities, the identity of Christians (and, for that matter, Romans) were what Judith Perkins has called "trans-empire social constructions."[291] This is a period in which subjects were encouraged to maintain multiple associations that we would respectively categorize as social, political, civic and religious. In Asia Minor, we could expect to find subjects who understood themselves as members of the

Roman State, culturally Greek, initiates into multiple soteriological cults, and members of their smaller local communities.[292]

The martyrs who affirm their identity as Christian place their position vis-à-vis God above all other configurations of social relations. It surpasses their local, cultural and even biological relations, as evidenced by the testimony of the martyr Papylus; when asked by the Roman proconsul if he had any children, Papylus proudly stated he had many, at which point a helpful member of the crowd explained that he has no biological children but refers rather to his children in Christ, those who he brought up in the ways of Christianity (*M. Carp*. 29). Aristides extends this into social class as well, holding that any Christian whose slaves convert to Christianity should be considered "brethren without distinction" (*Apologia*, 2.15). When one became a Christian, every other matrix of the self was exceeded. The gospels prefigured this situation when Jesus declared "whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:25-27; cf. Mt. 10:37, Jn. 12:25).[293] In the context of the Roman Empire, that meant to become Christian was to "exuere patriam," disowning and forsaking their relationship to their fatherland in preference of their new identity.[294] The command to place the "Christian" life above all other relationships was formulated through the *acta* as the fulfillment of gospel law, establishing a fundamental ontology determined by the Christian symbolic order.[295]

Letters by Ignatius of Antioch support that interpretation, regularly encouraging his flock to recognize fellow Christians as their first and foremost neighbors (*Ig. Magn*. 6.2) who are also "servants of God" (*Ig. Poly*. 6.1; *Ig. Phil*. 8.1). There are suggestions that participation in the Eucharist, the central Christian ritual meal was the touchstone of

Christian identity (see, for example, *Ig. Eph*. 5.2), as was the expressed belief that Christ truly died on the Cross and was resurrected (e.g. *Ig. Smyr*. 3.2-3). Still, the commonplace scholarly move to eschew considerations of orthopraxy in order to assert orthodoxy as the determinant relies too much on later competitive doctrinal interpretations.[296] Ultimately both are necessary, but neither sufficient to establish "true" Christian identity. Ignatius stresses that ritual constancy and proper belief are both important because those result in living properly according to the will of God, the ultimate determinant of Christian identity (*Ig. Eph*. 1.1, 3.2; *Ig. Trall*. 2.2, 6.1-3; *Ig. Smyr*. 7.1-2). Ignatius answers the question "who are the Christians" by asserting they are the obedient members of a specific power hierarchy that has Jesus at its head. Loyal members of this religio-political configuration *believe* in the divinity (and thereby authority) of Christ,[297] and therefore *act* in ways deemed proper. Public activity that demonstrates obedience to God lay at the core of those who understand themselves as Christians.

Christian identity was determined on the basis of a symbolic order that gives shape to self-understanding and provides guidelines of action. For Ignatius, the *ekklēsia* was a direct reflection of the will of God.[298] His letters are largely urgings toward unity with their Christian brethren under the authority of the (sanctioned) bishop who could transmit that will (see for example *Ig. Poly*. 1.2; *Ig. Phil*. 1.4).[299] The fundamental nature of Christian identity was – like Jewish identity – that of a chosen people, bound to follow the laws of a sovereign God who stood above the cosmos but who had incarnated on earth to serve as a model for true life and lead His followers to everlasting life. Fully appreciating the nature of this social group requires that we cease approaching Christianity as a religion that is somehow separate from questions of power.[300] As Perkins has it, "whatever else Christian discourse was doing,

it was forging the space for a new power site outside the oversight of the imperial gaze."[301] Using terms like "the faith" as a label for the institution of Christianity leads modern readers to consider it only in terms of an internal connection of belief, signaling a differentiation of the religious sphere from other spheres of power.[302]

Early Christian writings repeatedly warn against any separation of religious identity from political authority. When speaking about their relationship to Jesus, the same blend of concepts that are used in reference to Rome and its political theology are used in reference to Christian divinity. References to God as the Father were made at a time where the emperor was known as *Pater Patriae*, Father of the Fatherland. Ignatius repeatedly referred to Christ as his *kurios*, a term meaning lord or master, as well as *basileus*, a king. Lucius calls Him the "king of heaven" (*M. Ptole*. 19), while the Scillitan martyr Speratus goes as far as to assert that the God of the Christians is the "emperor of kings and all peoples" (*M. Scill*. 6).[303] The "kingdom of God" expected to be inaugurated by the Parousia was not merely a metaphorical monarchy.[304] These titles of divinity are as much political designations as spiritual ones.

This is reinforced by the concept of blasphemy (*blasphēmian*), which found purchase in reference to opponents of Rome and Christ alike. Polycarp declared that blasphemy against his king and savior was beyond his power (*M. Poly*. 9.3), which is mirrored in the concerns of the martyrs of Lyons about the "sons of perdition" blaspheming against the way of God (*M. Lyons* 1.48).[305] At the same time, the martyr Carpus was accused of blaspheming the Roman gods and emperors (*M. Carp*. 21).[306] Such similarity may be due to Christian rhetoric rather than reflecting Roman understandings, but it still sheds light on how Christians understood their relationship to the divine, mirroring the politico-theological basis of Christian criminality and reinforcing the need to approach both systems in the same vein.

The contest taking place upon the bodies of the martyrs was between vying divinities: Christ and the Roman pantheon.[307] Speaking and acting in ways one demanded meant blaspheming against the other; abiding by the laws of one meant being a criminal in the eyes of the other.

The Roman demand to sacrifice was part of the system that reinforced that conception, as it served as a demonstration of how those of good character act. It affirmed that those performing sacrifice accept the symbolically represented cosmic order, and was concerned with acting in accord with principles derived therefrom. Moreover, the sovereign imaginary itself was publicly *created* in the act of sacrifice, be it by the destruction of incense and wine, or life itself. At issue was a struggle between the Roman reality, grounded in the Roman pantheon and affirmed in *performing* a sacrifice, and the burgeoning Christian reality, one that was assured by the appearance of the Messiah, and confirmed in participants *becoming* a sacrifice.

The acknowledgment of power that was inherent in Roman sacrifice was anathema to Christians. They could not curse Christ, nor could they sacrifice to the idol of Caesar. To sacrifice would be to deny that Jesus had been the last sacrifice needed for the salvation of mankind. The gospel passage that graces myriad signs at sporting events is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." This speaks in the language of sacrifice; Christ was sacrificed for mankind. Paul's letters make this most explicit, celebrating Christ's willingness to "give himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). The messiah's appearance on earth, Paul affirmed, was to "remove sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26; cf. 1 Jn. 2:2).[308] The expiatory sacrifice accomplished in Christ's death in a great sense *is* the fundamental Christian dogma (for only a few salient examples, see Rom. 5:6, 8:32; 1

Cor. 15:3-4). However, the Christian belief that Christ's incarnation removed any further need for sacrifice did not preclude them from making great use of sacrificial discourse.[309]

The Christian conception of Christ as sacrifice was influenced by both Jewish and Greco-Roman conceptions of sacrifice.[310] From the former, the resonance of the Passover sacrifice of the lamb is evident in Paul's calling Jesus the "Paschal Lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7), the numerous references to Christ as the "lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29, 1:36 cf. Rev. 5:6, 21:14) and the atoning power of the "blood of the lamb" (Rev. 7:14).[311] Also significant were ideas provided by Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the only day when the Temple's central room – the Holy of Holies – could be entered (this is mentioned in relation to Christ's deliverance, e.g. Heb. 9:12). On this day, the sins of Israel were ritually transferred to the lamb's Caprinae cousin, a goat. This expiatory rite provided the Jewish community with a dynamic of social redemption and a release from sin, precisely what Jesus' death was seen to accomplish for Christians. In fact, there is good reason to suspect that the atoning nature of Jesus' crucifixion and death was part of the earliest ideas of the Church, and is evident in Ignatius' letters (e.g. *Ig. Eph.* 19.1).[312]

Christian sacrificial discourse also has parallels in the deaths of the Maccabean brothers in the Jewish apocryphal text IV Maccabees. The story tells of brothers who, like Christian martyrs, preferred death to transgressing God's commandments, in their case by eating pork as commanded by the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes. Seven brothers are tortured and killed by the tyrannical ruler for disobedience while their mother proudly watches her before she too is executed. It is not surprising that the text was likely composed in the first century C.E., during the same period that Christian martyrology was being constructed in Paul's epistles and Luke-Acts.[313] It is also unsurprising to find several clear

allusions to the Maccabean martyrs in Christian characters, such as Blandina who was "like a mother encouraging her children" (*M. Lyons* 1.55) and Agathonicê whose words also recall the tale (*M. Carp*. 42-44).[314]

Ironically, the Imperial Cult's sacrificial system likely provided as many symbolic components for the Christians as their close theological brethren, and may have been the central model the Christians built upon.[315] Like the Jewish conceptions, it blended social concerns with political demands based in religious ideals.[316] Roman sacrificial logic (and that of the Greeks before them) recognized the ascendancy of the gods through a public act of voluntary loss, a willing renunciation that ensures the favor of the gods. It was an act that made the invisible and infinite divine present in the destruction of the finite.

However here again we see the Christian discourse inverting the logic of the Roman system, asserting that Christians do not sacrifice to idols or demons (*M. Carp*. 22, 34) because "those who sacrifice to them are like them" (*M. Carp*. 6, 8). There are multiple levels to this inversion, but foremost is altering the nature of the performance itself. It was the Roman priests who operated as mediators to the gods by performing proper sacrifices (the same role the High Priest served for Jewish sacrifices); Christ is the only way to God for Christians, and is therefore the only possible mediator (cf. Jn 14:6 – "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."). This idea is evident in the epistle to the Hebrews attributed to Paul (cf. Heb. 2:17, 4:14-16, 9:11) and in martyr *acta*, such as where Polycarp offers praise through the "eternal and celestial high priest Jesus Christ" (*M. Poly*. 14.3; cf. *Ig. Phil*. 9, where Ignatius likewise discusses Christ in relation to the Roman high priests).[317]

This inversion goes beyond the issue of who is the appropriate agent of sacrifice, of course. As is evident from the passages above, Christ was both sarificer and sacrificed, and the atoning nature of his death reoriented the traditional sacrificial dynamic. Aristides argued that God "requires not sacrifice and libation, nor even anything visible", and declares it a deficiency that any god "requires burnt-offering and libation and immolations of men, and temples. [For] God is not in need, and none of these things are necessary for Him" (*Apology* 1.2). The pleasing odors rising from the altar that Romans believed fed their gods had no effect on a Godhead that was utterly complete within Himself. Rather, as the gospels make clear, actions in accordance with God's will are what is pleasing: "'to love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:33). Adherence to the new commandment is how Christians please God and fulfill their side of the covenant (Mt. 9:13, 12:7; these passages look to Hosea 6:6 for precedence). This is what supports Carpus' assertion that "the living do not offer sacrifice to the dead" (*M. Carp*. 11; cf. *M. Carp*. 6, *M. Lyons* 1.53). The true Christian sacrifice was the sacrifice of individual will to the will of God.

Jesus communicated the demand to act in accordance with God's will, no matter what the outcome, while also being the model of behavior himself. He warned his followers that to follow him would require the same sacrifice that he performed, and would suffer the same fate, which would in fact be a mark of his disciples (see, for example, the imperative to "take up your cross" in Mk. 8:34; Mt. 10:38, 16:24; Lk. 9:23; Jn. 16:33). Paul's frequent allusions to the need to suffer with Christ likewise recognize that connection (e.g. Rom. 8:17, 2 Cor.

11:23), and the Book of Acts follows the apostles evangelization after Jesus' death to make clear the connection between suffering and preaching in the face of persecution.

In the second century martyrs took this command to its extreme and literal conclusion, affirming themselves as the true disciples and imitators of Christ. For these, demands to pick up their cross and suffer like Jesus did were absolute injunctions, were read as *law*.[318] It was demanded that those who would follow Christ and inaugurate God's kingdom imitate the sacrifice of their savior. The anguish to which Christian martyrs were subjected was interpreted as the same that Jesus endured in order to serve penance for the human race.[319] Ignatius brazenly makes it clear he operates upon this premise throughout his letters (even beginning his missive to the Ephesians with it, *Ig. Eph*. 1.1), and the second century *acta* often sought to make this dynamic clear in the minds of the *ekklēsia* (e.g. *M. Poly*. 2.1). In her work on early Christian martyrdom, Candida Moss contends that framing bodily suffering as a means to imitate Christ was a process by which to commend a particular mode of life to Christians that brought them into the Christian story itself. Jesus was made real again in the actions of those who based their comportment on his model.[320]

Second century discussions of martyrdom routinely used the language of imitation. Ignatius repeatedly uses the frame to discuss his own martyrdom, pleading with his Roman audience to allow him to be an imitator of Christ's passion (*Ig. Rom*. 6.3; see also *Ig. Tral*. 1.2; *Ig. Smy* 12.1, 4.1; *Ig. Eph*. 10.1). Polycarp's actions are framed as an attempt to make all his audience imitate Christ's behavior (*M. Poly*. 1.2), while Blandina was seen to have "put on Christ" as she suffered her ordeals (*M. Lyons* 1. 42; cf. Rom 13:14, Gal. 3:27). The relationship between suffering and discipleship is perhaps made most explicit in Ignatius' letter to the Romans, when he holds that only when his life ends in the same manner as

Christ's would he be a disciple of God (*Ig. Rom*. 4.2). It is clear that "for Ignatius, discipleship *is* martyrdom."[321] Disciples are the exemplary followers of God, those who carry the Word forward following Jesus' execution. Reading and creating the stories of martyrs in the frame laid out by Christ's own passion both reinforces his model as the template for Christian life, and demonstrates the limits of Christian belonging. Like Christ, the martyrs were interpreted as becoming the victims of sacrifice while concurrently sacrificing themselves for God.[322]

Sacrificial metaphors riddle Ignatius' letters, such as where he pleads that the Christians in Rome "not seek to confer any greater favor upon me than that I be sacrificed to God while the altar is still prepared." (*Ig. Rom*. 2.2; cf. *Ig. Trall*. 7.2, *Ig. Ephes*. 5.1). The instruments of torture that Ignatius was eager to embrace he saw as the means of his sacrifice (*Ig. Rom*. 4.2), and allusions to his own life as ransom for Christian lives abound as well (e.g. *Ig. Eph*. 21.1, *Ig. Smyr*. 10.2, *Ig. Poly*. 2.3, 6.1).[323] Ignatius imagines the effects of his martyrdom mimicking the effects of Christ's, which is unsurprising considering the importance he places on imitation.

Polycarp too uses such sentiments, telling his captors there is no need to nail him to the stake (*M. Poly*. 13.3) which interestingly diverges from the *imitatio Christi* that so often dominate discussions of Polycarp's death. Instead he is bound like an animal selected for "a holocaust to be made acceptable and received by God" (*M. Poly*. 14.1).[324] The martyr's life concludes with his request that he be received "as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, God of truth who cannot deceive, have prepared, revealed, and fulfilled beforehand" (*M. Poly*. 14.2).[325] Similar allusions appear elsewhere, such as the martyrs of Lyons described as having been sacrificed after their lengthy endurance (*M. Lyons* 1.40, 1.51, 1.56). This motif

carries even unto the deaths themselves; Polycarp's burning body was said to have smelled "as though it were smoking incense" (*M. Poly*. 15.2), and Attalus gave off a "sacrificial savor" as he burned (*M. Lyons* 1.52). Described in terms intentionally calling to mind the Roman system of sacrifice, these martyrs take their place alongside other innocent sacrificial victims like Christ or Isaac.[326]

The shift of focus to the martyr as sacrifice has several consequences, foremost being the emphasis on the pure and incorruptible nature of the Christians being executed. By coloring the martyrs with the purity necessary for a sacrifice they symbolically contend against the Roman classification of Christians as criminals. It further reiterates the importance of moral action for all Christians, making it a popular theme for Christian preaching. Guy Stroumsa argued that through the reinterpretation that linked Jesus to sacrifice and changed the focus from the sacrifice to the innocent victim, sacrifice became both the central provocation for martyrdom and the central purpose of Christian life.[327]

Some support for his contention exists in the sacrificial connections drawn between martyrdom and the central rituals of Christianity, the Eucharist and baptism – both ways in which death was reconfigured in the minds of early Christians. The ritual meal resonates in the story of Polycarp, where his body appearing as baking bread (*M. Poly*. 15.2) and certain similarities between his exhortations and Eucharistic prayers.[328] Ignatius sees his body as "God's wheat… ground by the teeth of wild beasts [to] be found pure bread [of Christ]" (*Ig. Rom*. 4.1, see also 7.3).[329] Baptism too was a ready metaphor for the sacrifice of martyrdom;[330] Tertullian refers to martyrdom as a "second baptism" in his early work *Ad Scorpiace* (6.9), and Origen picks up the thread in his third century *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (see esp. chap. 37). In keeping with the idea of martyrdom as perfection that

Ignatius and Polycarp hold to, these authors see the final initiation into the Christian faith coming through martyrdom, the ultimate baptism in blood. By this means alone can individuals "not only be called a Christian, but also be found to be one" (*Ig. Rom*. 3.2).

Sacrifice itself it not one thing. Katherine McClymond highlighted the polythetic nature of the category, noting that any giving up qualifies as sacrifice only when it is framed within other actions bearing a sacrificial relationship, where loss "gains sacrificial authority by being performed within the context of other activities, which reinforce sacrificial authority."[331] Sacrifice is generally associated with some level of destruction, but the particular form of destruction that communicates an understanding of order where the act of sacrifice results in a benefit for the one sacrificing. The teachings and passion of Jesus provided Christians with the means by which to construct an obligation to die rather than renounce Christ's teaching. A constructed discourse of sacrifice provided them with the means to sacralize the loss of their lives to the violence of the Empire.

Although there is little evidence that the Romans had any interest in systematically persecuting Christians during this period, the gospel narratives added to the apocalyptic expectation in Christian life made it a moot point. Persecution was expected as part of the end of the world and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, and every story of Christian prosecution served as a piece of evidence that the time was nigh. With the end so near, nothing was gained by protecting the physical body; everything was gained by giving that body in sacrifice. Armed with such images, the Christians understood themselves faced with a requirement to die when faced with demands to transgress what was required of a Christian, and an understanding that suffering in imitation of Christ's suffering is what made one a

Christian. Christ's own suffering and death provided the model true Christians would imitate and thus be glorified.

While the relationship to sacrifice is radically different in the Roman and Christian systems, a similar relationship lay at the core of both. Where Christians gained salvation for themselves through their sacrifice, for the Romans sacrifice inculcated subjects into their sovereign ban on violence.[332] Both were earned by a public demonstration of allegiance to their social group and the cosmic order that supported it. Sacrifice connects the personal sphere to the political sphere by means of a symbolic act of destruction that demonstrated the individual's obligation to a system of ethics based in an understanding of cosmic order. The Christian's ability to reframe the situation by asserting an opposing sovereign imaginary was powerful, and ultimately sought to reorient their audience's understanding of the world. It makes use of a legal setting meant to determine the truth of a person and a situation, while supplying a contrary perception of order and justice. As the confession of guilt is transformed into the confession of salvation, the Christians invert the hegemonic understanding of the position of the individual (the agent of sacrifice), the victim (the sacrifice itself) and the purpose of the sacrifice (the obligations owed to the divine). Sacrifice to the emperor was the means by which Christian were exposed and condemned, and sacrifice to God through the imitation of the Messiah was the means by which Christians promoted a different way in which to perceive the world.[333] By inverting the symbolic system of Rome, martyrs were able to transform the punishment for a crime into a means by which to achieve salvation and eternal life.[334]

Violence and the Law

The legal arena was more than simply the place where Christians were prosecuted; it is the context where the official truth is established and violence is sanctioned. Rome was able to impose their vision of social, political, and cosmic order through an institution that marshalled legitimate violence in support of its normative ends, enforcing behavior by imposing suffering as a consequence for transgressions.[335] According to legal theorist Robert Cover, legal orders exist upon fields of pain and death, and "a legal world is built only to the extent that there are commitments that place bodies on the line."[336] All manner of consequences can come from the transgression of ethical codes (social isolation, feelings of guilt/shame), but only the law is supported by physical repercussions recognized as legitimate.

The torture described in Christian texts demonstrated the sovereign's power to punish.[337] Ideally the law balances punishment with wrongdoing, but it also can reinforce the imbalance of power wielded by the governing institution in relation to the individual. Such demonstrations are often meant to be deterrents to behavior considered particularly dangerous or deviant. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault saw in torture the articulation of sovereign power, used so all present could witness the ability of the rulers to impose their will upon the bodies of their subjects.[338] Ensconced in ritual and trappings of wealth and power, these displays led to the awe of the sovereign, transforming the violence into a sacred presence, and leading the audience to internalize the sanctioned moral code. The resulting conformity comes from respect amplified by fear.

Demonstrations of such force need to be seen as *legitimate* inflictions of harm, consistent with law; without the acknowledgement of legitimacy, such force would be seen

as tyrannical. Physical coercion was therefore couched in public, ritualized activity that lent an aura of validity and sacrality, without which torture could produce fear, but not awe.[339] As we saw above, the arenas where public trials took place were designed explicitly for the reiteration of power relations, and perhaps the most important relationship was that of the sovereign to its subjects. The shows of power that took place were the manifestation of the emperor's sovereignty, which in turn delimited the social field under his rule.[340] Those witnessing such spectacles of agony saw power verified in the broken bodies of its victims.

Torture in Rome was more than punitive – the consequence of transgressing the law and the price of readmission to the body politic. The beaten body was a symbol of dishonor and servility, and showed a loss of social status.[341] Torture is an act of vengeance, one that allows for no concomitant acts of revenge because a) the state wields a disproportionate amount of violence and b) the ritualized aspects cloak the proceedings as justice, allowing for the misrecognition of violence.[342] Since criminals showed their deviancy in their body when acting in ways opposed to state sanctions, they needed to show their allegiance on their body as well, and the resultant wounds must be accompanied by authentic repentance and the acceptance of the sovereign's ability to determine right and wrong. Acting in ways that transgressed Roman laws was enough to bring a person to trial, but once there the court required more than obedience; it required public recognition of its power.

The situation of the second century martyrs saw two opposing sovereign structures seeking reality, both of which demanded recognition in the body of the subject by voluntary enactment of their directives.[343] (As Foucault points out, the disappearance of the body in modern incarceration functions in much the same way.)[344] It is the sovereign prerogative to evaluate, judge, and punish action, and whatever order is imagined to legitimately possess

that power is established as dominant over the individual body through performances in conformance with those judgments. In accepting oneself as guilty of a crime, the victim explicitly validates the sovereign juridical code along with their place within it, establishing that a) the one confessing is what the authorities say he is (i.e. a criminal), and b) he has transgressed against that which he was obligated to obey. As Leonard Thompson put it regarding Polycarp's case, "for the state's control to be effective, Polycarp must acknowledge the rightness of the proconsul's actions, preferably by becoming a Christian apostate, the intended aim of the governor. If not that, then even a cry of pain or eyes cast down during the torture would vindicate the justness of the state's coercion. The criminal would accept his criminality, the deviant his deviancy."[345]

While the infliction of bodily pain may appear as a necessary part of this process, Christian rhetoric focused on the excesses of torture to argue that its purpose was not to extract the truth, as was the accepted Roman juridical belief, but rather to force them to *deny* the truth. Tertullian says the torture of Rome were meant to ironically force Christians into denial, while the torture of (other) criminals was to draw out a confession (*Apol*. 2.11).[346] The writer of the *Acts of the Martyrs of Lyons* asserted that the tortures heaped upon martyrs were devices of the devil to "have some word of blasphemy escape their lips" (*M. Lyons* 1.16). It was seen as a means to cause them to speak against the truth of God's coming kingdom, denying that the messiah had truly come to earth and obliged his followers to abide by divine law. In the tale of Polycarp, the purpose of torture was made explicitly clear while providing a link to the gospel accounts: "those who were condemned to wild beast endured terrible sufferings, being spread out on trumpet-shells and suffering with other various kinds

of torture in order that, if the tyrant was able, he might turn them through their continual suffering to denial" (*M. Poly*. 2.4).[347]

Here "denial" translates *arnēsin*, which is regularly used in the gospel narratives in the sense of denying the truth and speaking falsely about what one knows to be true, and is precisely the same term used to describe Peter's thrice denial of Christ (Mk. 14:66-72; Lk. 22:54-62; Mt. 26:69-75; Jn. 18:13-27). After witnessing Jesus' arrest, Peter attempted to covertly follow Jesus to the Sanhedrin but was discovered by the crowd, at which point Peter said he was not with "the man from Nazareth." Twice more they pressed, and twice more he denied, until the cock's third crow fulfilled Jesus' prophecy and reminded Peter of his promise to follow Jesus even though it cost him his life (Mk. 14:31; Lk. 22:33; Mt. 26:35; Jn. 13:37). The disciple's betrayal is presented as the consequence of his fear of capture, subsequent imprisonment, torture and possibly death.[348] Peter's denial is revealed to be an act of apostasy, and the apostle laments.

Writing in the name of the Paul, the author of 2 Timothy explained the reason for the lament, saying "if we deny [*arnēsometha*] Him, He will deny [*arnēsetai*] us" (2 Tim. 2:12; cf. Matt. 10:33, Mk. 8:38, Lk. 12:9, 1 Jn. 2:23). As the Christian doctrine revolves around the need to be recognized by Christ before the Father, Ignatius writes: "Ignorant persons deny [Christ], or rather have been denied by Him, being advocates of death rather than of the truth" (*Ig. Smyr*. 5.1). The dichotomy is between the truth that Jesus represents and promises, and the death that awaits those who do not accept him as their savior. Suffering's place in that acceptance is reinforced by Jesus' dictum "if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves [*aparnēsasthō*] and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the

gospel, will save it" (Mk. 8:34-35; cf. parallel passages noted above). The denial under discussion is intentionally linked to the need to put oneself second to their relation to Christ.

It is no surprise then that this scriptural complex is mirrored in texts around Christian martyrdom. The author of Ptolemaeus and Lucius' *acta* explains in an aside that "a person who denies [*arnoumenos*] something either deliberately denies [*exarnos*] the fact, or else (aware that this is unworthy and alien to him) avoids any admission of it. But such conduct does not befit the true Christian" (*M. Ptole*. 14). The martyrs of Lyons go as far as asserting the torture that is meant to turn them to denial actually serves Christians in the opposite way, waking up those who had previously denied the Christian truth and returning them to the fold (*M. Lyons* 1.25, 1.45-6). Maintaining constancy through pain and death served to highlight the crucial importance of publicly acknowledging that truth which gives form to an individual's identity. At least that is the hope of those who spread the tales of these martyrs to bolster Christian fidelity.

Furthermore, the verb *arnēomai* is regularly contrasted with *homologeō*, meaning to confess, witness or acknowledge, which regularly appears in the martyr acta (e.g. *M. Lyons* 1.18 1.35, *M. Ptole*. 13, *M. Poly.* 12.1). Such a concept is not fully covered by verbal profession, but requires an alignment of character with speech.[349] "To say" is different than "to confess." Confession is to say something about who one is, and how one understands their obligations to that which shapes their life; confession confesses the truth of power. The confession that torture seeks is the confession of sovereign power as distinct from mere violence. Hence Paul Kahn's assertion: "Torture was a practice of producing truth."[350] Torture's aim, Kahn argues, is:

> to make law real in the body of the subject. The failure of sovereign power was not the absence of consent, but the refusal of the victim to speak. A torture victim could 'choose' to become a martyr and thereby defeat the sovereign claim. He could, in other words, refuse to

> surrender, maintaining faith in his own god. What was unimaginable was that he could withhold speech simply because he did not consent. Those without faith, confess easily. In a sacred world, only one faith can displace another. For this reason, torture is associated with the struggle between faiths.[351]

While Kahn is speaking to the place of torture in current democratic systems, he could be speaking directly to the Christians under discussion. Two powers, anchored in metaphysical assertions supporting conceptions of proper action, seek embodiment in the broken body.

Herbert Musurillo, in his authoritative translation of the martyr *acta*, attempts to name that truth torture sought to produce: the tyrant employed torture in an attempt to make Christians "deny the faith."[352] However the meaning of 'faith' in this passage is ambiguous. While Musurillo incorporates 'faith' into his translation (e.g. *M. Lyons* 1.35), we should not take this as a reference to a state of mental belief; rather he references *the* faith, the fellowship determined by commitment to the Christian sovereign imaginary. Peter denies that which is true and that he knows to be true, that he is a follower of Jesus.[353] The same is at stake in the *acta*, where the martyr refuses to falsely negate who they are, to betray their relationship with the divine. The "faith" Kahn sees being identified in torture is the connection of the individual to that which directs their life and gives meaning to their pain and deaths.[354] For Christians, denying the faith means no longer participating in the project of making the world align with the will of God, and rejecting that a worse penalty awaits those who ignore their obligations to God.[355] To allow pain and fear to change what you confess is to implicitly state the sovereign imaginary does not "really" reflect the cosmic order of things.

These martyrs opposed one power through their free adherence to another power, one they recognized as legitimately commanding obedience.[356] Minucius Felix, a Christian apologist of the second century, revels in how "mocking the noise of death, [the martyr]

treads underfoot the horror of the executioner *when he raises up his liberty against kings and princes and yields to God alone*, whose he is" (*Octav*. 37.1).[357] In the face of Roman violence, Christian power was being established, and it was precisely the same form of power that Rome sought through torture. Christian martyrs effectively stole the awe surrounding the power of Rome by showing the force deployed in torture to be ineffective without the complicity of the actor.

Again we see a contest evident in the moments of torture. Meaning is being inscribed on the suffering body, but it remains an open question as to *whose* meaning. These victims' bodies are 'read' in accordance with particular symbolic systems of order, transforming public violence into a system of signs that communicate a message about cosmic order.[358] Judith Perkins eloquently contends "All power ultimately is reduced to the vulnerability of the body to be hurt, destroyed, dissolved, and obliterated and the opportunity to coerce that this vulnerability cedes to the powers that be. By denying the vulnerability of their bodies to pain and death and looking forward to their coming life, Christians preempted contemporary structures of power."[359] In the moments of torture spectators wait to see whether the afflicted will change their relationship to the power structure, or atone for the infractions that led them to suffer so. On trial for the crime of being a Christian, the martyrs' confession was the catalyst of their painful deaths, and simultaneously an affirmation of the charges against them.

The martyrs remained in the same symbolic relationship between pain and truth; torture is premised on a belief that a person will lie until agony reveals the truth, while martyrs show that nothing at all was preferable to avowing the truth was a lie. Confessing to a crime implicitly accepts that the activity *is* a crime, which condones the entire ideological

structure that deems the activity to be transgressive. By asserting an alternate theological base for appropriate actions, Christian martyrs subverted the basis of Roman legitimacy, and by not succumbing to the force Rome wielded they showed it to be ultimately impotent in *forcing* action. Their resilience demonstrated their character, and that character was mobilized in testimony to the true, legitimate power that governed Christian life.

The Testimony of Christian Witnesses

It is no mistake that the original term for martyr, had a legal origin, as courts are a significant venue for defining the shape of social order.[360] The court's decision on a case before it serves as a speech-act that establishes the official, legal truth of the circumstances.[361] It is also no mistake, I would contend, that so many of the early martyr *acta* take the form of trial transcripts; by maintaining the context where social truth is determined, Christian authors continued to coopt a symbolically laden arena of the Romans to their own ends. What need to be made clear is how precisely these deaths serve as witnessing, and what exactly it is they witness.

Witnesses are those who have had relevant experience of an event, and are called upon to publicly share that experience to aid in the court's decision.[362] In reality what they offer is their *interpretation* of their experience, how they made sense of what transpired. Even testimony as simple as "he ran away" relies on classifying movement as having sufficient velocity for the qualifier "run," the perception of a center of activity to judge direction of movement and perhaps even the physical characteristics that mark an individual as male. Any and all of these may be opposed by a witness with a different means of

categorizing. The witness is mobilized in hopes of having their interpretation become the official – "true" – interpretation.

The quality and therefore potency of a witness' testimony is determined largely on the basis of his/her character. As the second century Roman jurist Modestinus put it, "the value of testimony depends on the dignity, faith, morals and gravity of the witnesses" (*Rules*, bk. 8. *Dig. Just*. 1.22.5.2). Where that character was questionable, Roman law utilized character witnesses who could speak to the witness' virtues, and sometimes used torture to assure honest testimony.[363] Testimony by those of reputable character (which higher class citizens were naturally assumed to be) was given far more weight in trials than that of slaves or other lower class individuals. Writing in the early third century, Roman jurist Arcadius Charisius wrote of witnesses: "If the matter is such that an arena-fighter or similar person has to be called as a witness, his evidence should not be believed without torture… What is decisive is not numbers but sincere and reliable testimony that illuminates the truth" (*Dig. Just*. 1.22.5.21). If pain reveals witnesses to be lying, their testimony is questionable. If, however, in the face of extreme agony and death they hold fast to their testimony, it must be accepted that they are fully committed to their perception of the truth.

Refusing to alter one's speech in the face of death not only serves to demonstrate the veracity of testimony; it was seen to fundamentally change the nature of that testimony. Where the crowd had cried for blood during Agathonicê's speech in defense, when she remains constant through torture the crowd turns on the Roman court, siding with the Christians (*M. Carp*. 45). The author of Justin and his Companions *acta* saw suffering as essential for qualifying their words as "testimony" (*martyrion*; *M. Just*. 6.1), perhaps because it was only "through their perseverance the infinity mercy of Christ was revealed." (*M. Lyons*

1.45). Ignatius exhorted the Roman congregation not to plea with him to save his life, telling them "if you remain silent and let me be, I shall be a Word of God (*logos theou*), but if you love my flesh, I shall again be a mere voice (*phōnē*)" (*Ig. Rom.* 2.1). Entreaties from supporters to save his life (which are also found throughout the *acta*) threaten to weaken Ignatius' resolve, and if weakened to the point of denial his word would lose its potency. The martyr Blandina shared a similar concern that her bodily weakness would prevent her from making a "bold confession" (*M. Lyons* 1.18).

Herein lies the core of Christian "witness." A "martyr" must have their speech accompanied by extreme, coercive, and ultimately ineffective harm deployed against their body. It is only amidst such suffering that such a "bold confession" of Christian faith and identity was possible. These martyrs confronted the dominant Roman framework that sought to explain these executions as just recompense for transgressions against the empire and the gods, and opposed it by proffering their own interpretation of a necessary trial expected to test the limits of their obedience. In doing so they troubled Rome's ability to determine the truth of who they are and what power had control over their life. Their "boldness" pulled back the curtain of hegemony and revealed that it was only force that lay at the heart of Roman power. And force can be resisted.

Sovereign institutions are defined by their ability to justify physical force, and the use of physical force becomes violence when it is perceived as outside accepted frameworks.[364] Justice is one such frame, where harm is legitimated as appropriate recompense for transgression. The violent killing of Christians is authorized force if the Christians indeed had committed a crime.[365] Those who accepted this thereby accepted the entire symbolic system supporting this interpretation; in fact, the freedom displayed by the martyrs in their

resistance suggests that whoever accepts the interpretation is thereby complicit in its machinations. By refusing to "confess" that they are guilty of criminal activity, the testimony of these martyrs recasts the force as serving injustice, evident in numerous moments in the *acta* where non-Christians cry that these are "unjust ordinances" (*adika prostagmata*, *M. Carp*. 45. See too 36, *M. Poly*. 2.2), and the many Christian accusations of injustice discussed above. The revelation of the Christian God defines justice, thereby determining Roman dictates as unjust. Christian doctrine communicated the true moral power in the world, and that power was made evident – was made witnessable – through the martyrs' continued commitment in their throes and death. Their "bold" testimony gave reality to their guiding system of appropriate and moral action.

The Greek words that are translated as Blandina's "bold confession" are *homologian parrhēsiasathai. Homologeō* and its derivatives meaning "confession" were discussed above, which leaves us with *parrhēsia* as the descriptor for the "boldness" that is evidenced by the bodily testimony of the martyr. The Greek concept of *parrhēsia* is characterized by a communicating something understood to be dangerous and subversive, and that poses a risk to the speaker. The speaker recognizes that risk, but sees it as her duty to speak out, regardless of the consequences. Inherent in *parrhēsia* is the innate freedom and right of every person to speak what they see as the truth – situations where the ability to do so is stymied is by definition tyrannical. This understanding is what leads Euripedes to contend that the lack of *parrhēsia* is the lot of the slave (*Phoenissae*, 390-92).[366]

Michel Foucault devoted his last lectures to analyzing the operations of *parrhēsia,* where the speaker establishes himself as a truth-teller by "open[ing] his heart and mind completely to others through his discourse."[367] According to Foucault,

> *parrhēsia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relationship to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism of criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, *parrhēsia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his like because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself).[368]

Parrhēsia is at its core speech about the speaker: "he says what he thinks, he personally signs, as it were, the truth he states, he binds himself to this truth."[369] Foucault holds that "the decisive criterion which identifies the *parrhēsiastes* is not to be found in his birth, nor in his citizenship, nor in his intellectual competence, but *in the harmony that exists between his logos and his bios*."[370] Where their way of life conforms to the content of their speech, the *parrhēsiastes* is established as possessing truth: an ultimate commitment to a certain way of perceiving the world and one's place within it made evident in bodily activity.

Although Foucault centers his discussion on the ascetics who had previously concerned him (and specifically on the figure of the Cynic), he recognized that the Christian martyr "is the *parrhēsiast par excellence*."[371] Though he has a problematic understanding of martyrdom,[372] he cannot avoid the recognition that the martyr "has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape in his own life, as it were, in his own existence, his own body."[373] His purpose is "making the truth burst out to the point of losing one's life."[374] Each aspect of the preceding discussion is evident in Foucault's analysis of how *parrhēsia* signifies a truth-teller.

Apart from Blandina's statement, other texts support placing this mode of truth-telling at the heart of early Christian martyrdom. Though it rarely appears in the synoptic gospels (although Jesus does speak with *parrhēsia* when he first "openly" lays out the teaching about the Son of Man's rejection, crucifixion and resurrection, Mk. 8:31-33), it appears fairly frequently in John's gospel (e.g. Jn. 7:13, 10:24, 16:25, 18:20), as it does in

Paul's epistles where it is consistently linked to speech in the face of persecution (e.g. Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:1-2). This supports G.W. Bowersock's contention that in the New Testament witnesses were those who *literally* witnessed Jesus' teaching and death, and the term "martyr" was interchangeable with "apostle."[375] Speaking powerfully in hopes of advancing the Christian truth communicated a sense of having experienced the teachings and wonders of the Christ first-hand.

In Luke-Acts, this sense of the term finds its apex. *Parrhēsia* is the means by which apostles are recognized by non-believers as possessing or being possessed of the Word of God. It applies to all of the heralds of apostolic authority: Peter and John are recognized as companions of Jesus by speaking with *parrhēsia* even though they were "uneducated and ordinary men" (Acts 4:13), while Barnabas (whose own authority is shown through *parrhēsia* in Acts 13:46) proves Paul's authority by telling how the latter spoke "boldly" in Damascus (Acts 9:27-28). Moreover, *parrhēsia* is bestowed upon true Christians in a Pentecost-like scene:

> And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness (*parrhēsia*), while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (*parrhēsia*). (Acts 4:29-31)

The special place such speech held in the regards to authority, risk of suffering and speaking the Word of God makes it reasonable that the Book of Acts closes with the apostles going out into the world of the gentiles to speak with *parrhēsia* (Acts 28:31).

It is therefore no surprise that the martyr *acta* likewise make important use of the concept. The trope of authority is taken up by the martyr Alexander who is said to "possess a share in the apostolic charisma" based on his speaking with *parrhēsia* (*M. Lyons* 1.49),[376]

while Justin and his companions connect the form of speech with their refusal to turn "from piety to impiety, from light to darkness" (*M. Just*. 4.6, rec. C).

At the climax of Polycarp's famous narrative, this form of speech is pivotal. After the proconsul insists for a third time that Polycarp sacrifice to the emperor, the martyr replies "If you imagine in vain that I shall swear by the Genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend not to know who I am, then listen openly and I will tell you plainly [*meta parrhēsia*]: I am a Christian" (*M. Poly*. 10.1).[377] Linking his free speech to his confession of identity, Polycarp is sharing a truth about himself, and in speaking about himself he is speaking a truth about the world. His ontological truth reflects an existential truth, spoken in hopes of realigning perceptions of the true life, and what institutions should be understood as custodians of that life.

Parrhēsia is also placed at the core of martyrdom in the *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*: "While they displayed the power of the martyr in their deeds, speaking with *parrhēsia* before all the people, and while their nobility was made clear through their endurance, fearlessness and courage, still they declined the title 'martyr' be used of them among Christians, due to their fear of God" (*M. Lyons* 2.3-4).[378] For Irenaeus' Christians in Lugdunum, at least, the ability to speak boldly demonstrated in bodily testimony was the very essence of martyrdom.

In Foucault's words, to speak with *parrhēsia* in such contexts "is to question [the Roman] mode of life, to put their mode of life to the test and define what there is in it that may be ratified and recognized as good and what on the other hand must be rejected and condemned. In this you can see the organization of the fundamental series linking care, *parrhēsia*, and the ethical division between good and evil in the realm of *bios*."[379] Aligning

the Romans with injustice and evil and affirming the Christian life as ethically good is made true by Polycarp's self-possession amidst their suffering and torture.

For Christians, the witnessing of martyrdom is intrinsically related to this form of speech. Reorienting discussions of Christian martyrdom to focus around a speech that tells an existential truth – about what power determines true right action – through an ontological truth – about how the martyr understands him or herself – makes sense of the conflicting claims about sovereign authority respectively made by the Christians and the Romans, and why the martyrs held such a high place in the imagination of the early Christians.[380] By refusing to divert from the truths that guide their lives as Christians even amidst the most painful coercion, these martyrs show their commitment to understanding themselves in accordance with divine revelation and their willingness to deny the legitimacy of the Roman system literally at all costs. By telling the Christian truth in the face of efforts to establish the Roman truth, martyrs give the Christian narratives reality in their broken, dying bodies.

Conclusion

The contest between the Christian and Roman imaginaries did not take the form of a metaphysical battle, or a religiously inspired war. Rather, the context was juridical, where martyrdom "witness[es] to the greater jurisdiction of God's power and justice, which supersedes that of the mere temporal authority."[381] At the center of the conflict with Rome were competing legal codes, systems of ethical obligations and prohibitions reinforced by regimes of punishment. While the Roman punishments were swift and physical, the punishments awaiting those who sinned against God (though deferred) were considered by

Christians to be equally assured, and greater in impact. The two were at loggerheads, with individuals unable to fulfill, or at least avoid transgressing, both simultaneously.

What we see in the second century then is a contest of laws and the metaphysical supports that assured the just nature of those laws playing out on the bodies of these martyrs.[382] The Roman's theocracy charged Christians with belonging to a group that did not recognize the basis of the law, and who therefore were dangerous to Rome and her subjects. To show they were loyal members of the *populi Romani*, those brought up on such charges were required to ritually demonstrate that allegiance by sacrificing to the genius of the emperor. Christians in turn averred the radical injustice of the Roman legal system that explicitly favored the elites while being used as a means to oppress the poor and marginalized. In his *Stromata* written at the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria wrote that martyrdom was a "confession of faith in God, and every soul that is purely constituted in recognition of God, obey[s] His orders" (iv.4).[383] The social order that confronted them, along with the demand to worship the emperor as a god led to a perception of a world out-of-order, in chaos. In its place, they affirmed a normative system of ethics that was, like the Roman's, based in theological ideas.

The sentiment that right behavior was that which was in conformance with God's commands delivered through Jesus' preaching defined Christian identity, while authorities in Rome's provinces insisted subjects recognize the Roman system as alone possessing the ability to determine appropriate behavior, and sanction harm in its support. The command to publicly sacrifice wine and incense to the emperor's genius aimed to establish which of those systems an individual was committed to, while torture and exposure to ferocious animals were extreme manifestations of the means by which the Empire sought to ensure theirs was

ascendant.[384] When martyrs refused to capitulate even in the face of such coercion, the audience witnessed sovereign institutions seeking to establish their reality through the painful marking of the body. However, the meaning of those wounds remained open to interpretation, depending on the symbolic system that provided the hermeneutic. As much of the judicial setting as the Romans controlled, the interpretation of its outcome was out of their hands; they could only offer a narrative frame and hope the audience would understand what they saw through that frame.

This necessary weakness enabled the Christians to apply their own narratives to an extant ritualized means of determining truth. Their development of an ideology of martyrdom ironically located their resistance in their compliance with the Roman legal system. In order to invert the system, the system must function. By constructing their own understanding of sacrifice that played off the Roman system, Ignatius, Polycarp and the other martyrs of the second century were able to transmute these acts of execution into rituals of martyrdom. Their confession of Christian identity enabled them to overturn the foundations of the Roman system itself.

Ultimately the contest between Roman and Christian imaginaries revolved around what would be established as truth. This truth is not limited to a single sphere of experience. It is political in that it speaks to the identity of individuals in relation to a system of law that establishes the grounds by which to judge force as legitimate or transgressive; it is religious in that it links that political identity to a conception of cosmic order and responsibilities of man vis-à-vis divinity that are based in sacred narratives; it is social in that it is being enacted and aimed at life with others while anchoring those relations in a sacred conception. The

truth is fundamentally a question of meaning, what hermeneutic frame will be used to understand individual obligation and direct action in the world.

The Christian conception built on Greek and Roman ideas that link character to suffering for truth in witnessing. By maintaining self-possession in the face of extreme coercion, and by speaking the truth of their perception of the world by speaking the truth about themselves *qua* Christians, the martyrs served to offer a truth that conflicted with the hegemonic Roman perspective, and sought to reorder ideas about normative morality during the second century. Maintaining their voice throughout the coercive means of the state allowed them to be perceived as truth-tellers, communicating an existential truth that altered perceptions of legitimacy and authority and ultimately gave their sovereign imaginary reality through their bodies. They do in fact speak truth to power, but they do so by speaking the truth about another power that gives shape to their identity and the ethical conceptions that guide their lives.

Chapter 3

"Suicide Bombings" and "Martyrdom Operations:" Constructing Martyrs in 20th Century Shi'a Islam

Introduction

On November 11th of each year, the Lebanese Shi'ite group Hizbollah celebrates Martyr's Day, when they remember the act of Ahmad Qasir, a seventeen-year-old who in 1982 drove an explosives-laden truck into an Israeli military barracks. Waving yellow and green flags and chanting, hundreds line streets around areas of Beirut and Southern Lebanon in remembrance of a young man's sacrifice of himself in an attack against an invading force. His smiling visage graces posters hanging amidst those featuring Hizbollah's leaders and evocative images of soldiers in battle. While much of the world sees him and the group celebrating him through a lens of terrorism, on these days, in this setting, Qasir is recognized as a martyr.

Official estimates vary as to the number killed in his attack, but all counts begin with Qasir himself who with his act inaugurated the modern tactic of suicide bombing. While the most infamous suicide attack to date must be the September 11, 2001 attacks, the technique of detonating explosives in the middle of a crowd has been seen on every continent across the globe. Even though this method has used by non-religious associations such as Russian anarchist groups and the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, it is most often linked with extremist interpretations of Islam attached to terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (also known as ISIS or Da'esh). The global media's

constant coverage of such groups has challenged all people to question the limits of rational behavior, the assumptions of liberalism and the idea of martyrdom itself.

This new frame sees contradictory labels placed upon a single actor. For the majority of the world's population, members of al-Qaeda or ISIS are terrorists, modern instantiations of evil responsible for innumerable horrific tragedies. Suicide terrorism is perhaps the biggest concern for security regimes during this period of history, and unprecedented steps have been taken in hopes of thwarting such actions, as anyone who has removed their shoes in an airport security line can attest. However, for those supporting the causes and organizations initiating such destruction interpret these acts as martyrdoms, laudable self-sacrifices performed against an agent of tyranny and oppression, and earning an eternal reward for those brave enough to give their lives in struggle.[385]

Any attempt to understand how such diverging labels can sensibly be applied to a single individual demands that moral judgments be suspended in order to approach such acts on their own terms. Ethical suspension does not, and should not be seen to suggest approbation or support for such actions. I am firmly against violence of all kinds, particularly when exercised against unsuspecting civilians. But I also believe that any solution for a state of affairs like that which we face in the twenty-first century is impossible if attempts only allow one side of the conflict as valid. Therefore, in what follows I will seek to uncover the performative logics behind these acts, and how taking one's own life in an attempt to kill is justified, made sensible, and made meaningful.

To understand how a discourse of self-sacrifice was constructed to support such operations, in what follows I will investigate the setting where it first emerged onto the scene as a tactic in support of Islamist goals.[386] For Islamism, I rely on Roxanne Euben and

Muhammad Qasim Zaman who define it as "contemporary movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the Muslim community, excavating and reinterpreting them for application to the present-day social and political world."[387] While the movements that can be gathered under this term vary in terms of structure, area of operation, and ideological lineage, the term does connect groups that seek to order societies based on their interpretation of Islamic *shari'ah*.

Popular discussions name acts like Qasir's and others in the Islamist context "suicide bombing," which explicitly calls attention to the killing of self in the killing of others. "Suicide" is a contested term in this context, however. Not only does it inculcate the observer into questions of power as I discussed in the first chapter, but Islam itself has strict prohibitions against self-destruction – *tahluka*, or *intihar*. Suicide is explicitly forbidden in the Qur'an 4:29-30: "do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful. And whoever does that in aggression and injustice – then We will drive him into a Fire." Such proscriptions stem from seeing life itself as a gift from God, and the need to endure suffering when it strikes. Suicide is a problem for Muslims because it serves the individual at the expense of God; God created life, and that gift is discarded in despair.[388] In that sense, the disgust felt at "suicide bombings" in the West are shared by Muslims everywhere who see it as blasphemy to take one's own life in desperation and depression.

Of course the label of "suicide bombings" – *al-'amaliyyat al-intihariyya* – is not how the communities celebrating such attacks refer to them.[389] Some see the very label of "suicide bombing" stemming from a colonialist legacy that seeks to discredit and delegitimize local cultural categories.[390] Rather, they are called "martyrdom operations" – *al'amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya* – a phrase that links their strategic intent to a celebrated discourse of sanctified

self-sacrifice that appears in Islam just as it did in Christianity, and bestows the appellation on such actors, *ishtishhadi* or martyrs. Martyrdom, in the words of Deputy-General of Hizbollah Na'im Qasim, "is a voluntary act undertaken by a person who has every reason to live, love life and cling to it. It is thus an act of one who does not suffer from any reasons compelling him to commit suicide."[391] So someone who is content in life and yet seeks to end his or her life in service to something else cannot be considered a suicide, because they are lacking the central attribute of despair. They are, or hope to be, a martyr.[392]

Historically, the figure of the martyr – *shahid* (pl. *shuhada*) in classical Arabic, coming from the Syriac *sohaido* which was used to translate the Greek root *martys* and having the same meaning of "witness" – can be traced back to the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his followers. The witness performed by *shuhada* was not always connected to military matters; in the term's early appearances in the Qur'an, it often referred to the Prophet Muhammad as the one who "bears witness" to the Muslim faith, providing testimony about the true Will of God to those ignorant of it.[393] In a well-known *hadith* – the term for the collected sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that play an important role in the Islamic canon – the term referred to myriad forms of death, including plague victims, victims of drowning, those who succumb to torture and women who die in childbirth.[394] David Cook suggests early Islamic texts "reflect[ed] a process of widening the definition of martyrdom to the point where it began to lose all meaning and simply came to cover anyone who had died a worthy death and should be admitted immediately into paradise."[395] Designations of a "worthy death" exceeded the bounds of violent conflict alone, and became attached to those who died during a life lived in line with the dictates of Islam.

The blissful existence awaiting *shuhada* are assured in the Qur'anic verses 3:169-71, which are often referenced in the context of martyrdom operations:

> And do not think of those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stayed behind and did not join them; knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve. They are jubilant at the favor from God and His bounty; indeed, God does not destroy the reward of the Believers.

These verses are often repeated to assure those preparing for martyrdom; a similar purpose inspires the repeated presence of perhaps the most-referred to Qur'anic verse: "and some people sell themselves for the sake of Allah's favor. Allah is kind to [His] servants" (2:208). These and similar places in Muslim scripture urge Muslims to be confident in sacrificing for God, because they are assured paradise in exchange for their struggle.

Martyrs in Islam are usually spoken of in the context of *jihad*, a term usually translated as "holy war" but is better understood as "striving in the path of God." As I will explain below, *jihad* traditionally referenced a variety of activities, but in part due to the operations considered here its connections to warfare have increasingly been highlighted. The focus on the "battle martyr," the *mujahid* or "holy warrior" who dies in the fight to raise the word of God to the highest (cf. Qur'an 9:41), as the primary mode of martyrdom is the result of a long history that gradually elevated violent death above other deaths occurring in service to God. One significant shift came in the work of Abdullah Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 797), who first elaborated on the sensual pleasures awaiting such martyrs in the afterlife, most well-known being the seventy-two *houris*, the dark-eyed virgins who so often appear in commentaries on these acts.[396] As the experience of Muslims increasingly resonated with al-Mubarak's focus on martial symbols, the *Sunnah* (a term for the collected Islamic traditions) that put military forms of dying above others began to outshine the Qur'anic proscriptions

that previously placed them on equal footing with others kinds of deaths deserving of paradise.[397]

The modern phenomenon of suicide attacks begins with two tales of young men giving their lives in operations against those they saw as oppressors and enemies. The more well-known origin point is that which started the chapter, Ahmad Qasir's 1982 attack on the Israeli military barracks following Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon. The lesser known is thirteen year-old Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh, an Iranian youth who strapped rocket propelled grenades to his chest and exploded himself beneath an Iraqi tank during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88.[398] Both were declared martyrs on account of their sacrifice; Qasir would be claimed as a martyr of the Lebanese group Hizbollah, Fahmideh by the nation of Iran.[399] Both are organizations affiliated with Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the once Supreme Leader of Iran and leader of the Islamic Revolution that first established a modern Islamic republic.

Attempting to understand these burgeoning forms of martyrdom during this period, I will approach the two conflicts – the Iranians war against Iraq and the Lebanese resistance against Israel's invasion, both Islamist groups opposing Western imperial agents – in tandem.[400] Both groups stemmed from the "Shi'a awakening" under Musa al-Sadr (d. 1978) in the 1970s, and together formed what Lara Deeb terms the *hala islamiyya*, the "Islamic sphere" that came about from the political mobilization aimed at improving the lot of Shi'ite Muslims, historically a minority marginalized both economically and politically.[401] When the revolution in Iran takes on an Islamic character in the early 1980s, it connects with people in both regions through a Shi'ite network of religious schools and the circulation of pamphlets urging resistance based in a reinvigorated religious ideology. This context is widely

considered to be the root of modern suicide bombing; in Diego Gambetta's words all the human bombings to follow are "fruits of the same tree."[402] Seeking understanding of this extreme tactic that is employed by radical groups across the globe therefore should begin with an understanding of this context.

There is no shortage of scholarly work written on the topic of suicide bombing, most of which looks at them as an act of terrorism and seek to explicate the strategic logic they follow, best exemplified by Robert Pape's *Dying to Win* which has become the benchmark for political studies of "suicide terrorism."[403] By and large such studies group suicide attacks as a bloc, regardless of cultural particularity or religious persuasion, leading to a marginalizing of such considerations. Some scholars like Robert Brym and Bader Araj have sought to reintegrate religious and cultural concerns, leading to more nuanced studies that still treat religious affect as cloaking more fundamental social or political goals.[404] By looking specifically at a single cultural context I will look to take these religious ideas seriously, and recognize how the models religions provide take on lives of their own as determinants of action.[405]

Some others like Ariel Merari and Adam Lankford attribute a psychopathology to suicide bombers, asserting that discourses of martyrdom disguise a desire to takes one's own life out of despair.[406] Not only do such attempts project motives onto their subject, but in the words of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual father of the Lebanese group Hizbollah which will concern us in this chapter: "attempts to study the phenomenon of martyrdom from the [psychological] perspective… refuse to admit that certain things can be understood only through labor and pain. You can never be capable of appreciating freedom if you do not come to grips with enslavement. You can appreciate the crises of the starved only when you

come to grips with the pangs of starvation."[407] How, Fadlallah seems to ask, could Western academics snug in their well-appointed offices understand the resistance of the oppressed and disenfranchised? In recognition of this fact, this analysis will be based in the words left behind by martyrs rather than any assumptions about their mindsets and how those may deviate from some normative ideal. Surprisingly this is an uncommon approach, but one I hope will allow for understanding of the particular political, cultural and religious contexts from whence these bombers spring.[408]

This work will look to build off and reorient social scientific studies of these attacks while avoiding the trend of approaching them a) as first and foremost acts of terrorism, and b) using a rational actor theory framework. The former characterizes the political science works mentioned above, but also prefigures the kinds of questions able to be asked about such acts. The latter has become very much in vogue in the last decade, but struggles to in trying to understand how self-destruction can be spoken of as an act of self-interest. The market logics that permeate such studies only allow for a liberal actor who must be seen to pursue his or her own end, precluding the possibility of altruistic or collective action (save where a more individual purpose lay beneath it). Too often the conclusions of such studies merely show, in Roxanne Euben's assessment, that "martyrs have a revealed preference for martyrdom."[409] While these studies are certainly an improvement from previous structural-functional attempts that asserted suicide bombings as a compulsive reflex against modernity (something that still influences psychological approaches), the rationales they rely on do little to elucidate how such actions are understood within their native setting.

Several social scientific scholars have pursued programs of study that recognize cultural particularity and the significant role of religion in suicide bombings. Mark

Juergensmeyer's work in *Terror in the Mind of God* continues to be a central study in this context, which seeks to understand the goals stated by the individuals performing the operations and the symbolic goals their acts are thought to serve. Also of note are Domenico Tosini's quantitative study where he articulates what he calls an "axiological rationality" as a means of approaching these acts as following a rational logic based in a commitment to a set of values that supersede other concerns.[410] Tosini's axiological rationality has much in common with the "individuated rationality" expounded upon by Michael Roberts, who focuses on the witnessing function of these attacks, something very much at issue in this study. By grouping suicide bombings in with no-escape attacks, suicide protests and even theatrical assassinations, "embrac[ing] a whole range of suicidal operations that express justificatory testimony," Roberts mirrors Juergensmeyer's focus on the performative dimensions of these acts.[411] I am also sympathetic with his conclusion that the goal of suicide bombing is the "affirmation of the justice of their cause."[412]

In order to attend to the ways these particular settings spawned young men and women eager to die as martyrs, in what follows I will examine a series of wills and last testaments left behind by martyrs of both groups. Hizbollah started the now common tradition of martyrs recording videotaped final testaments explaining their intent and hopes in performing an operation where they will lose their lives. Al-Manar, the group's web portal, contains an online database of videos and transcripts, from which most of those texts used here were taken save where otherwise noted.[413] Fighters for Iran in the war with Iraq likewise left written statements speaking to their hopes and pride in struggling for Islam and Imam Khomeini, which were collected and distributed all around the area by the Iranian government in compendiums called *Vasiyyat-namehha-ye Shuhada* – "Testaments of the

Martyrs."[414] Meir Hatina sees such testaments "constituting a sub-genre of morality literature" where "the martyr is presented not merely as an operative player executing a violent act but rather as a pedagogic agent, a preacher, and role model setting a sacred example for the living and, thereby, invested with moral authority to guide the reader or viewer."[415] It was likely this educational function combined with their bloody sacrifice that led Khomeini to say of them, "these wills make one shudder and wake up."[416] Analyzing the content of these testaments will offer insight into the symbolic frames that made both situations meaningful, and portray a sacred duty to die bringing about Islamic rule that alone was seen to promise salvation oppression. Furthermore, as we will see, these groups of texts support the intent to treat them as extensions of a single politico-religious conflict.

In what follows I will first trace the historical awakening of political Shi'ism in the Middle East, paying special attention to the ways sacrifice became linked to ideas of self-determination and how a once quietist tradition helped establish the first independent Islamic Republic. I will then look at how a common experience of oppression and imperialism led to the multifaceted practice of *jihad* taking on the particular shape of divinely-sanctioned combat during this period. Along with this renewed focus came the promotion and celebration of sacrifice, and I will examine the scriptural and mytho-historical bases upon which the martyrdom operation rested. Analyzing the words of martyrs will lead me to a discussion of the intention behind these sacrifices, namely to bring about a legitimate and just "kingdom of God." Finally, I will describe how the witness of martyrdom was seen to exceed *jihad* due to its role in establishing an Islamic truth in the world.

The Shi'a Awakening

The period under consideration was a turbulent one in the wider Muslim world, when stories were circulating about victories achieved by Muslims from Afghanistan to Egypt. In the same decade that saw Ruhollah Khomeini ascend to power following a revolution against the secular government of Shah Reza Pahlavi, Anwar Sadat was assassinated in Egypt (an act encouraged by a *fatwa* [Islamic legal opinion] written by Abdul al-Rahman, an Afghani jurist), in Pakistan Zia ul-Haq rose to power on the back of a tide of Islamic sentiment after the assassination Benazir Bhutto, in Afghanistan the religious warriors known as *mujahidin* emerge victorious against the occupying Soviet Union forces, and the first Palestinian uprising (often referred to as *intifada*) would become best known for the martyrdom operation. Across the globe Muslims rose up against governments that sidelined religion to a sphere separate from politics, and sought to reinstitute a government based in Islamic doctrine.

Tracing the developments of martyrdom at issue here could extend all the way back to the seventh century when, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim community divided over who held legitimate rule. One group saw the station passing through the Prophet's relatives, specifically his son-in-law Ali, resulting in the "Party of Ali" *Shia-ne-Ali*, which was shortened to Shi'a. The others, while also recognizing Ali as the fourth and last legitimate ruler (*caliph*), saw authority passing to those most aligned with the traditions of Islam – the *Sunnah*, from which comes their name, "Sunnis." The Sunnis remain the largest sect, and have established caliphates and empires throughout history, while the minority Shi'a rarely engaged in politics for most of their history. That would change with the ascension of Khomeini, but it is important to note that all those under consideration in

this chapter are of the Shi'a denomination, while the majority of other Islamist groups who would perpetuate martyrdom operations are Sunni.[417]

Imami or "Twelver" Shi'ism, the most popular Shi'a sect, was noted for its practices focusing on spiritual development rather than political activity, and claims Khomeini as an adherent along with significant populations in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan apart from Lebanon and Iran.[418] Such quietism was shared by certain segments of Egyptian and Syrian Sunnism as well as some salafi practices in Saudi Arabia, but Shi'ite non-involvement was based on millennial hopes of the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam from whom they derive their name and who went into hiding in the ninth century.[419] According to the Shi'a, when the time is ripe, the Mahdi will emerge from his seclusion (along with Christ) and establish an everlasting reign of justice according to the dictates of Islam. Until this "kingdom of God" is established, Shi'ites see all governments as illegitimate and debased, and they abstain from participating in such systems.[420]

Doctrines of martyrdom have been much more the provenance of Shi'ite Muslims than Sunni communities where *jihad* has had a much more powerful effect (likely helping institute the focus on battle martyrs in the modern period).[421] However in the twentieth century a certain amount of what Ivan Strenski calls "cross-fertilization" occurred, a product of the popularity of Islamism and a shared experience between of oppression at the hands of foreign western colonial powers. This experience provided a common enemy against which a new, or at least resuscitated, pan-Muslim identity was forged.[422] Many during this period sought to overcome sectarian identities in the face of the new enemy; Ali Shariati, foremost theologian of the Iranian Revolution whose work plays a large role shaping the modern Islamic concept of martyrdom, spent time publicly retracing an Islamic lineage to show a

common Muslim identity and demonstrate that martyrdom was never a Shi'a issue alone.[423] Struggle against an enemy necessitates the possibility of suffering, and a common identity based in Islam provided the foundation for a reimagining of the *shahid*, the holy martyr.

That cross-fertilization evident in Islamism works both ways, and the ideas of several important Sunni thinkers would substantially influence on the advent of martyrdom operations. Perhaps the two most notable would be the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb and the Indo-Pakistani Abul A'la Maududi, both of whom are foundational theorists of twentieth century Islamism and responsible for the reinvigoration of *jihad*.[424] Although neither was a traditionally trained religious scholar (*alim*, pl. *ulama*), their political ideals and devotion resulted in significant popularity.[425] Moreover, while the two contemporaries were separated by geography, they both faced a situation where Muslims existed under secular rule, and lacked any opportunity to self-govern. Both consistently and convincingly argued that the liberation of all Muslims required governments that implemented Islamic law – *shari'ah* – as the basis of their political practices.

Shi'ite political abstention changed with the emergence of Khomeini onto the clerical scene. He had been outspoken against the government of Shah Reza Pahlavi since the 1960s, declaiming it as atheist, bolstered by Western imperialist interests, and Satanic. For his pains he was arrested and exiled in 1964, spending much of his exile in Najaf, Iraq, a place of utmost religious importance and one of the leading places of Shi'a learning. While there Khomeini would oppose quietism and declare "Islam is politics, or nothing at all."[426] In a 1970 lecture he asserted that the religious scholars were the deputies of the hidden Imam, charged with upholding righteousness and just governance. He promoted the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*, the guardianship of the jurisprudent, where the most accomplished *alim*

should direct government since they were most familiar with the law of Allah.[427] This would become the core political ideal in both Iran and Lebanon, before being spread through the networks of Islamist *jihadism*.

As Khomeini gained notoriety, the most well-known and revered scholar of Islam was Baqir al-Sadr, founder of the Islamic Dawa Party who was also actively trying to modernize the clergy at Najaf to respond to the perils of his time.[428] Like Khomeini, al-Sadr believed the Western sovereign nation-state system could not fulfill Muslim expectations of just government, and an explicitly Islamic government was required. Rather than the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*, Al-Sadr sought to establish the highest clerical post of the *marja*, who was in his words the "main witness (*shahid*) of the revelation and essential guide for the believers after the Prophet and the Imam."[429] Both clerics sought to anchor political office in religio-legal knowledge and the reasoned consideration of Islamic law – an activity known as *ijtihad*[430] – but in 1970 al-Sadr threw his support behind Khomeini beginning the consolidation of Shi'ites. The guardianship of the jurisprudent increasingly meant the guardianship of Imam Khomeini. Khomeini remained in Najaf until 1978, and over the next two years would achieve something thought impossible at the time: overthrowing a strong secular government and establishing a nation with an explicitly Islamic charter.

While the ascendancy of Iran's Shi'ite religious elements came about through political struggles rather than unanimous support, the basis for a religious experience had been paved by several acts of the Shah's government. In the years prior to the revolution, the secular regime had revoked the clergy's exemption from mandatory military service, reduced the religious presence in educational and legal arenas, subjected religious institutions to state oversight, and prohibited both traditional religious garb and some Shi'a rituals.[431] Adding

this to the atheist character of the government, these acts were seen as an attack on Islam itself rather than a simple political dispute.[432] Iranian propaganda presented the war as a gift to Iranian Muslims, an opportunity to demonstrate their faith through participation in violent confrontation.[433] Such moves made it easy to see the government as repressing religion, connecting with a long-standing Shi'ite motif of dispossession under an aggressive and spiteful regime. It also laid the groundwork for a heightened focus on an individual's willingness to sacrifice.

In protest to such moves, on January 9, 1978 a large demonstration broke out in the city of Qom, a sacred site in Shi'a Islam. In a show of support the clergy of Qom joined the protestors, expanding their already significant numbers, before the crowd was violently dispersed by police forces resulting in several deaths and scores of injuries. Forty days later, when people gathered in accordance with Shi'a tradition to memorialize those who died as martyrs, the police again used violence to disperse the crowds, creating the first links of what Hans Kippenberg calls a "chain of martyrdom" on which the old Iranian order was carried away. The mass rallies opposing the Shah's rule were put down violently, leading to more rallies forty days after which brought more repression, spawning more martyrs, *et cetera*. Khomeini, who had given a long speech on the fortieth day extolling the virtues of those first martyrs, declared that anyone who died in the struggle against the atheist and Satanic forces of the Shah earned the status of martyrdom, which connected with some of the deepest held connections to noble sacrifice and selfless death available.[434]

It is important to note that the revolution in Iran had many non-religious labor-focused movements that interacted with its religious elements. Communism was present throughout the Middle East and must be considered a co-instigator of the Revolution. The

communist Tudeh Party for instance had long been harassed by the Shah's regime and consequently established an underground infrastructure that was essential in organizing Iran's discontents.[435] Their socialist influence is evident in many of Khomeini's speeches which focused on the lower classes facing off against the elites, and they would participate in the revolutionary government until marginalized by Khomeini and his cohorts as they struggled for a religious basis to the new state.[436] When the first president of post-revolutionary Iran, the secularist Abolhassan Banisadr, left Iran in 1981 for fear of his safety, the religious base was able to oust the leftist and modernist bodies, consolidate their own power, and firmly ensconce the Islamic character of the new Republic.[437]

At the same time Iran's religious was perceiving their faith as under attack, Saddam Hussein's secular government in Iraq was growing increasingly concerned with the fervent religiosity shown by the Islamists in neighboring Iran. The success of the Iranian Revolution exacerbated fears of an unstable, sectarian Middle East, and the Ba'athist Party governing Iraq worried about their own large Shi'a population. On September 22, 1980, supported by the U.S. and other Western governments, Hussein executed Baqir al-Sadr and launched an invasion into Iran. Many Iranians saw Western forces using Iraq's regime to do their dirty work and doling out punishment for the overthrow of the Shah, and read these forces as threatening the utopia promised by a government led by a Muslim jurist and administering Islamic law.

Iraq possessed technological superiority over Iran, but that dominance came up against the willingness of Iran's population to sacrifice for their cause. Nowhere was this devotion more on display than in the special corps known as "The Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed," better known as the Basij. Composed of men aged between

eighteen and thirty, this volunteer militia was renowned for their devotion and fearlessness.[438] Set up by Khomeini in 1979, the paramilitary group gave the revolutionary regime a force independent of the official Iranian army which had previously served the Shah. According to Iranian estimates, at its peak the Basij claimed one hundred thousand active members, and they were responsible for suppressing dissidents and managing a complex recruitment structure, as well as their most well-known exploits, the so-called human wave attacks.[439]

Human wave attacks were exactly what the term suggests: huge numbers of men marching forward into enemy forces only to be slaughtered *en masse*. But for every line that fell, endless waves came up behind, overwhelming and disturbing enemy forces. As one Iraqi officer recalled, "They come toward our positions in huge hordes with their fists swinging. You can shoot down the first wave and then the second. But at some point the corpses are piling up in front of you, and all you want to do is scream and throw away your weapon. Those are human beings, after all."[440] Shi'a symbolism permeated the Basij, many of whom wore plastic keys around their neck to open the gates of heaven at the moment of their martyrdom. In a culture of sacrifice, these scores of young men stood out as models of commitment, and were credited with offsetting the technological superiority of their enemies.[441] Their overt religiosity also helped color the revolution as explicitly Islamic.

After two years of bloody warfare within Iran's borders, Iraq's armies were repelled, and Iran launched a counter-invasion into Iraq in Operation Ramadan (in reference to the holy month when Muslims fast to remember the revelation of God), seeking to liberate Iraqi Muslims from another imperialist government. The incursion quickly led to a stalemate, but Iran persisted for several more years until hostilities finally ended in 1988. The Islamic

Revolution would not be extended into Iraq, but would find root in Lebanon, particularly in its capital of Beirut and the Southern Bekaa valley.

Lebanon's experience that led to human bombings was distinct from the cultural situation of Iran, one that was more shifting and unstable. The country itself was established by the French and English colonial governments when the Ottoman Empire was dissolved at the close of World War I. In the chaotic years following its creation, insular Shi'ite communities congregated mostly in South Lebanon and areas of Beirut. Marionite Christians and Sunnis comprised the Lebanese elite and were disproportionately represented in government; when economic deprivation hit the Bekaa Valley, even more Shi'ites shifted to the capital where shanty towns had been set up to house those seeking solace.[442] Palestinians who had been displaced by Israel were the other major population in these shanty towns, forging connections with Shi'ites on the basis of common adherence to Islam and experiences of displacement.

This was the situation in 1978, when the Iranian Revolution sent shocks through the Middle East and eastern coast of the Mediterranean.[443] That year would see the first invasion of Lebanon by Israel, ostensibly done in pursuit of Palestinian groups who had launched attacks against Israelis. Four years later, and less than a month before Iran launched its counter-invasion, Israel expanded their presence into the Bekaa Valley and Beirut, bringing them in direct contact with Lebanon's core Shi'a population. Israel's occupation gave another common experience to unite the Palestinians who were influenced by the likes of Qutb and Maududi and the Shi'ites who now shared a common enemy.[444] Like in Iran, a significant communist presence was present in Lebanon, particularly in the poorer sections. Their activities influenced an interpretation of Islamic doctrine increasingly concentrated on

social justice and defending poor and marginalized believers.[445] As opposed to Iran's clerics who excluded communists from power, Lebanon's socialist groups connected with Shi'ites on social goals and a commitment to an almost millenarian concept of a just society to come.

At the time of the incursion, Lebanon's leading Shi'ite clerics were attending an annual conference in Tehran. Receiving the news that their home had been occupied by a Western-backed imperialist force while they were engaged with esteemed *ulama* and jurists of newly Islamic Iran could not have but connected the experiences of the two groups.[446] At the same time, the Marionite Christian contingent was seeking to reestablish their dominance in Beirut, leaving Shi'ite communities with an intensifying sense of powerlessness and lost dignity. In hopes of increasing political recognition and asserting a just order to be established, a group of religious and secular grassroots organizations mobilized by overlapping social goals became active.[447]

The most famous and infamous of those groups was Hizbollah, a Shi'ite group whose leadership had ties to Iran both culturally and ideologically.[448] Their founders and main organizers came from the same place as those driving the Iranian Revolution – the institutions of Shi'a learning in Iraq – and hundreds of Iranian Revolutionary Guards – known as *Pasdaran* – traveled to Lebanon in hopes of securing a sort of Islamic franchise.[449] Hizbollah's name references a verse in the Qur'an that reads "and whoever takes God and His messenger and those who believe for a guardian, then surely they are part of the party of God [*hiz b'Allah*] that shall be triumphant" (5:56). Hassan Nasrallah, a founding member of Hizbollah and its third Secretary-General, arrived in Lebanon in 1978 from Najaf, coming from the same time and place as Khomeini at the start of the Revolution. Moreover, Nasrallah was a student of Musa al-Sadr, who collaborated with Khomeini on the

transformation of Shi'a Islam into a revolutionary ideology.[450] From the start Hizbollah was committed to the rule of the jurisprudent Khomeini, which Nasrallah fully acknowledged: "the *faqih* is the guardian during the absence of the Twelfth Imam, and the extent of his authority is wider than that of any other person… We must obey the *wali al-faqih*… [as] the guardianship of the *faqih* is like the guardianship of the Prophet Mohammed."[451] To deal with Hizbollah therefore necessitates understanding the way religious authority was being structured and centralized in Iran.[452]

The same year Israel began conducting sorties into South Lebanon, seventeen-year-old Ahmad Qasir drove his explosives-laden truck into the Israeli barracks. For the next decade and beyond individuals attached to Hizbollah would kill themselves in the struggle against the forces of oppression and occupation and be declared martyrs. Three years after the first suicide bombing, Israel would withdraw from Lebanon almost completely, which many attributed to the success of this new tactic. In the span of a few short years devout Muslims in two different countries, facing two different enemies who were both seen as imperialist forces of oppression, began intentionally sacrificing their lives in tactics aimed combating an imperialist foe and securing a level of self-determination. Both were inspired by a common religious ideology, and located legitimate power in the Islamic order and Imam Khomeini who was its guardian and representative. Coming to terms with how the modern phenomena of martyrdom operations took hold must begin with an understanding of how the people in these areas during this period came to perceive their own existence as one of oppression, and how they came to see *jihad* as the solution.

The Jihad against Oppression

A common experience of oppression and occupation united these actors in Lebanon and Iran. Both groups blamed their suffering on the forces of a colonial, imperial, and secular West, amalgamating the "Zionist" programs of Israel, the cultural hegemony of American culture and the colonial governments of the United States, Great Britain and France, among others.[453] These institutions all sought to exclude Islam from the administration of the nation by relegating the faith to a private sphere in line with the secularization model that used Protestant Christianity as its standard. Islam, however, was not seen as solely a personal faith. Rather it was a complete social system, with its own structures of authority, ethical dictates and ideas of just governance.[454] The privatization of religion and exclusion of Islam from the state's juridical foundation was seen as a distortion of Islam brought about by colonialist powers, and in fact it was. Hizbollah railed against an imported ideal of religion that separates ethical values (determined according to religious standards) from legitimate rule, seeing it as subjugation that disregarded popular and cultural traditions.[455]

In Lebanon the issue was compounded by disproportionate sectarian representation in government. Since 1943 the highest state offices in Lebanon were allocated by a set pattern: the President was a Marionite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the largely ceremonial position of President of Parliament to Shi'ites.[456] Had the assignments been proportionate to their populations, Shi'ites should have enjoyed much greater representation. Moreover, the Marionite Christian community could rely on support from Western imperial powers (which resulted in such a political distribution) and Lebanon's Sunni community on Arab nations like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, leaving only the Shi'a at the bottom of the pecking order with no external support. That changes with the Iranian Revolution.

Though Iranian Shi'ites had a radically different experience with secular Western powers, they still saw the Shah as an agent of Western oppression. Khomeini often used the rhetoric of slavery to describe their situation, an outcome he saw coming out of the financial power wielded by the U.S.

> If some American's servant, some American's cook, assassinates your *marja* [leading religious scholar, viewed as the 'object of emulation' by lay Shi'a] in the middle of the bazaar, or runs him over, the Iranian police do not have the right to apprehend him… [The members of the Iranian parliament] have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog… Why? Because they wanted a loan and America demanded this in return… The government has sold our independence, reduced us to the level of a colony, and made the Muslim nation of Iran appear more backward than savages in the eyes of the world.[457]

A state of affairs that neglects the highest of Iran in favor of the lowest American is one where Iranians had lost dignity along with the ability to self-rule. It appeared to many that Iran had sold itself into bondage.

Ideas of slavery resonated with the work of Sayyid Qutb, who decades before had a close encounter material culture during his time in the U.S., an experience that led him to rail against the forces that keep men enslaved to other men.[458] True freedom, according to Qutb, comes only with complete submission to God, the very meaning of the term "Islam." It was only this devotion which could tear men from their self-imposed servitude to atheists and polytheists, who he grouped under the label of *jahiliyya*, which traditionally referred to the period of idolatry before the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad. Qutb revitalized the term in reference to the ignorance of God and applied it to all regimes that were not based in Islamic law. Ignorance would become one of the dominant tropes used to describe the situation Islamists faced, including the Iranian martyr Nasrullah Shahabi who declared in his will "I fight against ignorance as did our Prophet." As Muhammad combated the ignorance of *jahiliyya* by spreading the word of Islam, Shahabi and his martyr associates use their lives to do the same.

Since oppression came about at the hands of those ignorant of God's will, Islam appeared as the solution to their predicament. That led to the mobilization of concepts of *jihad* while providing an overarching identity that applied to people regardless of their nation or sectarian character. As Maududi put it in his *Jihad in Islam*, "Islam is a revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of the whole world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideal. 'Muslim' is the title of that International Revolutionary Party organized by Islam to carry into effect its revolutionary programme."[459] All Muslims are called to act against the forces of oppression, which is a theme consistently referred to in the testaments of martyrs who heeded the call. Nearly every Hizbollah martyr references their hopes of liberation from repression, like Sanaa Mheydleh who affirmed that "liberation needs heroes who sacrifice themselves," and implored her family "don't be sad for me, but be happy, laugh for the world as long as in it there are heroes and hopes for liberation." Sanaa counted herself fortunate that her death would serve her people, as did Ahmad Sanezadeh, an Iranian martyr who in his final testament shared his hopes for "the liberation of people from polytheism and ignorance."[460] These and many of their cohort outlined hopes for freedom and the ability to determine their form of life for themselves, which required the struggle symbolized by *jihad*.

Briefly, it is important to note that oppression was not solely a consequence of non-Muslim rule. The fury directed at outside forces of imperialism was complemented by anger toward hypocritical Muslims who followed Islam in the kind of privatized form urged by secular forces. The latter posed perhaps a greater danger than imperialist forces, since they were able to lead people astray from (what was thereby constructed as) the "true" Islam that ruled every aspect of life.[461] Such a concern is visible in the popular text *The Neglected Duty*,

written by the Egyptian Abdel Salam Faraj during this period, where he states "The basis of colonialism in Islamic countries is these [so-called Muslim] rulers… the first battleground of *jihad* will be the eradication of those same infidel leaders and the establishment of a comprehensive Islamic order in their place."[462] The same concerns would later appear in the work of Ali Shariati, who saw two necessary models for liberation: the Prophet Muhammad who manifested Islam's victory over *jahiliyya*, and his son-in-law Ali who led to its victory over Muslim hypocrites who said one thing but did another.[463] This bifurcation resonated with people struggling against their own governments as well as outside agents.

That struggle was framed as *jihad*, a term as fear-inspiring as it is misunderstood. A term that means "striving in the path of God," *jihad* is a multivalent term that has multiple roots in both the Qur'an and Sunnah.[464] In the same way that the battle martyr became more popular over time, *jihad* in the twentieth century owed its martial shape to the specific sociocultural background of the period. The term carried a sense of suffering in a divinely sanctioned suffering throughout Islamic history, but at various times was used in reference to plague victims, those who die in torture and even mothers who perish in childbirth.[465] Ignoring this to only focus on the military context "reifies and dehistoricizes *jihad*, erasing the contradictions and ambivalences that have characterized its complex history, effacing the changing understandings of political action that history in part reveals" in the words of Roxanne Euben.[466] She argues that in the hands of Islamists "*jihad* is neither simply a blind and bloody-minded scrabble for temporal power nor solely a door through which to pass into the hereafter… [but] a form of political action in which, to use Hannah Arendt's language, the pursuit of immortality is inextricably linked to a profoundly this-worldly endeavor – the founding or recreation of a just community on earth."[467] *Jihad* links the temporal to the

eternal, removes the distinction between political and religious action, and gives a new interpretive frame through which to understand one's obligations.

Foremost for contemporary constructions of *jihad* was the need to realize God's sovereignty, *hakimiyya* in Arabic, on earth. Such a hope lies at the core of these struggles that seek to recapture an ideal life as conveyed by the Qur'an and the traditions that compose *Sunnah*; only when God's law fully governs all action can justice truly be realized.[468] Establishing the rule of God was so imperative that early in Islamic history the struggle to do so was placed on equal footing with the five pillars of Islam.[469] Twenty-five years after the Prophet Muhammad's death Muslim groups were justifying revolt on the basis of *jihad* as a sixth pillar, and in early collections of *hadith* it became standard to find chapters discussing *jihad* immediately following sections devoted to the five pillars.[470] These provided the foothold for those like the Muslim Brotherhood's founder Hassan al-Banna who argued at length for *jihad* to be considered as obligatory for Muslims as prayer or pilgrimage. The same was evident in Hizbollah martyr Samir Mohammad Mattout's final statement, where he said the one who "adds [*jihad*] to one of the branches of religion, which in some cases becomes one of its pillars… he hastens death, the meeting with Allah, and the assembly with Imam Hussein (as)[471] and his household. Hence, he'd earn the great honor that could only be earned by the fortunate ones, which is the honor of Muslims, martyrdom." Participating in *jihad* was seen by Islamists to be a demonstration of devotion and commitment, which easily translated into the honor gained by dying in the battle against oppression.

While realizing God's sovereignty has consistently been the goal of *jihad*, experiences in the 1980s focused on certain aspects of classical *jihad* doctrine while dismissing others. Traditional doctrine held a tripartite vision of the world: there is the abode

of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) where Islamic laws and norms govern, the abode of war (*dar al-harb*) where *jihad* is authorized in the pursuit of the *dar al-Islam*, and the middle ground of the abode of truce (*dar al-sulh*) where diplomacy regulates relations between Muslims and others. During the period under consideration, radical interpreters of Islamic doctrine argued that no true *dar al-Islam* existed because nowhere was a state administered fully on the basis of *shari'ah* law (at least not as they interpreted it). If no true Islamic state existed than everywhere was *dar al-harb*, and *jihad* was not only permitted but obligatory.[472]

In Islamic tradition, the *jihad* of violence and warfare is known as the lesser *jihad* (*jihad asghar*), which is traditionally considered secondary to the greater *jihad* (*jihad akabar*) that takes place internally as a person vies with their sinful nature and aligns their actions with the dictates of God.[473] Historically Shi'a Islam focused on the greater to the exclusion of the lesser, but as Khomeini and his cohort sought to integrate political struggle into Shi'ism, a new relationship was imagined where the greater *jihad* was seen as preparatory for those who would risk their lives in the "lesser" struggle. This idea appears as early as the work of Maududi and Faraj, but was taken up by the leaders of the 1980s.[474] In Khomeini's "Lectures on Surat al-Fatiha" he said "All forms of *jihad* that may be waged in the world depend on this greater *jihad*; if we succeed in the greater *jihad*, then all our other strivings will count as *jihad*, and if not, they will be satanic."[475] Since success in the greater means that all actions are in line with Islamic teachings, then the successful *jihadist* will enact God's law in all they do. Nasrallah too saw that "Before being a battle with guns and weapons, [*jihad*] is a battle of ideology, faith, loyalty, truth, reliance on God, aspiration to martyrdom, renunciation of worldly pleasures, the love of others, and the desire to serve them."[476] This same sentiment was evident in the words of Hizbollah martyr Ali Munif

Ashmar, who recognized "our *jiha*di path… is long, tough, and filled with difficulties and tribulations; this is why it requires good and righteous spirituality, as well as patience." The fluid relationship between *jihad asghar* and *jihad akabar* solidified into the latter being championed as what readies Muslims for the former, and therefore the one who loses their lives in political *jihad* is verified as a victor of the personal *jihad* and a model of Muslim life, something that echoes in the period's constructions of martyrdom.

Moreover, while the greater *jihad* was incumbent upon every Muslim in bending their will to God's law, the lesser *jihad* was not. To struggle towards establishing an Islamic state was not always compulsory, which is what allowed the quietism of Shi'ism before Khomeini. Even during times of turbulence, a distinction was made between political *jihad* as a collective obligation (*fard kifaya*) and as an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*); when a group acted to expand the domain of Islam, Muslims were responsible for supporting such efforts, but were not required to physically and personally participate. Support could come in a variety of forms, from providing money or supplies to those on the front line, and as long as an individual provided some form of backing to the cause they responsibility was fulfilled. If, on the other hand, Islam itself was perceived to be at risk, taking up arms against forces seeking its destruction became obligatory for all individually. That meant every Muslim was expected to take up arms against those who threatened their religion and way of life, and those who did not were, in the words of Maududi, apostates (*murtadd*).[477]

The struggle to establish God's kingdom was therefore an honorable task to undertake, as it was the fulfillment of Muslim duty, and offered a means by which to regain some of the dignity lost during the years of oppression. The desire to recover lost dignity is one of the most common themes in the writing of Islamists and the martyrs under

consideration here. Not only did these people feel unable to control their own destiny amidst repressive governments but, as Farhad Khosrokhavar notes, daily life brought numerous "fiddles" that soiled existence. "The black market, smuggling, precarious jobs, and petty crime, or a shameful collaboration with the enemy's intelligence services leading to a feeling of degradation and humiliation."[478] He saw *jihad* offering "A religious logic [that] transforms this internalized loss of dignity into a sense of sin and a possibility, through death as martyrs, of redemption."[479] Words for humiliation such as *dhill* or *hawan* were rife in the writings of contemporary clerics,[480] and most believed like Mohammed Hossein Fadlallah, that "Resistance allows man to feel human… to feel alive. It allows man to feel he is not a negligible quantity manipulated by his enemies."[481] Risking one's like on the field of *jihad* necessarily meant that he or she had taken control of their life and were willing to risk it for truth.[482] The struggling of *jihad* necessitated the sacrifice of martyrdom.

Joseph Alagha contends that in both Islamist and secular spheres of the period martyrdom was seen as not only a way to regain personal pride but also uphold the honor, pride and dignity of the entire Islamic community, the *umma* ('*izzat wa karamat al-umma*).[483] Originally used to refer to the actual followers of Mohammed in the seventh century, the *umma* sees all believers in the Islamic faith as part of a common social community based on the adherence and submission to God's law. The *umma* is without boundary, existing anywhere devout Muslims lived. Rhetoric around the pride of the *umma* was employed by Khomeini in a famous speech during the throes of the revolution where he declared "Today, great nation, you have come to a fork in the road: one way leads to eternal dignity and splendor, and the other (God forbid) to perpetual humiliation and degradation."[484] Such an idea is certainly present in the wills of martyrs in both settings, though the theme is more

prevalent in the testaments of Hizbollah's martyrs, which makes sense considering those Iranian Basij dying in the war with Iraq had already experienced the successful revolution. Still, Mohammed Ali Amir Sandjabi of Iran declared his intent "to either come out victorious or die with dignity," something that Sanaa Mheydleh echoed in her testament while noting that her family would certainly want the same thing. Hizbollah martyr Jamal Sati's is emblematic of Lebanese wills when he stated "I saw how our enemies, the Zionists,[485] destroyed our villages and towns; they humiliated us, forced our people to leave their houses and villages… I decided to regain my national pride and dignity." In line with Alagha's insight, Sati saw his act as producing both personal and communal dignity. As Asma Afsaruddin, one of the leading scholars on *jihad* put it, "under such disquieting, even cataclysmic, circumstances, violence deemed to be in the service of human freedom and the reclamation of human dignity can be regarded as a highly redemptive act of religiosity, even its apotheosis."[486] Afsaruddin intimates that the deeper the shame, the greater the honor gained by the death in *jihad* that is martyrdom.

During these years the entire Western world was colored as hostile to Islam, and since nowhere *shari'ah* law ruled, everywhere Islam was under attack. As Na'im Qassem, Hizbollah's deputy secretary-general and founding member put it, "We see ourselves as a people whose rights have been taken away and so we need to have a force to help us. It is impossible for us to relinquish this. *Jihad* is a fundamental basis for us. We do not use it as a means of imposing our views on others, but consider ourselves in a state of *jihad* to defend our rights."[487] *Jihad* became both offensive and defensive: it sought to protect Islam from those hypocrites and outsiders who would destroy it by making it a mere personal faith, while at the same time seeking to establish an Islamic state through conquest.[488] *Jihad* became so

fundamental to the experience of oppressed Muslims that all were expected to actively participate in order to prove their devotion, their moral fortitude, and their commitment to Islam. Inspired by this amalgam that reimagined deeply rooted cultural beliefs and practices, Ahmad Qasir and Mohammad Fahmideh felt confident that their attacks on their enemies were necessary and justified their homicidal self-immolation. Their acts of self-sacrifice in the struggle to establish God's sovereignty had been constructed as the central purpose of Muslim existence.

In the struggles of the 1980s, experiences of oppression result in the projection of a lost past where life had been, but is no longer, based in Islam. Consequently, the secular regimes of the contemporary age were seen to be tyrannical, and categories of Islam were revitalized to oblige struggle in the path of God. Participating in such a struggle was seen as incumbent upon each individual and a means to regain some dignity that was lost under such conditions. It was a small step from this focus on honorable men and women willing to give all in the struggle, to an encouragement for those to give their own lives in an operation that insures their enemies' deaths and their own martyrdom. *Incipit* the martyrdom operation.

Constructing Martyrdom Operations

One Sunnah in Islam holds that there are three types of men: the first wants neither to kill nor be killed, merely to live in peace. The second is ready to kill for Islam, but fears losing his own life in battle. The third type is one who fights *jihad* looking to kill and be killed. It is this last type, according to David Cook, whose every "drop of blood [dripping] from him is atonement for every sin; he will come to the Day of Resurrection with a drawn sword, [able to] intercede."[489] Nothing could more accurately describe this new kind of

martyr, this *istishhadi*, the human bomb who desires his own death and his enemy's death with equal fervor. Forming his or her subjectivity within a culture of sacrifice and seeking a way to regain honor and freedom from oppression along with a chance to be placed among the best of Muslims, individuals in these settings using their own lives as a means to defeat their enemy.

Though *jihad's* focus is often spoken of as a willingness to deploy violence, a greater emphasis in these arenas began to be placed on the willingness to suffer in service to Muslim goals. While change may require violence, acting violently always – and especially in contexts of domination and oppression – necessitates the risk of violent blowback. For this reason, in the words of Khomeini, blood is more important than the sword. Inaugurating In 1978, Khomeini explained to audiences that the sacred month of Muharram, when Shi'ites celebrate the festival of Ashura in memory of the "Master of Martyrs" Husayn, was "the month in which blood triumphed over the sword, and the month in which truth condemned falsehood for all eternity… the month that proves the superpowers may be defeated by the word of truth; the month in which the leader of the Muslims taught us how to struggle against all the tyrants of history, showed us how the clenched fists of those who seek freedom, desire independence, and proclaim the truth may triumph over tanks, machine guns, and the armies of Satan, how the word of truth may obliterate falsehood."[490] The symbols of the festival of Ashura, remembering the sacrifice of the revered figure of Husayn and his followers who fell to an overwhelming enemy force in the land known as Karbala, dominate the symbolic scene of the period and affirmed that blood, not the sword, assures victory over the forces of evil.

The culture of sacrifice that took hold in Lebanon and Iran filtered down into most aspects of life. One of the most popular books circulating in these areas of the period was a

compilation of poems celebrating the martyrdom of a famous Syrian martyr,[491] and daily life was infused with sacrificial symbolism. People ended letters with idioms like “your sacrifice” (*qorban-e shoma*), and sayings like "I sacrifice myself for you” or “I’ll die for you” became standard expressions of pity or gratitude.[492] The celebration of self-sacrifice ran so deep that Khomeini was able to declare with pride that “primary school children of seven or eight stand ready to sacrifice themselves and shed their blood for the sake of Islam and the nation.”[493] Such a statement may elicit horror in modern Western audiences, but was seen as an illustration of the deep pride and dignity of an Islamic nation, where even children are ready to sacrifice for God’s truth. It renders clear what martyrs Azim Motuli Habibi and Adel Karami meant when in their wills they praised the “martyr-nurturing” people of Iran.

Apart from the Qur’anic verses and *hadith* already noted, the religious texts most often referred to in the context of suicide bombing speak of it as an exchange of life for something better. Rather than the seventy-two virgins often said to inspire those who become human bombs (who have no basis in the Qur’an) many bombers reference verse 2:208: “And some people sell themselves for the sake of Allah's favor. Allah is kind to [His] servants." A large proportion of religious rulings cite this verse as well, which frames the act as one that serves the divine and therefore is looked upon with favor by God. While God’s pleasure may appear as a given, the label of martyr is ultimately bestowed by God if he is pleased with the act performed. Another popular Qur’anic verse that uses the language of exchange is 9:111: “Allah has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for paradise; they fight in the way of Allah, kill and get killed. That is a true promise from Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an; and who fulfills His promise better than Allah? Rejoice then at the bargain you have made with Him for that is the great triumph.” Not only does this

provide an interesting link with Judaism and Christianity while assuring heaven for the martyr, but it also implicitly sanctions it as a legitimate act of *jihad*. However, it is not scriptural interpretation but rather the reimagining of a sacred past that provided the central frame for martyrdom operations.

In Islam the great model of martyrdom is the abovementioned Husayn ibn Ali, nephew of the Prophet. The seventh century saw the ascension of Yazid I to the Ummayyad caliphate, the Islamic power structure that arose following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Their power was contested from the start, as this is the period when the question of who legitimately governed Muslim communities was at issue, resulting in the division of Sunni and Shi'a. Husayn was the son of the last *caliph* to be accepted by both sects, leading to his refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazid.

Days after this refusal, while Husayn was on Hajj in Medina, a plea for his help and protection came from Kufa, which was previously a capital of his father Ali's caliphate. Husayn left to support his father's people, but only two days from Kufa his small band was intercepted in Karbala, which exists today within the political borders of Iraq, by part of Yazid's army. Battle was not joined for nearly a week, and in the meantime the Ummayyads prevented Husayn's small troupe from accessing drinking water in the Euphrates. Water's importance in the Arabian Desert resonated then as well as now, and a tradition continues today where water is offered to all travelers in Iraq in memory of Husayn and his companions' thirst. When battle was finally joined, Husayn's vastly outnumbered group knew defeat was certain. Rather than submitting to illegitimate authority of the Ummayyad rulers, Husayn rallied his people in support of Islam (even turning one of the Ummayyad commanders to his side) and battled until none were left alive. Seventy-two warriors were

beheaded, all of whom are recognized as martyrs by both Sunni and Shi'ites, along with Husayn who is the "Martyr of martyrs" (*shahid al-shuhada*).[494]

When Ali Shariati looked upon Husayn, he saw someone obliged to fight against oppression without any hope of victory. Husayn knew he fought a losing battle, but felt the fact of his certain death did not remove his responsibility to resist forces hostile to "true" Islam. It was this dynamic Shariati thought lay at the core of why Husayn was so respected as a paradigm of Muslim action. He saw the martyr as having the "responsibility to perform the *jihad* against all that is corrupt and cruel. He has no other means at his disposal for his *jihad* but his own death… his *shahadat*… will bear witness to the fact that he carried out his responsibility at a time when truth was defenseless and unarmed. He bears witness that nothing more could be done."[495] The Battle of Karbala was important and remembered in the annual Ashura festival not because it presented an opportunity for Islam to spread, but rather an opportunity for those devoted to Islam to show their commitment. Husayn knew he would die, and yet was duty bound to fight. He went into the battle bearing witness to the truth of Islam through his death, and showed people that resistance always remains an option if one is willing to give their life.

Husayn's example dominates Shi'ite collective memory, providing a collective experience of loss, and a model for Muslim action in the direst circumstances. Moreover, Shi'a tradition recognizes a shared guilt inherited from those who recognized Husayn's authority but did not help during the battle.[496] Through Shariati's and other's reimagining of Husayn, death in service to Islam changes from something to be avoided when possible –the dominant perspective of Sunni *jihadis* to this point – to something intrinsically desirable and worthwhile.[497] For most of Shi'a history, however, the holy death of martyrdom was limited

to the holy saints who were worthy of such an honor and therefore beyond the reach of most Muslims. During the struggles of the Iranian Revolution, according to Meir Hatina, martyrdom was "democratized" and became accessible to all.[498] This was likely largely a result of the Basij corps' creation, which provided a means for young men to offer their lives in a sacrifice that was reminiscent of Husayn's, and linked up to the personal duty of striving in *jihad*. Sacrifice provided the avenue for individuals to ascend to the highest echelons of respect, surpassing even the leaders of the community, which Khomeini himself noted when he declared "I am embarrassed in front of you who are shedding your blood for the sake of freedom and Islam."[499] All people were equally presented with a ready-made means to achieve redemption, honor, and regain their lost dignity, at the low cost of their life.

On January 15, 1979, Khomeini gave a speech celebrating those martyrs killed during the Ashura riots the year before, those that began the "chain of martyrdom" leading to the success of the Iranian Revolution. Making use of the ready-made symbolism inherent in the myth of Karbala, Khomeini said "It is as if the blood of our martyrs were the continuation of the blood of the martyrs of Karbala, and as if the commemoration of our brothers were the echo of the commemoration of those brave ones who fell at Karbala. Just as their pure blood brought to an end the tyrannical rule of Yazid, the blood of our martyrs has shattered the tyrannical monarchy of the Pahlavis."[500] This connection with Karbala ritually remembered during Ashura provided the narrative frame through which Iranians and Lebanese Shi'ites understood their contemporary situation.[501] Remembering the central sacrifice of Husayn when faced with death or disobedience gave Muslims during this period a means to understand what was at stake in their plight and how they should respond. The motto of the Revolution became "Everyday Ashura, Everyday Karbala," leading to an ongoing experience

of participation and reenactment as well as a connection to the yearly rituals commemorating Husayn and his companions.[502] Those celebrations became ideological training, providing scripts for action when confronted with systems of oppression and injustice like those of Hussein's Iraq.

When the Basij marched towards their death, wearing their keys that unlocked the doors of heaven, they shouted "Ya Karbala! Ya Husayn! Ya Khomeini!"[503] Their human wave attacks themselves were named Karbala IV and Karbala V, further implicating Husayn's experience into their sacrifice, something that resonates in their wills. Karbala and Husayn provide the central motifs of Iranian wills, nearly all of which reference the symbolic complex in some way.[504] Alsighar Noori and Shahid Mirzapur both connect the imperial forces supporting Iraq with Yazid, conflating the symbolic enemy with the real enemy, while Bijam Muhammadian framed his actions as historically linked to Karbala, saying "if we were not in Karbala to assist Hossein, we have aided his child and this was our duty." Such statements both linked to Khomeini's framing of a direct connection between Karbala and Tehran, as well as connecting to expressions of collective guilt experienced by Shi'ites during the yearly rituals of Ashura.

These connections were further invigorated by speeches repeatedly organized thematically and temporally around Ashura. As it was a moment of heightened religious sentiment that carried an intrinsic sacrificial character, it is unsurprising that those seeking to direct such energies towards a political goal planned accordingly. Speeches led to demonstrations of increasing size, which were routinely dispersed with violence, leading to further commemoration and further demonstrations. As far back as 1963 an Ashura celebration brought thousands to the streets of Tehran and were broken up by the Shah's

agents, and women's diaries of the period recall their experience as living Karbala again.[505] Twenty years later over fifty thousand gathered during Ashura, and at the height of ceremonies an Israeli convoy drove through the ritual processions leading to violence and the death of several Lebanese Shi'ites. As a direct result the Shi'a high council in Lebanon issued a *fatwa* exhorting all Lebanese to use all means to resist such forces.[506] The timing of such demonstrations was not experienced as accidental but fated, reaffirming the duty of all Shi'ites to resist dominance and oppression just as Husayn and his companions did.

Lebanon, particularly the south spaces, became symbolically linked to the sands of Karbala along with the occupied lands of Palestine.[507] Just as Khomeini made great use of Karbala symbolism, so did the leaders of Hizbollah. Nasrallah held that those who died martyrs "epitomized the events at Karbala… as if you were that same Hussein, the commander on the battlefield, Hussein the rebel in the face of oppression and despotism, and Hussein who rejected humiliation and shame… epitomiz[ing] all that Karbala represented, from resistance to enthusiasm, to the path, to the tragedy."[508] Likewise the martyrs of Hizbollah latched onto such symbols; before leaving on his operation, Salah Ghandour asked that "God to grant me success in meeting the master of martyrdom, Imam Hussein, this great Imam who taught all the free people how to avenge themselves on their oppressors." The symbolic conflation of the Bekaa valley with Karbala also helps make sense of what martyr Ali Munif Ashmar meant by his hopes that his "blood merged with the soil of Holy Karbala." The martyr's blood consecrates the land it falls upon, a theme echoed by the martyr Sanaa who states "I am now planted in the earth of the South watering it with my blood and love for it," and which was a central characteristic of posters encouraging resistance in Lebanon.[509]

By connecting their land with Karbala and their acts with Husayn, these martyrs were encouraged that sacrificing themselves for Islam would be seen favorably by God.

At the close of his well-known speech “Martyrdom: Arise and Bear Witness,” theologian Ali Shariati divided the people of Iran into three types: “Those who died committed a Husaynic act. Those who remain must perform a Zainabic act. Otherwise, they are Yazids." While Husayn provided the model for those engaged in the fighting, and Yazid the paradigm of injustice to be fought against, the patience of those who held strong during the months of struggle recalled the figure of Zainab bint Ali, sister of Husayn, granddaughter of the Prophet and a symbol of resistance in her own right. Inverting the stoicism displayed by the mother of Maccabees IV who watched her sons be killed, when Zainab’s nephew was sentenced to death she threw herself upon him in protection, and earned him a reprieve from his captors. That nephew was Zain al-Abidin, the only of Husayn’s sons to survive the Battle of Karbala and the sole male who perpetuated the Imam’s line, imparting a significant status upon Zainab. Many other stories are told of her defiance, and her name also recalls the eldest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad himself and renowned throughout the Islamic world for her patience.

In the 1980s Zainab’s name was regularly invoked, particularly in reference to the mothers and wives of martyrs. Khomeini begins his speech “In Commemoration of the Martyrs of Tehran” by linking her virtue to that of Iranian women, and the Basij martyr Mohammed Ali Amir Sandjabi pleaded with his wife to remember Zainab and take her as a model. Hizbollah’s Salah Ghandour said Zainab "has been the role model for all women for centuries." Creating these symbolic resonances not only provided reassurance for the need for resistance, but also offered an avenue for women to participate in greater numbers than

they otherwise could.[510] Women related to martyrs were also given "noble citizenry status" and those who lost a husband in the conflict rarely went back to traditional roles. There was a sense that if their husbands were chosen to bear witness like Husayn, they too were chosen to display the constancy of Zainab.[511]

Perhaps even more than the wives of martyrs, the mothers of martyrs saw their suffering linked to Zainab and experienced an elevated place in these societies. Often they were given credit for inspiring their son's martyrdom, like Salah Ghandour and Iranian martyr Mohammed Ali Amir Sandjabi who told his mother "you were the mother who taught her son the lessons of martyrdom." Others attributed the mere possibility of their martyrdom to their mothers, like Hizbollah martyr Wadji al-Sayegh and hi Iranian comrade Said Fatahalla Araji who wrote "Mother, you must be proud that your son shall not refrain from fighting Saddam and his followers [as long as] there is blood in his veins, and he shall continue to protect his Imam, as that is your wish also." A few like Hizbollah's Samir Mohammed Mattout beg their families for forgiveness, but many more express their confidence in the pride their parents must feel that their children were willing to take such action.

This sentiment extended to the interactions others had with the mothers of martyrs. Ethnographers who interviewed such women were taken aback when they discovered the expectation was not to offer condolences for the loss of their child, but rather congratulations that their son attained the holy state of martyrdom.[512] Such praise was also evident in the ways some mothers spoke about their sons, such as one who described her son as an "altruist whose greatest duty and source of pride is to sacrifice himself for the well-being of his country by killing as many as possible of his enemies."[513] If parents didn't express pride at

their child's martyrdom they would be guilty of what Christoph Reuter called a "double betrayal: first, of the child, who would otherwise have died for nothing; and also of his faction, or even the community as a whole which for its part is flattered that its struggle is now seen as so important and sanctified by the self-sacrifice it inspires."[514] When Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech remembering his own son's martyrdom by Israeli soldiers, he embraced such a discourse admitting his son "consciously, willingly and independently chose this path. If I, his mother, or any martyr's father have played any role in this, it was to facilitate and not object to or prevent this or any other young man from going where he wished, or doing what he thought right."[515] These were not perceived as desperate acts, but acts of unbelievable courage and heroism, fighting when they *knew* they would die, but fighting nonetheless.

Social support for the families of martyrs went beyond statements by their leaders. In both Iran and Lebanon special services existed for the families of those who died fighting imperialist forces. The Basij and their families had access to special subsidized stores reserved for them alone, and Hizbollah's "Martyr's Foundation" was created in 1982 to provide social services to the families of those who die for the cause.[516] Certificates of martyrdom – known as *shahadah* – were distributed to these families to mark who could legitimately receive benefits.[517] All these ensured that concerns about what would happen to those left behind would not interfere with those who wanted to sacrifice themselves, and also linked with what would be expected of a legitimate Islamic government in such a period.

The family's central place was appropriated by aligning the martyr's family with the family of Husayn. This conflation resulted in the language of union and marriage being one of the dominant themes of martyr wills, particularly in Lebanon. Sanaa Mheydleh crowns

herself as “the bride of the South.” While Jamal Sati asks his family to “rejoice and dance as you would at my wedding, for I am the proud groom of martyrdom, and that is the happiest wedding I could hope for.” The responsibilities of a young person when they marry are displaced onto the struggle; it is to become the husband or bride of Islam itself, and giving all in its service just as one would be expected to give all to their families. This displacement allows Nasrallah to remind his audience “we are still holding wedding ceremonies for our martyrs, rejoicing in them and envying their lofty status, their badge of honor and their good fortune. We congratulate them on this honorable fate, take pride in them, and are more worthy and proud for having known them.”[518] More and more becoming a martyr took on a higher regard that becoming a spouse or parent, and a parent’s dreams were to be fulfilled by children who took on this sacred duty to protect Islam with their lives. It was further reinforced by the intercessory qualities martyrs possessed; Islamic tradition holds that on the day of Judgement the martyr can speak for seventy-two of his or her family members, saving them from hell on account of their own sacrifice.[519] This was granted to martyrs due to the extreme act of devotion they committed in service of bringing God’s kingdom into reality.

With these symbols being filtered into the whole of society, the willingness to risk one’s life tipped over into the explicit seeking to end one’s life. When faced with an inability to determine life on the basis they chose, these martyrs were determined to end their lives in an act of resistance. Feeling secure in the approbation of their peers and families, and confident those close to them would be cared for, these warriors ferociously courted their own demise by killing their oppressors. The operations they carried out – whether they be individuals detonating themselves in crowds, or part of a crowd walking into gunfire – were

not seen as acts of despair-fueled suicide but noble acts of the greatest sacrifice of which they were capable; they were not suicide bombings, but martyrdom operations.

This novel strategy quickly became popularly associated with the Islamist movement, but no consensus reigns in the Islamic community at large nor in among the best known religious jurists. Many, like the famous traditionalist Nasir al-Din al-Albani, hold that these acts are suicides; many others agree the evidence provided in Nawwaf al-Takuri's most authoritative *fatwa* "Martyrdom Operations in the Legal Balance," that they are legitimate acts of *jihad* performed in accordance with Islamic law.[520]

Such dissension is likewise visible in the context under examination. While Khomeini showered the Basij with accolades, Fadlallah was from the start more circumspect regarding the place of human bombings in Lebanon.[521] He was careful to only authorize martyrdom operations against soldiers and never against civilians, and ultimately accepted only those that occurred in legitimate settings of *jihad* and performed in consultation with religious authorities. Fadlallah expressed a need to balance out the suffering experienced by the bomber with the potential strategic benefit:

> The martyrdom operations, supervised by a religious authority, who takes into account the requirements of the battle, the goals and the benefit of the Islamic cause, is one phase of *Jihad*, because God hasn't defined specific means for *Jihad*, but He entitled the religious authority to lead the battle within the common rules that govern such a case. And the same evidence that implies the legitimacy of *Jihad* implies the legitimacy of martyrdom operations if the military conditions available lead to positive results. Just as in a combat or an attack.[522]

In short, only when it could be firmly rendered in line with Islamic law by jurists could these be martyrdoms, as it was up to those jurists to use the rational legal methods of *ijtihad* in determining what was called for in the specific historical moment; otherwise they would remain suicides.

That said, the authors of Hizbollah's "Identity and Goals" affirm that such attacks raise the morale of the entire Muslim *umma* through their demonstration of commitment and devotion.[523] Confidence that they are in line with Islamic morality seems to stem from the extents to which they are willing to go on behalf of Islam, and the happiness with which they give their life in its service. Martyrs Jamal Sati and Ali Munif Ashmar explicitly refer to human bombing as a "sacred" or "divine duty" in their wills, and most express some level of happiness at embarking on such an operation. Sati for instance acknowledges his joy at participating in any attacks against Israeli forces, but says his "happiness was supreme when I was informed that I was to fulfill a suicide operation." This selection process reflects the need for sanctioning in these attacks; it was not a case where anyone who desired could perform such an operation on their own accord. Nasrallah noted that many come seeking such an honor, and Maha Talib, the widow of Hizbollah martyr Saleh Ghandour, said of her husband "Even if I tried to stop him, it wouldn't have worked. This was his path; he'd dreamed of it for so long; for three years he'd pleaded with the leadership to send him on a [suicide] mission, until they eventually let him have his wish – even though they usually don't let fathers go... He believed that he had to defend his country, and that this was the best way to do so."[524] Very quickly individuals appear to have sought out the opportunity to perform such acts, and those acts were vigorously celebrated by those experiencing oppression at the hands of Western imperial powers. Communal spirit and Islamic doctrine combined during this period to construct a new idea of martyrdom that combatted concerns of suicide with a sacred duty to resist. Bravely taking up arms in *jihad* gave way to a new and extreme means of resistance, but one that continued the same project sought in *jihad*: the establishment of God's just rule on earth.

Establishing God's Kingdom

Everywhere in the words of leaders and martyrs we see rhetoric linking martyrdom to the creation of a social and political existence based in Islam.[525] Appreciating the hopes of these martyrs and their contemporary politico-religious leaders necessitates allowing their words to elucidate the form of sovereign collective they seek. Their calls echo those of their intellectual predecessors; years before the Iranian Revolution, Abul A'la Maududi called for the kingdom of man – *mamlakat al-bashr* – to be replaced the kingdom of God – *mamlakat Allah*.[526]

Establishing the kingdom of God means instituting *hakimiyya*, God's sovereignty, at the core of the collective. Only when this was accomplished could humankind be freed from their servitude to other men, because only under God's reign could a truly just system exist. The very idea of justice refers to a system of regulations that appropriately reflects the "true" world order, one where the devout lead, each receives their proper share, and the poor are provided for. This lies behind the Qur'anic verse that declares "We have made of you a just nation, so that you may bear witness unto the rest of mankind, and that the Apostle [Muhammad] may bear witness unto you."[527] The justice of the nation is linked to the same witness performed in martyrdom, which connects to martyr Azim Motuli Habibi's contention that his path is "the way of justice against injustice." Justice is inherent in Islam, a name that literally translates as "submission to God." In their final testaments, these martyrs continually referred to their desires to bring about such a state, one that lies at the core of their political and religious hopes. Nasrallah himself identified this as their goal when he said "We pledge ourselves to these martyrs. We will persevere on their path, preserve their blood, and heal

their wounds until God makes His will manifest."[528] Martyrdom is part of a larger project that seeks to institute God's law on earth.

When Khomeini mobilized the Shi'a he tapped into the already extant idea of a just Islamic rule that would make God's will manifest: the awaited return of the Mahdi. Shi'a tradition held the Twelfth Imam would reappear at the final apocalyptic battle that would lead to universal Islamic rule. Some martyrs referred to such millennial hopes, such as Hizbollah's Salah Ghandour who hoped his "*jihad, inshallah* [God Willing], is the preparatory *jihad* for the anticipated Imam." He asked that God "guarantee the continuity of the nation until the appearance of Imam Mahdi who will spread justice in the world after it was filled with injustice and oppression. I ask Allah that you be the soldiers of Imam Mahdi." Likewise, Ghandour's Iranian compatriot Sayyid Mahmoud Zargar asked that the people who buried him pray "Almighty! Protect the Imam until the revolution of your Mahdi!" Some martyrs awaited the reign of the Mahdi, while others saw themselves actively engaged in bringing about just governance here and now over the entire *umma*, under the righteous governor Khomeini, and based in the laws revealed by God through His Prophet Muhammad.

While this chapter revolves around Iran and Lebanon, the collective at issue exceeds political borders. Muslims everywhere are defined by their submission to the will of God, and therefore the rule of Islam was meant for the entire community, the whole *umma*. (This will dangerously resurface with the caliphate sought by groups like ISIS that demand they speak for all Muslims, but a less restrictive and more inclusive idea of the *umma* is meant here.) References to the *umma* in the 1980s sought to reconfigure and reconnect with the global Muslim community that had been disseminated across the globe.[529] Khomeini believed "In order to assure the unity of the Islamic *umma* and to liberate the Islamic

homeland from occupation and penetration by the imperialists and their puppet governments, it is imperative that we establish a government."[530] He also used ritual gatherings during times of heavy pilgrimage to reassert the connections existing between all Muslims, forging a common history and looking to overcome sectarianism based on the freedom inherent in Islam.[531] The leaders of Hizbollah echoed this connection, stating in the manifesto which announced their existence:

> We are a nation interconnecting with all Muslims of the world. We are linked by a strong ideological and political connection – Islam. From here, what befalls the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines or anywhere else verily afflicts the body of our Islamic nation of which we are inseparable part, and we move to confront it on the basis of our main legal obligation and in the light of a political view decided by our leader the *wilayat al-faqih* [the guardianship of the jurisprudent, namely Khomeini].[532]

It was not only for the cause of Lebanon that they suffered and died, but for all Muslims everywhere who battled injustice and sought to actualize God's will.

This "ummic" identity was reflected in the wills of martyrs from both contexts. They not only identify with Muslims in specific areas – especially Palestine but also Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and even America – but they use this identity to complicate the idea of a "nation." Martyr Nasrullah Shahabi links the "trenches of the nation" within which he fought to the "service to Islam," Mostafa Saidi saw the nation of Iran as committed to establishing life according to Islam for all Muslims, and Wadji al-Sayegh said Israel was "not only the enemy of my country or the enemy of Lebanon - but the enemy of the whole nation." Samir Mohammad Mattout went as far as to ask his audience to "Commit to the nation of Hizbollah… don't turn it into a group or an organization… commit to it and be a manifestation of righteousness." Nations, these imagined or interpretive communities, are not timeless and unchanging, but are rather continually in the process of being constructed through recognition of social difference and sameness, which takes place here through the

acts of martyrs and those who claim them as *their* martyrs.[533] In the words of Khosrokhavar, "Martyrdom… functioned as an act of witness, it engendered a *shared feeling of belonging to one nation*. Its sacrificial rites… [are] addressed to a *sui generis* community the martyr is trying to convince thanks to the fascination of the tragic and heroic nature of his act."[534] By connecting their sacrifice to hopes of a unified *umma* under Islamic rule, these acts not only spoke to the entire community of Muslims, it engaged in creating that very community. Any Muslim on the planet who recognized them as a martyr implicitly recognized the validity of their sacrifice and its goal.

Just as an Islamic identity determined the community the martyrs spoke to, it also determined who had authority over this group. The same sovereign imaginary that provided a common experience of belonging contained ideas of authentic authority. The doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* resulted in the ascension of Imam Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran, and linked to ideas of legitimate rule visible in Hizbollah's manifesto above. Khomeini's name likewise appears repeatedly throughout the wills of Iranian and Lebanese martyrs both: Hizbollah's Samir Mohammad Mattout asked God "to prolong the life of Imam Khomeini, the leader, reviver, and honor of the Islamic nation" and asked his fellow Muslims to "Struggle for the sake of Allah, and let your *jihad* be truly on the path of Imam Hussein and your leader be truly Imam Khomeini." His comrade Assaad Berro advised "If you have the desire to meet Allah, you have to free yourself from such attachments and from your ego, set yourself free in Allah's wide world, and struggle for his sake on the path of the Leader who followed the path of the Supreme Leader, the great Imam Khomeini, who drew for us the path of *jihad* and taught us to move confidently." Even Ahmad Qasir, who perpetrated the first modern "suicide bombing" said "O brothers, you have to hold on to the course of the Great Imam

Khomeini, the establisher of the state of Islam, because he is the right path of Islam." Everywhere his legitimate authority is affirmed, and the desire and outright need for him to rule echoes throughout these testaments.

Perhaps the most effective means to legitimate his rule is done by those martyrs who draw a clear link between Khomeini and revered past Muslim leaders. Iranians like Mohammed ‘Ali Amir Sandjabi reiterate the Mahdi’s guardianship entrusted to Khomeini implicit in his status as jurisprudent, and Shahid Mirzarpur avers "we must always be obedient to the Imam [Khomeini] for obedience to the Imam is submission to God, and disobedience to the Imam is disobedience to the command and orders of God.” On the Lebanese side too Khomeini was often linked to celebrated Muslims rulers. Samir Mohammad Mattout expressly linked Imam Hussein to Imam Khomeini, and Salah Ghandour explicitly connects Ali to Hussein to Khomeini through the martyrs who sacrificed themselves seeking divine rule, inculcating martyrs into the Islamic dynasty. While the circumstances in Lebanon were certainly different than they were in Iran, and Hizbollah’s ideologues staked out their own agency while acknowledging Khomeini’s authority,[535] the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* drove conceptions of just rule in both settings.

Meanwhile, Khomeini consistently articulated a stance that ostensibly placed him as a mere vessel of the law given by Allah. According to him it is the law that is highest and provides the foundation of life, not the rulers. In fact, the system Khomeini develops in Iran elevates the religious jurist above the political leader on the basis of his understanding of the law; the Supreme Leader’s job is to inform the political authorities on Islam’s demands, what divine law is and must be. *Shari’ah* law is the prevailing force, leading Khomeini to assert that not the jurist, the educated *ulama* or even the Prophet himself is exempt from its dictates.

This is what is meant by the authority inherent in *hakimiyya*, where only God is recognized as sovereign, and what lays at the core of both Khomeini's government and Hizbollah's who took the Qur'an as the constitution of the society they sought. For both, Islam is both religion (*din*) and legislative order (*dawla*).

Just as Khomeini declared that all people were subject to the law of Allah, he also saw himself as a servant of those who shed their blood in the struggle to realize God's will on earth. In a he gave in June 1979 he said "It was you who shed your blood, who went forth to struggle and do battle with the regime; I have no claims on our movements. I must serve you, not benefit from you by gaining some title."[536] The jurist was educated to interpret God's law, but the martyrs internalized that law into their being where it burst out at the cost of their lives. This provided them with a unique status, and significant authority (that paradoxically could never be exercised by them) that was appropriated by religious leaders who celebrated them. Hassan Nasrallah assured the martyrs "your voice, your wounds and your blood will ring in our ears and beat in our hearts as witnesses to what you have always told us. We promise to carry your rebellious voice to all the dispossessed people of this world, and to sprinkle your blood in every corner of the earth so *jihad* and resistance can germinate and grow."[537] Dying battling oppression and seeking to establish a just existence, these martyrs testify to their conception of justice and ideal of legitimate authority. The focus on blood over the sword put the focus less on *jihad*, and more on the obligations and expectations of Muslims who are determined to live according to the will of God no matter the cost.

Dying while struggling in the way of God was a way to connect one's death to the establishment of divine rule. One Qur'anic verse regularly pointed to in this context is 9:29:

"Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture." Commenting on this verse, Sayyid Qutb noted that the "reasons for *jihad* which have been laid out in the verses above are these: to establish God's authority in the earth; to arrange human affairs according to the true guidance provided by God; to abolish all the Satanic forces and Satanic systems of life; [and] to end the lordship of one man over others."[538] Decades later, Mohammed Fadlallah would concur, affirming that the goal of the Islamic resistance "is to have mankind follow the teachings of true Islam,"[539] and the first goal of all *jihad* is "working to build a life on the basis of belief in God, his Prophets and His laws."[540] While the impetus for martyrdom and *jihad* so often gets placed on personal belief, these statements show it is recognition of the law revealed by Allah as the true law that is sought. It is about justice, not belief. It is about following – and upholding – the law.

Martyrdom beyond Jihad

In his reflections on the concept of martyrdom, Ali Shariati distinguished two models of the *shahid*. The first is Hamzah, the companion and uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, who died gloriously during the Battle of Uhud. The other is of course Husayn, the central symbol of the Revolution who welcomes death in service to God. As Shariati eloquently explains,

> Hamzah is a *mujahid* who is killed in the midst of *jihad*, but Husayn is a *shahid* who attains *shahadat* before he is killed. He is a *shahid*, not only at the place of his *shahadat*, but also in his own house. From the moment that Walid, the governor of Medina, asks him to swear allegiance [to Yazid] and he says, 'NO!' – the negation by which he accepts his own death – Husayn is a *shahid*, because *shahid* in this sense is not necessarily the title of the one being killed as such, but it is precisely the very witnessing aimed at negating an innovative affair. A *shahid* is a person who, from the beginning of his decision, chooses his own *shahadat*, even though, between his decision-making and his death, months or even years may pass.[541]

Having Hamzah as a model for human bombs would seem logical, since theirs is a violent act of *jihad*, but the martyr is more than just a fallen fighter. It includes but exceeds the context of *jihad*, and Shariati sees Husayn's witness as "an independent 'rule' distinct from *jihad*. It is an alternative which remains after *jihad*."[542] In order to understand how martyrdom exceeds *jihad*, it is first necessary to prod at the boundaries of *jihad*, and step back to try and perceive the overall pursuit of Islamism.

Writing from Tehran University in 1986, jurist Ali Ezzati wrote "The concept of *shahadat* in Islam can only be understood in the light of the Islamic concept of *jihad*, and the concept of *jihad* may only be appreciated if the concept of the doctrine of enjoining right and discovering wrong (*al-amr bi'l-maruf*) is properly appreciated."[543] Commanding right and forbidding wrong is repeatedly referenced in contemporary discussions of *jihad*; the sainted Imam Ali declared it the finest form of *jihad*, and one *hadith* named it the highest purpose of any Muslim: "you shall have to enforce good and curb evil and arrest the hand of the evil-doer and turn it by force to do right or the inevitable consequences of the natural law of God will be manifested in this fashion that the intentions of the hearts of the evil-doers will influence your hearts and like them you shall also be damned."[544] In the Qur'an's third Surah, the doctrine appears as the central character of the Muslim community: "You are the best community raised for the good of mankind. You enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God."[545] Such a succinct statement of the *umma's* purpose likewise reflects the principle of juridical institutions of every system of positive law, religious or secular. Judicial mechanisms exist to command actions deemed "right" and through punishment discourage those deemed "wrong."[546] In this context, what is right is that which abides by the law of God, and that which is wrong is what transgresses that law.

The work of both Qutb and Maududi referenced these religious texts, giving them pride of place in the society they sought to create, and in the Islamic sphere of the 1980s this doctrine was linked to Husayn and the establishment of an Islamic government. Before leaving Medina on the journey that would take him to Karbala, Husayn announced he was going to those who pleaded for his help in Kufa to "invite people to the good and forbid evil,"[547] which is the attribute Fadlallah places at the core of Husayn's exemplarity.[548] This same imperative that modern scholars see linked to the desire for a Palestinian homeland is what Shariati believes "strict, responsible fundamentalist Muslims sense [as] their responsibility every moment."[549] Khomeini too saw his purpose as "establishing an Islamic government that will apply *shari'ah* law and fight the Westernisation of morality by resorting to the Islamic principle of imposing Good and forbidding Evil (*mar bil ma'ruf wa nahy an al munkir*)."[550] This was reflected in the Iranian Constitution's insistence that this same duty must be fulfilled "by the people with respect to one another, by the government with respect to the people, and by the people with respect to the government," which both shows the importance of the doctrine and the role the populace played in maintaining the *shari'ah* law at the heart of Islamic government.[551] In Michael Cook's definitive study on commanding right and forbidding wrong, he asserts that modern interpretations have come to mean spreading Islamic values, moving from a focus on personal constancy towards the maintenance of a just society.[552] Enacting the law of God lies at the core of this doctrine as well as *jihad*; as the Qur'an makes clear, right means to follow and affirm belief in the Prophet, and wrong refers to denying (*takdhīb*) him.[553] Here we might see parallels to Peter's act of denial against Jesus, explored in the last chapter.

Striving in political *jihad* during this period aimed at implementing an Islamic legal system in a place where a non-Islamic system holds sway. Any sovereign system has at its base a set of values thought to be transcendent and sacred, or perhaps "self-evident" in the American sense, whether they stem from *shari'ah* law bound in the Islamic divine order or Western conceptions of law that place individual freedom – itself a transcendent value that cannot be abated – at the core. [554] When two such orders come into conflict, part of the issue revolves around which is better disposed for governing over life, but such a concern exceeds rational calculation. It revolves around which is the "true" law, what is "truly" just. The *parrhesia* of Christian martyrs discussed in the last chapter circled around this same issue, and the "truth" they spoke was what they saw as their real obligations, both to the government and to God. Speaking truth to power requires a disagreement over what counts as "truth," and an unwillingness to relinquish one's conception of truth regardless of the consequences.

Like early Christian texts, Islamic doctrine holds a special place for the bold truth-speaking of *parrhesia*. One *hadith* holds "The finest form of holy war is speaking out in the presence of an unjust ruler, and getting killed for it."[555] At the heart of tyranny lies the inability of subjects to give voice to what one believes to be the truth without suffering dire, usually physical, repercussions. It was the extraordinary courageous who knew the penalties but were still compelled to speak and abide by the truth. The same function was discussed by Shariati, who ends his discussion of *shahid* by saying "For the eyes which can no longer read the truth and cannot see the face of the truth in the darkness of despotism and *istihimar* (stupification)… the blood of the *shahid* is a candle light which gives vision and [serves as] the radiant light of guidance for the misguided."[556] Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of al-Qaeda,

would affirm the same years later saying human bombers represented "firmness in the truth, and boldness with the truth in the face of kings, tyrants and oppressors – even if this leads to death."[557] Such articulations are likely a result of direct transmission between Christian and Islamic ideas of martyrdom, but while such connections are not uncommon in relation to martyrdom operations, the words used by Islamist martyrs suggest a further relationship to what they perceive as the truth.

Over and again the wills of *istishhadi* spoke of experiencing their conflict not between two opposing political structures but rather between truth and falsehood. The same is visible where Basij member Bijam Muhammadian affirmed "the present way is a conflict between truth and falsehood, and since truth is the victor, we are victorious. Since I wished to join the ranks of the combatants of truth, I entered the scene and this was my message." Both Qutb and Maududi saw the fundamental purpose of *jihad* being the establishment of the truth, with Maududi baldly stating that "*Jihad* is but another name for the attempt to erect the truth."[558] Such assertions are supported in the Qur'an itself, where it is made clear that *jihad* occurs "so that [God] may cause the Truth to triumph and abolish falsehood" (8:8), language which recalls the doctrine of command right and forbid wrong. Fighting on the side of God meant fighting on the side of truth, as the two were considered one and the same. Scholars like Juergensmeyer and Kippenberg are not wrong in seeing the powers of falsehood ascribed to Satan, which is what allows the demonization of enemies resulting in widespread death and destruction, but at the same time it is instructive to look beyond the personification of falsehood to what lies behind fears of it.

Satanic forces do not only aim to corrupt the souls of believers in the Islamic context, but also conspire to make life in accordance with the dictates of Islam impossible, inspiring

in people a willingness to transgress by obfuscating the truth from those who should be saved by it. The personal and the political are inherently linked; politically prohibiting prescribed practices requires the individual take a risk if they are to maintain adherence to a thus-maligned system. It seeks to determine the "right" on its own terms. Following the "true" law in such situations necessitates a sacrifice, a willingness to suffer on account of what one knows is right. If a religious truth requires breaking the state's law and suffering punishment, such trials are to be endured. Khomeini made as much clear when he warned "If God, therefore, had not appointed over men one who would maintain order and law and protect the revelation brought by the Prophet, in the manner we have described, men would fall prey to corruption; the institutions, laws, customs, and ordinances of Islam would be transformed; and faith and its content would be completely changed, resulting in the corruption of all humanity."[559] Without an institutional structure engaged in administering life on the basis of *shari'ah*, people would be tempted away from righteousness because they would be made to follow another system of obligatory actions, one at odds with divine will.

Furthermore, a victory of the forces of falsehood would mean the end of Islam itself. Hizbollah martyr Ali Munif Ashmar made it clear that the martyrs who preceded him fell in the battle for truth, and he and his compatriots "must not let them down or waste their blood. We should rather continue the path that they had started… Never stop, because if you do, this candle will extinguish and it would be hard to light it up again." If the candle that illumines the truth about what is truly right goes out, mankind will be left forever groping in the dark of transgression, unable to escape from sinning again and again. Those engaged in the struggle carry the flame (a symbol linked since Plato with self-realization and enlightenment) that makes the truth appear, revealing the false for what it is, and showing that abiding by

Islamic rule is more important than a comfortable life. This is the fundamental purpose of the *shahid.*

The foremost Islamist thinkers of the 1980s routinely explained that the paradigm of martyrdom Husayn was tasked with this very duty. It was precisely what Fadlallah saw as exemplary in the actions of the "martyr of martyrs," as did Murtada Mutahhari who was one of the foremost ideologues of the Iranian Islamic Republic and who himself was martyred in 1979.[560] His colleague Ali Shariati made the point with typical skill, asking: "What is [Husayn's] responsibility? It is his responsibility to fight against the elimination of truth, the destruction of the rights of people, annihilation of all the values, abolition of all the memories of the revolution, destruction of the message of the revolution, and to protect the most beloved culture and faith of the people."[561] What was at stake in his resistance against oppression was the utter elimination of the system of Islam, and while the *jihad* of Islamists aims to maintain that truth politically, Husayn's act was one of personally maintaining allegiance to the truth. The battle he waged was between his desire not to suffer and die, and his obligation to determine any life he had in conformance with Islam. Herein lies the attribute that marks Husayn's self-sacrifice as significant; the need to sacrifice one's own desire in order to abide by the law is a common experience, but the discussion changes when that desire is to avoid pain or stay alive. It is at this extreme limit that the lengths of commitment are determined, and the martyr is the one whose devotion is unbound by any concerns of the flesh.

When Sayyid Qutb discussed martyrdom in his influential work *Milestones*, he saw the martyr as inextricably connected to truth. According to him the martyr

> is with the truth – and what is beyond the truth but falsehood? Let falsehood have power, let it have its drums and banners, and let it have its throngs and mobs; all this cannot change anything of the truth. Indeed, he is with the truth, and nothing is beyond the truth except

> error, and the Believer cannot prefer error to the truth. He is a Believer, and whatever be the conditions and the situation, he cannot exchange error for the truth.[562]

Qutb holds that the martyr, if he or she is to be a martyr, must hold to the truth no matter the consequences. It is this constancy that marks them, like Husayn, as exemplary, and their unyielding connection to Islam determines their merit. People willing to stay true to that which they profess always serve as models of ethical action, but in moments that see a perceived threat to the very source of their values their necessity is heightened. Situations of oppression and persecution threaten these sources by employing violence against those who refuse their demands because they believe themselves to be otherwise obligated. Such measures coerce through fear, literally forcing each individual to decide whether they too are willing to sacrifice well-being for their true duty.

This contest between individual desire and sacred duty is laid out by Hizbollah martyr Asaad Berro who told his family "I entrust you to stay away from following your desires and having interest in worldly pleasures. If you have the desire to meet Allah (which is the result of constancy in His path) you have to free yourself from such attachments and from your ego, set yourself free in Allah's wide world, and struggle for his sake." The struggle for Islam – in both its greater/individual and lesser/political forms – is the struggle against individual ego satisfaction. It is no wonder such ferocious actions are taken up against a hegemonic corporate power that bases its own values in the freedom to pursue precisely such desires.

The system imposed by imperialist forces in the Middle East is construed as seeking to deny justice to the Muslims under their rule. It is this denial that defines oppression and is seen to have led to the economic and political inequities experienced both in Iran and Lebanon. True Muslims, it follows, do whatever it takes to expose that injustice and bring

about a just system of governance. This is precisely the role that Husayn and all martyrs who follow him fulfilled. Such a framework is likewise evident in statements by martyrs recognizing that justice only exists in the system revealed by God. When Hizbollah martyr Jamal Sati lamented about "how principles and morals fell apart," and wondered "how someone might martyrize for the sake of these principles," it was the system of Islam he spoke of. It is also visible in the above references to the kingdom of the Mahdi whose rule, in the words of Hizbollah martyr Samir Mohammad Mattout, "will spread justice in the world after it was filled with injustice and oppression." Belonging to God obliges martyrs to act according to the law He gave to mankind; it obliges them to act as befits a Muslim, no matter the circumstances. It just so happens that in this historical moment acting as a true Muslim is constructed to mean striving for a free community separate from imperialist rule, even if that means sacrificing one's life in the struggle.

Demands to act Muslim, defined as according to the system of behavior laid down by God through his Prophet, lie at the center of calls to martyrdom and many testaments of martyrs themselves. It is this connection that leads Iranian martyr Sayyid Mamoud Zargar to link his act of martyrdom to his mother's educational efforts, his brother's faith and his sister's *hijab*, the headscarf "which is her attire of war." All these things, Zargar holds, are in line with the true requirements of Islam and therefore take part in the same battle. It also gives context to the statement made by his compatriot Mostafa Saidi, who reminded his wife "our union began with the motto of Islam and faith, and henceforth we tried to live every day differently and to implement the commandments of Islam. You know well that my life has been devoted to realizing the faith in Islam… It is in confronting the calamities and difficulties of life that we appreciate the pleasure of devotion to God." Islam must direct all

activity, Saidi intimates, and their level of difficulty is proportionate to the level of devotion displayed. However, all are equal in that they are what are required of a Muslim.[563]

Accurately understanding those requirements is what leads to the importance of the scholars and the jurists that gained authority in Khomeini's activation of Shi'ism. Repeatedly throughout his public speeches Khomeini praised the scholars and jurists as agents of justice, a sentiment reflected in the testament of Samir Mohammed Mattout on the Lebanese side and Ahmad Sanezadeh on the Iranian. The scholars and jurists who have studied the Qur'an and Sunnah are most fit to determine "true" Islam. Focusing on the authority inherent in those with the greatest level of knowledge of Islam is what inspired Aliasghar Noori to contend "those who today disagree with the Imam [Khomeini], they would have disagreed with Imam Hossein too had they lived in his time, and should the Mahdi arrive, they would continue to disagree." A direct link of legitimacy is drawn from the Prophet to Husayn, and from Husayn to Khomeini, and, for some Hizbollah martyrs like Qintar, extends to the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah. Legitimate authority stems from the perceived ability to accurately and effectively interpret the commands of God laid down in Islamic doctrine. Authority is a product of knowing how to be a good Muslim.

Martyrs are committed to establishing a just society, and equally unwilling to act in any way that may participate in bringing about an existence of injustice and oppression. Such participation not only comes from actively proselytizing for imperialist rule, but also comes as a result of those unwilling to oppose such a rule. Shi'a quietism before Khomeini could be interpreted as just such an act, as their dismissal of the political world could be seen to have paved the way for illegitimate governments dominating Muslim communities. Shariati reminded people that the Ummayyad regime had offered Husayn the option to peacefully

retire into study in Damascus, but Husayn knew to do so was to abandon his responsibilities to his fellow Muslims. His duty as a follower of Islam was to combat oppression wherever it appeared, and that same duty was at issue in this period of history.

The constant frame of Karbala served to represent all Muslims as facing the same choice, and the martyrs as those who made the same decision as Husayn. Shi'ites were reliving the situation of Karbala, where they either joined the side of Husayn and used their lives in defense of the truth of Islam, or they sided with those who slaughtered their religious icon. Or in the words of martyr Shahid Mirzapur, "if we are not with the Imam then we are with the devil. Hence, we must always be obedient to the Imam for obedience to the Imam is submission to God and disobedience to the Imam is disobedience to the command and order of God." Khomeini is Husayn, Husayn is the Prophet, and obedience to the Prophet is submission to God. The martyr is therefore the one who witnesses the truth of the Islamic system by acting as they are commanded by the Islamic authority, who best understands the will of God laid down in *shari'ah*, no matter what the cost. They are celebrated for sacrificing any and all egoistic desires on the altar of duty. Martyr Salah Ghandour expresses it succinctly: "if the price of my love to You [Allah] was to be cut into pieces my heart shall always be devoted to you."

Closing his discussion of the figure of the *shahid*, Ali Shariati argued that it is only thanks to the martyr that the nation of Islam could continue to existence.

> It is in this way that the dying of a human being guarantees the life of a nation. His *shahadat* is a means by which faith can remain. It bears witness to the fact that great crimes, deception, oppression and tyranny rule. It proves that truth is being denied. It reveals the existence of values which are destroyed and forgotten. It is a red protest against a black sovereignty. It is a shout of anger in the silence which has cut off tongues.[564]

Shariati contends that the exposing power of the martyr, whose sacrifice of his life in his commitment to duty serves as a demonstration of the truth of Islam. The martyr's death

communicates: “we have written [God’s] message onto the face of history with our blood, saying: in our time we were with our Imam” according to Bijam Muhammadian. They declare their affiliation with literally all they have, and in doing so become an example for all who seek to follow Islam.

The power of such a message is undeniable, and many martyrs express their confidence that it will reach those they seek. Martyr Jamal Sati asks that “others soon follow my example in more suicide operations that will surely lead to victory.” Likewise, Sayyid Mamoud Zargar says “I shall give my life in ease knowing that you will continue in my path.” Having themselves been so moved by the tales of Husayn and other martyrs, these individuals feel confident about the perpetuation of their struggle. Their own acts become one more link in the chain of martyrdom that connects them to Husayn. And like him, it is the sign of the most upright fortitude, the virtue most desperately needed during their historical moment.

Nasrallah echoed Shariati’s words when he told an audience:

> The resistance lost martyrs, and so did the army, and these martyrs bore witness to how this resistance, steadfastness, presence and honor were displayed on the field. They are also the real witnesses to life. The blood of the resistance and of the army’s martyrs is calling out, and the echo of their voice is reverberating in all ears. Let no one believe that this nation has died; look at how life goes on in Lebanon, clamoring with power and blood, *jihad* and martyrdom; such a nation can never die.[565]

The nation that springs from soil watered by the blood of martyrs is the one whose inhabitants follow the example of the martyr and act as befits Muslim men and women in all things. The character of the society sought is an existence based on the Qur’an and Sunnah. This is the goal of every religious authority and martyr discussed in this chapter. In order for such an existence to come about, people must be committed to enacting Islam, to bring it into existence by acting in the ways they believe they are compelled to by divine fiat. The Islamic

community can only be created if people are willing to sacrifice everything in its service. Individually they must choose to sacrifice their own personal desires – which exist on a spectrum from material comfort to physical existence – in preference of acting as God demands.

Conclusion

Writing on American soil in 1787, Thomas Jefferson expressed his belief that "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."[566] Two hundred years later Ayatollah Khomeini said "The tree of Islam can only grow if it is constantly fed with the blood of martyrs."[567] A few short years later Hizbollah member Shadi Sleyman al-Nabaheen wrote "The tree of Islam is continuously nourished with the blood of martyrs so that it can provide shade to those who come after us."[568] Different from the two political leaders, after penning his testament al-Nabaheen left to seek his own martyrdom by blowing himself up in an attempt to kill the enemies of Islam and a public demonstration of his commitment to the laws of Allah.

Each who relied on the metaphor of the tree recognized an exceptional power coming from those who sacrifice themselves: the continued existence of values that lay at the core of a just existence. As early twentieth century experiences of dispossession and oppression connected Shi'ites in Iran and Lebanon, along with displaced Palestinian Sunnis, a common Muslim identity began to be espoused, one that demanded life be administered in accordance with Islamic law. During the same period and responding to the same situation came Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, who invigorated a dormant Shi'a political fervor that led to the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, administered by the most accomplished interpreters of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Inspired by a means to regain dignity lost under tyranny, members of

both Hizbollah and the Iranian Basij corps saw themselves obliged to battle against the secular governments that sought to make a blind faith of Islam, and determining life solely on egoist and materialist principles. Building upon constructions of *jihad* that had circulated in the Arab world for decades, and bulwarked by the sacred model of Husayn ibn Ali whose experience provided the frame by which to understand their own, men and women sought to use their own lives in sorties against the enemy who threatened the continued existence of God's law. Their acts of sacrifice were dedicated to establishing an existence determined by God's revelation for all Muslims, a goal that was worth their own loss of life.

By publicly acting in ways believed to support and induce a system of governance based on God's laws, they make of themselves a spectacle which draws attention and tries to dictate how their situation is interpreted. Both the image of the Basij human waves, calmly marching upon their enemies shouting for Husayn and Khomeini as bullets tore through them, and the spectacular and unexpected explosions produced by human bombs served to jolt people into facing what they may have ignored. They frame the circumstances confronting Shi'ites as a second Karbala where Husayn's party can follow him in martyrdom, standing with him when their ancestors turned away. Doing so was seen to be nothing more than expected of dutiful Muslims.

The first pillar of Islam is the confession of faith, a public declaration that "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." With this statement an individual declares fealty to the Divine as revealed in the Qur'an, and dedicates themselves to a life in compliance with Islamic doctrine. It establishes one as a Muslim. However, a simple declaration does not insure constancy; only actions can do that, which is reflected in the other four pillars focusing on activity: prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage. But at the core

of Muslim identity remains the profession of faith, known by the Arabic term *shahadah*, which possesses a linguistic connection to the *shahid* who have concerned us in these pages. Martyrdom is the highest act of devotion, the definitive performance of a commitment to the doctrine of God with all one has, regardless of the consequences. While professed Muslims could always prove their words a lie by becoming an apostate, the martyr forestalls any such possibility by ending their life in a way determined by Islam. By refusing to let any concerns come between them and their resolve to determine life on the basis of God's revelation, the martyr provides an act of witness that serves as an example to others and a piece of evidence in support of their conception of the truth. Truth, if it indeed be truth, is always operative, and must be consistently followed by those who adhere to it.

"Suicide bombings" are often framed as the antithesis of liberty, as they are seen to target those who claim to be representatives of freedom and justice. Those who give their lives in "martyrdom operations," however, understand themselves as supporting a just system that will ultimately redeem all of society. The visions of cosmic order undergirding such beliefs vary, but adherents share an unrelenting attachment to their system. Martyrdom operations are largely determined in popular discourse by their deployment of violence, especially on civilians, but analyzing the symbolic complexes put to use in the last testaments by those who go to become *istishhadi* show such to be a byproduct rather than central aim of their performance. More fundamental is a desire to inaugurate God's just kingdom on earth by the only means that are left to them, their own deaths. Engaging in obligatory *jihad* to defend the core of their version of Islam, they perform a spectacular act of resistance that inspires others to follow suit by symbolically enacting a sacred model of ethical perfection. If, as Khomeini routinely repeated, every day became Ashura, and everywhere became

Karbala, then every martyr became Husayn and knew good and well the stakes of the conflict – the truth – and what was required of them – their lives. In the next chapter we will see precisely this same dynamic at work in a context that is usually and contrastingly seen as nonviolent: the Buddhist country of Tibet which is the home of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a global symbol of peaceful resistance.

Chapter 4

Burning Buddhas: Constructing Tibetan Self-Immolators as Martyrs

Introduction

On the 27th of February 2009, a twenty-four-year-old monk from the Kirti Gompa[569] named Tabey walked to a busy crossroads of Ngaba Town in the Ngaba and Qiang Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, doused himself in kerosene and struck a lighter. Angered at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) canceling of a religious festival, the young monk took drastic measures to voice his anger in an area where dissenting speech is often silenced. As the flames engulfed him, he waved a Tibetan flag with an image of the Dalai Lama at its center and called for freedom in Tibet, until security forces shot him and extinguished his flames after he fell to the ground. Tabey became the first, but far from the last Tibetan to self-immolate in the 21st century.

Since Tabey's spectacular death, over one hundred and forty more Tibetans have publicly burned themselves throughout Tibet. Their deaths occur amidst tensions on the plateau where the Chinese state has placed restrictions Tibetan religious cultural practices, exiled the Dalai Lama and imprisoned other religious leaders while increasing military presence in Tibetan neighborhoods and monasteries. Moreover, charges of secret detentions, torture and forced sterilization by the People's Republic of China (PRC) are exacerbated by a steady influx of Han Chinese workers settling in lands traditionally understood to be part of Tibet. Tibetans face travel restrictions and telecommunications are increasingly difficult and dangerous to transmit. Yearning to take action, Tabey and others have resorted to voluntary

suffering and death in self-immolation[570] while yelling slogans decrying Chinese occupation, extolling Tibetan unity and demanding the return of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama.

A number of Tibetan expressions have been used to describe the act of self-immolation, including "to burn oneself" (*rang sreg*), "offering fire to the body" (*rang lus me mchod*), "to give one's body" (*lus sybin*) or "to burn [one's body] as an offering lamp" (*mar mer sbar*).[571] Across the board, Tibetans refer to self-immolators as *pawo* (W: *dpa 'bo*), a term closely related to 'hero' but often translated into English as "martyr." The Tibetan Youth Congress, an extreme nationalist group seeking political freedom in Tibet, commonly calls these men and women martyrs,[572] and a main road in Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama lives in exile with a large Tibetan community is known as "Martyr Street" (*Pawoe Sanglam*). The Tibetan National Martyrs' Memorial and Tibetan Martyr Pillar stand in Dharamsala, with the word carved into stone outside the Dalai Lama's domicile in the McLeod Ganj neighborhood. A compilation of information about the first twenty-eight self-immolations by the Tibetan group the Domey Exile Solidarity Alliance, *The Iron Hare: Flames of Resistance*, is dedicated to "the brave men, women and children who died as martyrs to the cause of a free Tibet."[573]

The term "martyr" has its roots in the Abrahamic religions already discussed, but in a Buddhist majority region the concept has also found purchase. Some scholarly commentators like Katia Buffetrille argue against calling the self-immolators 'martyrs', due to the term's Christian context carrying the sense of those who die rather than giving up beliefs, thereby overdetermining our understanding of these actions.[574] Likewise Margaret Gouin begins her analysis of the self-immolations with the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of martyr, seeking to discover whether the self-immolations could conceivable be understood by a

concept that has traditionally centered around theistic belief.[575] Jack Lee Downey also seeks to use martyrdom as a window into the self-immolations, approaching these autocremations as manifestations of "communicative suffering," a label to which I am sympathetic.[576] Consistent with my own purposes, Downey does not seek to determine whether or not these acts qualify as martyrdoms, but rather uses the term as a means to highlight the sacred aspects of their deaths and bring them into conversation with other forms of religious deaths. This chapter expands on those same conceptions, and I contend that using the lens of martyrdom to frame these deaths can both elucidate their performative logics and reveal similarities between social expectations in widely varying contexts.

In what follows I will examine why how the discourse of martyrdom is used regarding these self-immolators, and how these acts might function as 'witness' for the Tibetan collectivity. I will look to discover how calling these self-immolations "martyrdoms" prefigures them within a certain religious and/or political frame? What are these martyrdoms hoping to accomplish, and by what means? in what ways do these deaths and the context within which they are performed resonate with the other cases analyzed above? Why does the level of pain experienced – and the response to that pain – appear linked to their efficacy? The answers to these questions will increase our appreciation of the complexities and stakes of the situation in Tibet.

To answer these questions, I examine the last statements (*khachem*) left behind by self-immolators within their political and religious context to uncover the structures of meaning that guide their experience inspire and legitimize the fiery destruction of these men and women's bodies.[577] In 2012, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) published *Storm in the Grasslands: Self-Immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy*, which contained over two

hundred and sixty pages of analysis, images and profiles of self-immolators, including translations of the statements left behind by those who grace their pages.[578] Many of the *khachem* used here come from this resource, but many others have been taken from news sources, particularly Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, who operate both Tibetan and English webpages that make these texts available.

While others studies have looked to these texts for insight into the religious influences of self-immolation, many look only at texts written by religious professionals – Lama Sobha's recorded final statement before he self-immolated on January 8, 2012 being perhaps the favorite of scholarly analysts. Delivered as a dharma talk, a kind of Buddhist sermon interpreting and elaborating on Buddhist philosophy, his statement is littered with Buddhist symbolism and sentiment. As one of only two Buddhist masters to have self-immolated (the other being Tulku Athup, who self-immolated with his niece on April 6, 2012), his words are extremely important and will be examined in several places below. However such preference has two main failings: first, it prefigures the place of religion in these acts on the basis of one actor – an actor who has devoted their entire life to their tradition and would therefore naturally accentuate such beliefs. It therefore marginalizes the reasoning offered by others, both religious and lay. Second, it plays into scholarly biases towards religious elites, which has in the past resulted in the minimizing of devotional forms of Buddhism in favor of more abstract philosophies promulgated by elites.

Rather than giving preference to any single statement, I focus the analysis below on symbolic complexes evident in the majority of extant statements. Including those printed by ICT, I have gathered a collection of nineteen *khachem*, along with text from pamphlets, interviews given by survivors after the fact, and other first-hand accounts. More weight will

be given to those written by Tibetans inside Tibet than those few Tibetans in the diaspora who performed the act, not to suggest these latter are inauthentic, but rather to elaborate upon a common experience of Tibetans under Chinese rule; those living in India and other areas of South Asia have different perspectives influenced by more cosmopolitan conversation partners which is reflected in their statements. In hopes of identifying a common thematic in these statements I will base my analysis in indigenous Tibetan self-immolations, but will use sources from outside the plateau to identify significant parallels.

For help contextualizing these statements I rely on popular Mahayana Buddhist narratives, and the statements of the XIV Dalai Lama. While Vajrayana Buddhism is the dominant school in Tibet, with a heavy focus on tantric ritual practices performed by religious elites, I will focus on Mahayana texts for two main reasons: first, Mahayana texts are known to a wider proportion of Tibetans, while the ritual manuals of Vajrayana are restricted to those with advanced spiritual training. Concentrating on tantric texts would predetermine self-immolation as an act similarly restricted, and therefore available to Buddhist masters alone. While two Buddhist masters have self-immolated to date, the majority of *pawo* have been laypeople (for reasons explored below). Determining self-immolation as an advanced tantric ritual would exclude these or contend that they were deficient, an assertion utterly absent in the commentaries on the acts. Second, the moral narratives of Mahayana Buddhism are familiar to lay practitioners and elites both, providing a wider area of influence. Those texts examined here are known to all Tibetans, which means an expansive and flexible interpretive field within which self-immolation is understood.

Statements by Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama, comprise the last major source of material for this chapter. From 1959 to 2011, he gave an annual address to Tibetans on

March 10th, the anniversary of his exile from Tibet. These statements provide not only his plans and hopes for Tibetans, but also shows the rhetorical frames he uses to situate the Tibetan plight. A variety of these annual speeches will be referenced below, all of which were taken already translated from the archives of the Dalai Lama's official website.[579]

Self-immolation was not a common political or religious practice in Tibet before 2009.[580] Seeking to understand its place in the Tibetan imaginary, many scholars have sought to understand these acts within the horizons of Buddhism, the dominant religion of the region.[581] Buddhism is often held to be a religion of peace, and these agonizing acts of self-killing conflict with the image of saffron-robed monks sitting serenely in prayer. That juxtaposition, however, gained prominence in Malcolm Browne's 1963 photograph of the Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc sitting calmly in the lotus position while burning in protest against the Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem. Duc's act was done to demonstrate against the persecution of Buddhists, and the shocking image captured the imagination of Westerners who were focused on events in Vietnam while becoming increasingly fascinated by the spiritual practices of South Asia. Considering the prominence of Duc's act in Western media, it is not surprising that some western scholars have sought to affirm him as the model for the Tibetan cases.[582]

Parallels between Duc's act and the self-immolations in Tibet seem ready at hand; auto-cremation is the chosen form of self-killing in both cases, Duc was a Buddhist monk as were many of the Tibetan self-immolators, and both were acting against a government seen to be threatening their traditional way of life. However there are good reasons to look beyond Duc's protest in trying to understand Tibetan self-immolation. As Robbie Barnett has pointed out, Duc's strategy was based on the relative weakness of Diem's government and his heavy

reliance on international support, and as a majority of Vietnamese citizens were Buddhist, charges of anti-Buddhism had a significant impact on Vietnamese and Western audiences who were showing an increased interest in Eastern spiritualities.[583]

Tibetan self-immolators, on the contrary, confront a strong centralized government in Beijing, largely independent of international support. Moreover, there is little reason to think that Browne's photograph and Duc's protest resonated in Tibet like it did in the east, due to less concern around the events in Vietnam and the scarce technology of communication on the plateau. Any argument that Tibetans merely copy Duc – giving their lives in sheer surface mimesis without any further considerations – would treat Tibetans as being without agency, copying foreign models rather than finding inspiration in indigenous models of action.[584]

Even apart from Duc, all media reports and most scholarly analyses have labeled these acts as a kind of protest.[585] Auto-cremation's place in what Tsering Shakya terms the "global repertoire of protest"[586] has been reaffirmed by Jan Palach's actions during Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" and Mohammed Bouazizi's self-burning in Tunisia which sparked the Arab Spring.[587] Some scholars like Michael Biggs have sought to place Tibetan self-immolation into this context of "suicide protest" rather than Buddhism.[588] However, when the popular monk Thich Nhat Hanh tried explaining Duc's self-immolation to Martin Luther King Jr., he contended that the act is not fully encapsulated by the category of protest, and exceeds our normative moral and political categories.[589] Chinese intellectual and Tibetan commentator Wang Lixiong likewise found that protesting for international attention is rarely mentioned as the driving motivation in the final words of Tibetan self-immolators.[590] The majority rather communicated that their deaths were intended as an act performed in support of rather than publicizing of the Tibetan cause.[591]

While the Tibetans who have self-immolated in the 21st century vary in age, sex, and occupation, some trends can be noted at the outset. In terms of geography, the self-immolations have been concentrated in the areas of Amdo and Kham of the eastern provinces of Tibet. These are Tibetan areas outside the traditional lands of Ü-Tsang, today known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). The TAR and its capital of Lhasa is often considered "political Tibet," while the areas of Amdo and Kham (which are within the borders of China's Sichuan, Qinghai and Ganzi provinces) have been referred to as "ethnographic Tibet," "eastern Tibet" or "traditional Tibet."[592] These are the lands at the heart of the self-immolations, which have a high concentration of ethnic Tibetans and have seen a huge influx of Han Chinese to the areas, reinforced by the high speed Qinghai-Tibet railway connecting the urban centers of China and encouraging further relocation.[593] As far back as 1995 the XIV Dalai Lama expressed concern about Tibetans in these areas being able to maintain their distinct Buddhist culture and identity as minorities in Chinese provinces.[594]

At the heart of the self-immolations is Kirti Monastery, in Ngaba Town of the Ngaba and Qiang Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province (the traditional Tibetan land of Amdo). Not only was Tabey and approximately two out of three self-immolators through 2011 from Kirti and its sister nunnery Mamae Dechen Chokorling, but the area was also the first to feel the brunt of many of the PRC's programs.[595] Founded in 1870 (though claiming a lineage as far back as the 14th century), Kirti is a monastery of the Gelug, or "Yellow Hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism, that sees the Dalai Lama at its head.[596] The monastery's head, Kirti Rinpoche, went into exile where he remains alongside the Dalai Lama; his interpretation of Kirti's centrality to the self-immolations stems from the fact that Kirti and Ngaba was the first to have contact with Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA) as

they followed the retreat of Chiang Kai-shek's Red Army in 1935. From there members of the Kirti community (and the larger area of Ngaba) consistently felt themselves on the front line in the conflict with the PRC, which has become a point of pride for Kirti monks.

It is noteworthy that the first modern self-immolators including Tabey were religious ascetics, hailing from Gelugpa monasteries in eastern Tibet.[597] From 2009 until February 2012 all self-immolators were presently or previously members of the Buddhist clergy. During 2012, the year with the highest number of self-immolations (at the time of this writing), a shift began where laypeople began performing their deaths in the same way. Of the ninety-two self-immolations in that year, 39% were (or once were) monks or nuns, while 42% were not, with 13% being from nomadic tribes who were being forcibly relocated through Chinese policy.[598] In 2013, 43% of *pawo* were monks or nuns and 47% laypeople, including 10% nomadic persons.[599] *Pawo* are not restricted to advanced students of Buddhism, suggesting the logics behind these acts are not dependent on advanced Buddhist training and competency. It is possible that this trend challenges the traditional connection to spiritual purity laypeople experience vicariously through Buddhist clergy, or it may stem from a continued legitimation of the act assured by spiritual elites.[600] Here I just wish to point out that explanations of self-immolations relying on advanced tantric practices have significant explanatory problems. However, a too firm boundary between religion, political action and social belonging in Tibet will obfuscate more than it will elucidate.

Due to the prevalence of the Tibetan flags and pleas for *rangzen*, independence, by radical groups like the Tibetan Youth Congress, we may be inclined to link the self-immolations solely to the movement for Tibetan independence. As we will see, the history of Tibet that the self-immolations take off from is one of continued negotiations of Tibetan

sovereignty, and the relationship with the PRC is certainly central to understanding the situation on the plateau. However, as both Wang Lixiong and Robbie Barnett have argued, to consider only independence as a motivator simplifies a complicated socio-political situation, and reduces many hopes to a single cause that fits nicely within larger scholarly frames of nationalism.[601] Lixiong has further shown such a hermeneutic is not supported by the words left behind by self-immolators, which only occasionally speaks to a desire for independence, but show a much wider variety of goals.[602] While there certainly is an independence movement that celebrates and seeks to claim the social capital these auto-cremations produce, there are also many who would accept meaningful autonomy under Chinese rule as long as certain facets of Tibetan cultural life are upheld.

These auto-cremations are multifaceted. Their opposition is simultaneously symbolic and direct, seemingly performed to highlight oppression in a spectacular way while also taking steps toward its solution. Elsewhere I have argued that these acts do not fit neatly into constructed categories of violence or nonviolence, as such classifications require affirming what authority structures can dictate prohibitions against suffering and what transgressions of those prohibitions are sanctioned. If we accept they are consistent with Buddhist principles of *ahiṃsa*, actions that do not harm, we must simultaneously deny the PRC's perspective that these are transgressive acts of harm against Chinese subjects who the government is responsible to protect. Such determinations necessarily implicate us in questions of legitimacy and power; violence and nonviolence are descriptors of means towards ends, and the ability to determine what ends Tibetans can use their bodies towards is precisely what is at issue in this conflict.[603]

In what follows I will begin by laying out the broad historical and political history that has shaped the relationship between the Tibetan people and the PRC that forms the context for the self-immolations. I then describe how a perceived state of siege that has been present in Tibet for decades resulted in interpretations of Tibetan suffering as necessary for protecting the Dharma from extinction.[604] Following that I analyze the deep roots these conceptions have in Tibetan self-understanding and how they have been bolstered by an economy of legitimate violence that seeks to determine right conduct in alignment with Buddhist values. This sovereign imaginary provides rhetorics of sacrifice employed by self-immolators and those who celebrate these deaths to qualify them as sacred deaths performed for the Tibetan people. I conclude by showing how these frameworks result in a perceived duty of Tibetans to enact the truth of "Tibet" by using their existence to bring it into reality, compounded by a perception that capitulating to the PRC's program means participation in destroying the organizing principles of Tibetan life. By ending their lives in ways sanctioned by the Tibetan imaginary but prohibited by the PRC, self-immolators demonstrate their commitment to Tibet and commend their perception of reality through their burning bodies.

The Conflict with the People's Republic of China

For centuries the political authorities of China have played some role in determining the shape of life in Tibet, resulting in an infringed sense of identity and sovereignty that has characterized Tibetan life for a very long time.[605] Nangdrol, a Tibetan who self-immolated in September of 2012, wrote:

> This evil China has invaded Tibet,
> It is not possible to live under this evil rule,
> The evil China having no love and compassion,
> Inflict us with unbearable beatings and pain,
> Ultimately to smother Tibet.

May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for many ten thousand years.[606]

Nangdrol believes life under Chinese rule prevents his and his fellows from living like Tibetans ought. The practices that are forbidden by the PRC are seen to define life as a Tibetan, therefore the choice facing Tibetans is to lose their lives, or lose that which gives their lives meaning. Calling life "unbearable" due to "immense suffering" certainly suggests the melancholy and hopelessness that leads to suicide, but those who are understood to use their deaths in service to something sacred show that Tibet exceeds Tibetans.[607] Recounting some of the important developments in the relationship between the two collectives will help us understand the complex association that provides the foundation for Tibetans imaginings of themselves as historical, political and religious agents.

The relationship between Tibet and China is traceable at least as far back as the 7th century, when the first Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo, was given a Chinese princess for a bride, officially linking the two societies for the first time.[608] Early in its existence the Kingdom of Tibet commanded powerful armies, even conquering areas of China in the 8th century and negotiating treaties with the Tang dynasty in the early 9th century. In 1207 the Tibetans submitted to the army of Genghis Khan, setting up a 'priest-patron' relationship with the Mongols where the latter would protect the Tibetan people in exchange for spiritual guidance.[609] This relationship with the Mongols continued in the 17th century, when the Mongol warlord Gushri Khan helped establish the V Dalai Lama (Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso) as the political power in Tibet. With the Khan's help, the "Great Fifth" was able to bring his Gelug sect to the pinnacle of the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy and implant himself as leader of a now (loosely) unified Tibetan kingdom. As a reward for Gushri Khan's support of the Dalai Lama, and thereby the Buddhist dharma itself, he was named Dharmarāja, a "Dharma King." This was one of the key moments in Tibet's relationship with the PRC, as the Chinese state

sees itself as the inheritors of the Mongol polity, while Tibet recognizes no such transmission.[610]

Following the ascension of the "Great Fifth," Tibet experienced something of a reversal of fortune, and found themselves governed by China's Manchu (or Qing) dynasty during the early 18th century. The extent to which China exercised direct control over Tibetan lands during that period is debated, but it seems clear that by the middle of the next century Chinese authority had mostly evaporated from the plateau, leaving the Tibetans largely self-governing. Preeminent Tibetan historian Melvyn Goldstein qualifies such influence as "miniscule," and supports that claim by reference to multiple wars fought throughout the 19th century that were engaged and settled by Tibetans completely apart from China's input and influence.[611] What relationship there was between China and Tibet at the time was understood by Tibetans as *chōyōn*, a symbiotic relationship between spiritual teacher (i.e. the Dalai Lama) and lay patron (i.e. the Chinese Emperor). This relationship saw the Tibetans as the authorities in the religious sphere (like the priest-patron relationship established with the Mongols), which counters the subject-ruler configuration averred by historians of the PRC.[612] Coming into the 20th century, therefore, while there was a recognized relationship with China, Tibetans still saw Tibet as sovereign unto itself.

It is the negotiation and contestation between vying political institutions during the 20th century that is salient for understanding the self-immolations. This century's first decades saw the Qing dynasty give way to the People's Republic of China, while the British colonial project extended into the Tibetan plateau. These two incidents occasioned the Simla Convention of 1914, where officials from all three nations sought an answer to the question of Tibet's governance and sovereignty. While never ratified by the PRC, Simla's resolutions

divided Outer Tibet, where the Dalai Lama held full political sway, from Inner Tibet, which would be under Chinese rule but where Tibetans would have significant autonomy. Assurances were made that "nothing shall be held to prejudice the existing rights of the Tibetan Government in Inner Tibet, which include the power to select and appoint the high priests of monasteries and to retain full control in all matters affecting religious institutions."[613] Simla also held the stipulation that Tibetans were not to consider China a foreign country, an ambiguous statement whose meaning will be worked out over decades.

In the 1940s Sino-Tibetan relations plummeted again, but China's involvement in World War II along with British pressure resulted in the inability of Chiang Kai-Shek and his Kuomintang party to militarily impose their will in Tibet.[614] Legitimate concerns about interference from the United States among other nations resulted in attempts of Chiang's Chinese Nationalist Party to extend friendship to Tibet and even sending arms and munitions for the country's protection in 1945.[615] The chaos surrounding Japan's surrender and China's concomitant civil war gave the Tibetan government the opportunity to expel all Chinese officials from Tibet.[616] However only a year after the Kuomintang lost control of China in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA) declared their intention to liberate Tibet.

Although Mao would become infamous in Tibet, early on there was hope for peaceful diplomacy between the two governments. At the time the Tibetans were in no position to repel an army the likes of the PLA, but Chairman Mao opted for a gradual implementation of socialist institutions in Tibet, hoping to gain more by showing respect to Tibet's cultural institutions.[617] PLA soldiers were given instructions intended to belie any concerns of aggressive oppression, including being "taught the local religion, customs and language, and

they were under strict orders not to requisition even a cup of tea from local people."[618] In the meantime, Chinese ambassadors were in discussions with Tibetan authorities, looking to establish China's suzerainty over Tibet on the explicit condition that Tibetans stipulate they are part of China.[619] In 1950 the "liberation" of Tibet began, complicating future negotiations.[620] That same year Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama, officially took political power in Tibet, at a mere sixteen years of age.

On the 23rd of May, 1951, Tibetan and Chinese Communist Party leaders signed the "Seventeen-Point Plan for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet," a document aimed at cementing Chinese administration of the plateau while retaining the central structures of Tibetan identity.[621] The language of the Plan included overtures to "Tibetan nationality," and ultimately resolved to preserve Tibetan autonomy (Pt. 3), uphold the "status, functions and powers" of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama (Pts. 4-6), uphold freedom of religion (Pt. 7) and maintain Tibetan language education (Pt. 9). In exchange, Tibet would provide requisite funds for their administration (Pt. 16), the Tibetan army would be folded into the People's Liberation Army (Pt.8) and assist in driving out imperialist aggressors (Pts. 2, 15), and first and foremost "the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the motherland – the People's Republic of China" (Pt. 1).[622] In exchange for assurances that Tibetan life could continue largely as it had for centuries, Tibetans accepted the suzerainty of the PRC. With its signing, the Seventeen-Point Plan officially established Chinese rule over the Tibetan plateau, and marked the end of *de jure* Tibetan independence.[623]

Even with such an officially recognized agreement, there remains a perception among Tibetans that the Seventeen-Point Agreement was broken by the Chinese, and is therefore no longer binding. This view was supported by the XIV Dalai Lama who quickly grew

disillusioned with communism as a means of social change and argued that the actions of Mao Zedong and the CCP went directly against promises to protect the religion, culture and traditional values of Tibet.[624] This was seen as particularly the case outside the TAR, where the CCP had been acting more directly, pushing through sharp "democratic reforms" and land redistribution in Sichuan and Ganzi in 1956. This led to the Khampa Uprising that year, which was focused in the same areas of traditional Tibet that today are witnessing self-immolations.[625] For years after armed rebels in Kham and Amdo battled the PLA as guerilla fighters, resulting in brutal reprisals by the CCP.

Reports of torture, starvation and sexual violence against Khampa supporters were rife, but the resistance continued into the 1960s and even enjoyed some support from the United States' Central Intelligence Agency.[626] Relations between the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa and the resistance organization had long been acerbic, and deteriorated further when officials in Lhasa refused to intervene, choosing rather to honor the Seventeen Point Agreement in the TAR. Kham and Amdo ultimately experienced the destruction of over 90% of their monasteries, which had served as communication conduits and power centers for the rebellion, along with the imprisonment and killing of hundreds of clergy.[627] Despite the government in Lhasa seeking to stay apart from the uprising, relations with the CCP worsened and ultimately resulted in the exile of the Dalai Lama from Tibet in March of 1959.

The XIV Dalai Lama gave his first speech to the United States on the Tibet issue in September of 1987. In the following weeks monks and nuns took to the streets of Lhasa to show support for the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way Program" that seeks meaningful autonomy for Tibet along much of the same lines of the Seventeen Point Agreement. On October 2 of

that year, twenty to thirty monks demonstrating in Lhasa were arrested, resulting in a full-scale riot that saw a police station burn and claimed the lives of around a dozen Tibetans. Throughout the next year more nationalist uprisings took place, though none turned into the kind of violence experienced in October until the Great Prayer Festival of March 1988.[628] This festival, central to Tibetan Buddhism in general and the Dalai Lama's Gelug sect in particular, brought thousands of monks into Lhasa. Tthe CCP allowed the festival to go on amidst concerns that the monks (seen as the main instigators) would use the opportunity of such a large gathering to launch further nationalist demonstrations. To the surprise of most observers, the festival was peaceful until its last day, March 5, when one monk's demands for a prisoner's release led to huge masses declaring Tibet's independence from China.[629]

Melvyn Goldstein holds that the anti-Chinese riots that occurred on that day stemmed from a mix of causes, including bitterness over China's actions thirty years prior, the economic programs being forced onto Tibetans and the ongoing restrictions on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism.[630] Deng Xiaoping's installation at the head of the CCP after Mao led to the reduction of some of the more stringent restrictions on the large monasteries of Tibet, but many still remained including limits on the number of monks allowed to study in the monasteries. Such restrictions will remain an issue for those who will self-immolate two decades on.

Six years later the PRC held its Third National Forum on Work in Tibet, aimed at delineating the improvement and development of Tibet through labor programs and out of which came the programs and tactics that appear to have sparked self-immolation as a reaction. Concerned about the "Dalai clique," the perceived separatist authority under the Dalai Lama in exile, the PRC banned images of the religious and political leader, prohibited

the practice of Tibetan Buddhism for students and government workers, and required monks and nuns to denounce the Dalai Lama in writing.[631] The Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party in Tibet, Hao Peng, held that the separatist ambitions of the Dalai Lama justify such actions, and that "No sovereign country in the world would allow the hanging of a portrait of a person like that."[632] One could liken it to the recent debates over the flying of the Confederate Battle flag in the United States; for many, such a symbol of a separate governmental authority being proudly displayed was an offense against America. To rectify this, monasteries saw their pictures of the Dalai Lama replaced with mandatory images of the head of the CCP such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xioaping, and Xi Jinping. This is also in line with the "Nine Must-Haves" decrees of the PRC, which directs all monasteries and nunneries to prominently display the PRC's flag and images of the leaders of the Communist Party.

These are acts of what Martin Riesebrodt labeled superposition, appropriations of sacred places by subsequent ideologies in order to channel the devotion afforded these images toward a different locus.[633] The symbolic substitution is another attempt to reorient the Tibetan political imagination to the leaders of the CCP, who in their own right are pseudo-divinities for many in China. The so-called 'Cult of Mao'[634] has commanded as much obeisance and symbolic power in its atheistic setting as any religion could boast, and installing his images (and those who were conferred his charisma) in place of the Dalai Lama seems an attempt to replace one sacred figure with another. [635]

Unsurprisingly, the Dalai Lama denounced such acts, arguing they amounted to an attack on the practice of Buddhism. With such programs, he held:

> China dropped all pretense of respecting the ancient religious and cultural heritage of Tibet by launching a large-scale reform of its religious policy. The new policy states that "Buddhism must conform to socialism and not socialism to Buddhism…" Under the pretext that religion would have a negative influence on Tibet's economic development, the new policy aims to

> systematically undermine and destroy the distinct cultural and national identity of the Tibetan people.[636]

Tibet's leader clearly understands such actions as counter to the promises made by the PRC to respect their traditions, but in his declamation we can also see part of what angered China. Speaking to his desire to preserve the "national identity" of the Tibetans is read by China as a denial of their Chinese nationality. At this period in the modern nation-state system, only one nationality was allowable, so while China could aver to protect ethnic identity, national identity was wholly the purview of the PRC.

Four years after the National Forum, members of the ultra-nationalist Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) staged a hunger strike in India aimed at coercing the PRC into repealing its programs and gaining independence for the Tibetan people. One who planned to join the hunger strikers was an elderly man named Thupten Ngodup, a Tibetan ex-soldier turned chef whose small abode in Delhi was decorated with pictures of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan flags. In an interview with the Voice of America, he shared his frustration with the failure of the Dalai Lama's Middle Way program, and his pride at taking part in the actions against the oppression of his country. His statements stressed his desire to maximize his suffering in hopes of maximizing his act's efficacy:

> I do not have a hair of doubt or hesitation about giving up my life. This is my stand… When my turn comes to go on hunger strike I have decided to make it more effective. Many Tibetans are now determined to go on the hunger strike unto death... In my own case, I have decided not to accept any kind of massage treatment or drink any water… I am giving up my life to bring about peace and freedom to my unhappy people… I have one hundred per cent confidence that the people inside Tibet will not only continue the struggle but will intensify it. They will never sit back and not struggle.[637]

His ambitions were dashed when the Indian police, perhaps urged on by China, raided the TYC protest on the morning of April 27, 1998 and detained those on hunger strike. Evading the police, Ngodup slipped into a public bathroom, doused himself in gasoline, and ignited the gas upon his exit to become a torch in the middle of a Delhi street. Some report he called

for Tibet's independence as he burned, others that he shouted for the return of the Dalai Lama from exile. Just before Ngodup was pushed to the ground and his flames smothered, he was seen calmly placing his hands together in prayer, ending the scene with a powerful spiritual symbol of discipline and dedication reminiscent of Duc's act in Vietnam. With his death, self-immolation appeared as a means within Tibet to display protest and devotion.[638]

The XIV Dalai Lama visited Ngodup in the hospital, quietly asking that the self-immolator not harbor any resentment towards the Chinese, as dying while experiencing such negative emotions would harm the man's karma and result in a lower rebirth.[639] After being assured that the hunger strikers arrested were not harmed, Ngodup stated that he was pleased and quietly passed away on April 27, 1998. Ngodup's effect on the community of Tibetan exiles would be significant, and his linkage of extreme suffering to help for the Tibetan cause resonates in the actions of others who chose the same form of spectacular death.

The year of Ngodup's death saw the "patriotic re-education" campaigns begin in the Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham. The program teaches a Chinese version of history, approved ways to understand the place of religion and appropriate respect of the proper authorities. It is often framed as 'liberation' from the dangers of religious belief, a common trope in Communist doctrine since Marx, and one heavily expounded on by Mao Zedong. This 'education' operates through "work teams" (*gongzou dui* in Chinese, *ledonrekhag* in Tibetan) travelling to monasteries and nunneries to discuss Tibet as part of the "Great Motherland" of China while at the same time identifying potential problem individuals. According to one source, the work teams demanded that monks and nuns agree to 1) oppose separatism, 2) work towards the unity of Tibet and China, 3) recognize the Panchen Lama that China has appointed (as opposed to the incarnation identified by Tibetans), 4) agree that

the Dalai Lama is a threat to the "unity of the Motherland," and 5) deny that Tibet should be, or ever had been, an independent nation.[640] We can hear the same issues that have been being negotiated in Tibet for centuries, and it is unsurprising that these teams focus especially on the monasteries, which the PRC sees as the power centers of the 'Dalai clique'. It is not surprising that the monk Lobsang Tsultrim, who self-immolated in March of 2012 spoke in his statement of "the forced imposition of the deviant system of 'Patriotic' reeducation in monasteries, which no Tibetan can easily accept." Removing religion from the core of Tibetan life fundamentally shifts the traditional understanding of what it means to be Tibetan.

In 2008 the Olympics were held in Beijing, bringing eyes around the world to focus on China and providing a moment for Tibetans to communicate their plight to a wide audience. That year saw Tibetans rising up around the plateau, and on the March 10th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's exile forty-nine years prior, the largest monasteries in Lhasa staged protests against the excesses of Chinese rule. Some of these protests spiraled out of control, and riots again filled the streets of Tibet.[641] Anxious to quell disquiet at a time when it was seeking to showcase their economic and technological advancements, the PRC responded forcefully by mobilizing large numbers of security personnel, exacerbating tensions on both sides. Tibetans were perceived as the enemy by the Chinese state, and they in turn became more concerned about their eroding cultural identity and strengthened their resolve to maintain the traditions that define them. Tsering Woeser, the Tibetan poet and one of the leading voices on the self-immolations, believes that the auto-cremations continue the protests that began in 2008, as the issues raised in those demonstrations are repeated nearly verbatim by self-immolators.[642] Placing the self-immolations in this longer historical

trajectory certainly supports her assertion, while seeing these issue extending much further into the past.

While these are some of the broad strokes of a nuanced and complicated relationship around what institution has control over the Tibetan plateau, I do not mean to suggest that every Tibetan, or even every self-immolator is fully aware of the intricacies of historic Sino-Tibetan relations. On top of the scores of monks who supported the PLA in the 1940s and 1950s, there are still numerous clergy aligned with the CCP. There are those on both extremes that blame the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Program for the suicides.[643] The foregoing is meant to provide the reader with the background for Tibetan perspectives on the PRC's claim to sovereignty over their lands, and the means by which that sovereignty is sought.

The State of Siege

In the 21st century, plainclothes security officials roam Tibetan streets, and a surveillance grid has been established in neighborhoods and monasteries. I spoke to a Chinese scholar who had seen firsthand the surveillance implemented in ethnic minority lands throughout China and reported a program where areas as small as three square town blocks were assigned their own security team, and the comings and goings of individuals were closely monitored.[644] Communication lines were established between teams, with a centralized administrative core allowing for fast decision making and mobilization between teams. The technological might of China has created a security state of monumental proportions, and it has been buttressed by the omnipresence of agents wielding violence.

For these reasons many commentators describe the Tibetan areas of Amdo and Kham as in a perpetual state of siege, where the boundaries between law and violence have become blurred.[645] In 2009, the program of political re-education started being accompanied by the so-called 'strike hard' campaigns, where Chinese security officials questioned massive numbers of Tibetans suspected of anti-Chinese activity. Such has led the Dalai Lama to lament that Tibetans are being treated like criminals waiting to die merely for acting like Tibetans.[646] These campaigns have resulted in statements like the essay by an exile from Ngaba County who wrote "Ngaba is under a kind of invisible martial law. Communications are closed down, roads are closed, people are prohibited from gathering, normal observances are suspended and so forth. The monasteries and schools have turned into prisons… and a broad crackdown imposed on all monasteries in the region."[647] Perhaps the most poignant description comes from Lobsang, an exiled monk of Kirti Monastery, who told the New York Times "The most uncomfortable thing was seeing soldiers pointing guns at you but not shooting at you. This has been daily life since 2008. For myself, I'd rather get shot than to have them pointing the guns at me every day, twenty-four hours a day."[648] Accusations of torture and extrajudicial killings are regular features of discussions with Tibetans, including many who charge the PRC with forcing sterilization in an attempt to accomplish their goals through reproductive administration.[649] Whether or not the more severe of the charges are true, they shape the Tibetan perspective of their situation as what Giorgio Agamben termed a "zone of indistinction" where law and violence are nearly indistinguishable.[650]

This state of siege is meant to reinforce the PRC's demand that the laws of China must supersede those of any other power structure, and actions to the contrary are penalized with physical suffering and incarceration. Such action is founded on a kind of wager: in order

to avoid such physical pain, Tibetans will do as demanded and stop disobeying; by making the body crushingly present, agents of China hope to silent dissenting Tibetan voices, allowing only loyal speech to be heard.[651] Toward that end, they have made the threat of punishment omnipresent, while also equipping security officials with fire extinguishers in an odd juxtaposition that illustrates the dual nature of sovereign duty; the same agents that inflict pain in support of normative ends are employed in upholding the PRC's biopolitical responsibility of care.[652]

It is this responsibility that has led to statements like that of a PRC security force member speaking to the *Guardian* after the self-immolation of Dorje Rinchen: "Self-immolation is an extreme suicidal behavior that goes against humanity, society and the law, and deprives people of their right to life."[653] As the *de facto* caretakers of the Tibetan population, China's role is to protect the bodies of those within their borders from unauthorized suffering (i.e. outside those sanctioned by authorized PRC officials). Deaths of self-immolators are an affront to Chinese rule, as they are unofficial killings of the PRC's subjects, even though the perpetrator and victim are the same. Designating such acts as "suicides" brings them under the auspices of internal administration, while other statements by Chinese officials frame self-immolation as an action against the state. Raging against the Dalai Lama's unwillingness to condemn the acts, one Security Official blasted the self-immolations as "a disguised form of violence and terrorism" that "actively tried to pursue separatism by harming people,"[654] and references to self-immolators and their conspirators as "terrorists" have become routine.[655] A commentator for China's *The Global Times* went as far to say that the Dalai Lama should not use young monks as "spiritual suicide bombers." By coloring self-immolators with separatist motivation, and especially terrorism, officials

paint these actions as simply another form of rebellion from which any sovereign state has the right to defend itself. The prevailing prediction in the PRC seems to be that with the passing of the Dalai Lama, the problems in Tibet will likewise pass away. According to a Chinese-Tibetan official interviewed in 2011, "younger Tibetans are being educated in the proper way, so they won't cause much trouble."[656] However the young men and women who are being so educated by Chinese re-education programs are the same ones who are sacrificing themselves or celebrating those sacrifices.

In the contest between Tibet and China, the fundamental issue is which set of values will govern life and be seen as legitimate and enforceable. The practices that define Tibetan life are based in the dharma, which is the font of true life in the world. As Ashild Kolas puts it, for Tibetans "religion provides a more legitimate set of values than the Communist Party doctrine. Moral power lies with the congregation of monks and nuns, whereas physical power lies with the security forces."[657] Truth and values stem from the dharma, while the power wielded by the PRC is interpreted as a direct threat to the dharma's existence. Capitulating to the PRC's programs therefore becomes read as participation in a project of destroying the dharma.

This frame has long guided the conflict. During the 1950s the Chinese occupiers were called enemies of the faith (*tendra*), and the most well-known Khampa resistance force was the Voluntary Force for the Defense of the Faith (*tensung thanglang maggar*).[658] Some resistance fighters even "claimed to be the reincarnations of King Gesar, the mythical hero-king of Tibetan epic who fought for the Buddhist religion."[659] These fighters looked to the religious and political scripts for a model for their actions, and in following the paradigm laid out by one of the celebrated figures of Tibetan mythic history they join with them in a

common project. By the mere fact of aligning their actions with the mythical king's, much less claiming to be direct reincarnations, their struggle takes on sacred significance. They fight as Gesar did, to protect the dharma from the agents who seek its destruction.

Such a frame resonates with other prohibitions like the banning of sacred protection cords (which often hold images of deities or spiritual teachers) and the expulsion of large numbers of clergy from monasteries by authorities for being 'unregistered'.[660] Unsurprisingly then, the XIV Dalai Lama has asserted that these injunctions are "intended to deliberately annihilate Buddhism,"[661] and named Mao Zedong as the "destroyer of the dharma."[662] As far back as 1987 he expressed concern that China sought to create a "blind faith" of Tibetan Buddhism,[663] and by 2002 he feared that the Buddhist culture would be completely obliterated.[664] In the starkest terms, he declared that due to the Tibetan's "depths of suffering and hardship … the lineage of the Buddhadharma was severed."[665] The dharma is the organizing principle of Tibetan life; without it, Tibet would not exist.

China's actions are read through the lens of a sacred past, linking the experience of current Tibetans with their ancestors and providing a means by which to understand their experiences as well as their obligations in such a situation. Hans Kippenberg has shown that in order to understand any action with a religious component one must understand the meaning the actors themselves ascribe to it.[666] "Every action presupposes a definition of the situation. This is not generated of necessity by the situation itself, however, but is 'imposed' on the situation by the subjects. If they then act in accordance with this definition, this 'imposition' has real effects."[667] From this perspective, the PRC's actual intent regarding the status of the dharma is not the determining factor of Tibetan response; it is rather the way which Tibetans perceive, explain and ultimately experience such actions.

The perspectives of the self-immolators perpetuate this frame of understanding. As scholar of Tibetan Buddhism José Cabezón has noted, "Tibetans… see the motivation for the self-immolations in largely religious terms – for instance as an act motivated by the wish 'to protect the Buddha's teachings, the source of benefit for all sentient beings.'"[668] *Pawo* likewise speak to the connection between the dharma and Tibet's ultimate disposition. These references sometimes speak directly to the need to protect the dharma, like Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedup (self-immolated together on June 20, 2012) who lamented that they "could not contribute significantly towards the Tibetan religion" or Choephag Kyab and Sonam who stated they lit themselves on fire "for the development of Buddhism." Others speak to a need to act in accordance with Tibetan morality as defined largely by religious sources, such as the cousins Choephag Kyab and Sonam who asked those that mourned them to "follow the advice of the learned Abbots and Tulkus." Monk Tenzin Phuntsog distributed religious leaflets prior to his auto-cremation where he spoke against the depleted kind of religion the CCP was trying to create, and asked his "co-religionists, you who practice the exchange of self for others, reflect on the two abbots, upholders of the teachings, and the monastic community."[669] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the reincarnate Lama Sobha affirms that "it is extremely important to genuinely practice Buddhist principles in order to benefit the Tibetan cause." That cause, however, extends beyond Buddhism through cultural connections laying deep within Tibetan national identity.

Tibetans have responded to the prohibitions of China by destroying their bodies in self-immolation. Jamphel Yeshi, whose self-immolation on March 26, 2012 in New Delhi, India was one of the few to take place outside the borders of traditional Tibet, affirms that the struggle requires the fullest measures of devotion:

> Freedom is the basis of happiness for all living beings. Without freedom, six million Tibetans are like a butter lamp in the wind,[670] without direction. My fellow Tibetans from Three Provinces, it is clear to us all that if we unitedly put our strength together, there will be result. So, don't be disheartened. What I want to convey here is the concern of the six million Tibetans. At a time when we are making our final move toward our goal – if you have money, it is the time to spend it; if you are educated it is the time to produce results; if you have control over your life, I think the day has come to sacrifice your life.[671]

Yeshi implores all Tibetans to use whatever means they have to act toward the goals of freedom for Tibet, and his words suggest that only a coordinated and combined action will bring about the hopes of Tibetans. Every Tibetan, his act shows, has control over his or her own life, and he hopes his death inspires others to feel empowered to use those lives as resources in their struggle.

Constructing the Tibetan Sovereign Imaginary

Tibet's history has been peppered by shifts in foreign policy and contests over authority, but throughout the Tibetan people have maintained a common identity based in their language, cultural traditions, and brand of Buddhism. With the programs of the PRC being seen as aimed precisely at those institutions and practices, Tibetan self-immolators have construed the conflict with China as an attempt to utterly eliminate their identity. *Pawo* Sonam Topgyal who self-immolated on July 9, 2015 is one among many to aver that "the [PRC] government is carrying out policies to stamp out our religion, tradition and culture." The Dalai Lama has likewise signaled that understanding, lamenting in a 2009 speech that "the religion, culture, language and identity, which successive generations have considered more precious than their lives, are nearing extinction."[672] As this system forms the basic structures by which Tibetans understand and experience the world, its loss is literally inconceivable. At least as far back as 1997 the Dalai Lama expressed his concerns about PRC

policies that "aim to systematically undermine and destroy the distinct cultural and national identity of the Tibetan people."[673] This system of order has defined Tibetan life for hundreds of years, and it is now in danger of being lost.

Repeatedly, self-immolators have spoken directly to the necessity of maintaining this identity. In her last statement, nun Sangye Dolma (self-immolated November 25, 2012) expresses a common worry that the coercive powers and structural violence of the PRC will effect a fundamental shift in Tibetan self-understanding, pleading "children of the Snow Lion [a common term for Tibet] / Do not forget that you are Tibetan." Her concern is echoed by Nangdrol who explicitly links his fiery death to his hope that Tibetan identity will be maintained:

> By giving up my life to fire,
> Men and women of Tibet,
> I hope you all will keep unity and harmony,
> Dress Tibetan if you are Tibetan,
> Moreover, you must speak Tibetan.
> Never forget you are Tibetan.[674]

Behind these concern lie a simple premise: without individuals who see themselves as Tibetan and enact their Tibetan-hood in their bodies and actions, Tibet as they know it will cease to be. Even if we hold the position that "Tibet" will continue as long as there is a geographic area designated by that name, the cultural and political institutions of Tibet that have defined life on the plateau would (and perhaps is already beginning to) vanish. More than a geographic label, Tibet is what Elaine Scarry calls a "fictive reality," a way of perceiving the world in accordance with a belief about what should be. Without people dynamically creating their particular understanding of "Tibet" in their actions, it would remain a fiction.

In this way we can understand the reasoning behind insistences to maintain Tibetan culture, language and religion. These three poles of Tibetan identity are consistently mentioned together, and usually interchangeably like in the Dalai Lama's 2009 speech quoted above. In his "Appeal to the Chinese People" in March of 2008, he likewise expressed his "primary concern, as I have repeated time and again, is to ensure the survival of the Tibetan people's distinctive culture, language and identity."[675] In the same speech he notes that Tibetan culture is based in the values of universal compassion, and elsewhere affirmed that "religion constitutes the source of Tibet's national identity, and spiritual values lie at the very heart of Tibet's rich culture."[676] Self-immolators routinely refer to the need to maintain these modes of being as well, conflating the spheres of culture, religion and nation.

Multiple *pawo* speak to the need to save this complex identity of Tibet. Of those who left statements, 58% mentioned their desire that Tibetans uphold Tibetan religion or culture (often both), and 42% insist that Tibetans continue to speak the Tibetan language. The statement of cousins Choephag Kyab and Sonam, who self-immolated together in April of 2012, can serve as a representative example. The two begin their statement by noting:

> The Tibetan nationality is distinct from others as it has its own religion and culture. It is also unique as it shows compassion and love and serves the well-being of others. But the Tibetan Nation was forcibly occupied, oppressed and cheated by China… So we set ourselves on fire for freedom in Tibet, for the development of Buddhism, so all sentient beings can prosper, and for world peace… show loyalty and affection for your people, diligently preserve your culture and do not lose your dignity.[677]

Their words identify but make no distinction between Tibetan culture, religion and identity, but see all as an essential part of what it means to be Tibetan, just like the Dalai Lama's discourse.

Many self-immolators communicated their hope that Tibetans put aside the petty struggles that divide them and act in unity for the Tibetan cause. Calls for unity are included

in 70% of statements left behind by *pawo*, suggesting that division among Tibetans is part of the problem or that the solidarity of Tibet's people is part of the solution. Later in their statement, Choephag Kyab and Sonam write:

> If you feel sad for us, follow the advice of the learned Abbots and Tulkus so that if you learn and keep alive our culture and traditions in the right direction, sustain loyalty and affection for our brethren, make efforts for our culture and remain united, our wishes are realized.[678]

The pleas for unity are linked to pleas that the people of Tibet act and speak like Tibetans, and hopes that the community maintains their traditional forms of life. They show it to be incumbent upon all Tibetans to act in accordance with the customs that give Tibetan life meaning. Toward that end, in the 21st century Tibetans have begun to celebrate 'White Wednesdays' (*lhakar*) where only Tibetan food is consumed (though no meat is eaten in accordance with Buddhist ethical injunctions), Tibetan garb is worn and the Tibetan language alone is spoken.[679] The loss of Tibetan practices would equate to the loss of Tibetan identity, precisely what the Tibetans fear will result from the PRC programs.

While cultural practices and traditions are central to their construction of Tibetan identity, the symbol of the people, their country and its plight is the grinning figure of Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and global symbol of compassion and nonviolence. If there is a central symbol of the Tibetan conflict, it is the exile of the Dalai Lama. Prayers for the XIV Dalai Lama's return or his long life have become a kind of slogan for the Tibetan issue,[680] and cries for the Dalai Lama's return have been reported to accompany a great percentage of *pawo* who left no notes behind.[681] Of the proportionally small numbers whose intentions were recorded in audio or writing, a full 85% reference the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet. His absence from Tibet creates a world out-of-order, and no end to the conflict is seen to be possible without the return of the Tibetan leader.

The PRC, in contrast, sees him as a separatist and rebel authority, and has prevented his return. The CCP has colored the Nobel Peace Prize winner as a cult leader comparable to David Koresh of the Branch Davidians, brainwashing young Tibetans into committing suicide at his command, and he and his cohorts have been derogatorily named the 'Dalai clique' by Chinese media, charged with inciting riots and encouraging violence against China.[682] For the Tibetans, however, his absence is the absence of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the agent of the dharma who is believed to embody the essential character of the nation.

Such a belief extends backwards into history to Tibet's very beginnings. Tibet's political system has long been inextricably bound with the religious beliefs of its subjects, where some political leaders are understood as incarnations of bodhisattvas and are therefore simultaneously objects of religious devotion. Songsten Gampo was not only Tibet's first political leader, he was also retrospectively understood to be the physical incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezig (Skt: Avalokiteśvara). The Dalai Lama is another such field of devotion, and like Gampo he is believed to be an incarnation of Chenrezig. Likewise, the Panchen Lama, who Tibetans believe was kidnapped, imprisoned and replaced by China when he was only six years old, is thought to be an incarnation of the Amitabha Buddha. This is why Tibet's political system is called *chösi nyindre*, politics and religion joined together.[683] Even following the separation of political power from the Dalai Lama in 2011, any sense of a "secular" legal structure isolated from sacred concerns is unfitting for Tibetans.[684] Religion does not occupy a sphere separate from social life, but it rather fully integrated into Tibetan experience. As opposed to the buffered selves of Western secular experience and the perception of being resistant to extra-physical sources, in Tibet "the

boundary between the human and the nonhuman worlds is permeable" as Jose Cabezón puts it.[685]

The physical presence of the Dalai Lama and other spiritual masters within the boundaries of Tibet is believed to result in a blessed existence for Tibetans, and prayers for their long-life and well-being ask that the blessings of the bodhisattvas will continue. Prayers for the Panchen and Dalai Lama are understood as pleas for guidance and requests for teachings, acts of devotion as well as statements of the individual's desire.[686] Bodhisattvas are beings who are committed to attaining enlightenment in order to assist all sentient beings along the path. Distinctive of Mahāyāna Buddhism which itself is defined by compassion for others above all,[687] bodhisattvas are the exemplary models of Tibetan life, whose actions are reflective of the central texts, practices and knowledges of Tibetan Buddhism. These celestial beings exemplify and expound the teachings that can lead people out of the samsaric cycle of suffering, thereby enjoying a top place in the Tibetan hierarchy. The hopes that two emanations of divinity soon return to Tibet suggests that their presence in their sacred homeland can alleviate the suffering of Tibetans.

Here is the background needed to understand statements like that Tsultrim Gyatso (self-immolated December 19, 2013) where he states "The immolation of one's precious body was for the return of Gyalwang Tenzin Gyatso [the Dalai Lama] to his homeland; for the release of the Panchen [Lama] Nangwa Thaye from prison; for the welfare of the six million Tibetans. My body has been offered to the fire for these." His hope is not only justice for leaders wrongly exiled or imprisoned, but rather to secure the spiritual means to ensure happiness on the Tibetan plateau. Other pleas for the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet often follow a formula similar to that of *pawo* Gudrub (self-immolated October 4, 2012), who

began his final statement with the line "The people of the Land of Snow share a common goal of bringing His Holiness the Dalai Lama back to an independent Tibet."[688] Sonam Topgyal's echoes that assertion, saying the *pawo's* "chief goal is for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be able to return to the Potala Palace." Some frame their fiery act as a means by which to bring about his return, such as Tsultrim Gyatso above or Rikyo (self-immolated May 30, 2012) who affirms her act was meant to "ensure His Holiness the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet." Others, however, offer prayers for the Dalai Lama's long life in their statements. This last is exemplified by Nangdrol, who said "May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for many ten thousand years. / May Lamas and Tulkus [reincarnate Lamas] of Tibet live for ten thousand years."[689] Such prayers litter statements of both laypeople (e.g. Jigji Kyab, Tamdin Thar) and religious elites like Lama Sobha, who said "I offer this sacrifice as a token of long-life offering to our root guru His Holiness the Dalai Lama." His *khachem*, delivered as a dharma-talk (a kind of Buddhist sermon) also contains numerous prayers, including a traditional prayer for the Dalai Lama's longevity:

> Circled by ramparts of snow-mountains, this sacred realm,
> This wellspring of all sustenance and happiness.
> Tenzin Gyatso, bodhisattva of compassion.
> May his reign endure till the end of existence.
> May his great deeds spread across the space.

More than mere pleas for the return of their leader, these prayers function as acts of devotion to divine entities, using a traditional formula meant to gain merit and add to the overall karmic reserves of the community.

This conflation of the political and religious spheres has resulted in complications for outsiders trying to understand the conflict, due to an implicit expectation of differentiation between these spheres of experience.[690] Bhuchung K. Tsering, Vice President of the International Campaign of Tibet, notes the problem of the assuming such a differentiation of

spheres when it comes to Tibetan life: "The CCP's programs seem intent to separate Tibetan identity from Tibetan religion and culture, and those programs are continuing to fail to do so. The Party seems to see adherence to traditional mores and allegiance to the CCP as mutually exclusive."[691] Attempting to treat religious belonging and practice as something separate from political allegiance and activity has been an inherent aspect of the sovereign system of nation-states since the system's inauguration in the Westphalian peace of 1648. Since then, the modern international nation-state system has treated political belonging as distinct, while also recognizing a governmental obligation to respect citizen's freedom of religion.

China's Constitution does provide for a level of religious freedom, but those freedoms explicitly distinguish a religious sphere separate from political activity. Article Thirty-Six of the PRC Constitution holds:

> No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. *No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state*. Religious bodies and religious affairs *are not subject to any foreign domination.*[692]

The article makes it clear that religion must conform to public order, meaning religious practices that transgress PRC laws are not protected. The language used, that no persons "may make use of religion" to disrupt order tacitly sees religion as naturally aligned with that order, thereby creating an avenue to mark off degenerate religion that can be penalized. Excluding any religious practice that interferes with the biopolitical care of the PRC maintains their monopoly on the ability to sanction suffering, and in terms of Tibetan religion, religious bodies being "not subject to any foreign domination" means that the Dalai Lama's leadership is not protected by religious freedom. Excluding him from the religious sphere marks him as a political leader, thereby supporting the accusations of his separatist

inclinations. It is important to note that this explicit cordoning off of religious experience from political allegiance is itself novel for China, coming from the influence of the modern West and overtaking the close relationship between the two that had existed throughout previous dynasties.

Through his extensive education in the scene of international politics, the XIV Dalai Lama learned how the freedom of religion supported by the international community uses the language of separate spheres, and perhaps partly in an attempt to adhere and adjust Tibet's situation to those expectations he relinquished political power in 2011. He has held that it had been his intent to do so for many years, and has explained his reticence to speak on the self-immolations based in part on that fact.[693] In one interview he stated "If I get involved in [speaking about the self-immolations], then the retirement from political power is meaningless. Whatever I say, the Chinese government they immediately manipulate."[694] It also may explain his habit when pressed on the subject to speak only to the role of intention in determining whether or not self-immolation was a positive act. Open support may be read as articulating a political stance, while examining right mindset is firmly in the religious realm.

Anti-religious sentiment prevalent in and largely initiated by the Maoist version of socialism resonates throughout the PRC's policies. The PRC has outlawed many religious institutions beyond the banned images of the Dalai Lama or the Tibetan flag. Tsering Shakya explains that religious freedom aside, "the lives of monks and nuns are seen as incongruous in modern China, economically unproductive and refusing to fit into the current state's neo-liberal belief that market capitalism and consumption will liberate everyone. Since the beneficent exemption of minorities from the one child policy is irrelevant for them, their

lives negate the biopower of the state and they therefore are subject to surveillance and particular kinds of discipline that must bend their subjectivity to the will of the state."[695] Shakya's point is that the celibacy pursued by Buddhist clergy removes them from enjoying what the PRC conceives of as a benefit specific to ethnic minorities, the right to have multiple children when other Chinese citizens are held to a single child. Unable to enjoy the perks of ethnic life under Chinese rule means they are less likely to abide by the PRC's dictates out of gratitude or a sense that the country provides a just life for them. That concern is compounded by their separation from the economic modes of production.

That being the case, it would be a terrible mistake to think that the intent of the PRC is to make Tibetan lives worse. After all, Marx's oft quoted declaration that religion "is the opium of the people" is preceded by the designation that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature," and followed by the belief that "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness."[696] Mao saw in religion a stumbling block to true liberation of the masses, whatever fault may be found with his methods of procuring such deliverance. Like so many colonial projects, China's projects are aimed at "improving" Tibetans; religion especially is seen as a block to modernization and the improvement to life the PRC brings, as the Dalai Lama himself noted above.

Robbie Barnett accurately explains the contrasting views on the Chinese influx of money since the late 20th century into projects meant to modernize Tibet, saying "one side sees the investment as a kind of cultural levelling, eroding Tibetan language and culture; the other sees it as a beneficial modernization that is an overall advantage to Tibetans."[697] Medical anthropologist Vincanne Adams noted a similar paradox, noting "the enforcement of Chinese policies in Tibet leads to cultural and physical genocide in contrast to the

enforcement of its policies in the rest of China where they are seen in many accounts as enabling the *survival* of China's people."[698] Barnett is surely correct in asserting that "mutual incomprehension and sensitivity is rife at every level of discussion on the Tibet issue."[699] While it is impossible to not have a position on what is happening in Tibet, any easy villianization of the PRC is bound to unproductively perpetuate such misunderstandings.

By exclusively focusing on the political aspects of Tibetan authority as something distinct from religion, the PRC's policies have severely misconstrued Tibetan religion. Restrictions in Tibet are attempts to silence shows of deference to an authority other than the leaders of the CCP, and in a sense they are correct; praying to an image of the exiled Dalai Lama is an act that symbolically communicates loyalty to an outside authority. But expressing devotion to the Dalai Lama and identifying the reincarnations of spiritual masters, are actions required by the Buddhist conception of reality that lays at the core of the imagined world of Tibetans. Some middle ground must be found.

Attempts to differentiate spheres of experience in Tibet notwithstanding, Tibetan identity, belonging and authority are all based in the conception of cosmic order vouchsafed in the Buddhist dharma. From the very beginning, the nation of Tibet was perceived as a sacred construct. Tibet first came into existence with the early spreading' (*nyingma*) of Buddhism from India during the 7th-9th century C.E., and was first unified as a coherent nation under a Buddhist king. In fact, the popular Tibetan origin myth holds that the Tibetan people (known as *bod-pa*) are direct descendants of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion who married a demoness (*brag sin-mo*) and created Tibetans in order to spread the dharma.[700] For generations it was not uncommon to have numerous young men and women don monastic robes prior to turning eighteen, and social status was long linked to

religious education. The Tibetan people and in particular Tibetan religious specialists (*chos-pa*) are understood to be "carriers of the doctrine," responsible for maintaining the essential teachings of the dharma as explicated by Tibetan masters.[701] Likewise, monasteries in Tibet are not simply places of worship. Historically they have served as the central place of cultural life and Tibetan authority, and the lamas supply jobs, education, loans and a legal hierarchy for Tibetans.[702] As opposed to the retreat from the world brought to mind by Christian institutions of the same name, Tibetan monasteries are points of connection between the physical world and the source of reality beyond, aimed at replicating on earth the 'pure lands' where enlightened being dwell and the dharma is expounded continuously.

Buddhism is fundamental to Tibetan identity, authority and morality. It provides the "main idiom" of Tibetan identity, according to Kolas and the moral basis of the Tibetan order.[703] Moreover, as Goldstein puts it, "Buddhism in political Tibet also had profound meaning as the *raison d'etre* of the Tibetan state, and it was the main source of Tibetans' pride in the culture and country. Tibetans traditionally considered their country unique because of its theocratic form of governance in which politics was intimately intertwined with religion."[704] It should be noted, as Vincanne Adams puts is, that recognizing Tibetan culture and nationality "has been historically formulated within a culture of Buddhism is not the same as the idea that Tibetans are uniformly religious."[705] Tibet constitutes a sacred symbol, one that represents the collective and locates the individual's responsibility in service to that group. It has been suggested that membership in the Tibetan collective relies less on the geography of birth, and more on adherence to the Buddhism of the plateau; similar to the conflicts around North Africa and the Middle East between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, religion serves on the South Asian plateau as a marker for identity.[706]

Each aspect of Tibetan identity is placed in relation to the central pole of the dharma. In one speech the Dalai Lama noted the Tibetan language alone preserved "the entire range of the Buddha's teachings."[707] For many, the need to preserve Tibetan heritage is not for its own sake, but for the sake of the set of knowledges that provides the means by which all beings can escape the cycle of *samsara*. It is what gives Tibetan identity its distinctive nature. As this is the religio-political context for the self-immolations, any examination should be guided by the religious frames that orient these fiery acts, and should provide an analysis of how religious acts can serve the cultural amalgam to which the *pawo* refer.[708] At the same time, the conflation of nationality and culture with religion cannot be ignored, and attempts to understand the situation on the plateau must be careful to not treat any apart from the others.

The dharma, a term that refers to the essential reality of experience and to its deliverance through the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the first enlightened being, lies at the core of the Tibetan imaginary. It gives form to Tibetan culture and defines appropriate actions on earth; it gives shape to the *nomos* of Tibetans, defining right and wrong and providing a way to understand individual experience in the world.[709] Buddhist narratives give the community meaning, supplying the obligations laid on members of the collective with "history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose."[710] In this system Tibetan tradition, language, religion and identity are wholly intertwined, and as it includes the final standards by which to judge, celebrate and punish action in the world, this amalgam forms what I term the Tibetan sovereign imaginary.

It is the wholeness of this imaginary that is referenced by the self-immolators. Restrictions of the PRC go directly against what is expected of Tibetans; taking down and

replacing images of the Dalai Lama appears as a kind of idolatry for Tibetans, who see in the Buddhist leader a bodhisattva on earth and whose authority far exceeds matters of politics. Denouncing the Dalai Lama in speech or writing has been described in Christianity-laden terms as "the most cardinal of sins, condemning one to countless eons of 'vajra hell'."[711] There is an obvious connection with the situation of the ancient Christians, who found themselves ordered to 'curse Christ' or be killed; to deny such authority would be to deny the truth of their faith, an unimaginable transgression. That said, we should not treat the Tibetan self-immolations as a death "for religion" as Christian martyrdom is so often classified. We must appreciate both the role of Buddhism in the issue without neglecting the political aspects of authority and order resonant in the Tibetan's sovereign imaginary. A situation has been created where Tibetans must choose to disregard the very structures that give meaning to Tibetan life or lose that life altogether. Death appears on both sides. Like the early Christians, many Tibetans have chosen their own deaths rather than denounce their own core identities.

Self-Immolation as Sacrificial Offering

Considering this, it is unsurprising that the context of sacrifice largely shapes the way Tibetans speak of these acts, describing self-immolation as an offering of the body (*lüjin*), a lamp offering for the Buddha (*chömé*), and a giving of one's body (*lus sbyin*).[712] As we have seen, the phrases many commentators use describe the act as an offering, such as "lighting one's body as a lamp-offering" (*rang lus mchod mer bsgron pa*), or "making a fire-offering with one's body" (*rang lus me mchod*).[713] Buddhist sacrifice clearly provides a significant pole for understanding the significance of self-immolation in Tibet.

Ultimately the discourse of sacrifice serves to turn individual loss into the group's gain; it makes the loss sacred in line with the terms Latin origin *sacrificium*, to make holy or sacred.[714] In their well-known work on sacrifice, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss argued sacrifice marked the sacrificed as set apart from the everyday, and what is lost becomes a symbol for the greater social framework, providing a moment of connection with its structures of power.[715] Understanding a death as a sacrifice, then, serves to identify the death as performed on behalf of the collective interest. We will see this articulation will be important in discussions of the self-immolator's intentions.

From the early days of the conflict with China, Tibetans have celebrated those who have made the "ultimate sacrifice" for the dharma and Tibet, with the XIV Dalai Lama honoring them in each of his annual March 10th speeches marking the anniversary of his exile. From 1993-2005 he ended each of his speeches with some version of "Today, we remember those brave Tibetans who fought and died for the cause of our nation."[716] Beginning in 2006 these memorials open, rather than close, his addresses, perhaps suggesting a keener focus on the need for sacrifices in service of Tibet and her people. This increased emphasis is further reflected in a speech he made in 2007, when he labeled the struggle for Tibet a "sacred duty of all Tibetans."[717]

This framework was also extant during the British invasions into Tibet in the early 20th century, when Tibetans took "blood oaths" to defend their country embracing similar sentiments of commitment. One such read: "At present this Buddhist holy land of Tibet and its sacred religion face a hostile foreign enemy who harbors ill intentions, and the danger of invasion. All Tibetans reasonably swear to death to protect their magical homeland, and to bravely keep out the foreign invasion."[718] Moreover, that period is kept alive in the Tibetan

imagination by media like Feng Xiaoning's 1997 film *Red River Valley* (*Honghegu*), which all Tibetan schoolchildren were required to view and glorified the opposition to the attempted colonization.[719] That film concludes with a Tibetan herdsman burning himself alive rather than surrendering to British forces, creating one precedent for the symbolic act of self-immolation in the Tibetan imaginary and helping create a culture of self-sacrifice that places the group above the individual. It may be that this shift which responded to the increased focus in China on self-sacrifice for the Cultural Revolution (that resulted in sprawling "Martyr's Memorial Cemeteries" which can be found in urban centers like Shanghai)[720] linked ancient Buddhist teachings to a modern national issue, with the result of a self-sacrificial program that bore direct connections to the modern nation of Tibet while maintaining significant connections to the sacrifice of life for the dharma and well-being of all sentient beings.

This perspective is supported by Tsering Shakya who notes that the context and frame of sacrifice is complemented by reference to traditional acts with religious meaning, "as in the tradition of offering one's body for the benefit of others."[721] Such symbolic acts of self-sacrifice appear in Buddhist texts as the pinnacle of compassionate action. Tibetan self-immolators and commentators alike have drawn on the narratives of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially the *Lotus Sūtra,* a text that prominently features the act of self-immolation, and the jātaka tales which recount the previous lives of the Buddha.[722] The jātaka stories are regularly part of public religious lectures and find expression in murals painted on the walls of Tibetan monasteries, providing them an accessible place in the popular Tibetan imagination, while the *Lotus Sūtra* is one of the most popular Buddhists texts in Tibet and elsewhere.

This latter contains the story of the Medicine King, where the eponymous character (also called *Sarvasattvapriyadarśana*, the Bodhisattva Seen with Joy by All Living Beings) learns that of all the devotional offerings one can make to progress on the path to enlightenment, the offering of the body through fire is the highest. Having benefited greatly from the lessons in the *Lotus Sūtra*, he burns his body in an act of devotion to his teacher and the religious text itself (a common practice in a religious tradition that gives special honors to texts that teach the dharma). In terms that closely resemble descriptions of the Tibetan self-immolators' process, he "doused himself in fragrance and oil, drank scented oil, and wrapped himself in an oil-soaked cloth. He made a vow and then burned himself."[723] The close alignment of the phenomena would make the Medicine King seem to be a direct model for the Tibetan performances.

His act of devotion was aimed at spiritual development toward meriting nirvana, and on account of this was celebrated by the celestial Buddhas who called his act a "true Dharma-offering" and affirmed its supreme character by acknowledging "even if one were to give realms and walled cities, wives and children, they would still be no match for it."[724] In his *Burning for the Buddha*, James Benn argues that the story's interpretation has historically seen the body's destruction as a means to attain Buddhahood, as it provides a marker for the requisite detachment from the concept of the self.[725] Focusing his research specifically on early forms of Chinese Buddhism in the first millennium of the Common Era, he shows that by burning themselves alive, Chinese monks turned the *Lotus Sūtra* into a kind of performative speech whereby they "incorporated themselves into one of the most important and beloved scriptures of the Mahāyāna"[726] and "literally became bodhisattvas by enacting the role of this hero."[727] According to Benn, various social and political situations instigated

this performance, including persecutions of Buddhism, restrictions on monasteries, and the perceived risk to the dharma.[728] Where this risk was understood to be the result of bad karma (a common perception in Buddhist texts), self-immolation was seen as providing a "ritual force for social and cosmic renewal" and a way to correct the situation by generating merit.[729]

It is the textual interpretation by the Chinese monk Daosheng which perhaps speaks most directly to the *Lotus Sūtra's* significance in the current Tibetan context: "What does burning one's body signify? When it comes to what a man treasures and values, nothing exceeds bodily life, and when one burns it oneself, it is because there is something as treasured as much as the body."[730] The body's burning marks its purpose, its *telos*, as something that exceeds the individual, something sacred. The model of the Medicine King provides one narrative frame to experience suffering through and interpret the loss of the body as beneficial to the self and the community. In the case of the Tibetans, their statements make it clear is that Tibet, its cultural traditions, people and divine leaders are understood to exceed the individual life. References to the *Sūtra* serve to frame the act of self-immolation as one of compassion and great merit (in part serving as an argument against selfish suicide), and to reiterate the sacred nature of the Tibetan collective and imaginary.

While the *Lotus Sūtra* has the most direct textual precedence for the phenomenon, it is the jātaka of the hungry tigress (*Stag mo lus sbyin*) that claims the most references in the context of the self-immolations.[731] This parable tells of the Buddha who, while incarnated as a Prince, came upon a tigress and her cubs in a barren forest. When he discovered them, the tigress was emaciated and her hunger had driven her to the verge of eating her cubs. As doing so would bring vast negative karma upon the mother, the Buddha elected to give his own

body as sustenance to the family to aid the mother and save her from the consequences of such an immoral act. The Buddha goes as far as to open his veins to tempt the tigress when she hesitated in consuming him. When her and her cubs are sated, the merit generated by the self-sacrificial act of compassion results in the revitalization of the forest, which once again provides life for its creatures.

Several other jātakas revolve around the theme of the Buddha giving his body, like the Hare's Sacrifice, when as a rabbit the Buddha likewise gives himself up for sustenance of others, or the narrative of the Buddha's incarnation as the Monkey King who gives his body to allow his subject to escape death at the hands of a human hunter.[732] His heroism and self-sacrifice is applauded by the gods in each of these jātakas, however it is the hungry tigress which has garnered the most attention, as "the most dramatic example of self-sacrifice."[733]

Jātaka tales function like fables, relating ethical teachings through stories about the Buddha's many past lives, and have played a significant role in the development of Buddhist subjectivity since the religion's early days in India, as they are not aimed only at spiritual specialists but the lay Buddhist as well. The spectacular tales are easily remembered and transmitted, and explore the ethical expectations for all followers of the dharma, playing them out in symbolic ways.[734] Reiko Ohnuma argues that jātakas of self-sacrifice "provide a concrete manifestation of an abstract Buddhist ideal, locating this ideal within a dramatic character and allowing it to unfold within a recognizable human context replete with personal and social consequences."[735] Stephen Jenkins also saw this as the usefulness of these narratives which seek not to expound philosophically on the abstract nature of such actions, but to explicate Buddhist ideals in all of their complexity.[736] These narratives have a wider audience than philosophical treatises, likely making them more influential within Tibetan

society. Compounding that is the "pervasive influence" exerted by the texts on account of their being learned through intimate circles of relationships like family.[737]

Chung Tsering found that this narrative (along with the *Lotus Sūtra*) is frequently used on Tibetan message boards to argue whether or not self-immolations should be construed as "violent,"[738] and it is directly referenced in the last statement of Lama Soepa, one of the few Buddhist tulkus (reincarnate Lamas) who have self-immolated.[739] Prior to his act on January 8, 2012, he left a recorded statement in which he said:

> I am sacrificing my body both to stand in solidarity with [the other *pawo*] in flesh and blood, and to seek repentance through this highest tantric honor of offering one's body… I am taking this action neither for myself nor to fulfill a personal desire nor to earn an honor. I am sacrificing my body with the firm conviction and a pure heart *just as the Buddha bravely gave his body to a hungry tigress*. All the Tibetan heroes too have sacrificed their lives with similar principles.[740]

Nun Sangye Dolma likewise mentions the tale in her poetic final statement, even suggesting that it stand as a symbol of the changing fortunes of Tibetans:

> Look, my Tibetan brothers and sisters, look at the
> fortress in the forest look at the beauty of the
> turquoise, plain my tigress has come back.
> Look, my Tibetan brothers and sisters look at the
> land of snow, our destiny is on the rise.[741]

Her words link the destiny of the Tibetan people to the forest returning to life as a result of the Prince's sacrifice, suggesting a significant link between the tale and the situation of Tibet. Repeatedly this narrative is linked to the auto-cremations, and its relationship has significant consequences for the perceived purpose of the act itself and its alignment with Buddhist ethics.

Ohnuma has thoroughly examined "gift-of-the-body" jātaka stories like that of the tigress in Sanskrit literature.[742] In her work *Bodily Self-Sacrifice in Indian Buddhist Literature,* she contends that these stories are used to illuminate the 'perfection of generosity' (*dāna-paramita*), the most important bodhisattva practice, by recounting a gift that refuses

reciprocity. This aspect separates mere generosity from 'perfect' generosity, as the latter designates gifts that "*must never be reciprocated*,"[743] and are therefore instructive in learning to transcend the ego. The altruistic nature of the act "result[s] in an 'unseen' and transcendent reward in the form of karmic merit (*punya*)" rather than a *quid pro quo*.[744] Stories of self-sacrifice for others are the apex of the hierarchy of altruistic tales, as they demonstrate the most meritorious religious ideal in Mahayana Buddhism, compassion for others.

By associating the act of self-immolation with this jātaka, the altruistic nature of the act and the compassion inherent in these fiery spectacles are brought to the fore. While the altruistic nature of an act that can only bring extreme pain and death to the performer may seem self-evident, it is important to remember that the counter-discourse of the PRC labels them suicides, an (albeit ironic) self-serving act. Seeking escape from a desperate situation through self-killing without concern for others who are impacted by the suicide is an act in service to the self, even though it ends in the extermination of that self. If they are suicides, then, they are not moral acts in the Buddhist framework. However, if the same act is understood as an attempt to somehow benefit the situation of others, like the Buddha's act sought to aid the tigress and her cubs, then it is a compassionate act worthy of praise. Alignment with the Buddha's action assures the act's complicity with the laws of the dharma. The phenomena itself is understood through the discourse used to explain it.

Still we are confronted with a problem in the contrasting *teloi* of these narrative sacrifices and the self-immolations. To what extent can the auto-cremations of the 21st century accurately be seen as part of such a lineage when it is an explicit nation, defined by cultural complexes, that is sought, rather than the good of all beings in the universe? Religiously the new sacrifices would seem to be opposed to the more universal hopes of the

past; after all, nations are explicit ways of disconnecting humanity from itself, forming political groups that are exclusivist by nature. In that way sacrificing for one group (necessarily separate from another) could be seen as neglecting the Buddhist belief in the common struggle of all seeking to end suffering, and the necessity of working together in hopes of overcoming the woes of *samsara*. While these self-immolations can no less be separated from their nationalist context than they can be from their Buddhist roots, it should be recognized that although Tibetans are but a part of a broader humanity who needs saving, it is their cultural traditions that provide the means of universal salvation. The Dalai Lama has repeatedly acknowledged that Tibetan Buddhism contains the salve for suffering, and it is only thanks to the particular form Buddhism took on the plateau that *nirvana* for all is even possible. Moreover, a society explicitly formed on the basis of these doctrines itself must be a force for good in the world, providing another reason to defend it by whatever means. The overlapping status of Buddhism and Tibetan society has resulted in a blending of purpose and meaning that inculcates Buddhist cosmic dynamics as a means of national defense. Both are available to self-immolators who see their act as one means left to them to oppose the travesty they see occurring.

This brings to light an obvious problem that comes with the self-immolations that has already been noted about martyrdom in general: how do we determine the actor's intent? While earlier I tried to deal with the question by separating aspects of intention from direct causation, the actual cause behind the self-killing is essential in knowing how to understand the act of self-immolation. In this case, if self-immolators are understood to not be acting "for Tibet" and rather in response to personal situations the act would effectively be de-sacralized.[745] Toward this end several reports have come out accusing Chinese officials of

trying to coerce family members of self-immolators or even self-immolators who survive into "confessing" their suicidal intent.[746] The families of *pawo* Sangye Gyatso and Dolma Kyab were both reported to have been bribed by Chinese officials to say their family member's death was unconnected to Chinese policies in Tibet and were rather in reaction to family problems.[747] These means treat it as a battle over discourse.[748]

Returning to the issue of establishing intention, for Buddhists whether or not an action is in line with dharmic teachings depends entirely on the actor's motivation (*künlong*). While this is a common concept across cultures (the legal determination of *mens rea* along with the multiple degrees of murder or manslaughter for example highlight intention's role in determining the character of an action), Tibetan Buddhism makes a distinction between three levels of motivation; that which seeks happiness in this life, that which seeks relief from the cycle of suffering, and that which seeks the benefit of all sentient beings. This last is bodhisattva motivation, displayed by those who have come through long years of spiritual training to understand the true basis of compassion and thus achieved *bodhicitta*, the mind of enlightenment. Whoever has attained the mind of enlightenment has a full understanding of compassion, as well as the realization of egolessness and the illusory nature of reality, and therefore possesses a full understanding of the dharma.

As the emanation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the XIV Dalai Lama is one who can claim *bodhicitta*. The few statements he has made about the self-immolations all directly revolve around the issue of the self-immolator's motivation. It alone, he holds, can distinguish an act of suicide from an act of sacrifice, something both Christian and Muslim theologians have likewise asserted in their own ideologies of martyrdom. In one interview the Dalai Lama said "if the motivation is anger, hatred, [something] like that, then negative.

If the motivation [is] some different thing, more positive motivation, then more difficult to judge."[749] When pressed to elaborate on the means by which to distinguish positive from negative intention, the spiritual leader said "I am quite certain that those who sacrificed their lives with sincere motivation, for Buddhadharma and for the well-being of the people, from the Buddhist or religious viewpoints, is positive."[750] The Dalai Lama's statements align with the focus on compassionate altruism central to Buddhist ethics, and he sees the actions as "positive" if they are aimed at serving the people or the dharma.

As a recognized Buddhist master, Lama Soepa can confirm that his own action springs from compassionate roots "just as the Buddha gave his body to a hungry tigress," but it poses a challenge in terms of the *pawo* who are not as spiritually advanced. While the many monks and nuns who have self-immolated could possibly claim at least the beginnings of *bodhicitta*, the laypeople cannot be expected to understand the true motivations behind their self-inflicted deaths. This concern drove Lama Soepa to voice his worry that "their lives seemingly ended with some sort of anger."[751] Without the requisite understanding, again from the Buddhist perspective, they may think they are serving others but they may in fact be acting out of self-interest.

The same concern may be behind the affirmations of other Tibetan religious leaders, like Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa Lama, head of the Kagyu Buddhist school,[752] who unequivocally praised the "pure motivation" of the *pawo*.[753] Geshe Kalsang Damdul of the renowned Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala likewise designates their acts as stemming from the "pure motivation for the well-being of six million Tibetans."[754] These religious authorities guarantee that the performances are done for the sacred community of Tibetans and, like the model of the Buddha's sacrifice to the tigress and the devotional

offering of the Medicine King, are meritorious actions rather than suicides driven by despair. These spiritual masters echo a sentiment that is already well-established in the communities of Tibetans inside and outside Tibet.[755] While speaking solely from a Buddhist-centered perspective, the mechanisms to firmly establish intention are ritualized and based on advanced learning. However, such is not necessary to "believe in" what the self-immolators are doing for Tibet. That decision is one given to each individual witness. The preceding discussion was intended to demonstrate certain dynamics happening high on the religious spectrum, but it should not be construed to be the only way to determine if these auto-cremations are "sacred" deaths.

In fact, another mechanism exists for such determinations, one that Reiko Ohnuma proposes in her study of the "super-jatakas" of self-sacrifice and one that likely forms an undercurrent for our discussion:

> The close association drawn between the gift of the body and the absolute purity of the giver's intention is perhaps explainable by the fact that the former would seem to constitute a stark and obvious signifier of the latter. In other words, whereas the purity of the donor's intention is a purely mental quality – invisible and unverifiable to the outside observer – its existence seems to be vouchsafed by the dramatic spectacle of bodily self-sacrifice, which is clear for all to see. Indeed, one of the underlying assumptions at work here is that *nobody* would give such a difficult and painful gift – such an *extreme* gift – if his intentions were *not* completely pure.[756]

The self-immolations could thereby be self-verifying; the extreme lengths the *pawo* go in performing their deaths demonstrate their pure intent and literally make real the narratives that guide their actions. Tenzin Paldron sees the same dynamic operating in relation to the self-immolations, noting that pain's "presence suggests a certain kind of virtuous action in which an intimate encounter with pain is integral to the virtue of the deed. It is important to remember in these cases that a painful act is not being assigned virtue merely because suffering is taking place. Virtuous pain here is an act that manages to shift structural patterns

in unexpected ways."[757] Pain becomes positively experienced when it serves as a means to change the status quo in a beneficial way for the actor's interests. In sacrificing that which is held to be most dear in an act of devotion prefigured by the Buddha's offering to the tigress and the Medicine King's offering his body to fire, the self-immolators act in a meritorious way.

I would argue that such an understanding guides most discussions of martyrdom. The public, painful spectacle that accompanies all such acts are meant to make people take notice; through the act, they direct attention beyond the act, to those experiences and structures which incited the act. If self-extermination was the sole goal, there are certainly more painless and certain methods.[758] Spectacular deaths point beyond the individual. The selection of locations for self-immolations support such an assertion. All have been performed publicly, usually on streets or busy intersections, but a large number were performed either in front of monasteries or local government offices (including security stations). Both of these institutions are responsible for the establishment of social order and legitimacy, providing a meaningful setting for the self-immolators' objections to Chinese rule.

Some schools of Buddhism also incorporate a Sanskrit tradition of the four *yugas*, epochs that mark off stages in the life cycle of the universe. These eras progressively degenerate in terms of time and sacred character; the first known as the Satya Yuga is said to last for four thousand divine years,[759] and is known as the age of truth, where life on earth most closely reflects the divine teachings of the dharma. Currently, we are believed to be living in the final age, the Kali Yuga, which is not only the shortest of epochs but also the most morally deficient, and is thought to end with the utter destruction of the dharma itself.

At that point, when humankind no longer recognizes our connection with our divine basis, the universe will (again) be utterly destroyed before being reborn (again) into the Satya Yuga. Jan Nattier has pointed out that while there is a set timetable for each *yuga*, human factors play a large role in the degeneration of the dharma and its ultimate elimination.[760]

Even though we find ourselves in the Age of Ignorance, the Kali Yuga, we still maintain agency in our ability to maintain the teachings of the dharma. Making that point, the XIV Dalai Lama laments the mindset that says "all is lost, times are getting harder, the world no longer knows where it's going. It's the Kali Yuga taking over, after all. So let's retreat into our corner, let's profit from the little good we may have accumulated, let's forget the rest, and then we'll see."[761] Moreover, the ultimate disposition of the dharma is believed to be driven by outside, secular forces in most texts, either through their support or persecution of Buddhism.[762] Such a temporal understanding provides a template by which to understand the programs of the PRC as participating in a slide into ignorance, which will end with the ultimate loss of the dharma that guides appropriate life on earth. This does not necessarily result in impotence for individuals, quite the opposite. Acting in accordance with the dharma and thereby supporting its continued existence become increasingly important during such a period.

In the Buddhist spiritual economy, karma is the currency of action, incurred when acting meritoriously (read, in line with dharmic doctrine) and lost when acting selfishly (read, out of line with the purpose of our existence). A Sanskrit term referring to the basic principle that actions have some kind of ultimate result that bears back upon the actor, karma is one of Tibetan Buddhism's central concepts that offers Buddhists a way to control their fate and is accepted as a part of the fundamental dynamic of cause and effect in Tibet.[763]

Karma or its lack can be seen as the cause of looming death and misfortune, and Irmgard Mengele has shown that some see a buildup of merit as a way to avoid impending death.[764] Not fully attending to the place of karma in Tibetan action could amount to a mistake on the same level as assuming separate spheres of political and religious experience in Tibet.

Although karma is generally considered to be an individual matter, where one's moral actions are balanced against their immoral actions and the net result determines the individual's form in their next rebirth, there is also a belief in the collective karma of a people. The physical manner of karma's dynamic intimately connects individuals, and reaffirms the body as not only anatomical materiel but ultimately a social body, embedded in relations with others.[765] Such an idea has precedence in Tibetan death rites, where the family of the deceased is given time to bulk up the virtue (*dge-ba*) of the deceased through family "assistance" (*rogs-ram*), where merit (*dge-ba btang*) is sent to the departed. This is intended to ensure enough merit for the deceased's next rebirth to be as high as possible, but operates on the foundation of "shared merit" (*dge-ba pi-ma*) between relations.[766]

Moreover, the doctrine of reincarnation holds that through thousands of lives we have all been in numerous configurations with others. Vincanne Adams articulates this concept in a medical meditation on the origin of the *sems*, the Tibetan idea of the sentient mind that migrates through rebirths:

> These beings – who were not flesh, bone, blood, the same as 'you' – are now present in you in the sense that it was their actions that produced your physical existence. Their lives make up your life. Collectively, they are the physical foundations of the self. The most subtle mind is thus inseparable from the body and it is a collectivity of *bodies*. This most subtle mind must be seen as the expression of the accumulated *karma* that derives from these body forms in past lives.[767]

This relationship, Adams holds, is particularly visible in moments of deep suffering and pain, when "a theory of karma becomes a basis for understanding Tibetan subjectivity and might

be seen as operating at the level of epistemology in Tibetan culture."[768] Karma is not only a metaphysical assertion about the consequences of acting contrary to the accepted ethical system. Its function in the Tibetan milieu far exceeds that, and should be appreciated as a significant dynamic at work in the Tibet issue.

Tibetan Buddhist clergy and self-immolators alike use language that seems to reference such a state of interconnectedness, such as the Kirti Monk Lobsang who affirmed "the energy of the Tibetan people is totally linked like a bracelet of prayer beads."[769] *Pawo* Phuntsog, second to self-immolate after Tabey, says something similarwhen he asked Tibetans to remain united "like *malas* (prayer beads) on a string, linking every Tibetan." The XIV Dalai Lama has likewise spoken of a collective karma in terms of Tibet: "That is an intimate part of our classical teaching. What is true for an individual – who will feel in one of his or her existences the effects, favorable or not, of his or her karma – is true for groups, for a family, say, and also for a nation, for a people… And we wonder in fact if our collective karma didn't lead us to that confrontation [with China in the 1950s], which ended in disaster."[770] If it is the lack of karma that led to this degenerate state of affairs, he intimates, then the correction of the political situation is dependent upon upholding and abiding by the dharma.[771]

In his final statement, Lama Sobha plead that all Tibetans "genuinely practice Buddhist principles in order to benefit the Tibetan cause and also to lead all sentient beings towards the path to enlightenment."[772] The tulku saw the potential for acts of altruistic compassion to positively affect the situation in a causal manner in line with Buddhist conceptions of karma and sacrifice. In other words, "a practice of offering does not make the same move as resistance… the offering is an act that seeks to intervene in that suffering,

much as the Buddha intervened in that of the tigers."[773] The cause of Tibet is aided by people acting in accordance with Buddhist ethics, which lay at the heart of the Tibetan social, political and theological imagination.

Several other statements of *pawo* support this interpretation. Nyingkar Tashi, whose self-immolation on the 12th of November 2012 took place during a service for *pawo* Tamdin Tso, assured his family that "there is no need to worry and feel sad. Instead, engage in spiritual activities and accumulate merits."[774] *Pawo* Lobsang Tsultrim who self-immolated at the beginning of 2012 likewise hoped his sacrifice would "make all who belong to humanity open wide their eyes of mercy, examine things with a loving heart, and heed the law of karma."[775] Rikyo, the mother of three who self-immolated at the end of May 2012 hoped that people would not fight or steal or "indulge in slaughtering and trading of animals,"[776] which echoed Nangdrol's hopes that people "be compassionate to animals" and "restrain from taking the lives of living beings."[777] Tulku Athup likewise was said to have asked his students to engage in meritorious activities like saving animal lives in order to honor his sacrifice.[778] Mentioning the welfare of animals in what would appear to be a political action seems out of place, unless understood as inspiring conformance to a central Buddhist ethical tenet with hopes that it could positively affect the political situation through a karmic dynamic.[779]

In his analysis of the self-immolator's last words, Wang Lixiong showed that most self-immolators spoke of their self-sacrifice as actions aimed at solving the situation directly; by his estimation approximately 38% of the last words left behind by self-immolators referenced this idea. Reading such a preponderance within the context of Buddhist Tibet, he averred these acts are meant to develop positive karma, while recognizing the difficulty

people in non-Buddhist settings have in understanding "setting one's own body on fire as an offering for nothing else but merit."[780] What we are faced with is the possible inspiration of the self-immolation act being at least somewhat informed by a sacrificial logic that aims at building and deploying merit through its performance.

Suh an understanding shows that the personal benefits promised to those who act meritoriously are intimately linked to the political benefits enjoyed by the community. Any merit gained by the performers that helps their progression along the Buddhist path is earned on the basis of their compassion to others, and such contributes to the collective karma of Tibetans that helps improve their political situation. Furthermore, it is only actions done with the proper compassionate motivation that earn merit, meaning actions that are explicitly intended to help others (and not those that do so as an unintended byproduct). Those performed out of an intent to live in line with the dictates of the dharma provide such benefit, and therefore meritorious acts are those that speak to the guiding principles of the act beyond the act itself. It is not the personal benefit that is celebrated by the community however, but rather the benefit ascribed to the community.

By interpreting the acts of self-immolation and the words accompanying them in their religious context, these acts of devotion could be imagined to positively affect the situation in Tibet through a karmic dynamic that is an essential part of the Tibetan social imaginary. Such an understanding would offer a theological solution to the political situation Tibetans are experiencing and counter the harm caused by the actions of the PRC by putting their injured bodies to use toward their own ends.

Suffering, Coercion and Sovereignty in Tibet

The harm inherent in the PRC's programs in Tibet is intended to coerce adherence to and acceptance of their normative system. As the internationally recognized sovereign state, the PRC claims the monopoly on legitimate violence within their territory, where physical suffering can be imposed as a means to their ends alone.[781] As Max Weber, who first made this point, noted, "the state represents a relationship in which people *rule over* other people. This relationship is based on the legitimate use of force (that is to say, force that is perceived as legitimate)."[782] To "rule over" is to codify "allowed" and "forbidden" actions in law, and en*force* that law by inflicting suffering upon those who do not abide by their designations.

Dmitris Vardoulakis likewise begins his work exploring the nature of sovereignty with "the axiom that the operation of sovereign power consists in the justification of violence."[783] Echoing Weber's focus, Vardoulakis points to the ability of the sovereign to determine when the imposition of suffering is seen as justified, that is, in line with the conceptions of justice based in wider ideological structures. Sovereign legal orders are ultimately codified systems of actions sanctioned and forbidden in line with perceptions of reality and supported by regimes of violence.[784] Carl Schmitt's oft-cited discussion of sovereignty also revolves around this conception, as the sovereign is able to determine the exception to legal machinations of violence, because they are seen as able to suspend its operation.[785] The state of siege has been understood as a state of exception, where law is suspended over a certain area, but the suspension of law's operation should not be confused with its complete absence. The swift recourse to violence that characterizes such a state aims at only allowing sanctioned activity, and letting all know that illicit activity will be met with the imposition of intense suffering. Sovereignty has been treated nearly exclusively in terms

of where violence can legitimately be applied as means toward appropriate ideological ends, and who is able determine those ends. In the current situation, Tibet has been internationally recognized as under the sovereign jurisdiction of the PRC at least since the Seventeen Point Agreement, meaning the authorities of the Chinese state can determine what actions Tibetans can engage in, and how to punish those who do not.

These *pawo* demonstrate that their action cannot be *forced* by violence. If it could, the omnipresent violence evident in Tibet would have resulted in willing subjects of the Chinese state, not celebrated spectacular self-killings connected to an alternate locus of authority. The actions of these *pawo* highlight another insight of Weber: "If the state is to survive, those who are ruled over must always *acquiesce* in the authority that is claimed by the rulers of the day… this compliance is the product of interests of the most varied kinds, but chiefly of hope and fear."[786] Be they born out of optimism for a better tomorrow or the dread of a worse, actions that recognize and abide by authority perpetuate the state. To acquiesce is to ostensibly approve the dominant authority's ability to determine sanctioned action. For Tibetans, such an acquiescence would appear to make them complicit in destroying the culture and traditions of Tibet.

Pain and suffering can *influence*, but not *determine* action in the world. Likewise, those Christians who chose to suffer the most extreme lengths of pain at Roman hands rather than act in ways forbidden by doctrine demonstrated this premise in their bodies. Like these Tibetans, their resistance perpetually remained an option, though it cost their lives. Both sets of martyrs remind us that death is always an alternative when faced with actions that contradict the foundation of our lives. Sovereignty, the ability to decide upon the proper course of action free of outside influence, ultimately resides in the bodies of the individuals

who subscribe to it. As the *pawo* show, this is always a free act, unable to be forced, because there is always another option for those willing to pay the cost. For that reason, martyrdom simultaneously challenges the dedication of others, asking 'are you dedicated enough to choose death rather than act against the truth?' The Tibetan poet and commenter Woeser notes this power (and unknowingly echoes Ayatollah Khomeini), saying "when I think of the heroes and heroines (*pawo*) who have committed self-immolation I am ashamed of my inherent weakness, cowardice and uselessness."[787] The sovereign bargain relies on the fear of suffering to function effectively – were there no fear to direct action, authority would be without a central means to legitimate itself. States may claim the only legitimate violence, but that violence is also fundamental to that claim.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault showed that public executions were not only a means by which to create sovereign power through fear. Suffering and its possibility was used to procure the confession, where subjects recognized and verified the judgment of the sovereign, implicitly participating in the sovereign's power to establish truth.[788] The confession is an admission that the sovereign has the true ability to determine right and wrong, not as an extension of his violence but as a product of his sacred stature. It is beyond mere infliction of injury, as the rituals surrounding the execution produce awe in the face of the sovereign's sacrality, his connection to a cosmic truth. What Foucault describes is not only that the state truly can impose suffering, but that it is seen to have a *right* to impose suffering, that it alone can *give meaning* to suffering.

This has lead anthropologist Ralph Litzinger to pose what is perhaps the most crucial and least examined question about the Tibetan self-immolations:

> how the self-immolating body, the body that protests through flames and charred tissue, a body that is often wrapped in barbed-wire so it cannot be saved (cared for) by the Public Security or Health official on the ground, is not just giving itself to a greater cause. It is using

> fire to steal from the state its foundational relationship to violence. It is denying the state, if only for that singular moment when the body ignites in flame, its sovereign claim to determine how individuals, in this most precarious of times, will be cared for, how they will live, and how they will die.[789]

Acts of self-sacrifice in opposition to oppression demonstrate that individuals retain the ability to determine for themselves the systems which will guide their action. Such cannot be forced by intimidation and pain, but again require acquiescence. Speaking about the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi that set off the Arab Spring, Didier Fassin remarked that the act showed "the violence of the state and the resistance of the individual are embodied in one person."[790] However while Litzinger's quote is accurate, it only highlights one side of the equation. In exterminating themselves, these *pawo* are indeed denying China's legitimate authority, but simultaneously they are affirming the sovereign imaginary they *do* subscribe to through the form and function of their protest. Voluntarily suffering in order to declare with their entire being the truth of their sovereign imaginary, the self-immolators demonstrate that sovereignty depends ultimately on the free actions of individuals.

The Dalai Lama, the embodiment of compassion on earth and symbolic head of Tibet, demands obedience not because of the violence he can direct, but the promise he signifies as a symbol of the Tibetan sovereign imaginary. That imaginary cannot be subordinated to the PRC's ideology, these self-immolators seem to say, because the former contains the truth of who they are and how they are obliged to act in the world. Such a truth does more than accurately reflect reality; it determines the proper way to be in the world and gives assurance and pride to those who form their subjectivity in accordance with its principles. It appears as the "true" determinant of identity and morality.

Their fiery sacrifices are shaped by and perpetuate social constructs of meaningful belonging and action, indicating what is meaningful for the actor; in Juergensmeyer's terms,

symbolic acts of self-sacrifice bring in an "alternate view of public reality."[791] The alternative offered by such acts challenges those power structures that fought to be taken for granted. They demonstrate that the dominant ideology is a construction, rather than a reflection, of reality. This is not to suggest that the symbolic world of the self-immolators is less real than that of the PRC, but rather to insist that *both are equally fictive*, existing only abstractly until they are called into existence by those who enact them into the world.

For these *pawo* and sympathetic Tibetans, to do nothing would make them complicit in destroying the reality of Tibet. Not being complicit means being unlawful, and a vast network exists throughout Tibet to discover and punish all unlawful activity. The PRC has international legitimacy to create their world by force, and to allow the fear of that force to prevent actions essential to Tibetan life is to allow them to dictate how the world will look. Such activity includes dissenting speech, noted by *pawo* like Lobsang Tsultrim, who lamented that the PRC has "deprive[d] us of the rights of expression, movement, communication, assembly, religion and so on, but they do not allow the slightest word of it to reach the outside world, and even if it does, they cover it up with lies, and allow no one to see the real situation, and anyone who does show the real situation they shamelessly slander with false accusations, and secretly murder or secretly imprison."[792] If they do not act in ways perceived as assisting the destruction of the cultural institutions that have given their lives form, then, they would die. Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Sikyong (Prime Minister) of the Tibetan Government-In-Exile since 2011, asserts that "Tibetans seem to be saying [self-immolation] is the only form of protest left, because any other form of protest the consequences are similar – you get arrested, tortured and often die."[793] To live rightly

therefore means to risk your life, but these self-immolators demonstrate a belief that a just existence – living appropriately in the world – will ever remain above mere existence.[794]

Since they are not provided with any means of making known their convictions and attachment to their concept of Tibet, self-immolators have been led to creating their own public spectacles, a loudspeaker made with their lives. The arenas for those spectacles are not accidental, they are nearby agents of sustaining social structure. Spectacles like self-immolation make public a violence that would otherwise remain secret. By exposing themselves to the limits of pain and suffering, the self-immolator "illustrates the violence done by an 'other'."[795] The secrecy surrounding detention and the "disappearances" attributed to the PRC are buttressed, as Tsultrim noted above, by a lack of reporting and smear campaigns for many who speak out. By creating a self-verifying spectacle of their deaths linked to their speech, Tibetans make their own means of exhibiting the violence to which they are subject.

Rather than acting in conformance with China's dictates, these self-immolators perform their death in a way that is modeled in some of the most popular religious narratives of Tibet, and show their willingness to suffer and die for what they believe. Aligning the current situation with such cultural scripts serves as a way to make Tibetans' negative experiences meaningful, confirming as sacred both the individual and the fields of their devotion. Moreover, the alignment of self-immolation with well-known Buddhist models of ethical actions not only serves as a reminder of those models (and their morality) but provides a moment where those abstract tales are given witnessable reality.

The Truth of Tibet

On the 4th of October 2012, a 43-year-old Tibetan writer named Gudrub walked into the marketplace of Nagchu Town, a small hamlet about 300km northeast of Lhasa, and set himself on fire. In his note composed prior to his self-immolation, Gudrub explained:

> We are declaring the reality of Tibet by burning our bodies to call for freedom in Tibet. Higher beings, please see Tibet. Mother earth, extend compassion to Tibet. Just world, uphold the truth. The pure Land of Snow is now tainted with red blood, where military crackdowns are ceaseless. We as sons and daughters of the Land of Snow will win the battle. We will win the battle through truth, by shooting the arrows of our lives, by using the bow of our mind.[796]

The insight behind this statement is profound, and helps clarify both what is at stake in the conflict between Tibet and China and the potential efficacy of these auto-cremations and similar self-sacrifices. Ostensibly the conflict is over the actions of Tibetans, and their unwillingness to act in accordance with the authorities and laws of the PRC. Prohibiting actions like paying homage to the Dalai Lama and interfering in religious practices are attempts subordinate the symbolic systems of Tibetans to those of the PRC. Forcing submission makes the PRC's systems 'real' in their effects upon Tibetan bodies; what publicly happens looks like what the PRC says should happen. It effectively creates the PRC in Tibetan borders and bodies.

What Gudrub articulates is a method of fighting against this imposition. Like all battles, lives are placed on the line, but rather than sending arrows into the bodies of others, Tibetan bodies themselves are the arrows, driven into the hearts of those who witness their spectacular deaths. They expose themselves to the suffering that results from acting rightly, using it to transform pain into "a space for moral action that articulates this-world-in-the-next."[797] The need to suffer or cause others to suffer in service to the dharma has a long tradition in Tibet. Examples include tantric capital punishment for crimes against the dharma[798] along with sanctioned murders of those who posed a threat to the Buddhist

teachings (most notably that of Langdharma and the Compassionate Ship's Captain of the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*).[799] As compassion grounds the bodhisattva ethics of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the dharma contains the means by which to end the suffering of all beings, any harm in support of its existence is dwarfed by the procured benefit for all beings. For that reason, the dharma has been placed above human life. Though the first of the Five Precepts that form the core of Tibetan ethical codes is to harm none, suffering in service of upholding the dharma is sanctioned, even celebrated, because it is seen to benefit the group and by extension, all people everywhere. Narratives mobilized around the conflict with China and the self-immolations reinforce this, as do the statements of Tibetan leaders which participate in creating the frame for interpreting these narratives.[800]

Suffering in itself is therefore not a problem in the Buddhist tradition.[801] It has a central place in the doctrines and systems of Tibet, and there is an innate link between willingness to suffer on behalf of that which guides life and the enactment of a fictive reality. By voluntarily subjecting themselves to the immeasurable agony of burning alive, the self-immolations link their speech about their guiding cultural construction to their bodily suffering and death, making real on earth an ideological construct that otherwise would remain abstract. This is the "reality-conferring" function of injury described by Elaine Scarry: "instead of the familiar process of substantiation in which the observer certifies the existence of the thing by experiencing the thing in his own body (seeing it, touching it), the observer instead sees and touches the hurt body of another person (or animal) juxtaposed to the disembodied idea, and having sensorially experienced the reality of the first, believes he or she has experienced the reality of the second."[802] Belief is given substance in the body, and these bodies literally become a moment of the witnessable reality of their sovereign

imaginary.[803] That which gives their life meaning exists is given form and made visible through the body.[804]

The self-immolators witness the truth of their organizing construct through their own suffering and death. By accepting and even seeking the pain that is meant to deter them from their obliged activities, they assert a base of reality beyond the perceivable world. As Fassin has it, "the body is not only the site where power is exerted or resisted, it is also the site where truth is sought or denied."[805] Their act is a dual sacrifice and a dual witness: they make the body sacred in its destruction, and set that which directs their performance apart in its evidenced truth. At the same time they give witness to the true perception of reality in their bodies and provide the means for others to witness that truth for themselves in the performance of their deaths.

Truth appears regularly in the statements of *pawo*. Like Gudrub, Lobsang Tsultrim said the freedoms Tibetans demand belong to a people with truth on their side, and that it was "in testimony and for the sake of truth"[806] that he self-immolated, while Jamphel Yeshi explicitly linked loyalty to a cause to the knowledge of truth:

> My fellow Tibetans, when we think about our future happiness and path, we need loyalty. It is the life-soul of a people. It is the spirit to find truth. It is the guide leading to happiness. My fellow Tibetans, if you want equality and happiness as the rest of the world, you must hold onto this word 'LOYALTY' towards your country. Loyalty is the wisdom to know truth from falsehood.[807]

To know the true from the false is to recognize your legitimate obligations as opposed to those which are being forcefully imposed. Loyalty is not only a promise to act in accordance with the directives of rightful authority, but to further recognize that such authority extends from the true bases of reality. It is a consistent and reliable confession.[808]

In this same vein the Dalai Lama has spoken of Tibet's conflict with the PRC as "a struggle between the power of truth and the power of guns. For the short term, the power of

gun is much stronger, but in the long run, the power of truth is stronger than the power of gun. That is my fundamental belief."[809] Lama Sobha also paused in his final statement to say the Mandala prayer, a popular Tibetan meditation that includes the verse "those who bear hostility towards the Buddha dharma / May all of them be found and defeated / by the three jewels and the power of truth."[810] One nun who had been imprisoned by the PRC likewise pointed to the power of the truth, saying of the demonstration that resulted in her incarceration "When we went to demonstrate we were ready for death. We are fighting for truth and for this we must be ready to die. The truth will find its way. We never doubt this. I felt no fear. I felt strength from all the people who were killed before me."[811] In situations of conflict and states of siege, for the truth to find voice it must do so through the bodies of those who are willing to suffer for it. The self-immolations are taking up a long lineage of others who prefer the truth of traditional Tibet to their own well-being.

The ethical obligations of any ideological structure of justice are based in a conception of cosmic order and its dynamics, including how to appropriately shape our life in conformance. This perspective remains in the abstract until it is given reality, literally made real, in human bodies and actions. Loyalty, *fides*, fidelity, is the assurance that your actions will give only one ideological construct reality in your body. However, loyalty is not something that can simply be stated; saying you subscribe to a political authority is only meaningful if your actions align with that statement. How we act, and what structures we enact, determines what we make true. Speech must be substantiated by action, and loyalty is the label for those who consistently perform actions in service to a basis of speech and identity regardless of the consequences.

Conclusion

The First Noble Truth of Buddhism is that to live is to suffer. All Buddhist doctrines take their cue from this basic fact of existence that determines how to live in the world. The way these determinations were elaborated within Tibet resulted in a collective identity based in a common language, cultural traditions and religious character. Together, these form an understanding of what it is to "be Tibetan." And it is precisely these practices that are under threat of eradication by the PRC, which has long held Tibet to be part of their Great Motherland and therefore claim the right to determine the shape of Tibetan identity. The PRC's claim has resulted in a perceived state of siege within the traditional lands of Tibet that deploys normative suffering against those who act in ways understood to negate that claim. Those same programs of action are perceived by Tibetans as obliterating their identity, and thereby destroying Tibet itself. Acting in accordance is therefore rendered as participation in the project to destroy the social structures that gives their lives meaning.

All Tibetans therefore face a choice: act in ways that contribute to the destruction of your core identity or suffer torture, incarceration and perhaps death at the hands of the CCP. For many Tibetans death appears on both sides, and not risking their physical existence would result in a cultural death, eliminating that which gives their lives meaning.[812] In response, self-immolators have chosen a form of self-killing that goes beyond suicide by marking it as an act for the collective, placing the good of their community above their personal good. The collective's benefit first comes through the spectacle itself, performed in public places to highlight the violence being deployed on Tibetan bodies. Within the state of siege, no avenue for dissenting speech is offered and inflictions of harm take place secretly. As protest, these auto-cremations link the speech that would otherwise be silenced with the

willingness to suffer for the truth, resulting in a powerful act of testimony that communicates the actor's perception of the situation they are facing.

At the same time, religious labels of sacrifice are also applied to these fiery deaths. Religion stands at the center of the programs of the PRC, partly because of the particular religious character of Tibetan identity, partly because Buddhist leaders and institutions have long been incorporated into Tibet's political administration, and partly because of the negative place religion occupies in communist ideology of Marx through Mao. The Dalai Lama, the symbol of Tibet and for over fifty years its spiritual and political leader-in-exile, draws most of the PRC's vitriol, and remains at the center of their repressive programs. Restrictions aimed at a separatist authority simultaneously prohibit acts of devotion central to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

What we see over and again is a setting where religious devotion cannot be separated from cultural and political institutions. Speaking of religion in Tibet is to speak of nationality, identity, language and the cultural traditions that define life on the plateau. In contrast to Talal Asad's argument that spheres such as religion and nationalism need be treated separately, any such hueristic would misrepresent the Tibetan setting.[813] As evidenced by the self-immolators own words that reflect the dominant themes within the Dalai Lama's speeches since his exile, religion is a fundamental part of Tibetan existence, and provides the means of understanding ethics, purpose, and even politics in Tibet.

Religion provides a sacred frame through which to understand the conflict and to connect the current struggle with those of Tibet's history; the country's mythologized past begins with the creation of the Tibetan people as guardians of the dharma, and rhetoric used by self-immolators and commentators continue such a perspective. Such a discourse connects

Tibetans to their honored ancestors and provides a means to gain dignity during a desperate time, while also providing scripts of action for those who seek to correct a world out-of-order. Cosmic order is vouchsafed in the teachings of the dharma, and the perception that China seeks to empty or utterly eliminate those teachings not only aligns with the perils of the Kali Yuga, but connects to a long tradition in Tibet of sanctified suffering in defending the font of truth.

Such a frame not only assures the morality of such actions, but also shapes them as meritorious acts that incur karma for oneself and the larger community. With an embedded concept of collective karma and a religious tradition that focuses on gaining escape from suffering through meritorious actions, aligning these acts with Tibetan models of ethical action serves to encourage and sanctify them. The Buddha's offering himself to the tigress and the Medicine King's offering himself for enlightenment both provide an interpretive mechanism that affirms self-immolation's compassionate base and meritorious nature. As such, the act intercedes directly in the conflict by accruing karma for both the individual and the community. Concurrently it serves to mark these auto-cremations as supported by an ethical system that can legitimately determine justified suffering (as opposed to the illegitimate violence utilized by the PRC), and thereby denying the potential of that violence to determine their behavior when it is at odds with the true moral system. Right defeats might, or in the idiom of the XIV Dalai Lama, the power of the truth is victorious over the power of a gun.

Those who declare these *pawo* to be martyrs for the cause of Tibet thereby connote their acceptance of the same truth and participation in the same project as the self-immolators. That project seeks to create a Tibet that reflects their conception of true cosmic

order supporting life on the plateau. Self-immolation in support of such a project appears as the Tibetan sovereign imaginary made real in their broken bodies; these *pawo* become symbols of the reality of the order that supports true authority and provides the guidelines for right action in the world. By linking their suffering to their speech, they also bolster the resolve of others by becoming an observable example of the limits of commitment to such an imaginary, unwilling to forsake it even amidst the direst of circumstances. These martyrs give testimony to their conception of true life while providing a spectacle for others to witness that conception made real before their eyes.

The martyr's self-sacrifice is both a devotional act, aimed at effecting an improvement of their situation, and a political statement, publicly identifying the means by which their ontological and existential truth is made real. Both the PRC and the Tibetans seek to create a Tibet that aligns with their understanding of what life should look like in the region. Both would forever remain only a possibility unless they are enacted by willing bodies. The ultimate character of the country is still being negotiated, and by spectacularly taking their own lives these *pawo* are frozen forever in the act of creating their Tibet.

Chapter 5

Theorizing Martyrdom: Self-Sacrifice, Sovereignty, and Truth

Comparing Discourses of Martyrdom

In the previous three chapters, I examined the words attributed to martyrs within their active context. This chapter will seek to draw these analyses together into a comparative frame, looking to identify what congruencies they share and what, if anything, might be made of such similarities. To begin then, it should be remembered that while the Islamist martyrs of Hezbollah and Iran possess a direct doctrinal connection with the second-century Christians, no such connection is extant with the Buddhists of Tibet. Moreover, although Islam considers Christianity, especially the Christianity prior to the seventh century when the Qur'an was revealed, as a direct predecessor, the martyrs brought to trial in Asia Minor saw the world in very different terms than those who martyred themselves through human bomb attacks. Both differ radically from those Tibetan Buddhists whose lives were given in fiery protests. In what follows I will not seek to obfuscate these differences, but rather attempt to elucidate what lessons can be drawn from the common ways they employ the discourse of martyrdom. Centrally I will contend that martyrdoms are performed within specific socio-political contexts as attempts to fix an interpretive frame about the purpose of and circumstances surrounding these deaths.

Such an attempt must begin with an axiom that martyrdom is a way of talking about and making meaning from death. (While historically some traditions of martyrdom and even more colloquial uses also apply the term to prolonged or acute suffering, such references depend on their connection to death and the natural aversion to both.) Forms of death differ

radically between cases, but death, and a suffering death, appears as the common denominator between executions, bombings and self-immolation. In all, the painful loss of life was linked to something that exceeded the individual who perished, and recognizing such a link commends the explanation provided by the martyrs themselves, as opposed to competing assertions provided by other institutions. Speaking of martyrdom as a discourse, then, recognizes it as an interpretive act that endows a death with meaning by connecting it to wider symbolic complexes.

That act of interpretation is not a private one. While the extent to which one accepts the reading offered is an individual decision (and we have already seen that there is certainly no consensus about the meaning of these deaths), these acts are performed publicly and their stories are spread widely. Moreover, whichever version is accepted has consequences for public behavior. The reach of these stories seems to be a consequence of the spectacular and painful nature of the deaths. Martyrs' deaths are rarely if ever peaceful, and of those examined here the bomb's dismemberment may appear as the least painful merely on account of its immediacy, but few would call death by explosion a serene death. Those Christians who were Roman citizens could expect a swift death by beheading, but those who were merely Roman subjects faced torturous deaths brought about by a gladiator's steel or a beast's teeth. Perhaps the most excruciating form would be the auto-cremations of the Tibetans; a fiery death is an agonizing death and modern media allows people to experience every horrific moment firsthand. Pain is not epiphenomenal to martyrdom, but necessary in its very structure.

Pain appears essential to martyrdom in two key ways; first, these martyrs and their fellows exist in situations where institutions of power use spectacular and covert violence in

hopes of forcing alignment with a system of action. Martyrs saw such aggression aimed specifically at their group, putting them in a defensive mode and leading to a defining experience of tyrannical oppression. No negotiation or mediated détente appeared possible, only a forced choice between conformance or suffering. Such experiences were constructed and compounded through reference to past moments of similar repression extant in the group's collective memory, making the program appear directed at their "kind." The degree to which that was the case is disputed, as the dominant group deemed such activity to be legitimate enforcement of the law while the martyr's group rejected it as in service to injustice. (For ease of understanding, going forward the dominant political power administering these areas will be referred to as "the state," while recognizing the oversimplification inherent in such shorthand.) At the same time, since those of the martyr's clique could not hope to avoid being afflicted, suffering began to be seen as a duty required of group members, and perseverance incumbent upon true adherents. In doing so they converted oppressors into their accomplice by reading the state's infliction of pain as enabling a necessary expression of devotion.

This need to persevere through torment is the second way pain appears central to martyrdom. The suffering wielded by the state is coercive, and the martyr's constancy often takes the shape of continued control over voice in the midst of anguish. Christian and Tibetan sources both have scores of tales where their martyrs endure torture silently, and the silence required for the covert actions of the *istishhadi* serves the same role. More generally, genres of martyr tales share a trope where the martyr refuses to produce any sound that could be read as capitulating to the state's authority. Confessions, admissions of guilt and even

guttural cries all become a symbol of the oppressor's power, and the function of martyrdom seeks to deny them any such power based in mere violence.

A natural aversion to pain and death is expected of any living creature, but in all cases of martyrdom a decision to suffer and die is made. If any of these martyrs chose, they could have avoided their deaths, particularly the Islamists or Tibetans who simply could have chosen not to light themselves on fire or blow themselves up. The Christians too had ample opportunity to avoid death; every martyr *acta* included the imperative to sacrifice to the emperor, and made clear that doing so would result in freedom. Many stories relate Roman authorities going to great lengths in hopes of convincing Christians to sacrifice and avoid execution. And yet in each case individuals intentionally sought out their painful deaths, transforming the negative experience of pain into something positive. Talal Asad referred to this as passionate engagement, an intensity of the relationship to an ideology or group.[814] While the specific reasons martyrs give are not and could not be the same on account of the disparate settings, the manner in which their last words frame their deaths share a number of similarities that can help us understand why people seek their own martyrdom or honor those who do.

Each case sees a conflict around a series of practices. Traditional cultural practices understood to be paying homage to an opposing authority are seen to pose a challenge to the state, who in turn demands their cessation. Jesus Christ, the Dalai Lama and the Ayatollah Khomeini all anchor oppositional political hierarchies promoting a different system of order. Resistance to foreign rule crystallized around these charismatic individuals whose authority stemmed from religious doctrine and narratives that also determine the group's guiding ethics. Condemnations of such leaders put the state on the wrong side of morality, and

suddenly their reliance on violent means of enforcement began to look like the machinations of evil powers seeking the destruction of the religions that promised salvation.

Two conceptions of right disagreed over whether certain actions are forbidden or necessary. One side has more access to technologies of force than the other, but that does not mark them as ontologically different; they are both perceived by some to have legitimate authority over people's lives. Here I have used the term sovereign imaginaries, but the same is at stake in Juergensmeyer's "ideologies of order" or the *nomos* of Peter Berger.[815] On account of this, settings that produce martyrs are often characterized by an expanding colonial power coming into contact with an extant cultural group. During the second century, Rome's influence was being more keenly felt than ever before, and it was only decades prior to the Tibetan self-immolations that the PRC began more firmly tamping down on Tibetan religious practices. For all that discussions of Islamists today tend to look back to early days of Islam, the situation faced by the Shi'ites of Iran and Lebanon stemmed from the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the role Western powers played in determining the subsequent political boundaries of the Middle East. This provided *shuhada* with a cultural amalgam symbolized by Israel and Western imperial agents to fault for threatening traditional ways of life. A new landscape of power is being worked out in these periods, and the martyrs saw their deaths as a means of participating in the struggle.

Some level of cultural preservation was promised by the colonizing group in all these cases, meant to allow for continued religious expression and not disrupt the lives of their subjects. None saw their programs as intentional attempts to eliminate the religions of those under their rule, but each took steps to determine the shape of religion and separate it from the political sphere. The result was a common practice of privatization, firmly placing

religion in a personal sphere where faith would not interfere with political duty.[816] Perhaps it was seen to be necessary, as a number of different religious orientations existed side by side in within the jurisdictions of these states, presenting a challenge for powers that sought peaceful administration of a multicultural populace. It also gave a feeling of discrete cultural groups that must look out for themselves. When faced with individuals who not only refused to accept their authority, but persisted in recognizing a separate authority, the states were compelled to employ violent means in reaction. That meant more violence, and more evidence of an evil oppressor.

The inherent connection between the martyrs' religious and political expressions translated into an experience of being asked to deny that which made them who they are. Denial was another consistent trope between cases, where it meant both denying the authority of these leaders and the denial of their own true selves. Peter denied Christ when confronted by the crowd, the Islamic doctrine of enjoining right and forbidding wrong defines wrong by denying the Prophet, and Tibetan *pawo* plead with their compatriots not to deny their heritage. Doing so would be to speak against themselves, against the truth, and the martyrs boldly refused to do so. The state tries to impose its own identity, but by going to their deaths refusing to deny who they are, martyrs show that identity is a choice, one that cannot be abrogated.

This conflation of spheres and the attacks upon them led to the increasing salience of religious frames as a means of understanding how to face such dangers. The martyrs and their factions read their contemporary situation through the lens of a sacred past, replete with "imagined" causes of the state of affairs and its solution. Religious narratives promised an ideal existence to which reality did not measure up, and the martyrs saw it as their

responsibility – and often their destiny – to transform the real into the ideal.[817] It was only sensible to look to the same traditions that provided the vision to provide the means of transformation. Interestingly Christian, Muslim and Buddhist traditions all pointed to the need for sacrifice, a cosmically sanctioned loss, as the mechanism to bring about a just existence. Though sacrificial forms varied, all saw willing suffering as an act of devotion and dedication to the social group and sovereign imaginary.

Showing dedication in these moments meant following a different set of laws than those of the state. Everywhere a conflict between legal structures is evident, the statist institution confronting religious doctrines that promise individual salvation and future social utopia. People are forced to choose between directing action according to religious law in hopes of promised salvation, or the worldly power in order to avoid immediate physical pain. Fervent religious devotion was countered by increased violence, which played right into the story told by the religious leaders. Religious affect provides a basis for judging the state's assertion that their forceful means are legitimate punishments for moral transgression. The result is the perceived creation of a kind of state of exception where the line distinguishing law from violence (an unjust infliction of harm) becomes blurred.[818] The force supporting the state's laws becomes seen as separate from the practice of justice.

Conceptions of justice moor and exceed mere legal statutes. Positive systems of law lay out explicit guidelines of behavior oriented around ideas of fairness and right existence. Justice relies on a theory about order, about what the world *should* look like. Modern systems base such views in equal treatment between peers, coming out of an Enlightenment heritage, while religious structures rely on divine imperative and will. Moreover, different systems of ethics are activated depending on the context. What is allowed in theaters of war is not

allowed in civilian settings. The killing of soldiers in war is not murder. Valid legal punishment is not torture. These labels helps shed light on how varying perceptions come to be applied to a single act, precisely what occurs in these settings. The Shi'ite Islamists of the 1980s saw themselves using their lives in acts of war, not acts of murder. The PRC saw afflictions of the Tibetan body as just recompense for legal transgressions, not torture. The Christians knew that the death sentences they faced were the activities of evil forces that would bring about the end of the world, when God's kingdom would bring about a truly just rule. The ability to determine which evaluative structure aligns with reality depends on personal experience and the testimony of others, and by giving their lives in an expression of commitment to their perspective on a just world, the martyrs become some of the most convincing witnesses to aid such a decision.

What the martyrs contribute to, then, is a battle between dueling imaginaries, coherent ways of understanding the world and one's place therein. These imaginaries are political in that they engage in practices of power seeking to determine behavior, but are also religious or theological in that their juridical structures are based on projected visions of order. Whatever the source of such visions, both make equal claims on the lives of the subjects over whom they have jurisdiction. As Paul Kahn notes in his analysis of sovereignty, "Political theology understands politics as an organization of everyday life founded on an imagination of the sacred."[819] The administration of daily life depends on a certain imagined organizing principle, one that often remains unquestioned but becomes exposed when opposed by an equally situated claim.[820]

When such challenges occur, a decision about which imaginary presents the "right" vision of the world is incumbent upon all affected persons. Both legal orders cannot

simultaneously be appeased, since abiding by one means transgressing against the other. In making that decision, many rely on their own safety as determinant, willing to behave in whatever way ensure they will not suffer injury. Others reassess the basis and source of their commitments, often leading to an increased inward attention evident in Shi'ism prior to Khomeini's ascension. That allows a balance to be struck between powers through a certain interpretation of divine law. But some firmly adhere to the sovereign imaginary based in their culture and threatened by a foreign power, and become willing to use their lives in its support. The deaths of martyrs are both reactive and proactive: reactive in their response to a set of circumstances they are thrown into, and proactive in that they adhere to and perpetuate mytho-historical models believed to present the way out of their predicament. Those who witness acts of martyrdom are directly or indirectly provided with a symbol of resistance and evidence that others are so committed to their decision that they are willing to refuse any life apart from it. In legal theorist Robert Cover's words, they "insist in the face of overwhelming force that if there is to be continuing life, it will not be on the terms of the tyrant's law."[821] Martyrdom serves as both strategy and symbol; it is a performance of suffering.

Performance Suffering

In his analysis of religiously inspired terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer noted that those acts of violence operate on two registers simultaneously: first, they serve as a performative act that seeks to actively change the situation on the ground. On that level, acts of terrorism are strategic in that they contribute to the situations that inspired them, usually by attempting to inspire fear in others to make them cease offensive activities. The other side is the performance event, seeking to draw attention to how the terrorist perceives the world. This latter aspect operates on the symbolic level, channeling the focus of onlookers beyond the

literal target and persuading participants to see the conflict through a religious frame. The impact of religious terrorism relies on this dual dynamic.

The same duality is evident in acts of martyrdom. Attempting to understand them as merely strategic acts aimed at achieving a political goal or ignoring the symbolic elements that dictate the form of the act err by neglecting the close connection between both fields in the performance. Martyrs and their cohorts use these deaths in a strategy based in and determined by their worldview. As the situations faced by these various communities are understood through religious frames, actions that are likewise guided are fully symbolic in that they seek to make a statement about the source and aim of the conflict, and fully strategic in that they are believed to be part of solutions vouchsafed in the same traditions. The awe and revulsion they inspire encourages others to experience reality according to their symbolic model. Moreover, as these spectacular deaths are connected to stories that in part form a shared memory of their collective, they serve to rally people around such an identity and unite them against a (thereby constructed) common enemy.

For this reason, martyrdoms must be public events. Such deaths must be demonstrably in service to a goal. Every martyrdom discussed in these pages occurred in settings that are not only public, but determinant of political life. Iranian martyrs gave their life on an established battlefield, the place where the question of political rule is being worked out, and their Hezbollah comrades initially aimed at military installations where the same was at issue. The amphitheaters where Christians were executed served as legal arenas where law was made evident on bodies. Where the battlefield sought to determine which system of law would govern, the law court makes law's administration real. Tibetan self-immolators preferred to perform their fiery acts in areas connected to local governance –

such as monasteries which were where the local governance was based, or the police stations of the PRC – but even elsewhere they took place on street corners where their flames could be seen and their voices heard. The public square is as much a place where social order is constructed as those sites of institutionalized power, particularly for the marginalized voices seeking to reshape society. They are the same spaces where demonstrations are violently put down, and riots disturb the peace. While the self-immolations have been commended for their nonviolent nature (in that they do not cause harm to any who did not invite it), the specter of violence hovers in the background. Angry disturbances have not been unknown in Tibetan streets in past years, and some promise more if their conditions of autonomy are not met.

Such violence mirrors the routinized violence deployed against those who break the state's laws. Both are seen to be legitimate deployments of force on account of their connection with justice which makes the suffering imposed appear appropriate and deserved. Pain is a universal experience, but *how* pain is experienced varies radically depending on its perceived purpose, whether or not it has a fitting reason behind it. Such a dynamic is most evident in settings where one faction interprets the harm as sanctioned penalty while the other as tactics of oppression. Robert Cover made it clear that the state's routinized violence demands simultaneous action and interpretation, as to be coercive suffering needs direction and explanation for both the victim and the witnesses.[822] This pain is inflicted *as a consequence of* wrongdoing, rather than mere cruelty. It marks it as in service to the whole, rather than satisfying an individual (or collective) penchant for malice. How suffering is couched directs both the experience of pain itself, and what that pain communicates.

Pain marks a person's most intimate relation, that between the self and the body.[823] The sheer physicality of humanity is both necessary and troublesome, as we are embodied beings often required to put aside the demands of the body in order to act towards social ends. Freud called the internal voice demanding the compromise of our base desires in consideration of social mores our ego, determining actions in reference to the body's needs but not fully controlled by them.[824] Torturers look use the immediate and inescapable nature of pain to overpower the ego and act only in consideration of physical comfort, forsaking all social and political commitments. In seeking to determine action, institutions demanding people forswear their bodies' demands rely on narrative frameworks to give reason for afflictions by providing them with purpose, history and future. Explaining pain's source and purpose creates, in the words of Talal Asad, a space of moral action that articulates this-world-in-the-next.[825] Asad looks to a next world in attention to religious frames promising existence after death, but the same function is fulfilled by the utopia promised by states. Only an interpretive move allows for pain to move beyond something instinctively avoided, and as these martyrs show it can even result in the explicit courting of an experience that the vast majority of humanity assiduously avoids.

In spectacles of suffering, pain and the body are conjoined in the production of meaning. The meaning is contested since all sides look to make the afflicted body speak their own vision of world order into existence. With their testaments, martyrs sought to provide the final word on their act and understanding of their context, making it clear what meaning they made out of their sacrifice. At the same time, the state sought to impose its own hermeneutic structure, coloring the martyr's death as suicide, separatism or psychosis. Ariel Glucklich helpfully distinguishes between disintegrative pain like torture, which aims to

disrupt life and its associations, and the integrative pain of an experience like childbirth, pain that strengthens connections to the natural, social and spiritual world.[826] There is no objective criteria to distinguish the two; it is rather a matter of how pain is experienced by those suffering or witnessing the suffering. Neither order is fully able to determine how others perceive these deaths, but both look to make of the spectacle an example of their worldview which perpetuates the struggles of which they take part (according to the martyrs and their communities).

During this contest over interpretation, the statist institution may be considered to have an edge in that their power to make such determinations is taken for granted by a good percentage of the populace. In their analysis of the martyr's mind, Eugene and Anita Weiner contend "Established, accepted beliefs are readily reinforced through the use of ritualized validation ceremonies. This, however, is not true of non-conventional beliefs. The extraordinary or non-conformist belief requires a more powerful validation in order to be considered plausible. In order to get a hearing, it must sound an octave higher than the regular chorus of societal validations."[827] Both sides of the conflict seek the exact same thing, but for the martyr's beliefs to gain traction it requires a higher octave, and more impactful means of communication. The spectacle of the martyr's death provides that. These are not the docile bodies of Foucault, waiting to be subjected and used by power structures through disciplinary technologies, but rather a means of appropriating the power that supports structures of governance.[828] By enlisting their very being in service to speech we do not simply hear their words, but resonate with the harm on their bodies and feel their testimony, making for greater persuasive power.

By offering testaments before they ended their lives, martyrs made of their deaths a speech-act, linking their speech and being in a spectacular act of communicative defiance. Explaining their suffering through reference to a sovereign imaginary they sought to manifest, the performance of their suffering makes evident the perspective to which they were utterly committed. The only way such abstract structures could claim the status of truth is to have actions explained by them, and by accompanying such assertions with acts of extreme suffering martyrs intensify their charge. Spoken communication exists on a field of give and take, where accepting the truth value of statements depends upon numerous factors including, but not limited to, what is known of the speaker, the relative variance of the information from common knowledge and experience, and the nature of the content being communicated. One of the most significant determinants is the relative gain or loss the speaker faces for expressing their claims. For instance, when a legal witness gives testimony that would benefit them, like removing a competitor or escaping their own legal troubles, their testimony is suspect. Where the individual stands to gain, their voice could be seen to be in service to their own desires, but when they risk all by speaking their claims become that much more credible.[829] The creation of martyrs confronts the state with a troublesome and potent voice of dissent, and the number of such voices is in proportion to the difficulty they have in controlling the interpretation of the acts.

This is the very dynamic of martyrdom that was recognized by the Christian and Islamic traditions of martyrdom as bold speech, and the concept of *parrhesia* discussed in chapter two. Just as self-control endows individuals with an apparent ability to govern others, as Foucault showed, those so committed to their value systems that they gave their life were thereby seen as possessors of a truth.[830] When Foucault elaborated on *parrhesia* in his

Courage of Truth and elsewhere, he argued that truth-tellers were identified on account of the harmony between their speech (their *logos*) and their lives (their *bios*). His focus on the Cynics of antiquity stressed how their system of action flew in the face of accepted behavior, and their commitment to such a form of life in the face of ridicule and mockery signaled to others the high regard they had for their system of thought, and convinced many that there was something worthwhile in the Cynic philosophy.[831]

In distinction to the persistent deviant behavior that marked the Cynics, martyrs appear to have found a shortcut to the same level of esteem by linking their *logos* to their death, their *thanatos*. Both modes communicate a core connection between the martyr's life and its guiding system, and their devotion marks them as truth-tellers. They tell a truth about how to perceive the world and their place within it, and the dignity and nobility that stems from their discipline showed their confidence in such assertions. This led legal scholar Jonathan Simon to see *parrhesia* as expressive of the whistleblower's act of speaking truth to power, where the speaker risks all in their commitment to making the truth known.[832] What Simon's work reveals is that such activity exists on a spectrum that permeates nearly every social relation. Willing to speak truth regardless of penalties defines the good advisor, leader and good citizen as much as the good. Telling a friend a truth that they do not want to hear, and in doing so risking their anger and possibly the loss of friendship entirely is a risk a true friend must take. We rely on the honest testimony of others in order to make decisions on things that are not immediately available to our senses, such as who should be in charge, people's intentions behind their actions, and what is morally right. To be an authentic member of a collective – no matter the form of that collective nor one's position within it – always requires a willing risk of loss in service. It requires a willingness to sacrifice.

Sacrifice is legitimated loss, necessitating an authority able to make such affirmations of legitimacy. Therefore, in the cases of these martyrs they not only tell a truth *to* power, but they tell the truth *of another* power.

This other power is not only made evident in the words they leave behind (though it does permeate those texts), but more potently in the symbolic statement made by aligning their contemporary situation with a mythicized past. Conflating the real and imaginary by associating self and other with characters from cultural narratives results in what Gavin Flood calls an internalization of a tradition or "entextualization of the body," where the acting body is formed in conformance with the narrative models and doctrines.[833] The same process is present in acts of intentional martyrdom, giving traditional narratives form in their own bodies through an act of subjectivity, a literal subjection of their lives to their religious ideals. We should not assume a too close identification between subject and model, however. Imitation is not duplication, and the narratives sought in such times present sets of available strategies toward a goal rather than rules to be blindly observed. They are not following directly in their footsteps, rather than traveling the same path to the same purpose.

All cases see that purpose as the establishment of an earthly order that reflects their sovereign imaginary, with moral leaders administering a just state. It marks full victory, the final outcome long promised. Narratives that present the ultimate value structure defining the collective are called "sovereign dramas" by Ivan Strenski, as they connect to a perception of ultimate authority in the cosmos, and also connects to Roger Friedland's discussion of political institutions as regimes of valuation.[834] The same is at stake in Bruce Lincoln's determination of myth as ideology in narrative form, along with Robert Cover's description

of narrative as the literary genre for the objectification of value.[835] The myth is not real, but it is true.

In pointing to the parable of the hungry tigress, Tibetan self-immolators expressed the system of moral values they bound themselves to, where any single person's significance – even the Buddha himself – pales in relation to the welfare of others. At the same time the reference links themselves to others who recognize the story and see in it the expression of an existential truth. With Buddha as the protagonist, each personal willing to perform the same sacrifice is equated with the divine, seeking what they sought, participating in the same struggle. The same would go for Christ or Imam Khomeini who is the descendent of Ali, as both are enabled to bestow divine consent onto the political struggle, signaling that the struggle is right and aligned with cosmic order. Unlike doctrine which explicitly delineates structure, tales of a mythicized history carry explicit and implicit hierarchies that appear as taken for granted and can at times be more effective in instilling a cosmology. They are also generally more open to interpretation and redescription; after all, every narrator can highlight one act over another, or marginalize a part of the story considered crucial by another storyteller. Most importantly, these legends carry an explanation for a) how things came to be in such disorder, and b) what steps are necessary in order to bring order to the world.

Since these narratives carry suggestions and models of behavior, Hans Kippenberg refers to them as scripts, recognizing that these accounts are not simply fascinating tales but contain paradigms of performance.[836] While I am in full agreement with such a label, I am less convinced by Kippenberg's focus on a salvific orientation, where such scripts are followed explicitly because they promise salvation. We have seen that these narratives do direct their audience's attention to benefits that exceed this world, however I would argue

they are followed not simply because they assure profit for the actor, but because they appear as the right way to be in the world. Ultimately the outcome is the same, as the joys of nirvana or eternity in God's presence beside God are approachable only through right action that does not seek personal gain. Rather we must appreciate that the power of these scripts comes because they are recognized as the right thing to do.[837] Duty must be the primary driving factor, duty over desire. Here again we can sense charges of suicide lurking at the margins; if taking one's own life is done to fulfill our desire to be done with life, we classify it as a suicide. If it is done because the collective must take precedence over self-preservation, we have a sacrifice. We cannot sacrifice *for* ourselves, we can only sacrifice for another that we thereby place above the self.

The difficulty in establishing an individual's motivation has provided a looming backdrop to this study. Again and again we encountered vying interpretations applied to the same action or set of practices. Taking one's life can simultaneously be read as a holy act of devotion, a selfish escape from suffering, and an insidious strategy to corrupt and kill. As a consequence, contributors to discussions of martyrdom routinely speak of the importance of intention.[838] Such a concern appears in the issue of *niyya*, true purpose, in Islam being ultimately judged by God who decides whether the individual qualifies for the holy death.[839] The martyrs' communities act as though God will agree with their estimation, but also allow for the possibility that they have been deceived, in which case God will know a person's true heart.

Lama Soepa likewise expressed concern about those Tibetan self-immolators who gave their lives without having advanced training in Buddhism. He laid it out explicitly:

> I am taking this action neither for myself nor to fulfill a personal desire nor to earn an honor. I am sacrificing my body with the firm conviction and a pure heart just as the Buddha bravely gave his body to a hungry tigress [to stop her from eating her cubs]. All the Tibetan heroes

> too have sacrificed their lives with similar principles. But in practical terms, their lives seemingly ended with some sort of anger. Therefore, to guide their souls on the path to enlightenment, I offer prayers that may lead all of them to Buddhahood.

According to his brand of Buddhism, if their lives ended with anger they could not hope to achieve their goal, nor would they make any spiritual progress. Only those who have cultivated self-knowledge and self-discipline through Buddhist practices are able to confidently sacrifice themselves because they are fully aware of their intention. The intention of martyrs therefore must be to place the truth over their own self-preservation, and if the act is seen to serve the self (in the expanded sense that goes beyond life on the physical plane) it is not for the group, and therefore does not qualify for martyrdom.

I suggested elsewhere that the extreme nature of martyrdom marks them as somewhat self-verifying in terms of intention, and the willing participation of those not religiously trained demonstrates a diversity of ideas around how to establish intent. Those who apply the label of martyrdom to these deaths are clearly confident about the martyr's intention being in line with what is expected, and that what they have witnessed qualifies as a sacrifice. Within that sacrifice the infinite – that which gives form to the collective and the cosmic order – is realized through the destruction of the finite body.[840] The sovereign imaginary is made present in the broken flesh of the martyr, visible to all. Any behavior that explicitly abides by the imaginary's guiding principles make the ideology apparent, but in spectacles of suffering the lengths of commitment make it more manifest and more widely witnessed.

What we see in these acts of martyrdom is a performance of suffering, where the afflictions to the body are given context and used to communicate a truth about the world. Whether through the Christian's bold speech before Roman authorities, Islamist wartime acts, or the Tibetans' spectacles of fiery protest, each sees their act as a contribution to the struggle that provides the context for their performance. At the same time, these acts make a

symbolic statement about a) the nature of the conflict, b) the nature of the collectives taking part, c) what the world *should* look like, and d) the means by which to achieve such a state. Such contests require the submission of the body to the ideology, and the conformance of behavior to the guidelines of action that are most vividly evinced by mytho-historical figures who provide the martyrs' scripts. Such scripts place the current moment of suffering and dejection at the middle rather than end of the story, while laying out the next act of the drama. Subjectivity, the social group, structures of authority and a concept of justice all join together in these performances, which impress with their drama and communicate with their symbolism. The power of martyrdom lies in its ability to change minds and perspectives, and ultimately change how these events are interpreted.

(Per)Forming a Fundamental Ontology

Martyrdoms occur in discrete moments in time, when life's routine is disrupted by forces wielding violence in an attempt to determine the shape of social and political life. Where questions of sanctioned behavior are at issue, means of enforcement always lurk. It is not a coincidence that the term "sanction" is used to mean both approval and the penalties imposed for misbehavior, which often takes the form of physical pain (even the deferred punishment of hell, whose torments are spoken of in physical terms). Threats of physical harm as consequence of certain actions are meant to coerce; if you do not want to suffer, you must not act in these ways. Such programs are based on the simple premise that humans want to avoid suffering, and will always act to preserve their life. Martyrs dissent to that assertion.

In fact, most people only want life under certain conditions. Those conditions are often so few, so basic that they are assumed to be intrinsic to any understanding of "life." Attempting to appreciate the mindset of those whose voices fill these pages, however,

requires that we move beyond a binary idea of life/not life, and begin to examine the contours of acceptable life. Most people would not want a life where every day brings excruciating pain without hope of relief, which has led to modern debates around physician assisted suicide. Those who would still cling to life in such a state, dismissing personal welfare as determinant of acceptable life, might balk at an existence where their friends and families are targeted for daily indignity and torture. Correcting such a horrid state of affairs might be worth one's life. And what of an existence that sees the government supporting acts of theft, assault and murder, while those trying to do right are subjected to horrific deaths by the state's institutions. A daily experience of wrong dominating right, evil prevailing over good, defines the experience of the martyrs and their contemporaries. The martyr declares that mere life, mere existence, is not enough. Life must be possessed of a certain quality for it to be desired and maintained. For each of these cases the life available has as its price the forsaking of structures that give life meaning. The result is popular resistance hoping to reinstitute forms of life in line with sacred values. The risks of the martyr and other participants serve to reinforce the importance of those qualities for members of the martyr's collective. If the martyr is willing to die rather than live without X, then X becomes fundamental to the group's self-identity.

Accusations of torture appearing in all these contexts – particularly the Christian and Tibetan – are not coincidental, but rather serve as an articulation of coercive pain seeking to determine life. Both Elaine Scarry and Paul Kahn press for the destructive power of torture coming to bear not only against the physical body, but the speech of the tortured. The screams that produced by the torturer's craft are certainly evocative of that "state anterior to language," but it is the content of the victim's speech that is the focus, those dangerous or

subversive ideas they had vocalized.[841] Language is a learned cultural complex, and to cause a person to revert to a pre-social state eliminates cultural considerations that define their identity and interactions with others. One is reduced to brute animality, both in psychological processes (fight, flight or freeze), and in primacy of goals (the first of which becomes to stop suffering). The goal of the torturer, then, is to see all relationships forsaken, all goals shifted, and all identity lost. In Scarry's words: "in confession [as a result of torture], one betrays oneself and all those aspects of the world – friend, family, country, cause – that the self is made up of."[842] What one was, one confesses no longer to be.

If, however, in the midst of acute suffering the victim maintains control of their voice, either in silence or by affirming the doctrines and discourses that led to their suffering, then those doctrines and discourses are determined to be at the core of their very being, as defining *who they actually are*. There is no state prior, no animality underneath. There is *only* a Christian, a Muslim, a Tibetan; nothing exists outside of that. It demonstrates what I would term their *fundamental ontology*, the core self that defines their existence. It is fundamental in that it marks the point where no more excavation is possible, where nothing lies beneath, and ontological because it defines their very being. They are this and nothing else, and it supersedes responsibilities to their state, their family, even their body itself. This is the claim made by martyrs, that their life is utterly and completely determined by being Christian/Muslim/Tibetan. They will always act as is expected of such a person no matter the consequences, because they cannot do otherwise. Where a state wields harm to coerce them to behave as though they could be something else, compliance becomes a dismissal of this ontology in obedience to those seeking the destruction of Christianity/Islam/Tibet. The

martyr's act reveals that no one can be *made* to do anything, that there is always a choice to be made when confronting such a situation.

This fundamental ontology is internalized on account of one's belonging to a social group. The "I" is always embedded in a "we." Furthermore, the ontology is defined by certain practices expected of all group members, and demanded by authority figures who are empowered to determine the shape of group life. Such authority in turn is determined based on conceptions of cosmic order.[843] All such contentions are based in a central ideal that this system of order alone is sovereign over the individual, and discloses guidelines for right behavior in the world. Understanding the martyr then requires that we come to some understanding of how these fit together in a coherent whole.

Primarily what I have sought to elucidate then is the martyr's subject formation, by which I mean the way the "I" comes to be filled with cultural content and an experience of subjection to a power.[844] Our lives become meaningful when we can express that meaning to others and be understood, which requires others be familiar with and base their own subjectivity in the same meaning-generative narratives as we. Meaning is eminently social. By interiorizing traditional cosmologies, a subjectivity is developed in conformity to the ends the traditions promote about what the individual can do with their life and what life's very purpose is. Determining one's own life on such bases transcends individuality – which sees a human first in their isolation (symbolized primarily by the body) – through subjectivity, a literal subjecting of oneself to pursuits that extend beyond the self. Subjectivity leaves space for agency because the individual still freely chooses to act, but the spectrum of options are conditioned by concerns about right action. Someone in the second century brought up on charges of being a Christian and faced with the demand to sacrifice could choose to make an

offering or not, but that choice is conditioned by the extent to which a Christian subjectivity has been developed. Anthropologist Victor Turner referred to these as social processes, where actors are guided by subjective paradigms of action that affect their behavior.[845] Martyrs have developed such a complete subjectivity in line with their sovereign imaginary that all actions are shaped on the basis of that commitment.

Determining behavior on the basis of such an imaginary leads to its approach as a matter of belief – how much someone *believes* in an ideology – but there is no necessary connection between belief and action. Calling oneself a Muslim/Christian/Tibetan signifies adherence, but requires action in order to have that assertion be considered "true." Moreover, the fiercer the conditions surrounding the pronouncement, the more veracity conferred. "True" Muslims will act as befits a Muslim no matter the consequences, "true" Tibetans will maintain that identity in the face of all opposition, "true" Christians will act as Jesus commanded though it costs their life. Martyrs perform their identity in the direst circumstances in order to show their commitment to their identity. The performative aspect of identity has been recognized by philosophers like Judith Butler and anthropologists like Roy Rapaport, and here finds its highest expression.[846] Claiming an identity is an act of voluntary submission to an ordering system, and requires accompanying action to be granted truth status. Claims like these are always open to contestation, but certainty is proportionate to the difficulty of the circumstances wherein the claim is made. Where identity claims are met with physical, emotional or social repercussions, only those truly committed dare to make them, and when they do, they confirm their claim on the basis of the act itself.

In the contexts of martyrdom examined here, each martyr sought to publicly link their statement of identity to their sacrifice. Apart from their testaments, Tibetans shouted slogans

while they burned, demanding onlookers recognize the identity to which they were committed (or at least the particular shape they believe that identity takes) and that they were willing to die in its name. The testaments left by Shi'ites of Lebanon and Iran serve the same goal, making it clear they understood their act as being demanded of true Muslims (again, of their particular kind). These are acts of confession, confessing the self and its attachments, confessing who one is, and thereby what they are compelled to do. The performance of suffering is always a performance of identity.

Our identity is also defined by who we see as members of our social group, which belies a shared character and intimation of who comes first in our concerns. We exist as part of a vast number of groups simultaneously and attach varying levels of importance to different social configurations.[847] Nationalities, ethnic orientations and religious membership often dominate the conversation, but any means of organizing ourselves socially produces an identity. For many, blood relatives provide the core social configuration (and therefore the fundamental ontology), resulting in assertions that "blood is thicker than water." Attachment to any social configuration carries responsibilities related to bringing about the good of the whole, even when it conflicts with personal desire. During most times we can maintain a plurality of identities simultaneously as long as their obligations are compatible. However at times these responsibilities come into direct conflict. Civil war is perhaps the foremost symbol of such a state of affairs, where "brother fights brother" at the intersection of filial ties and political belonging. To refrain from fighting out of respect for the family connection is to act for your family and against your political collective, or vice versa. It is to act *qua* family member rather than *qua* citizen. Such times demand one identity be subordinated in favor of another.

Identities are never static, but are conjured in part through reference to narratives that identify common ancestors or origin stories. Bruce Lincoln has shown the "invocation of an ancestor [is] simultaneously the evocation of a correlated social group."[848] When these martyrs recall central figures of the past, they conjure a social configuration based in the recognition of those figures. Consistently we see martyrs calling for unity among their collectives, be it the drive for unity that characterizes early Christian theology, the appeals to work together to bring about the rule of the Mahdi for the Islamists, or pleas to maintain Tibetan cultural dress and practices of consumption. All cases see the repeated cry to remain united, and not subordinate that identity for the one being imposed by the imperial power.

Scholars like James Aho have recognized that identifying a common enemy is one of the most effective means of establishing unity amidst a group.[849] Seeing what they are *not* reminds members of what they are, specifically *not* what their enemies embody. Rene Girard extends this idea in another vein by seeing in sacrifice a means to push the violence lurking at the center of collective life onto a safe surrogate, thereby defusing a potentially explosive challenge to group unity. During what he calls "sacrificial crises," moments when social hierarchies and differentiations – distinctions between "we" and "they" – are disturbed, a sacrifice is required to reaffirm the character of the community.[850] Such reaffirmation requires a scapegoating mechanism, where all the woes of the community are attributed to one individual who is then executed or banished, expiating the guilt of the community and solidifying their social ties. The result is, according to Girard, these deaths being valorized as sacred and integrated into the symbolic fabric of the community, since "the most profound state of peace known to any community" follows the sacrifice.[851]

In spite of his methodological problems and universalizing tendencies, Girard here recognizes some significant attributes of collective life, including the security in solidarity. By revealing some of the violence inherent in social systems, he has illuminated some of what would otherwise remain hidden in our political arrangements. Perhaps one of his keenest insights comes with his recognition that anyone able to serve the sacrificial role must resemble the community enough to serve as a surrogate for the whole, but differ enough to enable the whole of the collective to unite against them and approve of the violence employed.[852] Therefore groups look to sacrifice "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants."[853] Only by uniting against such liminal characters can the rest of the collective feel confident in their own standing.

However, when violence is not imposed but willingly accepted as in the case of martyrdom, it inverts the relationship between individual and collective. Rather than being someone on the margins, the martyr becomes a symbol of the collective's core character which people compare themselves to rather than defining themselves against. By welcoming the violence deployed explicitly against members of the collective (a frame evident in each case), the martyr's death accomplish the same end as Girard's scapegoat: an enhanced feeling of unity within the community. The astonishing discipline shown in maintaining constancy through suffering and death, and their symbolic connections to sacred paradigms evoke the sentiments that form the group. The group is literally represented in the martyr's torn flesh, because they suffer for acknowledging the primacy of such values above any life without them. Martyrs are an embodiment of the community, and applying the label of martyrdom to a death is the affirmation that such a person does in fact reflect the community's character.

We see here that the self cannot be approached in isolation from the social configurations that contextualize it. Neither can that community be separated by the structures of power and authority that shape members' lives. In their testaments, the men and women examined here repeatedly pay homage to their leaders, and encourage others to do likewise. In some cases leaders are considered incarnations of the divine themselves, but in all they are seen to be the representative of the source of sovereignty with the goal of bringing life into conformance with the true cosmic order. Leaders are often represented as possessing the qualities that characterize members of the collective, which is what allows them to speak on behalf of – and more importantly direct force in the name of – their guiding sovereign imaginary. Imam Khomeini is as much a representative of God as Jesus (at least before an ecumenical council declared him to literally be God), as much as the Dalai Lama. Their relative divinity varies with the nature of the religious tradition, but all share the ability to speak in the name of the true sovereign.

During such times that voice is articulated within a setting where another institution commands a greater proportion of force. That force threatens to wipe out the martyr's group, or at least restrict their practices to such a degree that their traditions are unrecognizable, reduced to a "blind faith" in the Dalai Lama's words or an "empty religion" in Ayatollah Khomeini's. Such is the condition of many religions existing within countries of the Global North, as the reduction to a personal concern is a prerequisite for admission, leading to the privatization discussed above. That is why the PRC can claim to abide by a statute of the free practice of religion, and why the Romans were so baffled at the Christians' refusal to make a small display of loyalty before continuing to practice their traditions. This clash of

perspectives drove the experience of oppression as it was aimed explicitly at the traditions that formed the martyr's subjectivity.

But while the state possesses the greatest recourse to violence, they do not have the *only* recourse to violence. The ability of an institution to wield force depends on individual persons acting as directed, either because they recognize the authority's legitimacy or fear that the violence would then find its way onto them. Organized violence then is an *extension* of power, not its basis. Power resides in the willingness of individuals to sacrifice their own will and allow something outside them to direct their action. So while the state enjoys this privilege, other social groups have the ability to direct violence on their own behalf. We see this in cultural initiation rituals, which regularly contain some mechanism of marking the body. Rituals in many parts of the world with strong statist presences have shed such connections, but they continue in many other places where a central power is less effective. Even in Western countries where a strong centralized government maintains a tight rein, street gangs regularly require their members to endure painful processes before they are admitted into membership. Groups like MS-13 or Hell's Angels have their own ideas about who is qualified to wield justified violence, and the tight unity of these groups combined with their brutal tactics results in an ability to operate relatively autonomously from the state. Central American drug cartels operate in ways as statist as any internationally recognized government. In one of sociologist Max Weber's most quoted lines he stated that the state is defined by its claim upon the monopoly of violence. However, the majority of citations ignore its precise formulation. Weber does not say the state *possesses* the monopoly on exercising legitimate violence, only that it *claims it possesses it*. Other collectives take it upon themselves to exert violence legitimized through ritual and wielded in accordance with

their systems of behavior, and such groups are those most likely to come into conflict with a state.

At least part of the friction such groups have with the state stems from their assertion of an opposing system of order carrying its own system of practices members are obliged to follow. They possess their own laws, replete with mechanisms of judgment and systems of physical and symbolic punishment. They carry their own ideas of what is obligated and forbidden for their members. They each articulate a normative world, described by Robert Cover as an integrated world of obligation from which the rest of the world is perceived, meaning we understand the world in terms of our own responsibilities to ourselves, to those around us and those powers to whom we owe obeisance.[854] When obligations diverge, a decision must be made about which (if any) to follow. A host of variables influence such decisions, one being the potential penalties that accompany disobedience (as the very purpose of penalizing transgressions is to dissuade people from acting in particular ways). Those who transgress against statist systems out of obedience to a different order state through their action that their identity as group member is more important than as a citizen or subject.[855]

Religious orientations find more success in inspiring such transgressive action in part because the penalties they wield go beyond the physical world, but also due to their hold on morality. Religiously based systems of ethics are based in metaphysical assertions about the order of the cosmos, which surpass the more pragmatic foundation of statist legal systems. Moreover, since most religions see membership based in the acceptance of a complex of doctrines and narratives, they have an ability to be universally available. The combination of these aspects results in a significant challenge to the hegemonic hopes of any national or

imperial governments, which in part leads to martyrdom being spoken about in a religious register when the dynamic of self-sacrifice itself is inherent in any social institution.

Believing in a guiding moral system does not always translate into action, else there would be no need for doctrines of sin or karma that contain punitive mechanisms. Doctrines like those operate through a sense of having erred, a feeling of transgression that necessarily links to an experience of being subjected to a moral law and translates as guilt when that code is transgressed. Durkheim saw the formation of the soul itself being the result of this very internalization of the system of injunctions that lies at the core of a group's existence, which is echoed in Peter Berger's idea of the *nomos* and the way Pierre Bourdieu spoke about the development of the unconscious.[856] It is an incorporation of the ethical system into the body, a literal taking in of the corporate subject of which one is part.

When we say martyrs die for their beliefs, this is what we mean. They give their body over to what they perceive to be the true order, accepting judgment according to its ethical system, and recognizing that personal suffering is sometimes a necessary part of social belonging. In moments when the community and its guiding structures are under threat of oblivion, it becomes the responsibility of all group members to resist no matter the cost. They are dying in support of the way they believe the world *should be*, in sharp contrast to what they experience it as. Their ideal can only become real by people willfully enacting it, acting according to those precepts of justice irrespective of the consequences.

Every case here sees discussions of martyrdom based in narratives of redemption and holding some idea of the atoning nature of these deaths. Martyrs are purified through their performance, evident for instance in the Islamic doctrine that exempts them from the ritual washing after death because the martyr's blood is the most purifying agent (Christians

likewise possess such a tradition). The benefits awaiting the martyr after their death likewise imply their accumulated sins or negative karma are negated by this glorious act of devotion. Most traditions see that atonement overflowing the martyr him or herself onto others. Writing to the congregation at Smyrna, Ignatius not only reminded his flock of how the sacrifice of Jesus served to free all his followers from sin, but also made it evident that the martyr's death could likewise serve to atone for the sins of those who accepted the martyr.[857] Something quite similar exists in the Tibetan idea of collective karma that the self-immolators seek to correct, and in the Islamic *sunnah* that recognizes the ability of martyrs to intercede for family members and friends on the day of judgment. This sacred act of self-sacrifice results in a surfeit of redemption, purifying the martyr, their families, and perhaps even their communities. Such rectification is necessary because our base nature leads our desires to conflict with the divine systems of behavior to which we are obliged. We follow laws when we forsake our individual desires in favor of our duty, which always has at its core the welfare of the collective.[858]

When a martyr gives their life in a performance of their fundamental ontology, suffering and dying because that is what is demanded by their circumstances, they demonstrate to all immediate and future witnesses their willingness to suffer for a group and an ideology that exceeds them. Rather than *dying for* the group, which implies a necessary separation between the martyr and the group in which they are embedded, it might be more illuminating to speak of these deaths as a *dying into*, since in their spectacular deaths they use their bodies to become a symbol of the group. By internalizing the moral structures understood to have a divine source, they perform a public act of devotion just like the sacred models that guided the martyr's performance. They are martyrs because they gave all of

themselves for the good of the group, and in recognition they become the most revered members of the collective who continue to exert influence beyond the grave. They perform the grandest act of atonement, an *at-one-ment*, forever and in all ways fusing themselves with the group.[859]

This becoming-one-with shows their self to be utterly determined by one social configuration, forsaking the usefulness of the body and person in all other venues, be it as a productive member of a political society or a family member that has certain obligations to parents, siblings and often children. At the same time, it curtails any possibility of future transgressions against their sovereign imaginary. As long as there is more life to live, the possibility of change, of sin, of failing in the eyes of the divine and acting in ways forbidden to members of the collective, remain. While Judith Butler argued that identity is called into being through a "stylized repetition of acts,"[860] the act of martyrdom freezes the performer in an act that marks them as a member of a social group. They are forever fixed in an act that maintains their loyalty in the most difficult of circumstances. They can never be otherwise, and hence establish their fundamental ontology. Martyrdom serves as an illocutionary act, fully accomplishing the identity of the martyr through their performance. Martyrs validate publicly that their personhood is fully determined by their sovereign imaginary, that they are a loyal adherent, a true representative, and a model for all other members.[861]

By creating a material moment of the values and ideals of the collective, martyrdom serves to engender further acts of subscription to authority by others who likewise self-identify. Affect is generated by creating a spectacle that resonates with the models extant in the group's collective memory, which reminds other members in the collective of their common project and character. The performance of bodily harm and death does that

particularly well, as it causes the ambivalent reaction of awe and horror leading people to hear and feel the truth in their bodies.

In Testimony to the Truth

Understanding the social significance of martyrdom requires appreciating its relationship to the concept of witnessing and the abstract nature of our social orders. During periods like those considered here, multiple assertions of order come into conflict along with competing systems of normative law. Two or more sovereign imaginaries impose contradictory requirements on a person regarding the recognition of authority. Even within such disparate times, geographies and traditions the same issue repeatedly appeared: a demand that individuals understand themselves as obligated to a system governing their behavior. One's self-understanding is fundamentally connected to ways of being in the world. If Christians are Roman subjects, they are subject to the same demands as their "pagan" neighbors, including the ritual of devotion that was the sacrifice to the emperor. If, on the other hand, they are Christians first, their ultimate allegiance is to the risen Christ who has forbidden sacrifice as an affront to the true God.

The same dynamic has slightly different contours in Tibet, where the Buddhist culture of the plateau recognizes the Dalai Lama as an emanation of divinity propagating the way to true happiness. The PRC, on the other hand, views the man Tenzin Gyatso as a separatist leader threatening their country's cohesion, and therefore prohibits his images along with expressions of support. If Tibetans are subject to PRC rule, then they must reimagine what practices of Buddhism are essential and what can be left behind in order to abide by the laws of China. Tibet's contested self-determination is reflected in the other modern case of the Shi'ites of Lebanon and Iran, where a particular interpretation of Islamic doctrine promoted

the legitimate rule of the jurisprudent whose authority rested on his perceived ability to understand divine law. For the contemporary secularist governments, that figure posed a threat to their own sovereignty anchored in a Western-led international political system. If Shi'ites were principally Iranians or Lebanese, then it would be right for them to maintain the patient quietism that had previously characterized them. Establishing who these people are – what their true identity is – determines right action.

Competing political and legal institutions rely equally on imagined ideals of what the world should look like, and by what means peace, stability, fecundity and order can be established. That ideal is promoted as the solution to life's uncertainty, if only all people worked together to bring it about. Herein lies the core of the sovereign imaginaries that seek to determine life's shape and why force seems appropriate in its support. When unchallenged, such structures by and large enjoy a hegemonic status where their legitimacy is assumed.[862] Pierre Bourdieu spoke of this in terms of *doxa*, where "there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principle or organization… [with] the natural and social world [that] appears as self-evident."[863] This apparent correspondence between an asserted ideal of order and the experienced shape of existence is what engenders an experience of truth – what is said to be true is true because the evidence presented aligns with the vision expounded. This is certainly what Eugene and Anita Weiner had in mind when expressing their view that

> the martyrological contest can be viewed as a contest about what is true, or, more exactly, what should be true. It is about the questions: who defines what people should regard as truth, which 'folk knowledge' should prevail. Since folk knowledge is the belief system that is taken for granted by the members of the community, successful martyrdom makes a different set of convictions plausible and transforms them into an acknowledged reality of life.[864]

Contests between sovereign imaginaries have nothing less at stake than the determination of the truth, and the martyr is a decisive player in such a contest.

While Weiner and Weiner focus their analysis on the level of knowledge (which translates into their unfulfilling reliance on conviction), there is a need to go beyond mental structures. The truth at issue certainly requires systems of knowledge, but is perhaps more concerned with the ability to sanction and penalize action in the world. At stake is a sovereign truth about who can determine behavior and why they are empowered to afflict the body.[865] The power of *doxa* lies in its ability to engender action along its lines without recourse to forceful means that expend energy and risks the exposure of its own arbitrariness. Suffering itself is not the central concern, but rather what suffering is seen to be productive.[866] Legal penalties, self-defense, and acts of war are but a few situations where the violent deployment of harm has been endorsed. When multiple institutions claiming that power disagree, the distinction between true authority and mere violence becomes a matter of individual interpretation.[867]

Individuals facing such situations must decide which system possesses the true claim. The violence that rampages throughout their worlds is meant to convince people that it has its source in the true power, or at least instill such fear of opposition that people behave in the same way as those who do believe in its truth. The focus on knowledge and conviction that colors so many studies of martyrdom neglect that it is *behavior, not belief* that can be administered by legal forces.[868] Belief's importance stems from its sponsorship of action; belief in an opposing order results in greater likelihood of transgressing the state's legal order. The repeatedly encountered link between the martyr's act and their hopes for an ideal government based in religious doctrine illustrates the need for an alignment between the dominant legal codes and the ethical code that determines good and bad behavior. The true

order that martyrs seek is where the laws that govern align with the cultural ideals of what the world should look like.

Ultimately, then, this truth is an interpretive one. It is a question of the frame by which the world is perceived to be moral or immoral, aligned or at odds with cosmic order. It is a question of whether the martyr's collective is engaged in self-defense (which marks their suffering as appropriate) or separatism (which marks it transgressive against the state's law). It is a question of whether their death is a suicide or a martyrdom. It speaks to both the individual and their motivation – the why of their act – and the sovereign imaginary that shapes their action. In many ways the truth of reality itself is at stake, as it is a matter of what frames determine how to interpret events and how we understand the actual world to be aligned or out of sync with the ideal world. This sheds light onto why martyrdom always appears as a religious category: these principles of cosmic order transcend locale and culture by being accessible to any who accept them as representing the true order. Its religious nature stems not from its operation within a personal sphere separate from power – far from it, as we have seen it participates in the question of power over bodies – but because the acceptance of such a normative frame is all that is required for membership in the collective, inverting traditional political orientations that see one's membership as a matter of geographic location.

The martyr's death then witnesses the reality of an interpretive truth. Its foundation in the concept of the witness reflects this relationship: witness testimony is presented to the court as part of the procedure by which the truth of a contested situation is determined. The Oxford English Dictionary defines witnessing as giving testimony, and defines testifying as giving proof of, asserting or manifesting the truth.[869] The prosecution and defense offer

contrasting accounts of an event, and in order to determine which story is "true" witnesses give their account before the judge, whose ruling establishes the truth of what happened at least as far as the state is concerned.[870] When the judge enters a ruling, the official interpretation of what happened is established, and cannot be undone save by the appeals process that relies on the same legal procedures. Martyrs make a similar interpretation using their suffering and death as a means of convincing others of their ideas about true power in the world. Different collectives affirm different authorities anchored in different perspectives on reality, and individuals rely on the testimony of others – from political agents to friends to family members – to determine right behavior. The link between the martyr's testimony and their suffering and death makes it more persuasive than other voices, particularly when it is about the validity of suffering.

Pain and death must be central to any understanding of martyrdom's significance. What truth it seeks to establish has the body as its central referent, as it is a matter of legitimate administration of activity by means of physical affliction. Moreover, martyrdom in every case is characterized by its performance of suffering, the spectacle of agony that concurrently attracts and repels us. We relish stories of constancy in the face of anguish while shuddering with horror in its face. The connection between speech and being that is at issue on all levels of the phenomena is a consequence of a structural relationship between the stakes of the contest and the means of establishing the outcome. What is sought by the vying institutions is the ability to dictate behavior, and the very existence of those institutions is utterly contingent upon individuals acting *as though* they have that power.

This is the dynamic evident where these martyrs are created. People in second century Asia Minor, the twentieth century Middle East and twenty-first century Tibet all share an

experience of an illegitimate power oppressing them, violently imposing rule and trying to prevent compulsory practices. Those living in such times are confronted with the choice of either obeying the unjust order out of concern for their personal well-being, or resisting it at all costs, aware that such resistance exposes them to injury and possibly death. Pain permeates the setting as both the consequence for transgressing law and the risk incurred in resisting the state. The actions of the martyr are performed within a context where violence and death appear on all sides, and the recognition of that fact poses a significant challenge to those institutions that seek legitimacy exclusively through force; if suffering is inevitable no matter how they act, then why allow a threat of suffering to cause them to give up traditional practices?

Martyrs exemplify a further consequence, namely where individuals are willing to give all in support of what they see as the true order the state's monopoly on violence is rendered impotent. As Paul Kahn has noted, the state can demand, but not force a sacrifice, be it of will or of life.[871] Martyrs can only hope their act inspires others to see the world as they do, and act correspondingly. Any victory of the martyr's group depends upon the spread of such commitment, as without an equal recourse to violent means all they have is their level of devotion.

By consistently recalling narratives of moral exemplars in discussions of their contemporary conditions, audiences are reminded that suffering is sometimes necessary, but worthwhile where it productively serves others and the true sovereign power. It shapes experiences of injustice as stemming from antagonistic forces seeking the collective's destruction for generations, thereby linking contemporary resistance with sacred models. One becomes Christ in his imitation, one comes to Husayn's aid where her ancestors did not, and

one shows the compassion of the Buddha by offering her life for others. These deaths sanctify the individual along with the collective that is demarcated as an appropriate locus of sacrifice. All this serves to encourage the martyr's voluntary personal loss and its interpretation as on behalf of the community (as opposed to a suicide serving a personal desire for oblivion).

Dying in a way modeled in the exemplary life and death of Jesus, Husayn or Buddha, the martyrs literally made their sovereign imaginary real in their body. By explaining their actions through reference to a normative system of action they align themselves with, a previously abstract system becomes real in the actions of the martyr. Robert Cover notices this dynamic where he reflects on martyrdom's function "as a re-membering when the martyr, in the act of witnessing, sacrifices herself on behalf of the normative universe which is thereby reconstitutes, regenerated, or recreated."[872] What Cover misconstrues is that the constitution, generation or creation inherent in the martyr's performance is not a repetitive act, but rather something new that references a mythicized past. Whether or not this normative order was ever ascendant, whether or not the mytho-historical narratives recounted in these settings ever "actually happened," they are given reality through enactment. The martyr's extreme act of witness aligns reality with the narrative structures they believe accurately reflects true order. When imagined structures orienting our reality are seen to accurately reflect our experience of reality, they become true.

In the language of Elaine Scarry, through their deaths martyrs are "frozen in [a] permanent act of participation," locked in their attempt to literally realize the system of governance that fundamentally adheres to cosmic order through their activity.[873] In her view, all political systems operate on the basis of a fictive reality, a tale about world order that is

fictional in that it is not true, but it is also not false as reality can be shaped in accordance. They are potentially true, but could never achieve a static existence where they are always and constantly true, because their truth status has its basis in people *acting as if they were true*. Every action conforming to a law makes that law concrete, removing its abstractness and making it real in the world, but if no one allows the law to guide their action it would have no existence until the moment penalties were enacted on the body, there again acting it into existence. Political and legal systems cannot *be* real, they can only ever be in a state of *becoming* real. Paul Kahn argues that the state – though we must allow that it is true for any self-governing collective whatever the form – "requires energy – *dunamis* in the classical sense. It must continually will itself into being. Absent that will, it may find itself simply brushed aside by other political organizations that assert themselves in the same space and time."[874] Without people choosing to enact the state, it would and could not exist. When people become so keen to act according to religious law they transgress state law, they create that religious law in their body for all to behold. The public nature of the martyr's performance is crucial because their act of witnessing must be witnessed.

Scarry's use of "frozen" stems from the impossibility of ever participating in the enactment of any other order, since martyrs forsake any future life in order to manifest their sovereign imaginary. No matter how many times a person follows a system of law, as long as they have life they have the potential for future transgression. By dying, the martyr denies any such possibility. On account of its extreme nature, their act of witness proves superior to other acts by creating a vivid material moment of the reality of the values and ideals of the collective in their broken body. Martyrdom serves to engender further acts of subscription to their authority by demonstrating that others believe in the system, and do so zealously. The

courage on display is something the audience aspires to, and the lengths of commitment connects the character of the courageous man or woman to the system to which they commend themselves. When two sovereign orders come into conflict, the martyr can inspire action in ways consistent with but opposite to the fear that stems from coercive measures. By giving rather than taking life, they provide an example of productive power, as opposed to the repressive systems that often claim scholarly focus.[875]

Their performance of sacrifice speaks to the truth of their guiding sovereign imaginary, making martyrs a piece of material evidence for a symbolic system. Their willingness to define their entire being by that imaginary marks their connection to truth, cementing their identity forever and locking them into a generative act of order. Middle Eastern Shi'ites, Christians of Asia Minor and Tibetan Buddhists all demonstrate this dynamic, and equally attribute great significance to these deaths. By applying the label of martyrdom individuals attach themselves to the same imaginary that motivated the martyr, claim the dead for their own, and reinforce the symbolic power of the narrative frames seeking to shape their experience. Spreading the tales of these deaths broadcasts the interpretive frames that see them as martyrdom, and hopes to engender more action along their lines with the ultimate result of creating a just rule in accordance with divine law and cosmic order. Wherever martyrs are created, a dispute rages over the nature of reality itself, and these deaths show a means of participating in that contest when no other means are available.

Epilogue: Martyrdom and Political Theology

In perhaps the most routinely cited passage on the subject of political theology, Carl Schmitt argues that "he is sovereign who decides upon the exception," meaning the one who

can suspend law's activity must be considered the highest authority.[876] Through Giorgio Agamben, Paul Kahn and others, the focus has become placed on the ability to kill but not be considered murder, something as evident in Agamben's *homo sacer* as it is on Foucault's scaffold. In most works the impetus is placed on the ability to wield force, which often links with Max Weber's assertion that the state claims the monopoly on legitimate violence. There is no single form of sovereignty, and recently Dmitris Vardoulakis has traced multiple levels of sovereignty operative over the years.[877] Without overriding those distinctions, I would put forth a different frame of sovereign power that relies not on the deployment of violence, but rather the willing acceptance of suffering, an acceptance that is understood as a form of sacrifice.

Such an insight links individual self-understanding to maintenance of a just legal order.[878] How one defines themselves carries with it understandings about what actions are appropriate and encouraged, and which transgress and therefore deserve a level of suffering. Accepting that bodily harm could be an appropriate consequence of action extends beyond notions of punishment. In the circumstances considered here, we see that suffering can also be a corollary of acting as befits certain people in hostile conditions. When the alternative is acting in accordance with a worldly power's laws but in ways expressly forbidden by divine law, it becomes better to suffer at the hands of injustice rather than voluntarily acting unjust. Martyrs demonstrate that action is always voluntary, and that the mere wish to avoid suffering does permit transgression. Doing so allows martyrs to transform the violence of the one into the power of the other.[879]

By confiscating the potency of coercive tactics, martyrdom shows that rules are not enough to determine behavior. Inspiring action can have farther reaching effects than

deterrence through the threat of punishment. The repeated reference, representation and engagement with sacred models serves to stimulate action by tapping into people's desire to consider themselves good, to feel confident that they are respectable people deserving approval and acceptance by others. Modern scholarship's focus on repressive modes of power has largely obfuscated the limits of coercive power, and how behavior can come from a desire to help and care for others.

It also shows that true sovereignty, the ultimate ability to determine the shape of collective life necessarily depends on the willingness to sacrifice. At the least, the possibility of suffering is a necessary complement of deploying violence. The risk of vengeance – both immediate in reactive violence and deferred retribution served after a period of time – is a necessary complement to harming others. Rene Girard recognized this dynamic at the core of the cycle of vengeance that can threaten to destroy social cohesion in social groups. He saw the scapegoat mechanism as one means of solving the problem, but in "modern" societies he believed that role was filled by systems of justice. The state claims the final and definitive act of vengeance, and the legitimacy it boasts allows its decision to be seen as just and appropriate, evading an outbreak of violence while also determining the shape of justice governing the collective.[880] What Girard neglects is that although part of that ability stems from the overwhelming force the state commands, every step along the way necessitates a willingness to sacrifice. Policemen, bailiffs and correction officers are all open to violence even though the weight of the state is behind them.

Likewise, any ability for states to engage in war necessitates populations who are willing to invite suffering and death on behalf of that which exceeds them and gives their life meaning. The sacrifice of soldiers is honored by state rites when they perish, and their

willingness garners respect and serves as a recruiting mechanism for those who wish to prove their own merit. Paul Kahn said "the subject whose will would negate the state is the enemy," and Carl Schmitt marked the decision on the enemy as the core expression of state power.[881] Giorgio Agamben too, by averring that the exceptions to law result in those who are declared vulnerable to violence and exempted from the protection of the sovereign ban, identifies the determination of the enemy as the definitive sovereign act. However, if the one whose will negates a state is the enemy, the one who uses their will to enact a state must be considered the friend. The martyrs who locks themselves permanently in willing enactment is the paradigmatic friend, demonstrating that both ends of the political spectrum of belonging are inherently based in suffering. In their efforts to create an oppositional political community – a counter-state – in the face of the oppressive state, the martyrs use their will and body in an act of reactive creation. Since the deployment of violence first requires those willing to risk injury, the efforts and very existence of any state depend on the number of friends acting it into reality. Not only do martyrs demonstrate the central dynamic of collective life, but they also serve as the primary source of sovereignty.

Martyrdom's consistent appearance in varied cultural contexts points to the central importance such figures play in human social organization. They contribute to and perpetuate a symbolic system that molds the shape of justice forming the basis of authority. Martyrdom links the political and the religious by establishing that both spheres are necessary in order to understand the ways we attach ourselves to a law and link our identities to an order seen to have a legitimate claim upon our life. Our ambivalent reaction to martyrdom, awe in the face of such commitment and horror at the spectacle of suffering, stems from our recognition that

belonging to social collectives entails an inherent promise that we ourselves could find ourselves faced with the need to perform our own deaths in the same spectacular way.

Notes for Chapter 1

[1] In most discussions of martyrdom, two cases are pointed to as preceding the act that Christians will reinvent and then define. The first is the religious antecedent found in the Jewish text the Maccabees, especially book four. The other is the model of Greek philosophy, Socrates, and his nobility in choosing to die in line with the dictates of Athenian justice rather than escape when given the opportunity. The two are occasionally referred to together, but often one or the other is used in asserting a kind of theoretical lineage for their approach to contextualizing martyrdom. Glen Bowersock, for instance, points to the Maccabees as illustrating a common sentiment in the period of the early Christian martyrs, based in a religious affect and sentiment. See his *Martyrdom and Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. chapter 1. Joyce Salisbury instead chooses Socrates, focusing on the voluntary aspect of willing to die for philosophical reasons. See her discussion in *The Blood of Martyrs* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 75-80. Rather than choose, I want to briefly examine why both seem to resonate with the modern conception of the martyr.

The Books of the Maccabees relate the activities of Jewish models during times of oppression, persecution and war. Although they are not technically canonical, they have exerted a great amount of influence, especially in the Eastern areas of Christendom. While the work ostensibly relates a situation in the second century B.C.E., they were likely written in the first century C.E., and numerous parallels are evident with the burgeoning Christian martyrology at the same time. Still, they are often pointed to as precursors for the kind of martyrs who died in Christian circles in the first few centuries.

While the discourse of dying for a faith or a religion is rife throughout, the stories are couched as arguments for the dominance of reason over emotion. The tales of Eleazar and the elderly women with her seven sons contain gory imagery of the tortures suffered, but unfailingly returns to the issue of reason's sovereignty over emotions. In each case, the emperor is commanding them to transgress Jewish dietary laws, and in each those affirmed they preferred death to disobedience. Their ability to remain constant to those laws amidst suffering and death is used to show how the emotions (such as fear and, one could take from the description, pain) cannot dictate behavior. The true sovereignty of God is taken as a premise in an argument: If god dictated the true law, then obeisance to or transgressions of those laws is what is truly at stake in human behavior. If one refuses to follow the laws out of fear, an emotion, then emotion would seem to be dominant.

For the Greek example, Plato's *Phaedo* recounts the final days of Socrates after being convicted of atheism and corruption of the youth. After delivering an eloquent, but ultimately ineffective speech in his defense, Socrates is locked in a cell to await execution by imbibing a draught of hemlock. He remains deaf to the pleas of his family and friends, saying he will continue to abide by the laws of the polis, which in this case demand Socrates' life. As he was innocent of the charges that put him in prison, he will remain innocent of any opposition against the state that has a claim over his life. Like the Maccabees, obedience is preferred to continuing life. Truth, Socrates holds, is the supreme goal of the philosopher's life (63e), and that truth is one that will come when the body is separated from the soul (65b). He contends, "who removes himself, so far as possible, from eyes and ears, and, in a word, from his whole body, because he feels that its companionship disturbs the soul ad hinders it from attaining truth and wisdom? Is not this the man, Simmias, if anyone, to attain the knowledge of reality?" To which Simmias responds: "That is as true as true can be." (66a) For a good discussion of the perception of Socrates' martyrdom see Hendrik Adrianus Bakker, "Beyond the Measure of Man: About the mystery of Socratic martyrdom," *Church History and Religious Culture* 95:4 (2015), p. 391-407; also Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors* (New York: Knopf, 1997) 24-38.

While the noble quality of death is often pointed to as the common variable, what I find more provocative is the relationship they maintain with the law. Both ostentatiously choose death over disobedience, and reflects a concern with living right over mere living. That, we will see, will repeatedly return in considerations of martyrdom in all contexts.

[2] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 19, see too George Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice: Roman and Christian Discourses in Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 175.

[3] Paul Middleton, "What is Martyrdom?" *Mortality* 19:2 (May 2014), 117-133.

[4] Joyce Salisbury, for instance, makes a common statement in martyrological literature, "martyrs accept death rather than give up their religious beliefs; they are witnesses." See her *The Blood of Martyrs* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 148.

[5] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993). See too Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[6] Time and again in the modern study of religion we have seen that religion itself is a constructed category, a creation of the scholar which risks normative classifications about what can be labeled "religion." This was perhaps best displayed in Talal Asad's critique of Clifford Geertz's definition of religion, but the boundaries of religion have become fuzzy in the works of myriad scholars, many of whom will be engaged with here. See Wilfred Cantwell-Smith *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1964), and Jonathan Z. Smith *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) for only two studies that deal with this level of construction, along with the Asad text quoted above.

[7] OED (2nd edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), op. loc. Also mentions the definition as "Simple attribution… martyr complex, an exaggerated desire to sacrifice oneself for other and to have the sacrifice recognized."

[8] The OED also notes the term's provenance from the Indo-Aryan root 'smer-' and its correlate Sanskrit 'smar-'. Both roots are concerned with memory and remembrance, strengthening the more commonly referred to Greek root's relationship with the recalling of that which was experienced. The Sanskrit term smara (स्मर) not only refers to remembering and recollection, but has explicitly religious references as well, including an interpreter of the Vedas and the god of love. In fact, love provides the context for a great many words building on that root (Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, last revised 2008, http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/).

[9] Martyrdom has a variety of meanings, not all of which are political and not all of which suggest physical death. For the cases under consideration here, martyrdom is a label applied to a certain kind of death. Some demand that it is a nonviolent death only, while others allow for a more active role. Some scriptures even delineate death by drowning qualify as martyrdoms, in traditional Islam for instance. The kind of death varies, but its characteristics and the meanings that are attached to it bear significance resemblances in disparate contexts.

[10] This is not to give over to popular usage the ability to determine the landscapes of the term, but rather to appreciate that in these phenomena the term has purchase for the collective. Since 'martyr' is a term stemming from a particular Greek root, the exact term is unavailable in the multitude of languages of communities that seem to make use of such an idea, which would seem to give more power to the translators.

[11] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[12] Islamist is used intentionally here, meant in reference to groups who seek to remake the world under the banner of Islam. Such a drive can appear in radically different contexts, and those examined here will be both nationally based and transnationally. The use of this word is inspired by the excellent work of Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman in their *Princeton Readings in Islamist Though*t (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), where they designate this category on the basis of the common core of jurists and "new religious intellectuals" that form a genealogy for a wide spate of groups formed on the basis of an Islamic character. Euben and Zaman define Islamist as "contemporary movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the Muslim community, excavating and reinterpreting them for application to the present-day social and political world" ("Introduction," 4). I will rely on their designation, and even in places where I will use the more general "Muslim" or "Islamic" it should be very clear that such groups do not get to determine what counts as determining Islam.

[13] These are sometimes referred to as auto-cremations rather than self-immolation (see, e.g. James Benn, "Political Self-Immolation in Tibet: Causes and Influences," in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 25 (December 2012), pp. 41-64) in order to recognize the specific form of death, since self-immolation general means self-destruction, not necessarily via burning. I will here use the more widely employed term self-immolation but may resort to other such designations without asserting any interpretive commentary about the form of the act.

[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein. As he shows for concepts like games, many things count as a game but no single attribute is shared by all activities referred to as game.

[15] Moreover her mother, Misty Bernall, published a book titled *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*. Elizabeth Castelli also went into detail of her martyrdom by Christian standards in her *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.), showing how the delineations I am making are certainly open to contestation.

[16] According to Cohen, The Holocaust was not a challenge to Jewish martyrdom but, on the contrary, an attempt to destroy martyrdom forever. Hadrian had decreed death for the crime of practicing Judaism and thereby inspired the martyrdom of such as Rabbi Akiva, which in turn inspired countless Jewish generations. Hitler, like Hadrian, sought to destroy Jews but, unlike Hadrian, was too cunning to repeat the ancient emperor's folly. He decreed death for Jews, not for doing or believing, but rather for being – for the crime of possessing Jewish ancestors. See his entry "Holocaust," in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr eds., *20th Century Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009).
[17] Sands opposed England treating him and other Irish revolutionaries as criminals, as such a designation denied that they were agents of an opposing sovereign nation at war by constructing them as British subjects who had transgressed against the crown.
[18] Here of course I have in mind the methodological move of Max Weber, who looks to ideal types as a basis for analysis. See his *Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), and *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).
[19] Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, eds. *Dying For Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), xviii.
[20] Carole M. Cusack and James R. Lewis, eds. *Sacred Suicide* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 3.
[21] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Sociological Analysis* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951), 44.
[22] Interestingly, Durkheim focuses this last discussion largely upon socially and economically successful members of the group for whom there are no more goals to pursue, and are thus led to despair. See book 2 chapter 5.
[23] Durkheim, *Suicide*, 151.
[24] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[25] The work of Ivan Strenski on the changing concept of sacrifice through Durkheim and his famous students Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, support this interpretation, as he sees them instituting a Protestant understanding of giving some up as opposing the traditional Catholic interpretation of giving all. Ivan Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[26] Heidegger? Benjamin?
[27] Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[28] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. chap. 7.
[29] Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2002) p. 7, n.1
[30] See Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), and Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
[31] Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 67.
[32] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 98.
[33] Ibid., 200.
[34] Flood, *Ascetic Self*. See too John R. Hall et.al, *Apocalypse Observed* which carries similar ideas regarding eschatology.
[35] I use the designation sacred narratives over scripture intentionally. Scripture is an important and inherently religious conception, though all of the narratives under examination cannot be classified as such (considering the implications of orthodoxy and canon, which some traditions exceed and some do not recognize at all), but the role of such tales in influencing self-understanding cannot be understated.
[36] John R. Hall, Philip Daniel Schuyler, Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 50.
[37] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[38] Not only does not appreciating martyrdom within its political context risk radically misunderstanding martyrdom, but as Daniel Gilman has shown it may result in a reaffirmation of the status quo, serving those who want to celebrate the act of self-sacrifice as an ideal but not recognize it as laudable in its particular instantiations. See Daniel Gilman, "The Martyr Pop Moment Depoliticizing Martyrdom," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 80:5 (Dec. 2015), p. 692-709.
[39] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991).
[40] Max Weber asserted that the economy of power is depleted by constant recourse to force; any institution seeking stable domination, Weber points out, requires voluntary obedience through the evocation of hope and

an acceptance of the ideological structures supporting claims to authority. See Weber, *Economy and Society*, especially volume II.

[41] Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in Max Weber, *The Vocational Lectures* edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, Translation by Rodney Livingstone, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004).

[42] This placement of a means-ends relation at the center of such questions comes from Dmitris Vardoulakis' exceptional treatise on sovereignty.

[43] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

[44] See Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), and Vardoulakis, *Sovereignty and Its Other* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[45] His actual quote reads "sovereign power consists in the justification of violence," however as I have argued based in part on the work of Georges Bataille, violence should be understood as transgressive force, and the determination of what force can be seen as sanctioned and transgressive is precisely the distinction here at issue. See Vardoulakis, *Sovereignty and Its Other*, 1 for his citation, George Bataille, *The Accursed Share* Vol. III (New York: Zone Books, 1991), and my own "Violently Peaceful," *Open Theology* 1 (2015) as well as chapter 4 here.

[46] Symbolic frames that provide the meaning for experiences in the world have been approached in a number of ways, from Peter Berger' concept of *nomos* to Mark Juergensmeyer's "ideologies of order" to Ninian Smart's "worldview." On *nomos* see Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) and his and Thomas Luckman's *Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966). On ideologies of order see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). On worldviews see Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). All look to a manner of perceiving the world and our place within it that includes aspects both secular and religious. These categories have been roundly shown to be co-constituting, where the secular is constructed through an intentional exclusion of religion. While I refer to these as distinct categories, the frame of political theology will repeatedly complicate any such distinctions. On these concepts see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), and the edited volume by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*. While I am in line with the need for such a perspective, the term *nomos* is not especially descriptive, ideologies of order place the emphasis on mentality over activity, and worldviews lack any relationship to the legal structures of power and authority that are central to the cases under discussion.

[47] Beginning with Charles Taylor's explanation of a social imaginary in his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), through Paul Kahn's recent analysis of political imaginaries in his *Political Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), to the work of Mark Juergensmeyer and Manfred Steger in exploring the development of global imaginaries in various entries of the *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, Helmut Anheier and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), the focus on an imagined conception that gives shape to life has become academically in vogue. Such a category not only reminds us that concepts outside the realm of economic exchange are important, but also that such structures are fundamental for any understanding how people determine their action in the world and the ways they are related to others. Manfred Steger and Paul James have rightly identified the "pre-reflexive" nature of imaginaries in that they are the grounds upon which reflexivity occurs (see their "Levels of Subjective Globalization: Ideologies, Imaginaries, Ontologies," in *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 12:1-2, 23). They also provide the ideal to which reality is held against and found wanting, which inspires actions that promise to bring around such an ideal. This dynamic is especially evident in the discourse of second century Christians and jihadist Islamists, and inherent in the ways Tibetan Buddhists frame their situation.

[48] This second maybe considered similarly to the habitus of Pierre Bourdieu, the structured structurings.

[49] Wendy Doniger, "Post-Modern and –colonial –structural Comparisons," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 66.

[50] Theorists who took over the comparative mantle leveled three standard critiques: insufficient attention to difference, insufficient attention to change over time, and insufficient attention to the particular contexts wherein these phenomena were embedded. Barbara Holdrege lays out these three critiques, as well as giving suggestions to correct them methodologically, in her "What's Beyond the Post?: Comparative Analysis as

Critical Method," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 77-91.

Scholars like Jonathan Z. Smith and Bruce Lincoln were able to both acknowledge these shortcomings while demonstrating the continuing usefulness of comparison. In his groundbreaking "Prologue: In Comparison a Magic Still Dwells," Jonathan Z. Smith interrogates the project of comparison, broken down under four headings: the ethnographic, the encyclopaedic, the morphological and the evolutionary. Through a concentrated analysis using Judaism as a test case, Smith declares that only the morphological which traces the development of hierarchical terms in terms of complexity and increased organization (28). While he admits all of these fall short in the ideal of comparison, only this he believes has continued promise and recognizes the existence of religious studies relies upon the change. The University of Chicago program in religion has become well-known for advancing the comparative phenomenological study of religion, while programs like those at the University of California, Santa Barbara have taken up the comparative banner in attending to religious violence and violent contexts.

By looking at processes of change over time in lieu of creating ahistorical, apolitical, general constructs, the dynamics of difference have become central to comparative work. At the same time, the theoretical reflection brought about by these critiques have led to a much more effective reflexivity on the part of the scholar who undertakes them. Aspects of comparison must come organically from the material engaged, but at the same time be employed toward a theory that is the decision of the scholar. Jonathan Z. Smith is most well-known for this insight, not only pressing on the need for scholars to be clear on the theory their comparison serves, and moreover that religion itself is a creation of the scholars. What they choose to extract from the wider cultural context to be held up to a likewise selected phenomenon determines what counts as religion. See his *Imagining Religion*.

[51] David White makes this point nicely in his "The Scholar as Mythographer: Comparative Indo-European Myth and Postmodern Concerns," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 47-54.

[52] Flood, *Ascetic Self*, p.21.

[53] Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God* is perhaps the model of this type of scholarship, looking at the ways religious symbols uphold and make possible terrorist activities. By comparing the dynamics supporting violent action, he is able to both see a common experience of cosmic war, which inspires acts of violence to be perceived not as transgressive but valorous and aligned with divine laws. Hans Kippenberg's *Violence as Worship* looks to a series of modern expressions of religious violence to show that the way an individual and group perceives the situation they encounter. Using the Thomas-Theorem – which contends that the way people define their circumstances thereby makes them real in their consequences – Kippenberg's comparison resulted in a new understanding of the ways violence becomes experienced as religious. Gavin Flood's comparison of ascetic subjectivity not only mirrors my own study in multiple ways which will become clear throughout these pages, and Flood deserves special mention as he alone of these three compares subjectivities across time, whereas the others rely only on contemporary traditions. Not only do I believe that is a feasible project, but by taking into account the historical power relations that define the situations of those in the past parallels can be drawn that make the past more understandable and relatable, shrinking the distance of us with our forbearers.

[54] Mark Juergensmeyer and Mona Sheikh, "A Sociotheological Approach to Religious Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, 622-644, Mark Juergensmeyer, Michael Jerryson and Margo Kitts, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[55] Sheikh and Juergensmeyer identify five aspects of a sociotheological approach: 1) demarcating an epistemic worldview, 2) bracketing assumptions about the truth of a worldview, 3) entering into an epistemic worldview and conducting informational conversations, 4) identifying narrative structures, and 5) locating social contexts. The first step will become evident through my description of the cases, and the second step is crucial to any investigation into such actions (as Ninian Smart pointed out with his discussion of the need for *epoche* in religious studies, discussed in his *Dimensions of the Sacred*). I will alter and expand upon the final three conditions to broaden their gaze and make them appropriate for this particular study which both looks to understand those already deceased without easy access to their communities in order to hold in-person conversations.

[56] Ibid. See also Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), and Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

[57] Juergensmeyer and Sheikh, "Sociotheological," 642.

[58] Cecelia Lynch, "A Neo-Weberian Approach to Studying Religion and Violence," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43:1 (2014) 273-290, 273; see also her "A Neo-Weberian Approach to Religion in International Politics," *International Theory* 1:3,(2009), 381-408.
[59] Lynch, "Neo-Weberian Approach to Studying Religion and Violence," 280. While Lynch separates herself from the sociotheological turn by encouraging a need to deal with "particular temporal and spatial contexts" (289) in order to appreciate the particularities of interpretations that lead to violence, such is not excluded from socio-theology and I would argue is essential to and implicit in Juergensmeyer and Sheikh's discussion.
[60] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 16-17.
[61] Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice*. Bruce Lincoln has shown that such tales not only encode hierarches, leading to his assertion that myths are ideology in narrative form, but also that reference to such tales are essential in establishing the boundaries of social groups. See his *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and *Theorizing Myth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).[61] Both will be crucial for understanding how martyrs use such tales as determinants of action, and are themselves used to call up and bolster particular social configurations.
[62] Lynch, "Neo-Weberian," 282.
[63] While theological etymologically retains a relationship with theistic thought, I will here take theology to refer to the internal structures of any order considered divine, cosmic, metaphysical or other such categories.
[64] A few exceptions include Lorenz Graitl's exceptional analysis of the communicative logics of "sacrifice notes," in his "Dying to Tell: Media Orchestration of Politically Motivated Suicides" (*Sacred Suicide*, eds. James R. Lewis and Carole M. Cusack, 190-200) where he derives provocative insights while keeping a critical methodological eye on the difficulties such data presents. Meir Hatina too acknowledges the usefulness of what he refers to as "ego writing" in his *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). There he echoes much of what Elizabeth Castelli does in her *Martyrdom and Memory*, examining the self-writing practices of late antiquity through the martyr acts. See especially 69-78.
[65] John R. Hall, "Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Michele Dillon, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 369.
[66] Adam Lankford for one warns against taking these words at their face value. See his *Myth of Martyrdom* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013), chapter 1.
[67] See for instance Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, W.H.C.Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), or Candida Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Even in studies that take seriously these texts, such as Castelli's *Martyrdom and Memory* or Moss' *The Other Christs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), they are used to delineate the construction of a collective memory rather than seen as accurate representations of the individual.
[68] See for example Ronald Pape *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), David Cook *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), or Farhad Khorsokavar *Suicide Bombing* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005).
[69] Wang Lixiong for instance has a detailed analysis in his "Last Words Analysis of Self-Immolators," and many of the special volume in *Cultural Anthropology* contain similar ideas.
[70] See James R. Lewis, "The Mount Carmel Holocaust: Suicide or Excution." in *Sacred Suicide*, 233-252 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2015) and Jonathan Z. Smith "The Devil in Mr. Jones," in *Imagining Religion*, 102-120 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).
[71] While it does provide a means of self-transformation by taking up certain disciplinary practices, as Foucault showed, even without that transformation such forms of writing make it possible to create a persona. See Michel Foucault, "Self-Writing," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).
[72] Apart from the texts examined in chapter 2, see Anna L. Peterson and Brandt G. Peterson, "Martyrdom, Sacrifice and Political Memory in El Salvador," *Social Research* 75:2 (Summer 2008): 511-542; Okuyama Yoshiko, "Christian Martyrdom in Japanese Contexts: The Amakusa-Shimabara Revolt and Christian Martyrs," *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 5:3 (Sept. 2015), p. 33-41.
[73] On martyrdom and the Nazis, see Jesus Casquete, "Martyr Construction and the Politics of Death in National Socialism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10:3-4 (Sept.-Dec. 2009), 265-283; see too John Harris, "Forgotten and Remembered: The martyrdom of Charles Christopher Godden," *St. Mark's Review* 229 (September 2014), 61-79;

[74] This approach is most notable in the work of Arthur Droge and James Tabor *A Noble Death: Martyrdom and Suicide Among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) along with Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2002). These works look to cultures in a way similar to Judith Perkins in her *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Christian Era* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002), though less critically. Droge and Tabor are followed closely by the collection edited by Margaret McCormack, *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) which relies on the five-fold designation of martyrdom of the former. Other works that follow this mold include Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "The Return of Martyrdom: Honour, Death and Immortality," in Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur eds. *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Mohammed Hafez, "Dying to Be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom*, Amy Pedahzur, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Gay Gullickson, "Emily Wilding Davison"; Mario Ferrero, "The Cult of Martyrs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57:5 (2012): 881-904.
[75] See for example Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) particularly chapters 5 and 6; Perkins, *Suffering Self*; Paul Kahn, *Sacred Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Geoffrey Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Elain Scarry, *The Body and Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[76] Beit-Hallahmi, "The Return of Martyrdom: Honour, Death and Immortality," 23.
[77] Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, "Introduction," *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), xix.
[78] Lacey Baldwin Smith, "Can Martyrdom Survive Secularization?" *Social Research* 75:2 (Summer 2008), 457. See also her *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*.
[79] Apart from the authors mentioned, others that fall under this category include Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Lacey Baldwin-Smith *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*; Michael P. Jensen, *Martyrdom and Identity: The Self on Trial* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); C.C. Pecknold, "The End of Martyrdom, Religious Liberty in Liberal Orders," *Nova et Vetera* 12:2 (April 2014), 415-431;
[80] Gay Gullickson, "Emily Wilding Davison: Secular Martyr?" *Social Research* 75:2 (Summer 2008), 461-484.
[81] Eval J. Naveh, *Crown of Thorns: Political Martyrdom in America From Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).
[82] See Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice*.
[83] See too Michaela DeSoucey et.al. "Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom," *Cultural Sociology* 2:1 (2008), 99-121; for the place of martyrdom in reference to Maoism see Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, "'Kill One, He Becomes One Hundred': Martyrdom as Generative Sacrifice in the Nepal People's War," *Social Analysis* 50:1 (Spring 2006): 51-72. Craig Hovey could also be seen to operate on this distinction, though with a particular theological bent that distinguished witnesses from martyrs on the basis of the latter being willing to forgive those who are responsible for their death. See his "Being and Witnessness: Minding the Gap between Martyrs and Witnesses," *Anglican Theological Review* 97:2 (Spring 2015): 265-280.
[84] See Emilio Gentile, Politics as Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[85] Of the many that could be referenced here, noteworthy are David C. Rapoport and Yonah Alexander, eds. *Morality of Terrorism: Religious Origins and Secular Justifications*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989);George Kateb, "Morality and Self-Sacrifice, Martyrdom and Self-Denial," Social Research 75:2 (Summer 2008): 353-394; Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); N. Verbin, "Martyrdom: A Philosophical Perspective," *Philosophical Investigations* 35:1 (January 2012): 68-87.
[86] Pape, *Dying to Win*; Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008); Ami Pedahzur, ed. *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Domenico Tosini, "A Sociological Understanding of Suicide Attacks," *Theory Culture Society*, 26 (2009), 67-97; Leonard Weinberg, "Suicide Terrorism for Secular Causes," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* Amy Pedahzur, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Neil L. Whitehead and Nasser Abufarha, "Suicide, Violence, and Cultural

Conceptions of Martyrdom in Palestine." *Social Research*, 75:2 (Summer 2008), 395-416; Anne Speckhard and Khapta Ahkmedova, "The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006): 429-492. Many of these discussions often only peripherally touch on understandings of martyrdom I need not go into them here; I will simply note that in *Terror in the Mind of God* Mark Juergensmeyer explores these ideas of military stratagems and shows that they are often ineffective or counter-productive to the causes of the attackers. I follow his lead in arguing the focus must be placed on the symbolic worlds of the attackers to gain an understanding of their actions.

[87] Diego Gambetta ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Dominic James and Alex Houen eds., *Martyrdom and Terrorism: Pre-Modern to Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); see also Brian Wicker, ed. *Witnesses to Faith: Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

[88] Gullickson too employs these labels.

[89] Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "The Return of Martyrdom: Honour, Death and Immortality," in *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism*, Amy Pedahzur and Leonard Weinberg, eds. (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004); Yuval Neria et.al. "The Al Qaeda 9/11 Instructions: A Study in the Construction of Religious Martyrdom." *Religion*, 35 (2005) 1-11; S. Byman "Suicide and Alienation: Martyrdom in Tudor England." *Psychoanalytical Review*, 61:3 (1974), 355-373; Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Trading Pain for Knowledge, or, How the West Was Won," *Social Research*, 75:2 (Summer 2008), 485- 510; Speckhard and Ahkmedova, Making of a Martyr;" Donald Riddle's *The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) bases itself in social analysis but serves to return to the question of how mental attitudes are manipulated. This argument is revisited in Ramona Houmanfar and Todd Ward, "An Interdisciplinary Account of Martyrdom as a Religious Practice/Una Vision Interdisciplinaria del Martirio Como Practica Religiosa," *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicologia* 44:1 (2012): 65-75.

[90] See Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy*, edited by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Glen Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. p.6-7; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 197.

[91] Rona Fields, *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology and Politics of Self-Sacrifice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), pp.25, 36. This resonates with the focus of Eugene and Anita Weiner in *The Martyr's Conviction*.

[92] Neria et.al., "9/11 Instructions." Similarly, Belanger and her colleagues who sought to create a psychometric tool that could appraise the willingness of potential martyrs, with measurements based on "readiness to self-sacrifice" and a "passion scale" along with "depression" and "suicidal ideation." Belanger et. al. While the desire for such an isometric is certainly understandable, *saying* you are willing to die for a cause is a long way from *actually* dying for a cause. Knowing the high value placed upon the willingness to sacrifice for something – in essence the very significance of martyrdom – would likely result in over reporting of a significant degree. Moreover, sitting comfortable in a climate-controlled room filling out a questionnaire is perhaps the opposite circumstance to those most martyrs find themselves in. How far can their imagination carry them into the depths of despair, degradation and oppression that seems to characterize political contexts that beget martyrs?

[93] Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

[94] Lankford, 83.

[95] Zubair Qamar provides an excellent overview of the methodological problems, such as his convenience sampling and projected conclusions, Lankford's work suffers in Qamar's review of Lankford's book in *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7:1 (2013), accessed at http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/249/html.

[96] Lankford., 22.

[97] Paul Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). This is also a common discussion in the realm of universal human rights, another place the Western concern for the individual is assumed to be ubiquitous. In many areas of the world the person first becomes a rights-bearing subject in the context of a group.

[98] Ibid., 8.

[99] Georges Bataille was one theorist that acknowledged this concern. See his *The Accursed Share*, Volumes I-III.

[100] Paul Kahn makes this point in his *Political Theology*, chap. 1.

[101] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) chapter 8.

[102] Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 169. Stark sought to treat religion as a complex of rewards and compensators, arguing that in seeking immortality people who follow a single religion's program have accepted a compensator (168). The more valued the reward, the more effective the compensators.
[103] See for example Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to Be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom,* Amy Pedahzur, ed. (NewYork: Routledge, 2006).
[104] While the work of Pierre Bourdieu may have taken a step in this direction by discussing social action in terms of multiple forms of capital, a useful analytical tool in many cases, I worry that such models operate on the basis of an equal exchange, requiring only that we determine the appropriate "value" of any "good" being sought or lost and from there look to an equality of exchange. Heaven is valued over life, therefore the martyr sacrifices their life in hopes of gaining heaven.
[105] Here is Immanuel Kant's understanding of morality in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[106] Robert J. Brym, "Religion, Politics and Suicide Bombing: An Interpretive Essay," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers candiens de sociologie* 33:1 (January 2008): 89-108; Robert Brym and Bader Araj, "Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada," *Social Forces* 84:4 (June 2006), p.1969-1986.
[107] Catalina Kopetz and Edward Orehek "When the End Justifies the Means," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24:5 (Oct. 2015): 386-391.
[108] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michaela DeSoucey, et. al. "Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom." In *Cultural Sociology*, 2:1 (2008), 99-121., Hall et.al. *Apocalypse Observed*; Joyce Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, esp. chap. 5.
[109] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).
[110] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 34.
[111] DeSoucey et.al., "Memory and Sacrifice," 113.
[112] See Desoucey et.al. "Memory and Sacrifice;" Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*.
[113] Lacey Baldwin Smith, "Can Martyrdom Survive," and *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Cook, *Martyrdom and Islam*; also Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), chap. 4 esp. p.113; Salisbury, *Blood of Marytrs*.
[114] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*; Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). On the problems of conversion as a category, see Paula Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time has Come to Go," *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religiueses* 35:2 (2006): 231-246.
[115] See Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*. David Cook makes a similar argument in his *Martyrdom in Islam*. As Cook himself recognizes, there is very little impetus for conversion among Jewish peoples, and yet there are Jewish martyrs, both in the current political context of Israel and the occupied territories and historically, such as the Maccabean martyrs (Cook *Martyrdom*, 5).
[116] Lacey Baldwin Smith for instance argues that tales of martyrs portray an evil executioner upon which the audience can focus their disgust, and unite against. Baldwin Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*. The requirement for an executioner, however, along with her insistence upon using categories derived from Christian discourse, disallows the possibility of the 'suicide attackers' being authentic martyrs, as they execute themselves and Smith's argument explicitly calls for an outside force to end the martyr's life.
[117] See her excellent discussion on 19-24. We should be sensitive to the critique of Roger Bastide who charges a Durkheimian problem of a disembodied collective consciousness existing above all individuals that ultimately serves to consume them, see Castelli's discussion at 19-21.
[118] Apart from Castelli's work I'm thinking of Shelly Matthews *Perfect Martyr: The Stoning of Stephen and the Construction of Christian Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Boyarin, *Dying for God*; on martyrdom's boundary maintenance between genders see Gail C. Streete *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
[119] Juergensmeyer , *Global Rebellion*, 432.
[120] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 172. See too his "Martyrdom and Self-Sacrifice in a Time of War," *Social Research* 75:2 (Summer 2008): 417-434.

[121] Christopher Catherwood, *Why the Nations Rage: Killing in the Name of God* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); William R. Garrett, "Religion and the Legitimation of Violence," in *Prophetic Religion and Politics*, 103-122, Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe, eds. (New York: Paragon, 1986); Jennifer Jefferis, *Religion and Political Violence: Sacred Protest in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[122]See Al-Rasheed and Shterin, *Dying for Faith*, chap 2.
[123] Hoffman and McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," 274-280. This argument leaves him unable to explain those mass murderers who acted under a nationalistic framework, like the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka who account for a large number of suicide attacks in the 20th and 21st century, without resorting to some sort of psychological aberration.
[124] Hall, et. al. *Apocalypse Observed*; see too Cusack and Lewis, *Sacred Suicide*, several of which deal with their topic in this way.
[125] Such a situation stems not only from the fervent religious devotion according to Hall, but rather is a consequence of particular social conditions where movements of an apocalyptic bent are confronted by a state institution seeking to control such 'cults' (an innately derogatory term in the context). See Hall, "Religion and Violence," 378
[126] This is also a main point of James R. Lewis, "The Mount Carmel Holocaust" in Cusack and Lewis' *Sacred Suicide*.
[127] See Mark Juergensmeyer, "Martyrdom and Sacrifice in a Time of Terror," *Social Research* 75:2 (Summer 2008): 417-434 where he makes the argument that war provides the context for all sacrifice.
[128] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.
[129] Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Sovereignty and Its Other*, 1.
[130] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, chap. 3.
[131] Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (),10. See especially chapters 1-3.
[132] Ibid., 22.
[133] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. part 2 sections 1, 3 and 5.

Notes for Chapter 2

[134] It could serve the reader to remember that the same author is believed to have penned both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which likely were circulated together as a work scholars referred to as Luke-Acts. See Helmut Koester, Introduction *to the New Testament, Volume 2: History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), op. loc.
[135] Not only is Stephen sometimes referred to as the "protomartyr," but there is some question as to whether Jesus himself qualifies as a martyr. Revelations (1:2) speaks about the testimony of Christ, and the second century Martyrdom of Lyons says the title of martyr was reserved for Christ alone (*M. Lyons* 2.3). Moreover, the fifth century Gelasius of Cyzicus refers to Jesus as "protomartyrus" in his *Historia Concilii Nicaeni* (2.19.26). This indistinction continues today (at a 2015 conference in Germany I was faced with this question by an audience member), but for this study I will abide by the common usage of referring to Stephen as the first martyr and retain Christ's unique status rather than discussing him as a martyr for the Christian truth. This decision is sponsored largely on the basis that Christ himself, as he so oft repeated, *is* the Christian truth, and therefore speaking of him as dying in relation to the truth he is remains problematic. That decision is emphasized by the regular perceived importance of the faith martyrdom showed demonstrated, a trusting of that which could never be completely assured. (Speaking of Jesus in such a way recalls the troubling cry from the cross "My God, why have you forsaken me" [Mt. 27:46, Mk. 15:34], but continuing down this path would bring us into the realm of theology, which I wish to avoid.)
[136] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 15.
[137] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 33.
[138] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 131.
[139] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 17.
[140] Boyarin, *Dying For God*, 94.
[141] G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the 'Great' Persecution," in *The Harvard Theological Review* 47:2 (Apr. 1954): 75-113; E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). See too Donald W.

Riddle, *The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) which speaks to the ways institutions manipulate such death drives.
[142] Here I particularly have in mind the studies that confront martyrdom solely in the context of Islamic terrorism, which I elaborate upon in a future chapter.
[143] Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, chap. 8. Also compare the discussion of Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs* chap. 3 to Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, chapter 2.
[144] Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 167.
[145] Ibid., 174.
[146] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco Press, 1992).
[147] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, chap. 3.
[148] Ibid., 72.
[149] Talal Asad's discussion on this point in his *Genealogies of Religion*, chapter 1 remains foundational for the subject.
[150] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 13.
[151] Friedrich Avemarie and Jan Willem van Henten, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[152] It is this problem that leads to misleading statements by Salisbury who avers "the modern world has little opportunity for martyrs as witnesses to the strength of their conviction, but it has all-too-many chances for martyrs as sacrifices." Salisbury, *Blood of Martyrs*, 147.
[153] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, chaps. 1, 2 and 5.
[154] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, esp. chap. 2.
[155] Ibid, 44-51.
[156] Ibid, 64. For the larger discussion see chapter 2, and p. 93.
[157] Ibid, 96.
[158] Matthew Recla, "*Autothanatos*: The Martyr's Self-Formation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82:2 (June 2014): 472-494; "*Homo Profanus*: The Christian Martyr and the Violence of Meaning Making*," Critical Research on Religion* 2:2 (2014): 147-164. See also Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, esp. part 2 chap 1.
[159] Judith Perkins *Suffering Self* helped inaugurate this approach. Other scholars within this paradigm include Kate Cooper, "Martyrdom, Memory and the 'Media Event': Visionary Writing and Christian Apology in Second-Century Christianity," in *Martyrdom and Terrorism: Pre-Modern to Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Dominic Janes and Alex Houen, 23-39 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Carlin Barton, "Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds," in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* ed. Margaret Cormack, 23-38 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Carole Straw, "'A Very Special Death': Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context," in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack, 39-57 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[160] Brown, *Body and Society*, l.
[161] The term "sociohistorically grounded ideologies" comes from Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 20.
[162] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5.
[163] See for instance Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 49.
[164] Incidentally, John of Patmos tells the Christians in Smyrna, the town of Polycarp, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10).
[165] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 178.
[166] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 17.
[167] Latin translations are my own, in consultation with the translations of Musurillo's *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Greek translations were all developed in collaboration with Dr. Don Adams at Central Connecticut State University. In some places extant translations formed the base of the translation I provide: for the letters of Ignatius, I relied on J.B. Lightfoot's 1891 translation in his *Apostolic Fathers*, in conjunction with the Roberts-Donaldson translation collected in the *Early Church Fathers* found at http://www.ccel.org. Most of the *acta martyrum* quotations come from Don Adams, though in some places I relied upon Herbert Musurillo's translation.
[168] The question of the reliability of Ignatius' epistles was largely settled by Theodore Zahn and J.B. Lightfoot, but has recently been reexamined by Candida Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 52-57, R.M. Hübner

"Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der Sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochen," *Zeitschrift für Antike Christentum* 1 (1997), 44-72, and his students T. Lechner *Ignatius versus Valentinianos? Chronologie und theologiegeschichtliche Studien zu den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochen* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). While the author remains convinced by the persuasiveness of the evidence put forth by Lightfoot and the weakness in the critical arguments by Hübner and associates, these questions will not have a significant place here. (For a good summary of arguments regarding the dating and authorship of Ignatius see John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord: The background and use of the language of concord in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 4-10. See also Vall, *Learning Christ*, chap. 2.) What is important for the present discussion is the familiarity at least by Eusebius' time that these ideas had a home in 2nd century Asia Minor, a point that both sets of scholars agree, even if they disagree on the particular author. Whether or not Ignatius wrote them, people *thought* he wrote them, and acted accordingly. Any significant theological novelties in the three 'inauthentic' letters will be noted.

While the corpus of Ignatius of Antioch's epistles has aroused significant scholarly debate, I will here use the Middle or Eusebian recension, which can be dated to at least the beginning of the 4th century and are evident in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History (III:36). Those letters include the 4 so-called 'authentic' letters – To the Romans, Magnesians, Trallians and Ephesians along with those of more questionable authenticity – To the Philadelphians, Smyrneans, and Polycarp. Although these latter may not have been penned by Ignatius himself, there is reason to allow for the possibility, and their attribution to the martyr by Eusebius suggests that in the centuries following they were seen to possess his charism and authority. Moreover, as this study does not intend to declare the final word on the epistles' authenticity, but rather delves these texts for their understanding of martyrdom and the social function it was seen to fulfill, a text that was seen to be authoritative on such subjects deserves analysis, whether or not it can be ultimately attributed to an individual.

Ignatius is generally thought to have been martyred under Trajan at the beginning of the second century, though there is some evidence for a late first century composition. See Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2: History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 282-291, places them in the second decade of the second century, which this work accepts. J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, II/2 (London: MacMillan, 1885) and Adolf von Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlicken Literatur bis Eusebius*, II Chronologie vol. 1 (Leipzing, 1958/1897) place them between 100-118 C.E., while Joseph Ruis-Camps, *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius the Martyr* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1979) argues for the earlier dates prior to the turn of the second century. A good general discussion is available in William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, edited by Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Bowersock recognizes that Ignatius and IV Maccabees stem from the same area and time, based largely on linguistic evidence, see Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, Appendix 2.

[169] On his role in defining the Christian/Jewish boundary, see Thomas A. Robinson, Ign*atius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian relations* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). For a good discussion on his role in developing Christian authority, largely in terms of his perspective on martyrdom, see Peter Iver Kaufman, *Church, Book and Bishop: Conflict and authority in early Latin Christianity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) and John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord: The Background and Use of the Language of Concord in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007). A good general discussion of Ignatius in his religious and social context is available in Gregory Vall, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch and the Mystery of Redemption*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013) and William R. Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Volume I*, edited by P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1980), 30-56.

[170] Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 286.

[171] See Origen's "Exhortation to Martyrdom."

[172] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 26.

[173] Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 184.

[174] For those interested a comprehensive list of bibliographies and original sources for these texts, see Candida Moss, *Other Christs*, 177-201.

[175] Polycarp had long been heralded in the scholarly literature as the most important martyr act in the early centuries C.E. It is clear by the time Eusebius writes the passion of Polycarp in this Ecclesiastical History (iv.1) it has an established place in the Christian imaginary. However, as academic commentators have recently begun noting, led by Candida Moss, the importance traditionally attributed to the narrative may be more a reflection of scholarly interest rather than historical accuracy. As Millar points out, outside Eusebius the earliest complete

manuscript of the *acta* is of the tenth century (Millar, "Review," 241), and Moss spent a great deal of time in recent works formulating a persuasive argument for the dating of M. Poly. In the third century, in part on account of the paucity of evidence that the text was widely known prior to the second half of that century (Moss, *Other Christs*, 196-198; Moss, *Ancient Christianities*, chap. 3). On the other hand, T.D. Barnes offers a good sourcing of material that supports a second century dating ("Pre-Decian," 510-514), and Musurillo echoes his conclusions while zeroing in on a compositional date of 155/6 C.E. based largely on the appearance of proconsul L. Statius Quadratus in the text, who governed the area around 142 C.E. (Musurillo, *Acts*, xiii). While I find Moss' account convincing, I cannot discount the evidence presented by those holding to a second century dating, and am struck by the thematic and symbolic similarities visible between Polycarp's narrative and the others of this era, particularly that of *M. Lug*. many of which will be examined below. The proposed link with Irenaeus, and the status of Polycarp's martyrdom for his and Ignatius' theologies compels me to treat it as a second century text. It is likely, I believe, that the tale as Eusebius transmits it was edited in the third century to bulwark Christian souls against Decius' persecution, but I believe it is more likely that the core of the tale was being circulated earlier; or rather, I find it difficult to accept that such a famous death did not have its story told until a century after the event, particularly when the protagonist was so often referred to by his contemporaries. In the end, even if Moss is correct in her analysis (which again is entirely possible), many of the tropes and symbolic constructs are attested in other second century martyr *acta* either echoing or being echoed by the passion of Polycarp.

[176] The narrative that is given the title *The Martyrdom of Ptolemaeus and Lucius* (while recognizing Millar's charge that it was not circulated under such a title in the early centuries C.E., see Millar, "Review," 241) comes from the Second Apology of Justin Martyr through Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, iv.17 (though Eusebius inaccurately attributes it to Justin's First Apology, *HE* iv.17.1). The eponymous martyr Ptolemaeus is believed to have been a friend of Justin in Rome (Moss, *Other Christs*, 199), and on the basis of that familiarity the martyrdom is dated to around the middle of the second century (Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 515). Musurillo goes as far as to offer a dating of 150/60 C.E. to accord with its being prior to the death of Antonius Pius (Musurillo, *Acts*, xvi). Candida Moss, on the other hand, generally accepts the second century dating of the acta while allowing for the possibility that it has a later date, based on the work of Paul Parvis who contends that the Second Apology was in fact constructed after Justin's death and circulated posthumously (Moss, *Other Christs*, 199; cf. Paul Parvis "Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: The Posthumous Creation of the Second Apology" in *Justin Martyr and his Worlds* ed. Paul Parvis, 23-37, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). While I find the work of Parvis provocative, I side with the majority of scholars averring the second century composition.

[177] *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonicê* exists in both Greek and Latin versions, while the Greek version would appear to be the earlier text and the Latin possibly a fourth century recension (Moss, *Other Christs*, 182). Carpus is said to have been contemporary with Polycarp according to Eusebius (HE iv.15), Boeft and Bremmer suggest a *terminus ad quem* for the text of 215 C.E. ("Notiunculae II," 384-5), and scholars like Guilbert have looked to the command to sacrifice that forms a central part of the narrative to argue the martyrdoms must have occurred during the reign of Decius in the mid-third century (Joseph de Guilbert, "La date du martyre des SS. Carpos, Papylos et Agathonicé," *Revue des Questions Historiques* 83 (1908): 5-23). However it is instructive that many works that share such a means of dating merely point to others holding this view without promoting it as their own conclusions (e.g. Moss, *Other Christs*, 182; Musurillo, *Acts*, xv n.8). Pliny's missives with Trajan show that the command to sacrifice was an established part of Christian trials by the end of the first century, which would seem to remove this rebuttal to Eusebius' dating. Barnes hesitantly accepts the Decian dating on the basis of the question put to Papylus as to whether he was a senator (*M. Carp*. 24) and the "development of the [Roman] curial class" (Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 515). Even Barnes himself recognizes the fragility of such an argument and readily allows that this text could come from the second century. I here follow suit, approaching it as a second century text while stipulating Candida Moss' argument that the command to sacrifice that serves other scholar's dating shows that the text as we have it may be oriented for a third century audience facing the persecution of Decius (Moss, *Other Christs*, 182).

[178] The second century dating of the story of Justin's martyrdom coming through Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History (iv.16) enjoys a somewhat rare consensus among scholars. Moss highlights the presence of Rusticus, a famous Stoic teacher of Marcus Aurelius, as the Roman voice of the text which places it during the second century (Moss, *Other Christs*, 188) and Barnes follows suit (Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 515-17). Musurillo concurs, noting the date of 165 C.E. has been appended to Justin's death since the *Chronicon Paschale*, and further argues that the speech he delivers suggests it was penned at the beginnings of the formulation of the tradition

Justin champions (Musurillo, *Acts*, xix). Millar adds another supporting piece of data in the presence of references to Justin's accusations in Tatian's second century *Oratio ad Graecos* (19; Millar, "Review," 241).
[179] *The Martyrs of Lyons*, alternatively known as the *Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne* or the more historically accurate *Martyrs of Lugdunum* (which does not anachronistically apply the name of the modern French city onto the Roman city in Gaul; see Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 517 n.3) comes through Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (v.1-3), but is commonly attributed to Irenaeus who was the second century bishop of the area. Irenaeus was born in Smyrna and was said by Eusebius to have heard Polycarp himself speak (HE v; see Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 517), and the letter begins with an address to the churches in Asia and Phrygia which would both support its usefulness in discovering the sentiments around martyrdom in Asia Minor, but also connects with Irenaeus' origins. Eusebius himself gives the date of 177 C.E. to the text, and Candida Moss supports both the dating and its likely relation to Irenaeus (Moss, *Other Christs*, 189). Musurillo generally concurs, though he cautions against ignoring the possibility of a third century editor, particularly in reference to the treatment of the Christian dead (1.59-60), the references to the Devil as the ultimate agent responsible for the deaths (1.5, 42, 57; 2.6) and the references to the virgin mother (1.45, 2.7) (see Musurillo, *Acts*, xxi; none of these moments will be treated within this study). Two interesting notes on this text are the common consensus of the text's ideological reliance on 4 Maccabees (see Moss, *Other Christs*, 189), which was penned in the first century and will be treated below, as well as Musrillo's assertion that the "disturbances" that led to the trials and executions stemmed from an influx of immigrants from Asia Minor, the very area of Irenaeus' birth and that concerns us here (Musurillo, *Acts*, xxi).
[180] *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* appears to be one of the earliest extant records of court cases during the second century (Moss, *Other Christs*, 200; Musurillo, *Acts*, xxii-xxiii). While some are uncomfortable in the variations in the lists of those martyred, its authenticity is widely agreed upon. I here follow Barnes who believes the text to be a (yet incomplete) record of a trial at Carthage in 180 C.E. that was disseminated to other Christian centers (Barnes, "Pre-Decian," 519-20).
[181] Moss, *Other Christs*, 177.
[182] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdoms*, 9.
[183] As G.W. Bowersock put it, "despite all the differences in form, the kernel is the authentic documentation of the legal hearing." Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 27.
[184] One legend holds that soon after becoming Caesar he gave the head of his Praetorian Guard a sword and commanded him to use the sword for the emperor when the rule was just, and against him when it was not. See Stephen Dando-Collins, *Nero's Killing Machine* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2005), appendix C.
[185] Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 164-7.
[186] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, chap. 5.
[187] See Edwards, *Religion and Power*, 15-27, and MacMullen, *Social relations*, 101-120.
[188] Edwards, *Religion and Power*, 24.
[189] Robert Grant, "The Social Setting of Second-Century Christianity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. EP Sanders, vol. 1 (London, SCM Press, 1980).
[190] Grant, "Social Setting," 21. However Harry Gamble contends that literate Christians made up closer to ten percent of the community. See Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 5. See too D.J. Kyrtatis, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities* (London: Verso, 1987) and A.J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
[191] See Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).
[192] Grant, "Social Setting, "25. In our modern perspective, slaves are usually seen as the bottommost of the social ladder, without any agency whatsoever and excluded from political life. The chattel slavery of the U.S. south and the kind practiced across the world during the colonial period can leave us with the impression that slavery always appears the same. However, in the period under discussion, a large proportion of slaves had stable domestic situations and were able to purchase their freedom after reaching middle age. (See MacMullen, Social Relations, 92). In the Roman world, the free poor occupied the very last rung on the social hierarchy. Perhaps one in three were habitually poor, with no means of accumulating property or ascending the social ladder.
[193] Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 61.
[194] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, chap. 5.

[195] Edwards, *Religion and Power*, chap 1.
[196] Katsari, "Money and Proto-Identities" gives a good analysis of this process through a numismatic analysis of the first two centuries of the Common Era.
[197] Edwards, *Religion and Power*, 5.
[198] Boyarin, *Dying For God*, 17. This is at odds with and problematizes the work of such scholars as Bowersock and Frend, but will become central to later scholars like Castelli and Moss.
[199] Many texts could be suggested, but one of the best is surely Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[200] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 192.
[201] There has been some debate in recent scholarship on the question of the extent to which the Temple was the core of Jewish life at the time, or whether it had already begun to be marginalized by the first century. The author remains convinced of the former as opposed to the latter, more 'revisionist' histories. See Seth Schwartz, *The Ancient Jews from Alexander to Muhammad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 85-89 for a good discussion on the subject.
[202] For a good discussion on how the historical evidence of the Sicarii differs from the myth that develops in Israel, see Nachman Ben-Yahuda, "The Sicarii Suicide on Masada and the Foundation of a National Myth," in *Sacred Suicide*, James R. Lewis and Carole M. Cusack, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 11-28.
[203] This calm period was significantly interrupted by the Kitos War of 115-117 C.E. However, that conflict largely took place outside the state of Judea, and therefore did not have the impact of the First Jewish-Roman War.
[204] Michael Birnbaum and Reuven Firestone, "The Theology of Martyrdom," in Fields, *Martyrdom*. Birnbaum and Firestone note that death must be chosen before idolatry, incest and murder. Those three, they contend, transgress against the core of being Jewish and therefore are acts of *Chillul Hashem*, where when confronted with those death is a sanctifying, a *Kiddush Hashem*. Suicide is interestingly absent from this list, but could be implicit in the prohibition against murder (as in the murder of oneself, which is the context of suicide), since the sanctity of life is central to the Jewish tradition.

It is not entirely clear who first labeled the text as the "The Story of the Ten Martyrs." It is a midrash text that speaks specifically to the execution of ten teachers during Hadrian's reign, which would put it later than the period under study here and therefore likely influenced by the establishment of the idea of martyrdom during this period (see Boyarin). That story itself is also found in a more ancient text, the Midrash on Lamentations, the dating for which is less clear. Ra'anan Boustan's discussion on the subject (*From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* [Leiden: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 30-45) is exemplary.
[205] The official rules for martyrdom were said to be formulated at a council in Lydda during the second century. They declared death as obligatory rather than violating the commandments against idolatry, unchastity and murder. If any of these was performed even under coercion it was an act of hillul ha-Shem, defamation of the divine name, the complementary antonym of martyrdom. See Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Kiddush Ha-Shem and Hillul Ha-Shem," *Jewish Virtual Library*, 2008, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0012_0_11109.html.
[206] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 211.
[207] Polycarp was said to have been a Christian in Smyrna for eighty-six years at the time of his martyrdom (*M. Poly*. 9.3), which would necessitate the early establishment of the Christian community in the area. See too Frend, *Martyrdom*, 178, and chapter 5.
[208] For a long period, the gradual replacement of traditional Greek deities by more salvation focused cults (e.g. Christianity, Mithraism, Isisism) was thought to speak to a developing need for "religious belief." Robin Lane Fox has soundly discredited this overly broad understanding of the process (see her *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century A.D. to the Conversion of Constantine* [New York: Knopf, 1986]), but the fact of the shift to more salvation centered groups in the first centuries of the Common Era remains. A good discussion of the impact of foreign cults on the development of Christian martyrdom is available in Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 104-120.
[209] See George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
[210] David Ulansey,*The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[211] This term is the accepted means by which to refer to schools of Christian thought that would later be affirmed as "orthodox" teachings without reading such a position backwards in time. During the second

century, these school were one of a multitude, all seeking influence in Christian circles. Their eventual success should not cause us to treat them differently than we would the "heretical" schools of the same period.
[212] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 59.
[213] The idea of the *parousia* is basically, as Walter Wagner put it, "with-ness" or "being there" (*After the Apostles* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 8). While this resonates interestingly with Martin Heidegger's designation of human existence as da-sein, literally being-there, the concept of being in-company-with is provocative. The end times were conceived of as the period when God was (again) with man, able to exercise unchallenged sovereignty.
[214] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 115.
[215] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 114. However, it is important to acknowledge the kind of devotional practices demanded by Pliny and reiterated in the Christian *acta* were particular to a specific moment in history, and not omnipresent throughout the Roman Empire.
[216] Ibid., 114.
[217] Beard, North and Price, *Roman Religion*, 360.
[218] See for instance Livy *Ab Urbe* 24.10.6-11.1.
[219] Beard, North and Price, *Roman Religion*, 360.
[220] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 113. Under Trajan, this concern might have extended to the discomfort even around social clubs which provided an identity
[221] Kate Cooper, "Martyrdom, Memory and the 'Media Event,'" 29.
[222] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 106.
[223] See Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 163.
[224] For a succinct discussion of Pliny's rise and position within the empire, see Cook, *Roman Attitudes*, 138-146.
[225] Beard, North, and Price, *Roman Religion*, 225-227. L.F. Janssen, however, sought to affirm the charge of *superstitio* was not trivializing but rather labeled beliefs that were fundamentally in opposition to the *religio* of Rome. I am attracted by that perspective, but am hesitant about such generalization into a small bit of terminology. See L.F. Janssen, "'Superstitio' and the Persecutions of the Christians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 33:2 (June 1979): 131-159.
[226] George Heyman makes the distinction between proper "religion" rather than proper "belief," which seems an accurate use of the term religion as it would have been understood by the Romans, but I believe the orthodoxy/orthopraxy distinction works better as it does not exclude belief from religion which Heyman's words would suggest. See his *The Power of Sacrifice: Roman and Christian Discourses in Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Press of America, 2007), xi.
[227] The eminent scholar of early Christian martyrdom Candida Moss recently provided the most in depth examination of the rhetorical creation of persecution in her *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).
[228] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 50.
[229] Though some French and Italian scholars continue to assert evidence for a centralized persecution based around precise legal statutes, a general consensus has developed among American, British and German scholars that the charges against Christians lacked an official legal basis. This point has been made with the most force recently in Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, esp. chap. 2. See too Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 221 n. 32.
[230] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 181.
[231] See Thompson, "Polycarp," 33, and Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 39.
[232] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 41.
[233] See Jill Harries, *Law and Order in the Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) chap. 2 for a good discussion of the criminal legal process.
[234] Thompson, "Polycarp,"27. Huge swaths of the public were routinely brought together in these locations and inculcated into the cultural sensibilities, social distributions and political ideology of Rome. See Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997). In this context see especially chapters 3 and 5. She uses sacrifice as an explanatory mechanism for the dynamics of the arena, and her work has echoes of Rene Girard's concept of human sacrifice in the reminder but sublimated transcendence of violence into the controlled (though never fully controlled) staged expiation of violence from the community. The violence contained within the walls of the amphitheater is a way to drive the violence of the community into a container.
[235] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 107. See also Paul Plass' *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) for the symbolic importance of the

arena in maintaining and reinscribing social order. See Gail Streete, *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009) and Castelli chapter 5 and Boyarin chapter 3 for the arena's role in instituting and maintaining gender roles. For the place of the maternal body in the developing discourse of martyrdom, see Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 164-169.

[236] Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 35-37.

[237] On the necessary awe that changes violence into power, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* chap. 2, and Kahn, *Sacred Violence* esp. chap. 1.

[238] In the words of Roland Auguet, quoted in Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 122.

[239] See Andrew Lintott, "Crime and Punishment," 326. For a good look at the evidence for such influence during the second century, see De Ste. Croix, "Why were the early Christians Persecuted?" 15.

[240] MacMullen, Social relations, 104, 112-113. See too Grant, "Social Setting," 25.

[241] Elias J. Bickerman, "Trajan, Hadrian and the Christians," *Rivista di Filogia e di Instruzione Classica* 96 (1968), 312. See Harries, *Law and Crime*, chapter 3 for a good discussion of the *cognitio*.

[242] For a good discussion see John Richardson, "Roman Law in the Provinces," in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Law*, David Johnston, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 45-58.

[243] Andrew Lintott points out that at other times the wronged parties themselves, or even other private citizens with a stake in the proceedings could also serve as the prosecutorial party. See his "Crime and Punishment," 301.

[244] Friedrich Vittinghoff concluded that the mere public profession of Christianity amidst its social segregation was enough to merit a death sentence, cutting against the grain of the social fabric. See Friedrich Vittinghoff, "'Christianus sum': das 'Verbrechen' von Aussenseitern der römischen Gesellschaft," *Historia* 33:3 (1984), 331-357. Peter Garnsey went so far as to argue Christianity was a special case, the only capital crime undefined in Roman law, a difficult stance to accept considering the argument maintains a unique status for Christians rather than locating them in their larger context. See Garnsey, "The Criminal Jurisdiction of Governors," 53.

[245] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 168. This sentiment is echoed by den Boer and Fergus Millar, see the latter's "Imperial Cult and the Persecutions," 170.

[246] See his rescript to Caius Minucius Fundanus.

[247] This approach is mirrored in the works of Justin Martyr, whose texts written in Rome likewise took a philosophical, ethical approach to try and convince the authorities of the legitimacy of the Christian doctrine.

[248] Beard, North and Price, *Roman Religion*, 225.

[249] Riggsby, *Roman Law*, 201.

[250] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 167-8.

[251] D. Rankin, "Tertullian and the Imperial Cult," 213.For the troubles in establishing the legal basis for persecution of Christians before Decius' reign, see Timothy D. Barnes, "Legislation against the Christians," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58:1-2 (1968): 32-50.

[252] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 10.

[253] On the parallel of *sacriligium* to *atheous*, see G. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present* 26 (1963), 10 n. 34. On the dual threat of such charges, see Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 221.

[254] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 37.

[255] See Thompson, "Polycarp," 44-5 for a good examination of the historic charges of atheism in the Roman republic and early empire.

[256] Quoted in Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 105.

[257] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 46-7.

[258] See his *Apology*, 4.11, also 2.10, 11. See also Cook, *Roman Attitudes*, 166-7.

[259] See too Frend, *Martyrdom*, 236.

[260] Divorce is an anachronistic term for the practice of giving a *repudium*, a declaration of dissolution, in ancient Rome. The text itself says the woman "gave him what you call the *repudium* [*rhepoudion*] and left him" (*M. Ptole*. 6). For more on divorce in Rome and the practice of *repudium* see Thomas A.J. McGinn, "Repudium" in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Roger Bagnall et.al., eds. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and Susan Treggiari, "Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and How Frequent was it?" in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, Beryl Dawson, ed., (New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 7-30.

[261] Judith Perkins finds the central premise that the courts and justice system are unjust is linked to the growing divide in experiences with the law between elites and non-elites during the period, which is supported by the situation in the provinces noted above. See Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 95.
[262] See Plato's *Apology*, esp. sections 24b-28a. This rhetorical alignment was especially important for Justin Martyr, the philosopher in Rome who wrote at length to Marcus Aurelius on the sound philosophical basis of Christian morality.
[263] For a good discussion of the sense of "genius" used, see Jan Den Broeft & Jan Bremmer "Notiunculae Martyrologicae III: Some Observations of the Martyria of Polycarp and Pionius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39:2 (June 1985): 110-113.
[264] Beard, North, and Price, *Roman Religion*, 225-227.
[265] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 256.
[266] See also Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 219.
[267] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 50. The sacrifice that was required was apparently simple enough: a libation of unmixed wine and incense was performed before a statue of the emperor. While the image of the contemporary emperor watched over the proceedings, what was being worshipped was the genius of the emperor, that immortal aspect that was transferred between mortals who sat upon the emperor's throne. It was not only the emperor whose genus was supplicated with sacrifice; the genius of a Roman household also was regularly attended with sacrifices of flowers, unmixed wine and incense, marking the Empire as one household, with the Emperor as *paterfamilias*. (See Heyman, *Sacrifice*, xviii. Cicero's *De Domo Sua* goes on at length about the creation of the sacred space of the home, its altars and sacrifices.) Such actions gave up something useful to the sacrificer in hopes that the target would be pleased by the actions and would maintain order in the sacrificer's favor. Incense ranged in quality and cost, and was used as an odor purifier as well as some spices in foods. Wine also varied in quality, but the qualifier that the wine be unmixed refers to the contemporary practice of mixing water with wine (Pliny the Elder, uncle of the abovementioned Pliny, recorded that the appropriate mixture was eight parts water to one of wine [*Natural History*, XIV.vi.54]). Requiring 'unmixed wine' was a way to assure the purity of wine, and be more costly and dear to the Romans. For both, while undoubtedly a minimal amount, we have the literal and symbolic voluntary giving up of something of personal value for the benefit of oneself and ones relations. In doing so, it recognizes that which the sacrifice is directed towards controls the well-being of the sacrificer. It is no surprise then that the ruling hierarchies were reaffirmed during these rituals, as discussed above.
[268] See John Schied, *Roman Religion*, 79.
[269] Richard Gordon, "The Veil of Power," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 126-139. See too Scheid, *Roman Religion*, 95-97. Scheid's assertion should again direct us away from approaching religion during this period as something that depends on a mental activity or state. Sacrifice was a participatory act governed by belief but not only reflective of it.
[270] Cook, *Roman Attitudes*, 176-9.
[271] See Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 8.
[272] See Katherine McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), and Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972).
[273] Edwards, *Religion and Power*, 64. See too Frend, *Martyrdom*, 118.
[274] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 213.
[275] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 236-238.
[276] As Elaine Scarry has it, "in confession, one betrays oneself and all those aspects of the world – friend, family, country, cause – that the self is made up of." See Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 29.
[277] In fact there will be years of debate and discussion over what to do with the so-called *lapsi* who performed the sacrifice but later sought readmission to the Christian community once the persecutions abate. Several classifications of *lapsi* were determined depending on the transgression committed: *Sacrificati* were those who had performed a sacrifice to idols (Roman gods) but later sought reunification with the church. *Libellatici* were those who procured, often through bribery, a certificate from Roman authorities declaring they had sacrificed. Because they did not actually sacrifice they faced a less stringent path of atonement to rejoin the ranks of Christians, but were still considered outside the faith. Those who had burnt incense in accordance with the Roman decrees were known as *thurificati*, the third group. Cyprian of Carthage, who faced persecution under the Emperor Valerian and refused sacrifice saying "I am a Christian," would write "De Lapsi" in the mid-third century supporting the readmittance of these semi-apostates into the Church.

[278] The Greek reads *loidorēson ton Christon*.
[279] See too Frend, *Martyrdom*, 219.
[280] I am indebted to Don Adams for his assistance in working out the relative meanings and potency of the term.
[281] Interestingly, Paul goes on in that same verse to affirm that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." Hence whoever was able to hold to their confession, especially in the midst of coercive measures thereby showed their possession of (or by) the Holy Spirit. When we turn to the nature of the kind of speech performed by these martyrs, we'll see an ambiguity about who is speaking – the martyr or the Holy Spirit through the martyr. At a conference where I previously presented this material, Kate Kirkpatrick raised the question of who was actually seen to be speaking in the martyr's confession, the martyr themselves or the Holy Spirit. The acta give no intimation at all that it is any but the martyr who directs their speech, and even demand it as part of the martyrs' exceptionality. However within the New Testament, such language is clearly imagined to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Apart from Paul's quote here, see below on the 'mini-Pentecost" of Acts.
[282] Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 37.
[283] This is another common theme throughout the acta, e.g. Polycarp himself (M. Poly. 15-16); Agathonice (M. Carp. 46-48); and those in Lyons and Vienne who were reinvigorated by torture (M. Lyons 24 ff.). It is also interesting considering the influence of the Docetist doctrines that held Christ could only have appeared to suffer because God could not actually feel pain. Coming from the same tale that celebrated Ignatius' hero is interesting, and likely stems from a later attempt at hybridization.
[284] If, as Elaine Scarry has it, torture makes voice absent by reducing vocal output to screams signifying regression to an animalistic state, the martyrs refuse any such prior state is possible. They are declaring that the entirety of their person is essentially Christian, that fundamentally, ontologically they are defined by their Christianity. See Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 41-50.
[285] Reinforcing this, some *acta* portrayed the Christian body as something fundamentally different from others. Polycarp could not be burned in the fires of the arena, instead remaining untouched by the flames and being "as bread being baked, or like gold and silver being purified in a smelting furnace" (*M. Poly*. 15.2). Such metaphors both reinforced the fundamental difference of the martyr's body, and linked to images of the purification of sin. The martyr Sanctus not only did not suffer from the red hot pincers that were applied to his flesh, but he was "cooled and strengthened by the heavenly fountain of the water of life that flows from the side of Christ" after his confession of faith. (*M. Lyons* 22). Under a second round of torture, "his body unbent and became straight… he recovered his former appearance and the use of his limbs. Indeed, the second trial by the grace of Christ proved to be not a torture but rather a cure" (*M. Lyons* 24). Here again the Christian tale utterly inverts the Roman intent.
[286] When I speak of "relational identity," I refer to the means by which social identity is constructed in terms of one's position in a relational matrix. National identity is determined on the basis of a relational matrix determined by the institution of the nation, parental identity established on the basis of a relationship with children, etc.
[287] The Greek reads "*theophilous kai theosebous genou tōn Christianōn*."
[288] See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why this New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 49-68, Judith Perkins, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 239-268, David Horell, "Ethnicity, Empire and Early Christian Identity: A social-scientific reading of 1 Peter," in *Reading 1-2 Peter and Jude: a resource for students* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 135-149. I support the conclusions of these scholars, however I believe the context of race not only varies widely between historical periods and geographic areas, but it also falls short of an accurate description of early Christians on one important basis – the question of power and authority.
[289] See Gerhard van den Heever, "Space, Social Space, and the Construction of Early Christian Identity in First Century Asia Minor," *Religion & Theology* 17:3/4 (2010), 205-243.
[290] Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 1.
[291] Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 28.
[292] For some good discussions on the multiple identities held by Romans during the time under consideration see Constantina Katsari, "Money and proto-national identities in the Greco-Roman cities of the first and second centuries AD" *National Identities* 8:1 (March 2006) 1-20. For a more general discussion see Louise Revell, *Roman Imperialism and Local Identities*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[293] However Jesus' command to hate (*misei*) is interpreted, it is clear that love of and obedience to Christ must come first – above family, nation, even self. Interestingly, it seems to cause less of a stir when the self is

exceeded (the relation between the individual and her own body) than when more deeply ingrained social institutions like the family are. Consider Agathonicê, an onlooker who became a martyr and in doing so orphaned her son. While it is unlikely the Roman authorities would have actually allowed such an act, the transgression of what is taken to be a fundamental relational identity leads the crowd to plea for her to have pity on her child, to which she replies "He has God who can take pity on him; for He has providence over all" (*M. Carp*. 44). The crowd responds to such an inconceivable act by lamenting not her action, but the Roman decrees leading to her sentence of death (*M. Carp*. 45). There is some ambiguity in the text as to whether their claim of injustice is aimed at the Christian or Roman decrees, but the Christian context certainly suggests Roman injustice.

[294] See Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 211.

[295] Candida Moss, *Other Christs*, 49.

[296] While the many vagaries to that battle to control Christian discourse towards a single orthodoxy are well-beyond the scope of this paper, the means by which authority was being determined as early as the 2nd century are instructive. One could hardly be better served than by consulting W.H.C. Frend's magisterial *The Rise of Christianity* for perhaps the most thorough discussion, or the equally erudite *The Birth of Christianity* by John Dominic Crossan (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) which is particularly good for the 1st century. Jaroslav Pelikan's multi-volume work *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (3 volumes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) is equally as instructive, though it largely remains on the level of doctrinal developments over social issues. Paul Johnson's History is perhaps better for the more casual reader who still wants a thorough analysis. The author acknowledges he is neglecting a great series of others as well.

It is fairly well established that Christ himself is the primary authority, he is succeeded by the disciples and apostles who had direct experience of His teachings and miracles (with the exception of Paul, who never had any direct contact with Jesus). From there the question of spiritual authority is open, but the martyrs are widely seen as the next link in the chain, followed by the ascetics whose "white martyrdom" of bodily deprivation lend them authority. See Edward E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, Johannes Quasten, ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Press of America, 1950). Athanasius of Alexandra's writing of the *Vita Antonii* and relationship with the anchorite Antony in the fourth century is perhaps the best argument for this succession. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 207-218.

[297] It should be noted that various churches at this point in history held different beliefs about the relative status of Christ and God. While the Council of Chalcedon will attempt to instill a normative understanding of Christ as "truly man and truly God," this will only come about after centuries of diverse understandings of Christ's divinity that ranged from him being merely man to him being God on earth. The synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to favor the former, while the Gospel of John is well-known for his high Christology. During the second century, there was no consensus on the issue, and therefore I mean to suggest none, using "divinity" here as a shorthand for discussion.

[298] Wagner, *After the Apostles*, 151.

[299] See also John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord: The Background and Use of the Language of Concord in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007).

[300] Here of course I am thinking of the erudite critique of the category of religion provided by Talal Asad in his *Genealogies of Religion*.

[301] Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 34.

[302] This is a major failing of the translations Herbert Musurillo provides for the martyr *acta*. (See further discussion below.) Even speaking of Constantine's "conversion" in the fourth century as being the moment that Christianity became the "religion of the empire" maintains a break between religious ideology and political doctrine. Better to understand it as the moment the empire became Christian, when the Christian sovereign imaginary supplanted the Roman as the sacred backbone of Roman imperial policy (such is far too simplistic a description for the events around Constantine's "conversion" of course). The separation of a religious sphere from a sphere of power comes especially from Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* ().

[303] Lucius' statement translates *basilea tōn ouranōn*. Speratus' text reads *imperatorem regum et omnium gentium*; cf. to Rev. 1:5 where Christ is referred to as the "ruler [*archon*] of the kings of the earth."

[304] The idea of the Parousia is basically, as Walter Wagner put it, "with-ness" or "being there" (*After the Apostles* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994], 8). While this resonates interestingly with Martin

Heidegger's designation of human existence as *da-sein*, literally being-there, the concept of being in-company-with is provocative. The end times were conceived of as the period when God was (again) with man, able to exercise unchallenged sovereignty. It was at this time that judgment would occur, determining who would reside in the presence of God for all eternity and who would be cast forever from His sight.

[305] The Greek reads, "*Blasphēmountes tēn hodon, toutestin hoi huioi tēs apōleias*."

[306] The Greek here reads, "*Blasphēmian ēgagon tōn theōn kai tōn Sebastōn*."

[307] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 221.

[308] In the passages of this paragraph sacrifice translates *thysia*, save for 1 John 2:2 where the word translates *hilasmos*, an appeasing.

[309] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 51.

[310] Candida Moss has an excellent delineation of the variety of sacrificial discourses in her *The Other Christs*, 76-77. For her discussion of the particular constellation that informed Christian martyrdom in general, see ibid. 77-87, and Heyman, *The Power of Sacrifice*, 161-218.

While these will be the main streams of analysis for this section, I heartily agree with Candida Moss that promoting any singular conceptions of sacrifice in this period reflects the conception of sacrifice in the scholar's mind more than reflecting the understandings of their subjects. See Moss, *Other Christs*, 83. The dynamic of sacrifice that I will focus on here does reflect my own interests in the way sacrifice served as a marker of identity and allegiance to a sovereign power.

[311] The Passover sacrifice recalls the moment of Israel's salvation from Egypt, when the blood of a lamb was smeared on doors of Jewish families so God would "pass over" those households while dealing death to their Egyptian neighbors. Inherent in the story is the importance of a kind of public marking of identity and loyalty, a trope that continues in Christian reimaginings.

[312] See John Downing, "Jesus and Martyrdom," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s.14 (1963), 279-93. Also Candida Moss, *Other Christs*, 243 n.20.

[313] See the discussion of the date of 4 Maccabees in D. A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2006), xiv-xvii.

[314] It should be remembered that the Jewish and Christians communities were still closely related at this time, so speaking of "Jewish" influence may communicate a too firm distinction between the two groups; Christians at this time would not have seen themselves appropriating Jewish ideas, but rather seen these as their own sacrificial lineage, which of course it was.

[315] Heyman, *Sacrifice*, 2. See too Moss *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 76 where se elaborates upon how Ignatius in particular styles his death on the model of imperial based sacrifice, and Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 28, where he argues that the mores of the Greco-Roman world is central to the Christian system of martyrdom.

[316] Moss, *Other Christs*, 82.

[317] The Greek text in the Martyrdom of Polycarp is: "*aiōniou kai epouraniou archiereōs*."

[318] Moss, *Other Christs*, 32.

[319] For Christians, the cosmic order relied on the God of Abraham, and the concept of sacrifice was based in Jesus' death, which served as a counterpoint to the original sin of Adam and Eve. The progenitors' actions led to the penalty of death for all who followed from them, but Jesus died that death for all, so those who participate in that death with him are not subject to that penalty and gain life everlasting (this conception comes especially from Paul, see in particular Rom. 5:12-21). See Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, chapter 3 on the development of this doctrine in the New Testament period.

[320] Moss, *Other Christs*, 33. Moss of course points out that this was not something novel of the Christians, but rather tapped into long standing means of ethical pedagogy in both the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish world. See Moss, *Other Christs*, 19-24. Moss' overall argument convincingly shows how that understanding (by both the martyrs themselves and the Christian audiences that perpetuated the stories) resulted in early martyrs being seen by their contemporaries as "other Christs" whose mimetic suffering both held similar promises to and whose concomitant trials helped shape the understanding of Jesus' own ordeal. Although Christ was said to be "reincarnated in the tortured flesh of the martyrs" (Moss, *Other Christs*, 6), Christian martyrs did not attempt to directly take on the status of Christ. However there is provocative evidence that suggests the rhetorical separation of Christ and martyr aimed to address a popular (mis)understanding. Christ's sacrifice was seen as expiatory, and there is good evidence that in the second century Asia Minor the martyr's death was as well, especially in the epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius. (For a sound argument against seeing the expiatory nature of martyrdom as a common strand throughout the early Christian world, see Moss, Other Christs, 85-87. For the opposing side, and an argument that places it central to Christian ideas of martyrdom, see Francis Young, *The*

Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom (Patristic Monograph Series 5. Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), esp. 107-111, 129-134, and 223-238.) Pothinus was said to cause a stir as though he was Christ (*M. Lyons* 1.29), and Polycarp's story directly relates a popular concern that the martyr would replace Christ, setting up the explanation that martyrs are only loved because of their imitation of and loyalty (*M. Poly.* 17.2-3). The martyrs of Lyons goes as far as to suggest Christ alone deserved the title of martyr, as he was the "faithful and true witness" (the text reads: "*tō pistō kai alēthinō martyri*";*M. Lyons* 2.3). Giving voice to such concerns discloses the ongoing determinations of these martyrs' status during this period, but also should warn us away from any easy reading of the relationship between Christ and his imitators. What is clear, however, is that these texts aimed to explain to their audience that the martyrs are not Christ, and that which imitates a model is necessarily inferior to the model. Moss makes this point early on, and proceeds to illustrate that those who imitate the model still seek to garner the authority of the model for themselves.

[321] Moss, *Other Christs*, 43. Emphasis in original.

[322] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 54.

[323] See too Frend, *Martyrdom*, 199.

[324] The Greek reads "*holokautōma dekton tō theō hētoimasmenon."*

[325] Polycarp, like Ignatius, use the word *thysia* in reference to sacrifice, while the martyrs of Lyons prefer the equally common *etythēsan*.

[326] Moss, *Other Christs*, 59.

[327] See Guy Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. chapter 3. The move of some scholars to aver a more 'spiritual' substitution for the Roman visceral sacrifice seems ideological weighted, but the solution to such an issue is not necessary to understand the ways the Christian communities of the 2nd century manipulated a sacrificial discourse familiar to them in the cultural milieu. See Robert J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judaeo-Christian Background Before Origen* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1978) esp. 378-88.

[328] For more on this, see Moss, *Other Christs*, 245 n. 51.

[329] This translation is taken from J. B. Lightfoot, the Greek reads: "*di' odontōn thēriōn alēthomai, hina katharos artos heurethō tou Christou*." For more on the Eucharistic overtones of sacrifice in martyrdom, see Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 185, and for more on the role of sacrifice in the Eucharist see Moss, *Other Christs*, 78-82.

[330] On this point see especially Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001).

[331] McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 26. McClymond in that place refers to the act of killing specifically, but the context of her overall discussion merits the contextualization of the quote I have here.

[332] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, part 2 section 6.

[333] See Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 104, 119.

[334] Everywhere martyrdom is linked to direct ascent to heaven. See *M. Poly*. 2.3, 4.2; *M. Carp*. 7; *M. Justin* 5.1-3l; *M. Lyons* 1.36; *Ig. Magn*. 5; *Ig. Poly*. 2.

[335] See Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in Max Weber, *The Vocational Lectures* edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, Translation by Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004).

[336] Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," *The Yale Law Journal*, 95:8 (July 1986), 1605.

[337] Recla, "*Homo Profanus*," 152. See too Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* chap. 2.

[338] See Foucault's discussion on "docile bodies" in *Discipline and Punish*, part 3 section 1.

[339] This point was excellently made by Paul Kahn, *Sacred Violence*, 25.

[340] Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 117.

[341] Quoted in Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 99.

[342] This is one of Rene Girard's central points in Sacred Violence. On misrecognition, see Pierre Bourdieu.

[343] Legal theorist Paul Kahn has argued that in torture, the power of the sovereign is reproduced through the confession. Kahn, *Sacred Violence*, 25.

[344] See his *Discipline and Punish*, part II. See also Kahn, *Sacred Violence*, chap. 2.

[345] Leonard L. Thompson, "The Martyrdom of Polycarp: Death in the Roman Games." *The Journal of Religion* 82 (2002), 39. While Thompson does not account for why the cry of pain legitimates the coercion, I will suggest elsewhere that it was the control over speech that enabled the martyrs to help create and establish the truth they preferred.

[346] Tertullian's text in Latin reads: "*ut negantes nomen pariter utique negemus et scelera, de quibus ex confessione nominis praesumpseratis*."
[347] The question of the tyrant's ability to make them turn translates *dūnētheiē*, from the same root which is used by Polycarp and Sanctus to explain their inability to blaspheme against Christ (*M. Poly*. 9.2-3; see above).
[348] This reading is in opposition to that René Girard gave to Peter's denial (René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986], chap. 12, esp. 149-159. See also René Girard, "Peter's Denial and the Question of Mimesis," *Notre Dame English Journal*, 14:3 [Summer 1982], 177-189.) Girard looks to Heidegger's concept of *Mitsein* – being-with – to discuss Peter's association with Jesus. As an apostle, Peter was defined by being-with Jesus, a state that Girard sees as impossible following Jesus' arrest. As the apostle followed the Messiah, he was surrounded by the others of the mob, and his denials of being-with Jesus constitute, Girard believes, an attempt to be-with others. When the cock crows twice (a symbol which Girard extrapolates at questionable length), Peter realizes that being-with the mobs is not only being untrue to who he truly is (a Christian), but it is ultimately impossible for him (his accent and language marks him as a Galileean, marking him irrevocably as something other).

From this point Girard proceeds to use Peter as but one more proof of his scapegoat meta-hermeneutic. Not only does he rely heavily on a very literal reading of *Mitsein* (where physical absence results in an inability to be-with, a point that Heidegger would be troubled by, since when Heidegger discusses *Mitsein* in *Being and Time*, it links to the voice of 'them', the *Das Man*, the unidentified 'ones' who influence and direct the inauthentic form of being. Doing something because that is "just what people do" in no way requires the actual presence of others pressing their interpretation upon the person. See *Being and Time*, chapter 3, esp. §25-27), he also asserts that Peter's denial stemmed from a desire to participate in the scapegoating efforts of the crowd. Upon Jesus' arrest, Girard argues that Peter "lost all memory of *having been*" with his Messiah (Girard, *Scapegoat*, 150. Emphasis in original). He proceeds to go to fairly extensive imaginative lengths to assert that Peter 'switched sides' for the period of his denial. The dynamic is so powerful that "even the disciples cannot resist of the scapegoat… we must count the group of disciples among the forces that are united in condemning Christ" (ibid., 105). Such a radical interpretation is surprising considering the high place Girard holds for the Christian myth. Moreover it is unnecessary.
[349] Here too I am grateful for the conversation and erudition of Don Adams, who provided much needed context for vthis discussion of *arnēsis/homologeo*.
[350] Paul Kahn, "Torture and Democratic Violence," *Ratio Juris*. 22:2 (June 2009), 247.
[351] Kahn, "Torture," 250.
[352] Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), op. loc.
[353] For an excellent study comparing the concept of *fides* and *pistis* in the Roman Empire, see Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and the Early Churches* (New York: Oxford, 2015).
[354] Kahn, "Torture," 248.
[355] There is a sense that it is simply a matter of balancing penalties; that since the other fire will last longer it is worse and therefore it should be feared more than the present one. This is true, but at the same time I think obvious that it is not the entirety of the Christian argument. Most importantly, to weigh those two options is to necessarily accept the accuracy of the Christian representation of reality; namely that there is a judgment that leads to punishment afterlife. So to accept the eternal fires as a worse fate is to inherently accede to the fact that such a state of affairs is real, or true. To accept the part necessarily entails accepting the whole. More importantly, by using reference to the one to belittle the other, there is a communication of the validity of one over the other. You have to try to avoid one, but can find your way out and through the other.
[356] Any understanding, therefore, that the greater penalties of hell are responsible for the actions of martyrs misses the fundamental dynamic of martyrdom. In the face of some of the most coercive measures the state can wield, the martyrs respond through an act of fierce freedom.
[357] Emphasis mine. The whole passage reads: "Quam pulchrum spectaculum deo, cum Christianus cum dolore congreditur, cum adversum minas et supplicia et tormenta componitur, cum strepitum mortis et horrorem carnificis inridens inculcat, cum libertatem suam adversus reges et principes erigit, soli deo,cuius est, cedit, cum triumphator et victor ipsi, qui adversum se sententiam dixit, insultat! Vicit enim qui, quod contendit, obtinuit."
[358] Chris Frilingos, "'It Moves Me to Wonder': Narrating Violence and Religion under the Roman Empire," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77:4 (Dec. 2009), 829. While Frilingos sees the re-inscription of power through asymmetrical power relations as separate from challenges to "global" regimes of knowledge, I

would say it is precisely the contest between ascendant regimes of cosmic order that these bodies are read against, see 825-852.
[359] Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 41.
[360] See Castelli's discussion in *Martyrdom and Memory*, and Bowersock who contends that the term retains its legal sense by being transliterated into Latin, which effectively establishes a new category apart from the legal witness which is referenced by the Latin "testis" or "arbitra." (*Martyrdom and Rome*, chap. 1) I concur with the point, but we should be careful about the contingent nature of the category before moving, like Bowersock does, to assert a novelty in Christian martyrdom on this basis.
[361] For a good discussion of this point, see Robert Cover, "*Nomos* and Narrative," and Paul Kahn, *Sacred Violence*.
[362] The U.S. Department of Justice identify three kinds of witnesses: lay witnesses, "a person who watched certain events and describes what he/she saw," expert witnesses, "someone who is educated in a certain area" and "testifies with respect to his specialty area only," and character witnesses, "someone who knew the victim, the defendant, or other people involved in the case." Taken from The Offices of the United States Attorney, "Discovery," retrieved from http://www.justice.gov/usao/justice-101/discovery.
[363] However, this was rarely exercised against Roman citizens – and then only those of low status, reiterating the disparity of legal experiences. There was ongoing debate around the value of torture for such assurances, similar to that which exists in most cultures. See Keith R. Bradley, "Roman Slavery and Roman Law," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 15:3 (Fall 1988), 477-495, esp. 486-7.
[364] Such approved venues of force and harm include athletic contests or self-defense. See my "Violently Peaceful: Tibetan Self-Immolation and the Problem of the Non/Violence Binary," *Open Theology* 1 (2015), 146-159.
[365] This is what leads Elizabeth Castelli to hold that Christian martyr narratives create both truth and violence. See Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 195.
[366] Peter Brown has shown that this form of speech was one of the modalities of truth-telling during this period of history. Analyzing *parrhēsia* in his seminal study of authority in late antiquity, he links it to the gravitas earned by self-possession, criticism and learning, and he notes that "a primal awe surrounded those who were known to have withstood torture" (Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion* [], 64). Although he notes the connection with perseverance and suffering, Brown like Foucault focused on the fourth century ascetics who displayed *parrhēsia*, likely on account of his focus on a time that no longer produced Christian martyrs.
[367] Foucault, *Fear-Less Speech* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001), 12.
[368] Ibid., 19.
[369] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 11.
[370] Foucault, *Fear-Less Speech*, 106. Italics mine.
[371] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 332.
[372] See his discussion of Christianity, 173-181, 315-335. Foremost is Foucault's assertion that Christianity fundamentally changes the focus of the truth, removing it from a truth aimed at the political activity of individuals to their relationship to God. While I admit the relationship to God alters the discussion, I believe Foucault relies too much on Christianity as a religion, understood as a sphere separate from the sphere of politics and power. I have developed this idea more fully in my "*Parrhēsia* in Early Christianity," forthcoming.
[373] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 173.
[374] Ibid., 185.
[375] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 14.
[376] "Apostolic charisma" is a direct translation of *apostolikou charismatos.* Max Weber's discussion of charisma authority seems to be a good model for understanding what they are speaking to. See Max Weber
[377] The translation used blends the traditional approach with a close reading of the Greek. Many scholars, like Herbert Musurillo (*Acts*, op. loc.), have taken the παρρησιας to refer to the means of speech, here in reference to Polycarp's statement. Παρρησια does have a context more appropriate for speech than for hearing, leading some patristic lexicons to offer a correction ascribing the παρρησια to the speaker and not the hearer. At the same time, the text seems explicit, linking μετα παρρησιας το ακουε, literally meaning that Polycarp asks the governor to listen with *parrhesia*. This led a few scholars like Judith Lieu to translate it as "listen publicly" (Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 253), a technically correct translation but one without context, or the simpler "listen plainly" of Kirsopp in her translation of Eusebius' text for the Loeb Library (op. loc.) or that of Frend in his translation of the line (*Rise of Christianity*, 182). What does it mean to listen publicly or plainly? I have instead here tried to focus on Polycarp's hope that the governor will listen openly, without preconceived notions, to

what Polycarp has to say, not only listen for what the Roman authority wants to hear. At the same time, the *parrhesiastic* nature of Polycarp's speech also seems important, and related to the plea for a certain kind of hearing, so I have maintained the common use of *parrhesia* as a modifier to Polycarp's statement of identity. In Broeft and Bremmer's work on the martyr acts, they argue that the use of parrhēsia is meant to be definitive in this place, the final word on the subject, which comes at the end of being asked to confess three times. Their discussion include a brief analysis on the symbolic significance of the number three in Rome, and provides a link to the triple denial of Peter discussed above. See Jan Den Broeft & Jan Bremmer "Notiunculae Martyrologicae III: Some Observations of the Martyria of Polycarp and Pionius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39:2 (June 1985): 113.

[378] *Parrhēsia* was left untranslated here in order to a) point to the variety of meanings given that term, and b) show its centrality to the perceived power of martyrdom. I am again grateful to the advice and assistance of Don Adams in translating this passage.

[379] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 149.

[380] It is further supported by the regular use of the verb *teleioun* in reference to a martyr's death, a term that carries a sentiment of fulfillment, as in the fulfillment of a life. See Boeft and Bremmer's discussion of the term in reference to *M. Carp*. 47 in their "Notiunculae Martyrologiae II," Vigiliae Christianae 36:4 (Dec. 1982): 385-387.

[381] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 56.

[382] W.H.C. Frend's characterization of the conflict as a culture clash between universal claims articulated on metaphysical bases is an apt description. See Frend, *Martyrdom*, 20.

[383] Quoted in Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 67.

[384] As Thompson nicely puts it, "There was a latent contest over whose religious reality was revealed in the wounds of martyrs and whose identity was inscribed on their bodies. Lions, coercion, and resistance enacted simultaneously the Roman and Christian myths and rites of social identity and cosmic reality." Thompson, "Martyrdom of Polycarp," 49. See too 40-1.

Notes for Chapter 3

[385] For a few good discussions on the creation and distinction between the "terrorist" and the "martyr," see Muhammad al- Atawneh, "Shahāda versus terror in contemporary Islamic legal thought: the problem of suicide bombers," *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, 10:1 (2008): 18-29, and Mattias Gardell, "So Costly a Sacrifice Upon the Altar of Freedom: Human Bombs, Suicide Attacks, and Patriotic Heroes," in *Sacred Suicide*, James R. Lewis and Carole M. Cusack eds, 151-172 (New York, Routledge, 2014).

[386] By origin here I mean the moment when the tactic appeared to first be used in struggles for Islam in the 20th century.

[387] Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. *Princeton Readings In Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4. Meir Hatina holds the term is meant to refer to those movements of dissent against modern Western secularist principles that sought to apply Islamic principles to all spheres of life. See Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 11. This opposition to modern secularist regimes comes from Mark Juergensmeyer's *Global Rebellion*. See too Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 31-34.

[388] In spite of all the recent work on suicide bombings, the most referred to work on the perspective of suicide in Islam continues to be the appropriately named "On Suicide in Islam" by Franz Rosenthal, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 66:3 (July-Sept. 1946): 239-259. While much is still noteworthy in Rosenthal's work, Meir Hatina's *Martyrdom in Modern Islam* also contains a succinct exploration of the concept's religious significance, see pp. 39-43.

[389] On Nasir al-Din al-Albani, see David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 15. Arata Takeda has tried to offer new terminology to attend to this disjunction, suggesting these acts be called "sacrifice bombing" in order to appreciate the sacrificial nature with which they are imbued. See his "Das regressive Menschenopfer: Vom eigentlichen Skandalon des gegenwärtigen Terrorismus" *Zeitschrift für Bürgerrechte und Gesellschaftspolitik* 51:1 (2012): 116–129.

[390] For a good discussion see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 538.

[391] Quoted in Meir Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 96.

[392] Farhad Khosrokhavar extends this distinction into the category of martyrdom itself, delineating "playful martyrs" who seek their death out of a "desire for ecstasy and effervescence" (terms that bring Durkheim's work on religious affect to mind) from the "martyropath" who acts from hatred ad desperation. See his *Suicide Bombers*, esp. 84-90. While I believe the distinction is important, the dual use of "martyr" at the root obfuscates a larger point about the possibility of being considered a self-sacrifice. Islamic thought would not admit "martyropaths" qualify as martyrs, and I hold that the term's use must be determined by the group that claims the martyr. In seeking such commendation, the group may mask the "true" source of motivation, but we can never truly know, only hurl interpretations back and forth. Moreover, hatred can appear outside desperation and can link to the ecstasy felt destroying foes. See his *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[393] See Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 74.
[394] This comes from the popular tradition communicated by Ibn al-Mubarak, *Jihad*, pp.63-64; al-Bukhari *Sahih* iii, p.278 (nos. 2829-30). David Cook provides an excellent typology of early forms of martyrdom, see his *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21-30. See too Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving for God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 281-3 and chap. 4.
[395] Cook, *Martyrdom In Islam*, 33. See too Meir Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 16.
[396] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 35. This well-known promise is not found in the Qur'an, but in a weakly attested hadith where Muhammad said "In the sight of God the martyr has six qualities: He [God] forgives him at the first opportunity, and shows him his place in paradise, he is saved from the torment of the grave, he is safe from the great fright [of the Resurrection], a crown of honor is placed upon his head – one ruby of which I better than the world and all that is in it – he is married to seventy-two of the *houris*, and he gains the right to intercede for seventy of his relatives." Quoted in Cook and Allison, *Understanding Suicide Attacks*, 10.
[397] See Afsaruddin, *Striving for God*, 282.
[398] On Fahmideh see Afsaruddin, *Striving for God*, 231-235, and Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 45-66.
[399] Technically Qasir recognized himself as part of a different group, as Hizbollah did not yet officially exist. However when Hizbollah solidified Qasir's group was dissolved into the new organization.
[400] Kippenberg said the same, *Violence as Worship*, 83.
[401] Lara Deeb, "Exhibiting the 'Just-Lived Past': Hizbullah's Nationalist Narratives in Transnational Political Context," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:2 (2008): 369-399 (374 for quote, and see 374 n. 17); see too her *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Deeb focuses specifically on the experiences of Shi'a in Lebanon, but I would argue the same motivation are evident in the Iranian Revolution, and that the *hala islamiyya* should extend to both groups. On the common ground in the charism of Musa al-Sadr see Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 90, as well as Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 83.
[402] Diego Gambetta, "Can We Make Sense of Suicide Missions?" in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, Diego Gambetta, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 288. See too 80-81. And Luca Ricolfi "Palestinians, 1981-2003" in the same volume.
[403] Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), see also Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick. "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004): 243-281. For an excellent discussion of the shortcomings of Pape's work especially and the paradigm in general see Assaf Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of Dying to Win." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006): 707-729.
[404] Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj, "Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada," *Social Forces* 84:4 (June 2006): 1969-1986; Robert J. Brym, "Religion, Politics, and Suicide Bombing: An Interpretive Essay," Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie 33:1 (2008): 89-108.
[405] Assaf Moghadam's work has done a good job showing how such an approach can illuminate what is otherwise missed. See e.g. his . "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks." *International Security* 33:3 (Winter 2008/2009): 46-78. While I support much of the ways Moghadam looks at the issue, I take issue with the sharp distinction he draws between national based movements and transnational based movements, seeing the two as ontologically distinct. Though I would agree the shape of the

goal can affect the manner of the tactic, I believe more is revealed if the two are taken together rather than approached separately. Farhad Khosrokhavar likewise holds such a stance, and I will engage with his rationales below.

[406] See Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Ariel Merari et.al. ""Making Palestinian 'Martyrdom Operations'/'Suicide Attacks': Interviews with Would-Be Perpetrators and Organizers," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010): 102-119.

[407] Quoted in Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 100.

[408] Despite the volumes written on this topic, few delve into the texts left by martyrs, believing that they are a product of brainwashing or social pressure rather than an expression of conviction. For an examination of this problem see my discussion in chapter one. One exception is Farhad Khosrokhavar, a leading scholar on suicide bombers, who like Mark Juergensmeyer conducted a host of interviews with people who conducted failed suicide bombings, and whose conclusions will be engaged with throughout this chapter. Such scholars provide the foundation for my own methodology here.

[409] Euben, "Killing (for) Politics," 7.

[410] See his "A Sociological Understanding of Suicide Attacks," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26:4 (2009): 67-96.

[411] Michael Roberts, "Suicide Missions as Witnessing: Expansions, Contrasts." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (2007): 876.

[412] Ibid.

[413] Those taken from al-Manar include Ali Munif Ashmar (d. 10/15/95), Samir Mohammad Mattout (d. 6/15/86), Assaad Berro (d. 8/9/89), Ahmad Qasir (d. 11/11/82) as well as Qintar (d. 2015). All translations are theirs. Texts of the final interview with Wadji al-Sayegh (d. 3/12/85) and the last testament of Sanaa Mheydleh (d. 4/9/85) were procured thanks to the Chicago Project of Security and Terrorism which was kind enough to allow me access to their translations. Jamal Sati's last testament is a special case, as the original recording was discovered by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroue, who published them in a media performance and concurrent article "Three Posters: Reflections on a Video/Performance," *The Drama Review* 50:3 (Autumn 2006): 182-191. Salah Ghandour's last testament cam in part from al-Manar and part from Hala Jaber, *Hizbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Shadi Sleyman's last will was quoted in Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism." In *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom*, Ami Pedahzur, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 70.

[414] For the name and where most wills came from – Nader Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian Martyrs," *Iranian Studies* 30:3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1997): 263-271. Translations of Iranian wills come from Nazemi, except where noted otherwise.

[415] Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 165-166.

[416] Quoted in Hans Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 69.

[417] Briefly, it is important to note the difference between the Iranian and Lebanese actors under discussion here, and the Salafist *jihadis* that characterize the transnational actors like al-Qaeda or ISIS. Apart from the nature of their goals – a nation governed on *shar'iah* versus a world dominated by Islam – the Salafist are based on an interpretation of Wahhabist Islam coming out of Saudi Arabia. They share the connection with thinkers like Qutb and Maududi, and those like Abdullah Azzam certainly interpellated some of the ideas discussed here into the global terrorist organizations, but they differ significantly on the relationship with modernity. The brand of Salafism that ideologically sponsors demands for long beards and living a ninth century lifestyle, celebrating what Khosrokhavar calls archaeo-Islam, an "inverted modernity in which freedom is transformed into a logic of absolute taboos." See Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 86. In a line typical of his eloquent style he contends "Those who could no longer be consumers began to consume themselves. The desire to consume was projected onto a deadly form of the sacred. The outcome was a necrophile neo-asceticism." (87) This strand is on the whole absent from Iran and Lebanon of the 1980s.

Fadlallah puts it explicitly when he avers "we [Hizbollah] are not fundamentalists ('*usuliyin*) in the sense of wanting to live like people at the time of the Prophet or the first Caliphs or the time of the Umayyads." From Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah and Mahmoud Soueid, "Islamic Unity and Political Change: Interview with Shaykh Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25:1 (Autumn 1995): 63. Fadlallah's keenness to distance himself from those Wahhabist Salafists he clearly aimed at in this speech was returned in kind; after pronouncing that women could serve in high clerical positions several Wahhabist jurists accused him of heresy. See Abisaab, Shi'ites of Lebanon, 202. While all these share a concern about the moral destitution of

modernity, writers from Qutb to Khomeini were not opposed to technological advancements of the modern age; it was only the ethical system that guided their use that took their focus. See, for example, Qutb, *Milestones*, 10. Maududi also repeatedly praises science and its advancements in his *Understanding Jihad*, e.g. 13, 179.[417] That is not the case for those in ISIS, who demand like look as much like the life of Muhammad and his companions as possible. Such a distinction is not marginal, and should be recognized in order to appreciate the particular context that first inspired martyrdom operations. See Euben and Zaman, "Introduction," 19-23 for a good discussion.

[418] Cook argues that only the Imami's have remained as a distinct group, while all others have been amalgamated through their adherence to an Islamist ideal of Islam (see his *Commanding Right*, 505).That may be, but as will become clear I would argue that these groups also recognized and referenced thinkers like Qutb and Maududi, and other Islamists would look back with approbation on the success of the Iranian Revolution and the movements of the Shi'a. Moreover, with the martyrdom operations becoming such a significant tactic in modern Islamism, Sunni groups too could be said to relate to Shi'ism. Labels and belonging appear at various levels of abstraction and vary accordingly, so I would caution against such blanket statements about religious typologies.

[419] On the quietism in Sunnism see Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion*, 49.

[420] Moreover, they are governed by the doctrine of *taqiyya*, where they can conceal their faith to avoid persecution and injury at the hands of an unjust government. On the practice of *taqiyya* see Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 66-67.

[421] See Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 47-52 for a discussion of the Sunni relationship to martyrdom. Rola El-Husseini argues that the lack of martyrdom tradition in Sunnism led to suicide attacks being "justifies ex post facto by religious scholars who needed to give it the legitimacy of Islamic law." (411). See her discussion in "Resistance, Jihad, and Martyrdom in Contemporary Lebanese Shi'a Discourse," *Middle East Journal* 62:3 (Summer 2008), 409-412.

[422] See Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift, and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers,'" Terrorism and Political Violence 15:3 (2003): 13.

[423] Ali Shariati, "Shahadat," in *Jihad and Shahadat*, Mehdi Abedi and Gary Lehenhausen, eds. (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 1986), 194-199.

[424] It is this reinvigorated ideal of jihad that Gambetta believes best explains the inter-sectarian communication. See his "Making Sense of Suicide Operations," 287.

[425] Maududi occasionally spent time in religious schooling, but his charisma is not a result of such training, but rather reinterpreting Islamic doctrine in light of contemporary political experiences.

[426] Quoted in Christoph Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 42.

[427] On the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* see Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 46-50, and Imad Salamey and Zanoubia Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12:2 (June 2011): 197-212.

[428] On al-Sadr's activities modernizing the clergy see Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 95.

[429] Quoted in Abisaabs, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 99.

[430] *Ijtihad* provided the fulcrum of Shi'a religio-legal thought of the period and continues to do so today. It relies on the reasoning of learned scholars and stands firmly opposed to reliance on past precedence like the legal system of both the United States and Salafism. Shi'a consider precedent as belonging to a dead world, and rely on contemporary religious jurists to accurately interpret *shari'ah* for their period.

[431] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 62. Kippenberg asserts that these were meant to stigmatize Shi'ism, but the secularist projects of 20th century nationalism would have approved of the marginalizing of religious voices into a private sphere, since that was the dominant paradigm of "successful" states.

[432] Farhad Khosrokhavar said the war was experienced as an "imperial manoeuvre designed to destroy the new Muslim nation." See his *Suicide Bombers,* 70.

[433] Ray Takeyh, "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment" *Middle East Journal* 64:3 (Summer 2010), 366.

[434] Khomeini was not the first to proclaim the martyrdom of those who died in the battle against the Shah; the popular cleric Ayatollah Taleqani said the same thing while he was at Najaf in 1963. See Kippenberg, *Violence and Worship*, 57.

[435] On communism's role in Iran's Revolution, see Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).
[436] See for example his "The Anniversary of the Uprising of Khurdad," given 6/5/1979, in *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1981), 269-272.
[437] Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion*, 49-53.
[438] For a succinct and interesting discussion of the ideology of the Basij in relation to martyrdom see Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 76-84. Though he contends the participants were motivated largely by the desperation that came with the loss of their utopia, I would contend that their devotion was rather productive, committed as they were to bringing about that utopia by supporting the battle for political legitimacy of an Islamic state.
[439] On the other responsibilities performed by the Basij and their continued role in modern Iran see Saeid Golkar, "Politics of Piety: The Basij and Moral Control of Iranian Society," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2:2 (2011): 207-219; and Afshon Ostovar, "Iran's Basij: Membership in a Militant Islamist Organization," *Middle East Journal* 67:3 (Summer 2013): 345-361.
[440] Quoted in Erich Wiedemann, "Mit dem Paradies-Schlüssel in die Schlacht," in *Der Spiegel*, 31 (1982): 93.
[441] Stephen Pelletiere has said the idea of human wave attacks misrecognized smaller more tactical strategies at work. See his *The Iran–Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Praeger, 1992).
[442] When Shi'ites arrived in Beirut they faced "new ethnic, classist, and gendered hierarchies" according to Abisaabs, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 121-123.
[443] As Luca Ricolfi notes, no specific geographic label exists to cover the precise areas being considered. What she refers to as the "Middle East area" is close, but I will continue to be as specific as possible about the area I refer to, while recognizing that no name perfectly encompasses these lands and nothing else.
[444] The invasion was condemned by the U.N., which sent the "United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon," which despite its name is still active operating under an expanded mandate at the time of this writing in 2016.
[445] See Abisaabs, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 76-89.
[446] Hala Jaber, *Hizbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 47.
[447] The so-called "Damascus cartel" includes Hizbollah, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) which had a few members perform human bomb operations, Amal, a pro-Syrian Shi'ite group that fell out of favor in Lebanon on account of its actions against Palestinians, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). One of the most significant philosophers of the period who inspired the activities in 1980s Lebanon was Antun Sa'adeh, a secular theorist who sought a free and independent Lebanon nation-state. After the Revolution took hold in Iran Sa'adeh lost influence, but his words were sometimes referenced by martyrs. Though his programs were purely secular, he did say "Had there been in Syria one suicidal militant (*fida'i*) who would sacrifice himself for his homeland's sake and kill Balfour, the Syrian cause would have changed from the Zionist viewpoint in a startling manner." Quoted in *Antun Sa'adeh: The Man, His thought, An Anthology*, ed. Adel Beshara, (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2007), 2. On Sa'adeh's secularist hopes see Abel Daher, "Some Distinguishing Aspcects of Sa'adeh's thought," 267-313, and Rabee'h Debs "Secularism in Sa'adeh's Thought ad Sa'adeh's Conception of Religion," 391-423 in *Antun Sa'adeh: The Man, His thought, An Anthology*, ed. Adel Beshara, (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2007).
[448] Hizbollah would not officially be established until 1985. In the early 1980s it was probably best describes in the words of August Norton "less an organization than a cabal" (quoted in Abisaabs, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 128). It is also worth note that Ahmad Qasir did not self-identify as part of Hizbollah in 1982 since it had yet to incorporate, but did belong to one of the corporate bodies that would become Hizbollah. For a good breakdown of the organizations that composed the corporate body of Hizbollah see Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 76-85.
[449] On the Pasdaran, see Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 57.
[450] Musa al-Sadr was also related to Khomeini through marriage, and was the teacher of Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the so-called "spiritual inspiration" of Hizbollah, and is credited for bringing together Iran and Lebanon Shi'a. Abisaab and Abisaab see it as a result of channeling class consciousness into a new ethno-religious identity. See their *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 201. On his effect on Shi'ite communities particularly see Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 78-82.
[451] Quoted in Jaber, *Hizbollah*, 71.
[452] Fouad Ajami said the revolution's spread to Lebanon "declared the irrelevance of frontiers" in seeking to establish the transnational Muslim *umma*. Fouad Ajami, "Iran: The Impossible Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 67:2 (Winter 1988-89): 137. This is also an excellent example of what Faisal Devji terms the "landscape of the

jihad." See his *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[453] It is important to note, as Joseph Alagha does, that the enemies of Islamists were and are Zionist Israelis distinguished by their expansionist political stances, not the Jewish people as a whole who are defined by their religious traditions and belonging. See his *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 188. As has also been noted elsewhere, as a "People of the Book" (*al-Kitab*) Jewish people like Christians have a special legal status in *shar'iah* law. These individuals are better understood as anti-Israeli rather than anti-Semitic.

[454] Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion* and *Formations of the Secular* may still be the place where this stance is best articulated against the Western model of Protestantism, but see also Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (), Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen eds. *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Judith Butler, Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Square* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) for other good discussions around the creation of a seccular sphere that excludes religion.

[455] See Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 55. For that reason, this period is most productively approached as a postcolonial situation, which should reorient many discussions that favor a more adversarial model based on what Khosrokhavar labels "archeo-Islam," ideologies that renounces all things modern in preference of an illusory return to the ninth century. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 86. On the contrary, a number of scholars have convincingly argued that any balanced approach must frame the anger pouring from these locales as reactions against tyranny. Scholars of this ilk include Khosrokhavar, Alagha, and Kippenberg, all of whom are cited here, as well as Stephen Dale's "Religious Suicide in Islamic Asia: Anticolonial Terrorism in India, Indonesia and the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23 (1988): 37-59 which early looked at the issue from a colonial frame, and more recently Jan Ali in "Social-Political Suicides: A sociological analysis of Muslim terrorism," in *Sacred Suicide*, James R. Lewis and Carole M. Cusack, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2014). Roxanne Euben has provided an excellent analysis of the similarities between such groups and the modern western experience in *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[456] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 76.

[457] Quoted in Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 157. For other examples of his mobilization of slavery as a frame of experience see his "In Commemoration of the Martyrs of Tehran," 239-241 and "The Anniversary of the Uprising of Khurdad 15," 268-275 in *Islam and Revolution*. Bracketing in original.

[458] This is the central theme of his *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar Al-Ilm, n.d.).

[459] Abul A'la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*, (Lahore: Islamic Pubications, 1976), 5.

[460] Quoted on p. 265.

[461] Of course there is no single "true" form of any religion, as multiple interpretations are always vying for ascendancy, but what we see happening in Lebanon and Iran and across the Middle East is the more stringent interpretations gaining ground. Likely this is a consequence of their ability to set the terms for legitimacy, and anchoring everything in Islamic doctrine, what Bruce Lincoln has called a "maximalist" stance (see his *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* 2nd ed.[Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010]) and others have inaccurately referred to as fundamentalism. If the grounds of legitimacy are determined to have their basis in a level of holiness, those more committed can lay a claim to that authority, which perpetuates such decisions and demonstrates to others the means by which to gain such status for themselves.

[462] Quoted in Roxanne Euben, "Killing (For) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom, and Political Action," *Political Theory* 30:1 (Feb. 2002): 17.

[463] Ali Shariati, "Shahadat," 161.

[464] Asma Afsaruddin's *Striving in the Path of God* is perhaps the best treatise on the subject to date, but for an excellent and more approachable introduction to the concept see Cook, *Understanding Jihad*.

[465] David Cook's *Martyrdom in Islam* is an essential guide to understanding the shifting meaning of martyrdom in Islamic history. Hatina's *Martyrdom in Modern Islam* is an excellent resource for those seeking more modern shifts in the concept.

[466] Euben, "Killing (For) Politics," 8.

[467] Ibid., 9. She goes on to say "the field of jihad is action in pursuit of a legitimate *umma* (Muslim community), and it is the existence of the *umma* beyond a single lifetime that at once immortalizes human deeds and realizes God's plan on earth. As an expression of divine will, actualization of the *umma* in particular historical moments

is inevitable, yet these Islamists also argue victory is always contingent on human action. So understood, in this view jihad endows human struggle to remake a common world with existential weight: it is a form of political action that finds in the pursuit of the establishment of Islamic sovereignty on earth." (10)

[468] On the understanding of *jihad* in relation to Israel, see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 143-146; on the reimagining of *jihad* in the face of colonialism see Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 157-161.

[469] Those pillars are: *Shahadah*, the profession of faith that acknowledges "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet" (there is a direct connection between this profession and the *shahid* who shares a common linguistic root); Salah, prayer, while are performed five times a day while the supplicant turns their bodies toward Mecca; *Zakat*, charity and almsgiving which forms the core social responsibility as opposed to the first two pillars which are focused on the individual; *Sawm*, ritualized fasting during the month of Ramadan, and finally; *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims who have the means are expected to undertake at least once in their lives.

[470] See Euben, "Killing (For) Politics," 15, and Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 14.

[471] This notation is regularly found in martyr wills, and stands for the phrase *alayhi as-salam*, peace be upon him, which traditionally follows mention of Islam's prophets. It has been kept in these statements to remain as close to the original as possible.

[472] It is likely that such concerns linked with the perceived illegitimacy of all governments before the Mahdi's return, resulting in the absolute illegitimacy of all states and therefore the exclusion of any need or possibility of diplomacy. Here we can get a sense of what an impact the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran must have had.

[473] Michael Bonner articulates the greater jihad as the need to integrate Muslim norms. See his *Jihad in Islamic History*, 74-77.

[474] For Maududi, who argued that the idea of *jihad* without violent struggle was not a part of accepted Muslim tradition but was the impetus of a colonial mindset (something which resonates with the postcolonial work of Franz Fanon, who was writing in North Africa during the same period, and whose work certainly influenced the Islamic writers), see *Jihad in Islam*, 1-3. For Faraj, see Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 72.

[475] In *Islam and Revolution*, 365-425.

[476] Hassan Nasrallah, "The Martyrdom of Sayyed Hadi Nasrallah," in *Voice of Hizbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, ed. Nicholas Noe, trans. Ellen Khouri (New York: Verso, 2007), 177.

[477] See Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 67.

[478] Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 133.

[479] Ibid.

[480] See Cook and Allison, *Understanding Suicide Attacks*, 4.

[481] Quoted in El-Husseini, "Resistance, Jihad and Martyrdom," 403.

[482] Joseph Alagha contends that in both Islamist and secular spheres of the period martyrdom was seen as a way to regain personal pride but also uphold the honor, pride and dignity of the *umma* ('*izzat wa karamat al-umma*). See his *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 88, 112.

[483] See his *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 88, 112.

[484] Khomeini, "Muharram: The Triumph of Blood Over the Sword," given November 23, 1978, in *Islam and Revolution*, 245.

[485] It is important to briefly note that it was not all Jewish people who earned Islamists ardor, only those who participated and supported a "Zionist" program that sought to reestablish the biblical lands of Zion according to Jewish scripture. This has been the ideological backing for the settlement movement in Israel that continues to be at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Jewish people in general, like the Christians in general, were considered *al-Kitab*, people of the book, who have a special place in Islamic doctrine. While I do not mean to suggest that people following such radical interpretations of Islam readily make such distinctions, particularly the transnational groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS, it is important to recognize that the Islamic revolution was not explicitly anti-Semitic, but definitely anti-Zionist.

[486] Afsaruddin, *Striving for God*, 124.

[487] Quoted in Jaber, *Hizbollah*, 87.

[488] Afsaruddin suggests the simultaneous offense and defensive nature of the revitalized jihad was influenced by "early modern European socialist-utopian ideals conducing to global hegemony." The burgeoning globalized worldview of the Islamists coupled with the significant role of communist social ethics certainly support such a claim See her *Striving for God*, 293.

[489] Quoted in Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 15.
[490] Khomeini, "Muharram: The Triumph of Blood Over the Sword," in *Islam and Revolution*, 242.
[491] Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 77.
[492] See Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 38.
[493] Khomeini, "In Commemoration of the Martyrs of Tehran," in *Islam and Revolution*, 240.
[494] Ali Shariati contends that both Husayn and his uncle Hamzah, who lost his life fighting in jihad, are both *Sayyid al-Shuhada*, Masters of Martyrs. See his "A Discussion of Shahid," in *Jihad and Shahadat*, Mehdi Abedi and Gary Lehenhausen, eds. (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 1986), 238.
[495] Shariati, "Shahadat," 212.
[496] See Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 52-62, esp. 58.
[497] Ali Shariati for example remembers "But Imam Husayn ('a) addresses the people, saying, "Death, for the sons of Adam, is as beautiful as a necklace around the neck of a young and beautiful girl. Death is an ornament for mankind." Then he leaves Mecca to go towards death." See his "Martyrdom: Arise and Bear Witness," retrieved from http://www.al-islam.org/martyrdom-arise-and-bear-witness-dr-ali-shariati.
[498] See Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 81. See too Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 39.
[499] Khomeini, "Martyrs of Tehran," 241.
[500] Khomeini, "The Fortieth Day After 'Ashura," in *Islam and Revolution*, 249.
[501] This was so much the case that Michael Fisher, writing during this period would label it the "Karbala paradigm." Se his *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). See too El-Husseini, 404-5.
[502] For a good discussion on the development and role of Ashura in the revolution see Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).
[503] See Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 37-38.
[504] This was the central contention of Werner Schmucker, "Iranische Martyrertestamente," *Die Welt des Islams* 27:4 (1987): 185-249, which has been widely recognized as the definitive analysis of the wills of Iranian Basij. My conclusions build off Schmucker's while exceeding his to link up with a greater creation of a culture of sacrifice. See took Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 154-55.
[505] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 57.
[506] On this see Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 50-55.
[507] See Asisaabs, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 151.
[508] Hassan Nasrallah, "Elegy for Sayyed Abbas Mussawi," in *Voice of Hizbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah* (New York: Verso, 2007): 52-57.
[509] The language of martyrs' blood going into the soil routinely was employed. One poster showed an image of soldiers fighting upon graves, and read "350 martyrs irrigate with their blood the Bekaa's soil so that it remains Lebanese and free." See Wassim Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters / Affiches de la Resistance Lebanaise 1975-1985* (Chyah, Lebanon: Trebia, 2012), 15.
[510] Women did participate in the resistance, and one of the more famous martyrs of the SSNP was a young woman, but in Islamist circles traditional gender roles still reigned.
[511] See Shirin Saeidi, "Creating the Islamic Republic of Iran: Wives and daughters of martyrs, and acts of citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 14:2 (April 2010), 121-124. On noble citizenry status see 115.
[512] See for example Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 92.
[513] Quoted in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 92.
[514] See Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 15.
[515] Nasrallah, "Hadi Nasrallah," 172.
[516] On the general kinds of services set up see Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 141. On the Basij stores see Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 82. Hizbollah's Martyr's Foundation would become so well known that it would extend its support to Christians who suffered against the secular powers, and would be formally recognized by the Lebanese state in 1988.
[517] On these certificates, see Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 45.
[518] Nasrallah, "Hadi Nasrallah," 176.
[519] On the intercessory quality of martyrs in Shi'a Islam see David Pinault, "Shia Lamentation Rituals and Reinterpretations of the Doctrine of Intercession: Two Cases from Modern India," *History of Religions* 38:3 (February 1999): 285-305.
[520] For al-Albani see Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 15; for al-Takuri see Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 149-152. Cook and Allison collected over sixty-one *fatwas* written on the subject,

and found that over half mention the Palestinian cause which both provides the anchor for the issue and helps overcome its lack of support in classical Islamic jurisprudence. The Palestinian issue has taken hold so deeply in the Muslim world – particularly in the Arabic Muslim world – that few voices would be used in a way that would delegitimize any part of the resistance. See Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 12-14, and Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 153.

[521] He notoriously decried the attacks of September 11, 2001 as illegitimate and suicides, an act that resulted in his being declared a heretic by some Salafist jihadists.

[522] Quoted in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 75. He also said "it is haram (prohibited) to kill oneself or others, but during jihad, which is defensive of preventive war according to Islam, it is accepted and allowed, as jihad is considered an exceptional case." See Ibid., 102. On Fadlallah's focus on combatants only see Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 87.

[523] See Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, 88.

[524] Quoted in Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 69.

[525] Some like Khosrokhavar see an inherently statist project at work, with which I concur, with the caveat to not rely on preconceived and limited notions of what sovereign collectives look like, i.e. relying only on models coming out of the modern international nation-state system. If by "state" we mean a self-governing collective that bases their authority and judicial structures on a certain sovereign imaginary then contemporary nation-states are but one of a long history of empires, city-states, caliphates, etc. Khosrokhavar thinks that the martyrs of Iran and Hizbollah partake of the "classic" form that seeks to bring into existence a sovereign collectivity by which he means a nation, versus the more modern transnational seeking the global neo-umma, I think both operate on the premise of an *umma* that is not bound by national political boundaries, and those that operate on national level only do so because it is the dominant political international discourse at the time, but distinguishing forms of martyrdom doesn't seem to follow on account of the shape of their idealized goal.

[526] See Afsaruddin, *Striving for God*, 213.

[527] Qur'an 2:143.

[528] Nasrallah, "Hadi Nasrallah," 177.

[529] On the origins of the term *umma* see Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 58.

[530] Ruhollah Khomeini, "Islamic Government," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 168.

[531] See his "Message to the Pilgrims," *Islam and Revolution*, 275-7, and "Message to the Pilgrims," *Islam and Revolution*, 237-8. See too his hope for all Muslims to overcome all dissension and unite in pursuit of the goals of Islam. See *Islam and Revolution*, 240-241.

[532] Quoted in Jaber, *Hizbollah*, 54-55

[533] On imagined communities, the dominant mode of understanding nations, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. On "interpretive communities" see Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 1-17. Meir Hatina uses the model of interpretive communities in reference to modern Islamist martyrs, see *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 8.

[534] Khosrokhavar, *Human Bombers*, 111-112. Emphases added.

[535] Fadlallah was the most explicit in this, saying in an interview "I consider Iran as the base for the effective Islamic movement to which I am committed… That does not mean I have surrendered my intellectual freedom to Iran. My position may, and often does, agree with that of Iran, but I have my own opinions, and I sometimes differ with them in relation to method or circumstances." See his interview with Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden.* Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 403-408. Following the death of Khomeini and the rise of Khamenei Fadlallah reconsidered his stance, wondering if the reach of the jurisprudent had been allowed to reach too far.

[536] Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 270-1.

[537] Quoted in *Voice of Hizbollah*, 52.

[538] Qutb *Milestones*, 10.

[539] Quoted in El-Husseini, 403.

[540] Quoted in El-Husseini, 401.

[541] Shariati, "Discussion of Shahid," in *Jihad and Shahadat*, 238.

[542] Ibid, 200.

[543] Ali Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," *Al-Serat*, 7. Retrieved from http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/vol-12-1986/concept-martyrdom-islam.
[544] Referenced by Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*, 21.
[545] Qur'an 3:110. See also 3:104, 114, 7:157, 9:71, 112, 22:41, 31:17.
[546] It would be important to note Nietzsche's great contention that right and wrong do not correlate directly with "good" and "evil." Those more value-laden judgments stem from an absolute ethical foundation of obligation and transgression, and in the Islamist context the two show a significant amount of overlap, but at this point it is necessary only to recognize that all evil actions would be wrong, but not all wrong actions are evil. On this point see Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, and *Will to Power* and others, as this is a central theme of his work.
[547] See Shariati, "Shahadat," 176.
[548] See his Imam Hussein lecture.
[549] Shariati, "Shahadat," 171. On its connection to a Palestinian homeland see Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 100.
[550] Quoted in Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 37.
[551] See the Iranian Constitution, section 21, article 8. See too Cook, *Commanding Right*, 545.
[552] Cook, *Commanding Right*, 505.
[553] See especially verses 3:114 and 9:71. See too Cook, *Commanding Right*, 22.
[554] Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the United States' Declaration of Independence expressed its truths as "sacred" before altering it to read "self-evident" at the suggestion of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin recognized a system based in rational ideas should not make reference to a category of religion, but such a surface change merely disguised a more common experience of sacrality that lay at the core of any system of laws.
[555] See Cook, *Commanding Right*, 6, and 563 where he briefly and ineffectually connects with the idea of *parrhesia* of the Christians. See too Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 61. Cook in *Understanding Islam*, 20 notes several forms of jihad that revolve around speaking truth to tyranny. Those who performed such an act have been described my modern interpreters as telling the emperor he wears no clothes, speaking a truth that was obvious but people remained silent about out of fear. See Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 56-60.
[556] Shariati, "Discussion of Shahid," 241.
[557] Quoted in Hatina, *Martyrdom in Modern Islam*, 151.
[558] Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*, 44. Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood that would have such an effect on Islamist systems of the twentieth century likewise saw jihad as a collective enterprise by Muslims to defend the truth. See Afsaruddin, *Striving for God*, 207.
[559] Khomeini, "Islamic Government," 172.
[560] Mutahhari argued that that "the example of Husayn ibn 'Ali, [shows] he does not accept that mere personal harm dispenses one from performing the duty [of battling for truth]. It may be that what is at stake is something on which Islam sets a higher value than it does on life, property or dignity – as when the Koran is in danger." Quoted in Cook, *Commanding Right*, 536.
[561] Shariati, "Shahadat," In *Jihad and Shahadat*, 179.
[562] Sayyid Qutb, "In the Shade of the Qur'an," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 147.
[563] It should go without saying that I do not mean to suggest that these constructions are the "true" requirements upon Muslims, rather that they were simply using such discourse at this period. Indeed I would not agree that there is any such ultimate and singular true expectation, but rather that such are always and everywhere products of the social configuration that determines the interpretation. Universal claims are always specific and contestable.
[564] Shariati, "Shahadat," in *Jihad and Shahadat*, 213.
[565] Nasrallah, "Hadi Nasrallah," 171.
[566] Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to William Stephens Smith, November 13, 1787." Retrieved from http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl64.php.
[567] Quoted in Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 49.
[568] Quoted in Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism*, Amy Pedahzur, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 70.

Notes for Chapter 4

[569] Gompas are monasteries, but unlike other religious institutions of that name they were fortified centers of Tibetan governance. They blur the boundary between a citadel and spiritual retreat, and are symbolic of the religio-political blend that characterizes Tibet, which will be elaborated below.
[570] The term most often used in reference to these acts is self-immolation, though 'auto-cremation' may be a more appropriate term. Immolation refers to a more generic sacrificial consumption of the body (from *molare*, a sacrifice of grain), while cremation specifies the place of fire, which seems symbolically important to these acts. Here the terms will be used interchangeably.
[571] See Katia Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation in Tibet: Some Reflections on an Unfolding History," *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (December 2012): 10-17. See also Jose Cabezon, "On the Ethics of the Tibetan Self-Immolations," *Religion Dispatches*, June 18, 2013, http://religiondispatches.org/on-the-ethics-of-the-tibetan-self-immolations/.
[572] News articles on the Tibetan group Phayul's website for example consistently use the term. See http://www.phayul.com/news.
[573] Dhomay Alliance for Freedom and Justice, *Iron Hare 2011 – Flames of Resistance*, trans. and ed. Matthew Akester (Dhomay Alliance for Freedom and Justice, 2012), ii.
[574] Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation in Tibet," 10-11.
[575] Margaret Gouin, "Self-Immolation and Martyrdom in Tibet," *Mortality* 19:2 (2014), 176-183.
[576] Jack Lee Downey, "Dying They Live: Suicide Protesting and Martyrdom," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 3:2 (2015): 213-241.
[577] These statements were passed covertly through electronic networks to Tibetan news organizations and NGOs, who proceeded to make them public. A word of gratitude to all those who risked their liberty and safety to share these statements. The PRC has imposed strict limitations on such communications and threatened heavy punishments for those who are discovered doing so.
[578] Those translations are through Matthew Akester; in places where other translations are used it is noted in citations. I am grateful to Joel Gruber, Jose Cabezon and Dan Hirschberg who contributed to my understanding of Tibetan terms throughout.
[579] The website can be found at http://www.dalailama.com/.
[580] Tsering Shakya, "Self-Immolation: The Changing Landscape of Protest in Tibet." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 25 (December 2012), 20. See too Tsering Shakya, "Transforming the Language of Protest." *Fieldsights - Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online*, April 8. http://culanth.org/fieldsights/94-transforming-the-language-of-protest, April 8, 2012, last accessed August 8, 2012; Carole McGranahan and Ralph Litzinger, "Self-Immolation as Protest in Tibet," *Fieldsights - Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online*, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/93-self-immolation-as-protest-in-tibet, April 8, 2012, last accessed April 6, 2014; Emily Yeh. "On Terrorism and the Politics of 'Naming.'" *Fieldsights – Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online*, http://culanth.org/?q=node/526/, last accessed June 6, 2014.
[581] Shakya, "Self-Immolation," 19-40; Wang Lixiong, "Last Words Analysis – Why Tibetans Self-Immolate?" Translated by Ogyen Kyab. Invisible Tibet (blog), http://woeser.middle-way.net/2012/12/blog-post_29.html, last accessed July 7, 2014; Andrew Fischer, "The Geopolitics of Politico-Religious Protest in Eastern Tibet." *Fieldsights - Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online*, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/100-the-geopolitics-of-politico-religious-protest-in-eastern-tibet, April 8, 2012, last accessed November 21, 2013.
[582] See Shakya, "Language of Protest," and Downey, "Dying They Live."
[583] See Barnett's comments in Paul Mooney, "Tibetans Cry Out for Haven from China in Dozens of Self-Immolations" *The Daily Beast*, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/09/02/tibetans-cry-out-for-haven-from-china-in-dozens-of-self-immolations.html. Last accessed September 20, 2014.
[584] Robbie Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation in Tibet: Causes and Influences." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (December 2012), 57.
[585] See for example Tsering Woeser, *Immolations au Tibet: la honte du monde*. (Paris: Editions Indigenes, 2013); Michelle Murray Yang, "Still Burning: Self-Immolation as Photographic Protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97:1 (2011); See also Shakya, "Self-Immolation." Few news media articles neglect the frame of protest.
[586] Shakya, "Self-Immolation," 37.
[587] This last has been suggested as a possible piece of inspiration. See for example Alex Ortolani's 2012 interview with Tibetan scholar Robbie Barnett, *Asia Society*, February 24, 2012, http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-robert-barnett-why-tibetans-are-setting-themselves-fire. Last accessed November 10, 2014.

[588] Michael Biggs, "Self-Immolation in Context, 1963-2012," *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (2012). See especially p. 150 for chart. For more on this method, see Véronique Laloë, "Patterns of Deliberate Self-Burning in Various Parts of the World: A Review," *Burns* 30 (2004), 207-215.
[589] Thich Nhat Hanh, "In Search of the Enemy of Man (addressed to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King)," in N.Nanh et.al *Dialogue* (Saigon: La Boi, 1965), 11. See too Tenzin Mingyur Paldron, "Virtue and the Remaking of Suffering," *Hot-Spots – Journal of the Cultural Anthropology of Religion Online*.
[590] Lixiong, "Last-words." Some of those in India and elsewhere declare that they are hoping to make the world aware of what is happening on the plateau, but rarely within the traditional boundaries of Tibet.
[591] Ibid.
[592] Melvyn Goldstein, "Introduction," in Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein, eds. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (Berkeley, UC Press, 1998).
[593] There are likely several reasons for this concentration outside of the TAR. First, there has traditionally been a heavier security presence in the TAR than other areas, making it more difficult for the spontaneous self-immolations. Second the areas of eastern Tibet have been hit harder by the patriotic re-education and 'strike hard' campaigns, as they are considered by the PRC to be geographically outside the main regions of Tibetan autonomy (though they are still referred to as 'autonomous prefectures'). There has also been a large influx of ethnic Han Chinese into these areas, stoking fears of the loss of Tibetan modes of life.
[594] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 36th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1995. Last accessed September 14, 2013.
[595] Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 50.
[596] Technically, the Ganden Tripa is nominally at the head of the Gelugpa, but the Dalai Lama is clearly understood as its ultimately spokesperson and authority. For an excellent look at the monastic lineage of Kirti and their relationships with political power see Daniel Berounsky, "Kirti Monastery of Ngawa: Its History and Recent Situation," *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (December 2012): 66-74.
[597] The Gelug, or 'Yellow Hat' sect has at its head the Dalai Lama (though the Ganden Tripa is technically at the head of the Gelug hierarchy) and has been the dominant religious group in Tibet since the V Dalai Lama took power from his Kagyu counterparts in the 17th century. A few self-immolators have come from the Kagyu, or 'Red Hat' sect, and a smaller number from the Nyingmapa. While these distinctions carry a great deal of importance within the Tibetan lands, the pleas for Tibetan unity examined below seem to anchor Tibetan identity above such sectarianism, and all Tibetans regardless of sectarian affiliation see the Dalai Lama as the leader of Tibet. For a good discussion of the Gelugpa rise to dominance see Derek Maher "The Dalai Lamas and State Power," *Religion Compass* 1/2 (2007), 260-278.
[598] It should also be noted that there was no information available on the religious status of 15% of those self-immolators, but the trend is significant nonetheless.
[599] Similar proportions seem likely for self-immolations in 2014, but information was not fully available at the time of this drafting.
[600] For the relationship between monks and laypeople in the register of purity, see Janet Gyatso, "Discipline and Resistance on the Tibetan Plateau," *Fieldsights - Hot Spots*, Cultural Anthropology Online, April 8, 2012. http://culanth.org/fieldsights/96-discipline-and-resistance-on-the-tibetan-plateau/. The latter is an extension of the logic I will articulate in the following pages.
[601] Robbie Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 42; Wang Lixiong, "Last-Words Analysis."
[602] Wang Lixiong, "Last-Words Analysis."
[603] See my "Violently Peaceful: Tibetan Self-Immolation and the Problem of the Non/Violence Binary," *Open Theology*, 1 (2015), 146-159.
[604] Robbie Barnett may identify these as "sources of influence" which are separate from "causes," (Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 41) but I instead will look at them as means of legitimating a course of action, making it appear moral and appropriate given the circumstances. That does not at all exclude the subjectivity forming nature of these narratives.
[605] While there is good reason to refer to this conflict going back hundreds of years, in this paper I will be focusing mainly on the period since the 1954 exile of the Tibetan government. There are several good discussions of the history of the conflict both from the Tibet and Chinese perspective. I recommend John Powers, *History as Propaganda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) as the definitive work on the discussion.

[606] Nangdrol, quoted in International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), *Storm in the Grasslands: Self-Immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy* (Washington, D.C.: International Campaign for Tibet, 2012), 123-124.
[607] While completely ignoring the possibility that some of the self-immolations were done out of despair overstates what we can know, two things should be noted: first, there are ways of killing oneself much less painful than burning to death if the cessation of life is the sole goal. If the pain and suffering is the problem, seeking an end of such extreme suffering must have some symbolic charge. Suicide by fire is not unknown in that area of Asia, (see Laloe, "Patterns of Deliberate Self-Burning," 207-215), but Tibet lacks any significant tradition of death by burning. Indeed, the lack of such a tradition has made the self-immolations a challenge for interpreters and is frequently noted at the outset of scholarly analyses.

Second, the charge of suicide places death firmly within an individualistic frame, where it can be understood only as ending a life that is no longer wanted. Suicidal deaths are done in service to individual wants, such as the desire to end suffering, and therefore they are excluded from the communal or political sphere. The debate around the discourse of 'suicide bombers' versus 'human bombs' regarding Islamic martyrdom operations centers on this issue, and will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. Like its siblings homicide, matricide or even genocide, the suffix –cide (from the Latin –cida, a killer or cutter, related to caedō, caedere, to slaughter or cut to pieces) represents an inappropriate killing, a murder of oneself. Calling the self-immolations 'suicides' eliminates the possibility for these deaths to serve collective ends, and such accusations by PRC officials function to deny recognition of Tibet as a sacred community, instead affirming that these bodies are under the jurisdiction of the PRC. Tibetans have responded by making it clear they understand these acts as courageously performed for Tibet, bestowing the title of pawo, martyr, in support of their conviction. See for example the unnamed Tibetan monk quoted in Time magazine as averring self-immolators "did this not as individuals, but for the Tibetan people." "Burning Desire for Freedom," *Time*, November 14, 2011. Retrieved from http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2098575,00.html. A suicide is an act of an individual, a martyrdom is an act for the collective. Christophe Besuchet put the claim of suicide in perspective in his "Beacons of Resistance, Not Desperate Acts," *Rangzen*, April 28, 2012. http://www.rangzen.net/2012/01/28/beacons-of-resistance-not-desperate-acts/. Accessed June 4, 2014. For a good discussion of the role of meaning and Buddhism in relation to suicide see Martin Delhey, "Views on Suicide in Buddhism: Some Remarks," in Michael Zimmerman, ed. *Buddhism and Violence* (Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006), 25-63.
[608] Numerous works have been devoted to this topic, but three are recommended to the reader interested in learning more about the topic. The most comprehensive is certainly the three volume opus by renowned historian and Tibetologist Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991 [vol. 1], 2009 [vol. 2], 2013 [vol. 3]). For a much more condensed study that focuses specifically on the conflict with China, see the policy study by Eliot Sperling, *The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2004). No investigation of the history between these two should be undertaken without reference to Powers' *History as Propaganda*.
[609] Derek Maher has referred to this as "preceptor-patron," likely to remove the Christian overtones saturating the more commonly used "priest-patron." I believe his label is ultimately more accurate, but use the more common label here for ease of understanding. See Maher, "Dalai Lamas and State Power," 261.
[610] See Powers, *History as Propaganda*, chap 4.
[611] Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 1: The Demise of the Lamaist State 1913-1951* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1989), 44.
[612] Here see Powers, *History as Propaganda*.
[613] Goldstein, *Demise of Lamaist State*, 74. The entire transcript of Simla can be found in the work's appendix C.
[614] Glodstein, *Demise of Lamaist State*, 522.
[615] Ibid., 535.
[616] Ibid, 613-14.
[617] Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: Calm Before the Storm, 1951-55* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2007), 542-3.
[618] Goldstein, *Demise of Lamaist State*, 643. Mao Zedong had a policy of semi-autonomy for ethnic populations under China's control, meant to allow for some self-rule but the ultimate administration by China. Ironically, the XIV Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way Program' seeks similar autonomy for Tibet, but neither side can come to an agreement on how to administrate such autonomy.
[619] Ibid., 676.

[620] The allusion to Mao Zedongs famous dictum that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" is deliberate. See his "Problems of War and Strategy" (November 6, 1938), *Selected Works, Vol. II*, 224.
[621] "Liberation" formed the frame through which the Chinese Communist Party understood their service to the population of China, freeing them from the imperialist regime of Chiang Kai-Shek and the traditional modes of life that kept them unaware of their oppression.
[622] "Seventeen-Point Plan for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet," retrieved from http://www.cfr.org.
[623] An excellent discussion of the conditions leading to the Seventeen Point Agreement is available at Goldstein, *Demise of the Lamaist State*, 763-772.
[624] "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 50th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day," The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2009, para. 3-4. Last accessed August 8, 2013. On the Dalai Lama's perspective on communism, see Goldstein, *Calm Before the Storm*, 541.
[625] On the Khamba Uprising, see Melvyn Goldstein, *History of Tibet, Volume 3: The Storm Clouds Descend, 1955-1957* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 116-140. During the same period under discussion this group would be approached by the CIA to train as resistance fighters in Kham.
[626] Goldstein, *Storm Clouds Descend*, 120-140.
[627] Tsering Shakya, "Blood in the Snows." In *The Struggle for Tibet*, (New York: Verso, 2009). Wang Lixiong asserts that an estimated 104,000 members of the approximately 110,000 Buddhist clergy members were ejected from their home monasteries, and about 97% of monasteries were closed with their lands being redistributed. See Wang Lixiong, "Reflections on Tibet," in *Struggle for Tibet*, 53.
[628] Melvyn Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 80-81.
[629] Ibid, 82-83.
[630] Ibid., 84-85.
[631] Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 50.
[632] Statement to the foreign press on July 1, 2010. Quoted in "75th Birthday of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Violations of Religious Freedom in Tibet," *FreeTibet.org*, July 6, 2010. Retrieved from http://freetibet.org/news-media/pr/060710.
[633] Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation*, trans. Steven Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 30.
[634] Mayfair Yang has provided a thorough and detailed account of the so-called 'Cult of Mao' which articulates the innovation in Mao's cult of personality as opposed to a reworking of traditional Chinese religious affects. See Mayfair Yang, *Gifts, Favors and Banquets* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994). While I may disagree with Yang on the extent of Mao's perceived divinity, her work delineates centrally important aspects around the place of Mao in inculcating action in the PRC.
[635] Like other religious or pseudo-religious organizations, when a charismatic leader dies means are invented to transpose the awe in which they were held on the basis of their individual personality to the new head of the organization. See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991[1922]).
[636] Dalai Lama, "Speech on the 38th Anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising," March 10, 1997.
[637] From an interview with Voice of America, printed on the Tibetan Youth Congress website. Retrieved from http://www.rangzen.net/1998/08/01/rite-of-freedom/.
[638] See Buffreteille, "Self-Immolation in Tibet," 1-18.
[639] Much of the information about Thupten Ngodup's life and actions come from Jamyang Norbu, "Rite of Freedom: The Life and Sacrifice of Thupten Ngodup", written on August 6, 1998 and retrieved from http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/ 2008/05/12/remembering-thupten-ngodup/. Last accessed on 10/10/14. See also a brief discussion in Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation," 12-14, and in Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[640] See Anand Upendran, "The 'Patriotic Education' of Tibet," *The Diplomat*, August 21, 2013. Retrieved from http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/the-patriotic-education-of-tibet/.
[641] Perhaps the best examination of the situation in Tibet in 2008 is Warren W. Smith Jr.'s *Tibet's Last Stand?: The Tibetan Uprisings of 2008 and China's Response* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010).
[642] See those collected in Woeser, *Immolations au Tibet*, op.loc.
[643] For instance, Lhasang Tsering, a former president of the Tibetan Youth Congress, who told a BBC reporter "I question the current policy and position of His Holiness not to face reality and then forcing Tibetans to commit suicide." Quoted in Roberts, "Self-Immolations Shake Tibetan Resolve," *BBC*, April 18, 2012.

[644] The scholar will remain anonymous out of concern for his or her station and well-being.
[645] See for example Charlene Makley, "The Political Lives of Dead Bodies," *Cultural Anthropology Online- Hot Spots*, April 08, 2012, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/95-the-political-lives-of-dead-bodies. Accessed May 20, 2014.
[646] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 50th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day," The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2009.
[647] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 184.
[648] Quoted in Edward Wong, "From the Tibetan Monastery at the Heart of Self-Immolations, an Explanation," *New York Times*, p. 6, Section A, June 3, 2012.
[649] See Vincanne Adams, "Suffering the Winds of Lhasa: Politicized Bodies, Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and Humanism in Tibet, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 12:1, The Embodiment of Violence (Mar. 1998), 80-82. Tash Despa (Producer and Director). 2008. *Undercover in Tibet*. Channel 4, http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/dispatches-undercover-in-tibet/. Last accessed July 11, 2014.
[650] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 37.
[651] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 59.
[652] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macey (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). A question at a conference where I presented some of this material raised the issue of 'care' v. 'protection' as the purpose of the state in regards to citizen bodies. The former is said to allow for personal growth, say medicine in a wound, while the later defends against unwanted external inflictions, say the bandage over the wound. While I am intrigued by such a division, I am immediately suspicious of claims that determine what qualifies as 'external' vs. 'internal', especially in political contexts. I believe such claims are similar in character to those examined here, and I would assert my conclusions in this paper speak to this dichotomy as well.
[653] Quoted in J. Burke, "Tibetan 'Government in Exile' Calls for End to Self-Immolations," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/, para 10. Last accessed November 21, 2014.
[654] Quoted in Louisa Lim, "Protests, Self-Immolations Signs of a Desperate Tibet," *NPR*, February 21, 2012, http://www.npr.org. Last accessed November 16, 2014.
[655] See Shakya, "Self-Immolation," 37. Also Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 46.
[656] Quoted in "Burning Desire for Freedom," *New York Times*, November 14, 2011. The official was noted to be half ethnically Han Chinese and half Tibetan, an ethnic combination that is becoming more apparent particularly in the provinces where self-immolations are rife.
[657] Ashild Kolas, "Tibetan Nationalism: The Politics of Religion," *Journal of Peace Research* 33:1 (February 1996), 56.
[658] Bhuchung Tsering, "Man on Fire," *HimalMag.com*, February 10, 2012, http://www.himalmag.com/man-on-fire/. Last accessed 6/22/2014. While the translation of Tsering uses the term faith, we should appreciate the deep social embeddedness of the dharma in Tibet, and not see this "faith" as only a mental acceptance of a metaphysical creed, but rather a complete acceptance of religious grounds for life in the world, including social relationships and power structures.
[659] Tsering Shakya, "Blood in the Snows," in *The Struggle for Tibet* (New York: Verso, 2009), 85.
[660] This is likely the cause for the centralization of the self-immolations around Kirti Monastery in Ngaba, according to Tibetan poet and blogger Woeser.
[661] DalaiLama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 51st Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2010.
[662] Dalai Lama and Jean-Claude Carriere, *Violence and Compassion* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 151.
[663] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 28th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day," The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, accessed August 15, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1987.
[664] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 45th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2004.
[665] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 50th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day," The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2009, para. 4.

[666] Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship*, 14.
[667] Ibid, 16.
[668] See Cabezon, "Ethics," para. 7.
[669] Quoted in ICT, "Storm in the Grassland," 105.
[670] The lighting of butter lamps as both a devotional practice and a symbol of the illumination of enlightenment is a common practice throughout Tibet. While the symbolism and link to devotion seems a clear link to the self-immolations, compounded by the reports of Tulku (*sprul sku*; a title for a recognized reincarnate lama) Athup's last words to his family, "Today I feel at ease and am ending my life by offering butter lamps for all those Tibetans who have set themselves on fire for the cause of Tibet," a simple relationship of body to butter lamp is inconsistent with Buddhist theology, and appears nowhere in other statements. Tulku Athup's words quoted in "Tibetan Self-Immolation Toll Rises," Radio Free Asia, March 28, 2013, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/rises-03282013151556.html. Last accessed September 22, 2014.
[671] Quoted in "Tibetan Activist Who Self-Immolated Leaves Letter Behind," *New York Times*, India Blog, March 28, 2012, http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/tibetan-activists-letter-explaining-his-self-immolation/. Last accessed August 13, 2014.
[672] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 50th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day," The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2009, para. 12.
[673] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 38th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1997, para 9.
[674] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*.
[675] Dalai Lama "An Appeal to the Chinese People," March 28, 2008, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/appeal-to-the-chinese-people, §3. See also his speech on March 10, 1999, §6.
[676] Dalai Lama, "Speech to the European Parliament at Strasbourg," June 15, 1988. Quoted in Goldstein, *Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 88.
[677] Quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 142.
[678] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 142-3. Also quoted in "New Video Footage Show Self-Immolations in Zamthang," *Tibet.net*, May 9, 2012, http://tibet.net/2012/05/09/new-video-footage-show-self-immolations-in-zamthang/. Last accessed July 7, 2014.
[679] Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation", 4. Also note the work of the scholar at Beijing U.
[680] On the use and creation of slogans in regards to developing communal solidarity see Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) chapter 1.
[681] For a sampling, see Radio Free Asia's reporting of the self-immolation of *pawo* Dolkar Kyi (August 7, 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burn-08072012101822.html), Lhamo Tseten (October 26, 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burning-10262012120226.html), Tamdin Dorjee (November 12, 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burn-11242012182156.html), and Tsering Gyal (November 11, 2013, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burn-11112013093401.html).
[682] Hannah Beech and Tawu, "Burning Desire for Freedom." *Time Magazine*, November 14, 2011.
[683] Melvyn Goldstein, "Introduction," in Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein, eds. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (Berkeley, UC Press, 1998), 5.
[684] Law professor Rebecca French discovered this in a conversation with Tibetan exiles, reported in her "A Conversation with Tibetans?: Reconsidering the Relationship between Religious Beliefs and Secular Legal Discourse," *Law & Social Inquiry*, 26:1 (Winter 2001), 95-112.
[685] Jose Ignacio Cabezón, "Introduction," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. Jose Ignacio Cabezón (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4. For Charles Taylor's development of the terms "buffered" and "porous selves," see his *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
[686] Prayers for the long life of such beings also often accompany the dedication of merit. Dedicating merit not only transfers the benefits of good acts to others, but also achieves merit in the very dedication. Giving away the merit earned for skillful actions rather than allowing it to benefit the individual who earned the good karma is certainly altruistic, and that fact is not lost in Buddhist theology. There is also a relationship between the fields of dedication chosen and the merit gained. Those that remain beneficial to the actor (for example, dedicating merit to one's family) still increases the merit, but not as much as dedicating it to all beings which grows the merit exponentially. To elaborate, Patrul Rinpoche, in The Words of My Perfect Teacher, a well-known text in

Tibet, especially the Kagyu school, states "Never forget to perform the dedication at the end of any meritorious act, great or small. Any source of merit not dedicated in this way will bear fruit only once and will then be exhausted. But whatever is dedicated to ultimate enlightenment will never be exhausted, even after bearing fruit a hundred times." (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (Boston, MA: Shambala Press, 1994), 325.) While Patrul Rinpoche is talking particularly about dedicating merit to others attainment of enlightenment, the mechanism of dedication remains the approved way of not only directing one's merit toward a different goal, but also of building merit in itself. Dedicating merit to the Dalai Lama who is the emanation of the Bodhisattva who will lead all humanity into enlightenment is the same as dedicating the merit to the benefit of all sentient beings (a phrase that appears in several statements of several pawo, including Lama Soepa's). In this way, what benefits the Tibetan community benefits all people, functioning to inculcate all those who are witnessing the self-immolations into the conflict itself. It is not only the good of a small community that is at stake, but the good of all humanity.

[687] It is true that the third Buddhist Vehicle, the Vajrayana is the dominant form of Buddhism practiced by religious professionals in monasteries and nunneries. However, while the religious elite will be well represented here and the tantric abilities they possess will find mention, Mahāyāna Buddhism is the type of Buddhism practiced by lay people who have not developed their ritual proficiencies. Nearly all of the texts that are used to legitimize these acts of self-killing are from the Mahāyāna school as well.

[688] Quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 164.

[689] Nangdrol, quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 123-4.

[690] On the differentiation of spheres in modern political thought see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Jose Casanova, *Private Religions in the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and the collected essays in *Rethinking Secularism*, Mark Juergensmeyer, Craig Calhoun and Jonathan van Antwerpen, eds..

[691] Quoted in "Man on Fire," HimalMag.com, 2/10/2012, www.himalmag.com/manonfire.

[692] Constitution of China, emphasis added. It should also be noted that only five religious traditions are approved by the PRC - Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism – and even those religious communities must be of an approved variety to be in conformance with Chinese law.

[693] Dalai Lama, "Speech to Tibetans at Salugara Monastery, West Bengal," April 10, 2013. Retrieved from dalailama.com. There he told his audience "Two years ago, I took retirement from my political responsibility. In addition to my personal retirement, it also ended the nearly 400-year old system, established from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama and followed by the successive Dalai Lamas, of being both the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet. This system proved useful during its time, now the time has changed." §8.

[694] Quoted in Sue Lloyd-Roberts, "Self-Immolations Shake Tibetan Resolve" *BBC*, April 18, 2012.

[695] Shakya, "Language of Protest," 105.

[696] Marx, Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.

[697] Barnett, Introduction to Lixiong, Struggle for Tibet, 11. See also Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 48-50.

[698] Adams, "Suffering the Winds of Lhasa," 77.

[699] Barnett, "Introduction," 13.

[700] As related by Lama Dorje, the story runs: "The Tibetan people originated because an incarnation of Buddha Chenresig came into Tibet in the form of a monkey Bodhisattva. He lived in a cave, vowing to remain celibate. But a 'rock cliff demoness' [*brag sin-mo*] found him and begged him to take her as his wife, threatening to kill herself if he did not do so. The monkey returned to the Buddha field of Chenresig. But Chenresig said, 'You should return and marry her to start a human race that will have your Bodhisattva mind and learn the dharma.' The monkey Bodhisattva returned and married the demoness, and they had offspring. But after a time they could not provide for their own food in the forest. So the monkey again went up to plead with Buddha Chenresig. "What will we do for food?' It was then that Chenresig gave the five kinds of grain to the Tibetan people, which grew spontaneously as crops for them to eat." Quoted in Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 43-44.

[701] Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 45. It should be noted that the religious sensibility guiding Tibetan identity is not a constant throughout all of Tibetan history. Melvyn Goldstein notes that a drop off in religious sentiment followed the early incursions of Mao's communist programs and remained low until a Buddhist "revival" took place in 1978 ("Introduction"). Some even contend that the Chinese policies against religion have had the opposite effect, bringing more people to Tibetan Buddhism as a central pole of identity. Even allowing for this,

what I have recounted here is the current state of Tibetan self-understanding related to religion, that which has held sway for decades and form the background for the self-immolations.
[702] Joel Gruber, "The 'Lamaism' of Tibetan Buddhism," (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, forthcoming). See also Ben Hillman, "Monastic Politics and the Local State in China: Authority and Autonomy in an Ethnically Tibetan Prefecture," *The China Journal* 54 (July 2005), 29-51.
[703] Kolas, "Tibetan Nationalism," 64.
[704] Melvyn Goldstein, "Introduction," in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet,* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1998), 5.
[705] Adams, "Suffering the Winds of Lhasa," 80.
[706] Kolas, "Tibetan Nationalism," 53.
[707] "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 52nd Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2011, para. 5.
[708] Several scholars have made this point, see especially José Cabezón, "On the Ethics of the Tibetan Self-Immolations,"; Barnett, "Self-Immolation,"; Shakya, "Transforming the Language of Protest,"; Lixiong, "Last Words Analysis."
[709] Robert Cover, "The Supreme Court 1982 Term, Foreword: Nomos and Narrative," *Harvard Law Review* 97:4 (December 1983), 4.
[710] Cover, "Nomos and Narrative," 5.
[711] Fischer, "Geopolitics of Politico-Religious Protest," para. 5.
[712] On the frame of sacrifice operating amidst Tibetan discussions of self-immolation, see Shakya, "Self-Immolation," 36. Terms used are from Cabezon, "Ethics," and Tsering, "Self-Immolation," 38. Others include offering (*chöpa*) and offering fire to the body (*lus me mchod*). Katia Buffetrille has pointed out that the term for blood offering, *marcho*, is never used in conjunction with the self-immolations, suggesting the concept of sacrifice may be misapplied (Buffetrille, 10; she includes a good list of Tibetan expressions employed at the same place). Considering the relationship of blood offering and the indigenous Bon religion of the Tibetan plateau, however, this should be expected. The Bon rituals that surround the offering of blood include cutting the skin to let blood flow, which contrasts with these deaths by fire. For a good examination of these rituals see Lawrence Epstein and Peng Wenbin, "Ritual, Ethnicity and Generational Identity," in Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein, eds. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1998), 120-139. I disagree with the over-reliance on etymological arguments regarding the term "blood offering," as it risks favoring form over substance.
[713] Chung Tsering, "Online Articles on Self-Immolation by Tibetans in Exile," in *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (December 2012), 99.
[714] By 'sacred' here I mean to highlight what Emile Durkheim argued in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1912]), namely that religion itself functions as a symbol for the collective, and those things that serve the collective are marked as sacred in contrast to those that serve the individual and are thereby classified profane. A fuller analysis of Durkheim's discussion and how this study contributes to that understanding can be found in the chapters following.
[715] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). See also Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1912]).
[716] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 35th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1997, para. 12.
[717] Dalai Lama, "Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 48th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day." The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, last accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2007, para. 9.
[718] Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 60.
[719] Ibid., 62.
[720] On a trip to Shanghai I visited the Longhua Martyr's Memorial cemetery, and was able to tour a massive open space where monuments to Mao intermingled with memorial stones remembering those who perished in the PLA. The area itself sat on the ground of the Kuomintang military police site, where numerous supporters of Mao were first imprisoned then interred. The old headquarters has been transformed into an enormous museum loaded with personal effects of these martyrs.
[721] Shakya, "Self-Immolation," 36.

[722] Tsering, "Online Articles on Self-Immolation," 99-104. On the references to the Medicine King, see Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation," 8.
[723] James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 59.
[724] Ibid.
[725] Ibid., 51. While the Chinese Buddhism that Benn focuses exclusively on (though see his "Multiple Meanings of Buddhist Self-Immolation in China – A Historical Perspective." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 25 (December2012), 203-212 for links with the Tibetans) has a distinct lineage from the Indian Buddhist tradition that Tibet claims, to preclude any interaction would miss the fluid nature of the geographic and ideological landscapes between the two. See Lawrence Epstein and Peng Wenbin, "Ritual, Ethnicity and Generational Identity," in Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein, eds. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1998). especially since the interpretations used here took place prior to the founding of Tibet.
[726] Ibid., 53.
[727] Ibid., 62.
[728] Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 78-90.
[729] Ibid., 102-103.
[730] Ibid., 64.
[731] See for instance Paldron, "Virtue and the Remaking of Suffering,"; Robbie Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 57.
[732] For a worthwhile compilation, see the *Sutra of the Wise and Foolish, (mdo mdzangs blun) or Ocean of Narratives (üliger-ün dalai)*, trans. Stanley Frye (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981). Apart from Ohnuma's excellent treatise, readers looking for works on self-sacrifice in jātaka tales would benefit from Arthid Sheravanichkul, "Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisatta in the Paññāsa Jātaka," *Religion Compass* 2/5 (2008), 769-787.
[733] Stephen Jenkins, "On the Auspiciousness of Compassionate Violence" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33:1-2, 245.
[734] Kum Kum Roy, "Justice in the Jatakas," *Social Scientist*, 24:4/6 (April-June 1996), esp. 23-31.
[735] Reiko Ohnuma, *Bodily Self-Sacrifice in Indian Buddhist Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidas Publishers, 2007), 92.
[736] Jenkins, "Compassionate Violence," 321.
[737] I take the term pervasive influence from Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation," 58.
[738] Tsering, "Online Articles on Self-Immolation," 101-102.
[739] At the time of this composition the only other was Tulku Athup who self-immolated on April 6, 2012, leaving no statement. Dondrub Lotsey who set himself on fire February 13, 2013 while exiled in Nepal, was said to be the son of the reincarnated Lama Tulku Sangnag Tenzin, but no other religious leaders have performed the act. This may in part be due to the increased surveillance on such individuals, but that is only speculation.
[740] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 111, emphasis added. It is possible that the 'tantric honor' he refers to is a ritual of giving up the body to an otherworldly force rather than producing something by his death, but I believe the context of his sacrifice, especially when aligned with the others who have self-immolated, should dissuade us from such interpretations.
[741] Sangye Dolma quoted in "Our Last Message," *India Seminar*, http://www.india-seminar.com/2013/644/644_last_message.htm. Last accessed December 22, 2014.
[742] Ohnuma is engaging primarily with Indian Buddhist texts, from which the Tibetan canon springs. However, the Tibetan brand of Buddhism is heavily focused on the importance of teachers and the development of qualities that advance an individual along the path to enlightenment. It could be suggested that Ohnuma's, and therefore my, interpretation here is more suggestive of the kind of Sino-Buddhism that has a long tradition of self-immolation as a mode of gaining enlightenment by arguing that lighting oneself on fire is a demonstration of the understanding of no-self. I would contend that it is a different thing to offer proof of good intention (which is at issue here) than it is to offer proof of enlightenment. The statements I quoted above from the Tibetan spiritual leaders are not demanding proper training, only proper intention. I believe Ohnuma's analysis provides a means of seeing that intention proven in the action itself, as I will explicate below.
[743] Ohnuma, *Bodily Self-Sacrifice*, 143. Italics in original.
[744] Ibid.

[745] The category of the "sacred' as expounded by Durkheim seems eminently appropriate here, where an act that has as its locus the group marks it as sacred, and therefore a self-death stemming from personal concerns would be "profane." We could also read this in terms of his work on suicide, whereas portraying the death as an "anomic" suicide repels understanding as "altruistic" suicide.
[746] Early on there was an extensive program to color the self-immolators as psychological impaired, see for example Xinhua, July 18, 2012: "Self-immolation truth: Tibetan Buddhism kidnapped by politics", stating: "Copycat suicides spread, triggering public concern that teenagers and other vulnerable people are at risk."
[747] International Campaign for Tibet, "'Acts of Significant Evil': Criminalizing Tibetan Self-Immolation." http://www.savetibet.org/acts-of-significant-evil-case-details/
[748] When I was in Shanghai in 2013, I had the opportunity to ask several Chinese citizens what they thought of what was happening in Tibet. To my surprise, they were barely, if at all aware that "something" was happening, though they were unaware what. One student I spoke to heard of someone burning themselves to death, but showed astonishment when I explained the extent to which the self-immolations had reached. This could certainly stem from ignorance blended with fear of the consequences for speaking about the issue, but my instinct in speaking to these people was that it was more the former than the latter.
[749] Dalai Lama, Interview with Bharka Dutt, "The Buck Stops Here," *NDTV*, January 11, 2012.
[750] Dalai Lama, Interview with Ann Curry, *NBC*, October 11, 2012, http://tibet.net/2012/10/23/nbc-interviews-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-on-self-immolation-tragedy-in-tibet/. Last accessed September 12, 2013.
[751] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 110.
[752] There is an ongoing controversy regarding the recognition of the 17th Karmapa, with some groups supporting Ogyen Trinley Dorje (including the XIV Dalai Lama) while others support Trinley Thaye Dorje as the true Karmapa. Some, like Beru Khentse Rinpoche, believes they are both legitimate. My use of the title to refer to the former should not be considered as any commentary on the controversy, but it does link to the disagreement with the naming of the Panchen Lama noted above.
[753] Melinda Liu, "Tibetan Leaders Struggle to Cope with Spate of Self-Immolations," *The Daily Beast*, November 12, 2011.
[754] In Amy Lee, "Tibetans Sacrifice Their Lives for Their Faith," *Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2012, p.A9.
[755] For only a few instances, see Chung Tsering, "Online Articles on Self-Immolation,"; Twenty-year old unnamed Tibetan monk quoted in "Burning desire for Freedom," *New York Times*, November 14, 2011; two unnamed Tibetans interviewed by Louisa Lim, "Protests, Self-Immolation Signs of a Desperate Tibet, NPR News, February 21, 2012, npr.org/story/147170229.
[756] Ohnuma, *Bodily Self-Sacrifice*, 170.
[757] Paldron, "Virtue and the Remaking."
[758] Although the act of self-immolation carries significant cultural potency, as is evidenced in studies like Laloë, "Patterns of Deliberate Self-Burning," or Elizabeth Campbell and Isabelita Guiao, "Muslim Culture and Female Self-Immolation: Implications for Global Women's Health Research and Practice," *Health Care for Women International*, 25:9 (2004), 782-793.
[759] The question of the actual number of earth years for which these last varies, but is generally in the millions of years.
[760] Jan Nattier, *Once Upon A Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 119.
[761] Dalai Lama and Carriere, *Violence and Compassion*, 32. He also notes that the prevalence of nuclear weapons themselves, weapons of such unbelievable destruction, also constitute "the central element of the Kali Yuga," see p. 8.
[762] Nattier, *Future Time*, 126-127.
[763] Nicolas Sihlé, "Buddhism in Tibet and Nepal," In *Buddhism in World Cultures*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 254. A good discussion of the ethical and psychological aspects of the doctrine of karma is available in Lynken Ghose, "An Ethical and Psychological Analysis of the Doctrine of *Karma* in Buddhism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 35:2 (June 2007), 259-289.
[764] Irmgard Mengele, "Chilu ('Chi bslu): Rituals for 'Deceiving Death,'" in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. Jose Cabezon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103- 130.
[765] Adams, "Winds of Lhasa," 89.
[766] See Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 212-213.
[767] Adams, "Winds of Lhasa, 90.
[768] Ibid., 92.

[769] Quoted in Edward Wong "From the Tibetan Monastery at the Heart of Self-Immolations, an Explanation," *New York Times*, June 3, 2012.
[770] Dalai Lama and Carriere, *Violence and Compassion*, 164-5.
[771] Ibid., 166.
[772] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 110.
[773] Paldron, "Virtue and the Remaking of Suffering," para. 6.
[774] Quoted in "Our Last Word," India Seminar, http://www.india-seminar.com/2013/644/644_last_message.htm. Last accessed October 10, 2014.
[775] ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 158.
[776] Ibid., 146.
[777] Ibid., 125.
[778] Radio Free Asia, "Tibetan Self-Immolation Toll Rises," March 28, 2013. http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/rises-03282013151556.html
[779] Tibetan Buddhist scholar Dan Hirschberg first suggested this perspective to me, and my research has only supported his assertions.
[780] Lixiong, "Last Words," para. 21.
[781] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 33.
[782] Ibid., 34. Emphasis in original. Weber does not attribute all sanctioned violence to the state; instead he recognizes the state's claim that it determines the only acceptable deployment of violent force. The State's refusal to authorize any violence apart from that which exists in its institutional arms operates on the discursive level, and it is incumbent upon individuals to take this assertion as accurate regarding their state of affairs. Revolutionary violence, for example, is denounced as criminal or an act of war by the state, but appears as liberation to those founding a new collective subject. On the distinction of different modes of forceful action in the sphere of rule see Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* ().
[783] Dmitris Vardoulakis, *Sovereignty and Its Other*, 1.
[784] Legal theorist Robert Cover showed that legal worlds exist only to the extent that their commitments place bodies on the line. See Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," *The Yale Law Journal* 95:8 (July 1986), 1605.
[785] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, esp. chap. 2.
[786] Weber, *Politics as Vocation*, 34.
[787] Woeser, Invisible Tibet, April 4, 2012.
[788] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House Press,1995), 33-39.
[789] Ralph Litzinger, "Tibet Talk – on Life, Death, and the State." *Fieldsights - Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online*, April 08, 2012, http://culanth.org/fieldsights/104-tibet-talk-on-life-death-and-the-state. Last accessed July 7, 2014.
[790] Didier Fassin, "The Trace: Violence, Truth and the Politics of the Body," *Social Research* 78:2 (Summer 2011), 282.
[791] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 147.
[792] Quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, op.loc.
[793] Quoted in Phuntsok Yangchen, "CTA Holds Prayer Service for Tibetan Martyrs," *Phayul*, October 24, 2012.
[794] Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 299. See also Fassin, "The Trace," 283.
[795] Yang, "Still Burning," 12. See also Michael Biggs, "Dying for a Cause – Alone?" *Contexts* 7 (2008), 26 and Karin Andriolo, "The Twice-Killed: Imagining Protest Suicide," *American Anthropologist* 108 (2006), 102.
[796] Gudrub, "The Sound of a Victorious Drum Beaten by Lives," in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, 164-5.
[797] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 91. Asad's statement relies too heavily on an afterlife for the case under discussion, but the articulation of life within the bounds of that which lays beyond this physical life is appropriate.
[798] See Jacob Dalton's discussion of the 'liberation rite' in the 10th century tantric Dunhuang manual in *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).
[799] For a good discussion of King Langdarma see Jens Schlieter, "Compassionate Killing or Conflict Resolution? The Murder of King Langdarma according to Tibetan Buddhist Sources," in Michael Zimmermann, ed. *Buddhism and Violence* (Lumbini, Nepal: Lumbini Research Institute, 2006), 129-155. See too Derek Maher, "Rhetoric of War," esp. 185.
[800] See Bruce Lincoln, Discourse and the Construction of Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[801] This has been firmly established by Michael Jerryson in his work, namely *Buddhist Fury* and particularly his entry in the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Both Stephen Jenkins in his "Compassionate Violence" and Jacob Dalton in his *Taming of the Demons* concur with many of the insights Jerryson comes to.
[802] Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 125.
[803] Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 188.
[804] Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
[805] Fassin, "The Trace," 284.
[806] Quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*, op.loc.
[807] Jamphel Yeshi, "Tibetan Activist Who Self-Immolated Leaves Letter Behind," *New York Times*, March 28, 2012, http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/tibetan-activists-letter-explaining-his-self-immolation/?ref=asia.
[808] By confession here I mean the term in its explication by Paul Kahn, who sees confession as.
[809] Quoted in Ann Curry interview, *NBC*, October 11, 2012.
[810] Quoted in ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*,
[811] Adams, "Winds of Lhasa," 81.
[812] Susan Rudolph has spoken of the rivalry between cultural death and individual death in her "Religion, State and Transnational Societies," in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, ed. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder; Westview Press, 1997).
[813] See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, chap. 6. His work *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) carries similar ideas at its heart.

Notes for Chapter 5

[814] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, chap. 2.
[815] See Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion*, chap. 1; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, chap. 1.
[816] A great deal of work has been on this point in regards to modern secular state Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship and the Public Sphere" in Rethinking Secularism, 75-91, Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Van Antwerpen eds. for but one good example.
[817] This is the situation James Aho saw at work in the creation of heroes. See his *Thing of Darkness*, esp. chap 2.
[818] On the creation of such a line see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, part 2 section 1.
[819] Kahn, *Political Theology*, 23.
[820] I have in mind here Peter Berger's insight that a nomos gains hegemonic status by its mere "facticity" until it is challenged. See his *Sacred Canopy*, 30. On hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, esp. 292-361.
[821] Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," 1604. Khosrokhavar agrees, saying "the candidate for martyrdom seeks death because he lives in a world where the wish to be an individual within a sovereign collectivity cannot be fulfilled in this life." *Suicide Bombers*, 131.
[822] Cover, "Violence and the Word," 1614.
[823] I am aware that a distinct separation between body and spirit reflects certain Western religious categories, but my point throughout will be that a strict distinction between "body and soul" misconstrues the relationship between self and body, and that the self is always seen as utterly anchored in the body. That connection is precisely what all these political religions play upon. What is important is not how the connection is envisioned, but the mere fact that all people have a desire for physical wholeness, and the body can be afflicted in ways that direct the decisions a person makes and therefore the person they become.
[824] This is one of the central contentions of Freud's psychology, but on his ideas about religion see his *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Norton, 1952) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962).
[825] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.
[826] Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33 and following.
[827] Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*, 59.
[828] On docile bodies, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135. Gavin Flood contends the body of an ascetic or martyr "is not a docile body receiving the imposition of a sovereign power, but on the contrary, the weakening of the body… is the development of a tenacious body and the subjective appropriation of structures of power." See his *Ascetic Self*, 213.

[829] Rodney Stark recognized this fact specifically when it comes to the testimonials of martyrs, leading him to contend that "martyrs are the most credible exponents of the value of a religion, and this is especially true if there is a voluntary aspect to their martyrdom." See Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 173.
[830] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*., vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
[831] See Foucault, *Courage of Truth* esp. chap. 3-5, and *Fear-Less Speech*, esp. chap. 1.
[832] Jonathan Simon, "Parrhesiastic Accountability: Investigatory Commissions and Executive Power in an Age of Terror," *Yale Law Journal* 114 (2004): 1419ff.
[833] See Flood, *Ascetic Self*, 212 and elsewhere. We will see below that this "internalization of the tradition" aligns very closely with sociological ideas of religion promoted by Emile Durkheim.
[834] Roger Friedland, "Institution, Practice and Ontology: Towards a religious sociology," in *Institutions and Ideology*, 45-83, Renate E. Meyer et.al. eds (New York: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., 2009).
[835] Lincoln, Discourse, myth; Cover, "Nomos and Narrative," 45.
[836] Kippenberg's work has been formative for this study, however his focus revolves around an eschatological orientation, where such models only serve because they illustrate the correct means to gain salvation. He is certainly correct, and the focus on ends beyond the physical world absolutely serve to inculcate action in a way perhaps more strenuous than otherwise. However, only allowing for those types of scripts unnecessarily excludes a variety of such narratives that do not direct themselves only to salvation. While the particular political theological blend I examine here do nicely fit into Kippenberg's description, I would encourage a use of cultural scripts to avoid overdetermining what kinds of narrative scripts could feasibly guide action.
[837] An echo of the old paradox questioning whether an act is holy because God loves it, or God loves the act because it's holy can be heard in this challenge.
[838] See Nathan French, Weiner and Weiner, Joyce Salisbury, ??
[839] See Bonner, Jihad in Islam; also see Khosrokhavar who quotes Motahhari demanding a preparatory practice of achieving *agahneh* – the right state of mind – before proceeding on a martyrdom operation.
[840] These are the terms Paul Kahn uses in his *Sacred Violence*.
[841] Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 4.
[842] Ibid, 29. She says that what this shows is the inaccessible nature of physical pain to others, but what it might show is the challenge that the suffering of others, in the particular context of torture or involuntary suffering, poses to us.
[843] Not only is theological all too often discussed as a Christian conception, but it also figures routinely in religious ideals that exclude political considerations. Here I mean it only to refer to extraphysical considerations, of which come a wide variety between traditions. To do theology under such guise is to seek an understanding of the basic form of the cosmos.
[844] This closely resembles the way Gavin Flood determined subjectivity, see his *Ascetic Self*, 20 and elsewhere.
[845] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*.
[846] Roy Rappaport, Enactments of Meaning, Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
[847] By social configurations I mean the networks of relationships that take on a particular shape depending on the extent to which other individuals are part of "us", many of which overlap to great extents. This term applies to every group culturally and socially determined by any number of factors. It can be as narrow as a couple or as broad as the human race, however an individual perceives themselves to be bound with others by choice or by virtue of birth.
[848] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*.
[849] See Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, see Juergenesmeyer, *Global Rebellion* as well.
[850] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 49.
[851] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 103.
[852] Ibid., 102, see also 269.
[853] Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 12.
[854] Cover, "Nomos and Narrative," 31.
[855] Cover likewise explained that abiding by laws communicates something about the individual. See his "Nomos and Narrative," 8. It is important to note that such communication requires a statement that clarifies the reasoning behind action. I follow the precept not to kill simply because I am sitting at my computer alone, I cannot be said to act *according to* a law though my actions *align with* the law. On the other hand, if I hold off from a deep desire to kill someone because I do not want to transgress a law, then I would be acting according

to duty. In short, if I act against self-interest due to an imposed moral code, then I follow a law and link myself to that system of justice.

[856] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, Peter Berger, Sacred Canopy, Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78-9.

[857] Smyr. Chap. 2, 6.

[858] To say always is of course an overstatement, but those moral codes that do focus solely on engendering the goals of the individual struggle when it comes to sacrality. The capitalist mindset of course comes to mind here, but also the Thelemic law enunciated by Aleister Crowley: Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law. We can also hear interesting connections to Nietzsche's will to power that has to be met with demands that others be recognized.

[859] Maurice Blanchot discusses this fusing between the individual and the group in his *Prey into Hunter* ().

[860] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." In *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York City: Routledge, 2013), 462.

[861] This means that sacrifice itself lies at the basis of social belonging, preceding and prefiguring acts of sacrifice in war. Contrary to Juergensmeyer, it is not war that provides the context for sacrifice, but rather war is the extension of the dynamic inherent in all social arrangements. While Clausewitz was onto something when he declared war to be politics by other means, we see here that engaging in politics means attaching to a system of justice and seeking to enact it in the world, which necessitates sacrifice.

[862] On hegemony see Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), especially chap. 7.

[863] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 164.

[864] Weiner and Weiner, *Martyr's Conviction*, 58.

[865] Sovereignty is usually dealt with as the ultimate form of this relationship, hence its deployment around capital punishment, torture and war. However, with this understanding we can see many levels of sovereignty operative within various social configurations that claim some right to determining what suffering is legitimate and justified toward certain ends, which should reorient us to appreciate a spectrum of sovereignty. A parent in the modern U.S. has some amount of sovereignty over their child, as they can impose suffering (e.g. spanking) in service to discipline that is deemed to be legitimate; what the limits of that sovereignty are is a matter of perspective that varies between individuals, and is not consistent over time. In Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* he recognizes this spectrum of sovereignty obliquely. See chapter 2 especially. Where it gets perceived as excessive recourse to state authorities comes into play, showing that the state's sovereignty ranks higher, but until such a case is brought to statist agents for arbitration there is no real limitation.

[866] Violence itself, the imposition of suffering, is not the central issue; rather it is the transgression of the prohibition of violence that lies at the core of sovereignty, as Georges Bataille noted in his *The Accursed Share*. Giorgio Agamben in his *Homo Sacer* saw members of a political collective entering into a sovereign ban on violence, where individuals bequeath any access to violence to agents of an institution that avows to protect them from any violence. It should be noted that such protection can only ever appear in the form of a disproportionate level of suffering being deployed against perpetrators of such violence, which only can achieve a status of inevitability that would dissuade people from such actions. It is therefore less protection from suffering than the promise of retribution of such a level that it serves as a deterrent. Herein lies the very core of modern legal systems. Moreover, to move from this reactive state to a more proactive means of protection means that the agents of the state must be everywhere at all times, which is why acts of extreme violence lead to increases in security and surveillance that have today reached such a peak that they threaten basic liberties.

[867] In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* these are personified in the characters of *kratos*, the true power that is legitimate and dominant and can rightly wield suffering in support of its dictates, and *bia*, force that is exercised apart from structures of legitimacy. The latter is best understood as mere violence, and is descriptive not only of the violence implicit in transgressive acts like murder or assault but also of agents acting forcefully on behalf of figures who claim authority but have no right to it. *Kratos* adversely is the label for the force wielded by the law that is seen as justice.

[868] In fact Robert Cover holds that it is this very basis in the body that shifts ethic to law; he argues in his famous "Violence and the Word" that legal worlds only exist where bodies are placed on the line (1605). If there is no chance of bodily suffering as a consequence for transgression such discussions would remain on the level of moral philosophy.

[869] OED, op.loc.

[870] Family members of defendants found guilty may continue to dispute the established truth, and ultimately the judge's determination remains contestable, but the state action follows the legal determination. Families may cite their own experiences as informing their perception of the truth, but once the judge enters the decision the families have no other recourse against the forces of the state.
[871] See Kahn, *Sacred Violence*, chapter 1.
[872] Cover, "Violence and the Word," 1604, n. 9.
[873] Scarry, *Body and Pain*, 62.
[874] Kahn, *Political Theology*, 52.
[875] See his interview in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997)
[876] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology,* chap. 1.
[877] See his *Sovereignty and Its Other,* esp. chap. 2.
[878] As Paul Kahn put it, "If sovereignty is grounded in sacrifice, then public life is as much about the realization of a transcendent truth of the seld as it is about the maintenance of a just legal order." See his *Political Theology*, 24.
[879] This connects in part the idea of whoever and their strategic jujitsu or whatever.
[880] Girard, *Sacred Violence*, 15-16.
[881] Kahn, *Political Theology*, 52.

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