17
FANATICISM AND TERRORISM

Quassim Cassam

17.1 Introduction

In a book published in 2003, the noted historian and terrorism scholar Walter Laqueur declares that 'fanaticism is an essential part of terrorism, for how can one expect militants to kill and be killed but on the basis of a very strong, single-minded belief'? (2003: 27). However, the fanaticism that is an essential part of terrorism is not just a matter of strong or single-minded belief. Rather:

> the fanatic sees everywhere treason, betrayal, and the breaking of fidelity. He discovers everywhere conspiracies against his beloved idea, against the object of his faith. He is obsessed with a maniacal pursuit after the snares of the devil. Being in the grip of persecution mania, it is very difficult to bring him back to reality. He sees enemies all around him, and he always becomes the persecutor.
>
> *(2003: 26–27)*

In an earlier work, Laqueur represents fanatics as 'divorced from rational thought' (1999: 5) and as 'mentally unbalanced' (1999: 40). In both works, fanaticism is conceived of primarily in religious terms. Laqueur admits that not all fanatics are religious since there are also fanatical nationalists. Despite this concession, he insists that 'the religious (or quasi-religious) sources of fanaticism are beyond doubt' (2003: 26).

It is hard to believe that fanaticism, as Laqueur conceives of it, is an essential part of terrorism. For example, there is no reason to suppose that all or even most members of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) were fanatics in Laqueur's sense, even though the IRA was a terrorist organization.[1] For Laqueur, however, the terrorism of the IRA was an example of 'old' terrorism. The terrorism of which fanaticism is an essential part is the so-called 'new' terrorism of organizations like Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Indeed, the new terrorism is defined in part by its fanaticism.[2] Other key features include the following:

DOI: 10.4324/9781032128207-21

1 The ends of new terrorists are unlimited and non-negotiable.[3] Compromise with them is therefore impossible.
2 Whereas old terrorists were concerned with issues of national liberation and territorial autonomy, new terrorists are religiously motivated.
3 New terrorists seek, and are prepared to use, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) because they aim 'not at clearly defined political demands but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population' (Laqueur 1999: 81).
4 New terrorists do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. They kill indiscriminately and see non-combatants as legitimate targets.
5 New terrorists have a particular fondness for suicide missions, which they regard as demonstrating their fanatical commitment to their cause.

Several of these features can be seen as related to, and explained by, the fanaticism that Laqueur sees as an essential part of the new terrorism. It is *because* new terrorists are fanatics that their ends are unlimited and non-negotiable, that they are willing to use WMD to kill indiscriminately and that they have a particular taste for suicide missions.

The distinction between old and new terrorism has been challenged by scholars such as Martha Crenshaw and Isabel Duyvesteyn.[4] They argue that it does not correspond to any real distinction. However, one might wonder whether it is still helpful to distinguish between more and less fanatical forms of terrorism. Whether or not we wish to label the terrorism of Al Qaeda as 'new', is there not a sense in which its terrorism, or that of ISIS, is more 'fanatical' than, say, that of the IRA?[5] This is one question that needs to be considered. Furthermore, even if it is obvious that not all terrorists are fanatics, one might ask whether all fanatics are, or are likely to be, terrorists. If the typical fanatic is, as Paul Katsafanas suggests, 'willing to resort to violence' (2019: 5) does this not make fanaticism a significant risk factor for terrorism?

If it is doubtful that fanaticism is, generally speaking, an essential part of terrorism, and one is also sceptical about the distinction between old and new terrorism, then one might ask why the idea of the fanatical terrorist continues to resonate with some terrorism scholars and policy makers. One possibility is that it does so because it answers to something real in the world of terrorism. On this view, it is natural to think of someone like Osama bin Laden as a religious fanatic because he was one. There is, though, another possibility, namely, that terrorism scholars who are exercised by the fanaticism of new terrorism are, as Mark Condos describes it, 'pathologizing the political' (2016: 731). In a study of how British colonial officials in India dealt with assassinations along the North-West frontier in the late nineteenth century, Condos suggests that the labelling of the assassins as religious fanatics 'enabled colonial officials to dismiss their actions as politically meaningless expressions of deranged and violent lunatics' (2016: 738). Is it possible that when Laqueur characterizes new terrorists as mentally unbalanced religious fanatics with no clearly defined political objectives, he is wittingly or unwittingly recycling colonialist tropes about the Orient?[6]

This question has implications for the theory and practice of counterterrorism. It has been suggested that traditional counterterrorism approaches, such as political concessions and personal inducements, are unlikely to be effective when dealing with fanatical new

terrorists. To the extent that fanatics are irrational or mentally unbalanced, as evidenced by their fondness for suicide missions, they cannot be bargained with. Proponents of this view argue that other methods are needed. In practice, these other methods have included renditions, 'enhanced' interrogation, and preemptive war.[7] However, aside from obvious ethical objections to the use of such methods, there is also the concern that they misunderstand the nature of the terrorism to which they are a response.

The following discussion is in three parts. Part 2 will elucidate the concepts of terrorism and fanaticism and explore the relationship between them, especially in the context of attempts to distinguish different varieties of terrorism. Part 3 will examine the work of Condos and other historians who detect colonial imagery and Orientalist tropes in accounts of the role of fanaticism in what will be referred to here as the *new terrorism paradigm*.[8] In this paradigm, new terrorism is distinguished from old terrorism, and fanaticism as Laqueur as conceives of it is regarded as an essential part of the former but not the latter. Finally, Part 4 will examine the ways in which influential though plainly misguided conceptions of the relationship between fanaticism and terrorism have had a malign influence on both the theory and the practice of counterterrorism.

17.2 Terrorism and Fanaticism

Terrorism is a method or tactic, and terrorists are people, groups, or states that employ this method or tactic. Many different conceptualizations of terrorism have been proposed.[9] The following, by Anthony Richards, combines accuracy with brevity: terrorism is 'the use or threat of violence or force with the primary purpose of generating a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims for a political motive' (2015: 18).[10] On this account, terrorism is a method or tactic used by a range of actors in pursuit of a range of political objectives. It is not restricted to any particular type of actor. Furthermore, both combatants and non-combatants can be its targets. For example, the 9/11 attacks targeted civilians in the World Trade Center and military personnel in the Pentagon. Both the civilian and military casualties of 9/11 were victims of terrorism, and the intended psychological impact of the attacks went beyond their many immediate victims. Terrorism, then, is 'concerned with the *communication of a message* that would not otherwise be heard (were it not for the violence)' (Richards 2015: 56).

There are at least as many conceptions of fanaticism as there are of terrorism. Some see fanaticism in psychopathological terms. For such theorists, fanaticism is a mental defect, which Kant calls a 'malady of the head'.[11] Others see it as primarily an epistemic or rational failing. Finally, there is the view that fanaticism is fundamentally a moral failing. These views are not incompatible. For example, it is possible to regard fanaticism as both a mental and a rational failing. This is how Laqueur sees it. An example of a view which sees fanaticism as a rational and a moral failing is R. M. Hare's neglected account in *Freedom and Reason* (1963) and *Moral Thinking* (1981).[12] For Hare, the archetypal fanatic is the Nazi or fascist, and there are several features of his treatment of this version of fanaticism that can be used to construct a more general theory of fanaticism.

The sense in which fanaticism is a rational failing is that it consists in 'the refusal or inability to think critically' (Hare 1981: 172). The fanatic places his convictions 'beyond the reach of critical thought even when he is in a position (…) to examine and appraise them' (1981: 176).[13] The moral dimension of fanaticism is brought out by the following:

> [I]t is when people step from the selfish pursuit of their own interests to the propagation of perverted ideals that they become really dangerous. We shall never understand the phenomenon called Fascism, and other similar political movements, until we realize that this is what is happening. The extreme sort of Fascist is a fanatic who not merely wants something for himself, but thinks that it ought to be brought into existence universally, whether or not anybody else, or even he himself if his tastes change, wants it.
>
> *(1963: 114)*

A fanatic, for Hare, is a person who is willing to trample on other people's ideals and interests, and sacrifice his own interests, in order to realize his ideals.[14] For example, the Nazis thought that a certain kind of society and a certain kind of person were pre-eminently good. In this sense, they had ideals. What differentiates them from liberals is that 'they not only pursued a certain ideal, but pursued it *because of the sort of ideal that it was*, in contempt and defiance of both the interests and ideals of others' (1963: 160).[15] They 'trampled ruthlessly on other people's interests, including that interest which consists in the freedom to pursue varying ideals' (1963: 157).

Hare imagines a conversation between a liberal and a Nazi in which the liberal asks the Nazi the following question: suppose you discover that you are a Jew. Would you still favour the extermination of Jews? The fanatical Nazi will say: if I were a Jew then I would deserve to be killed. As Hare puts it, the fanatical Nazi 'sticks to his judgements even when they conflict with his own interest in hypothetical cases' (1963: 162). Indeed, the fanatic is also prepared to sacrifice the interests of his nearest and dearest to realize his ideal. A Nazi who imagines that he has Jewish blood also imagines that his children have Jewish blood. If he favours his own extermination in a possible world in which he is a Jew, then he must favour the extermination of his children in that world.

To summarize:

i A fanatic is willing to trample on the interests and ideals of other people in pursuit of his own ideals.[16]
ii A fanatic is willing to sacrifice his own interests in order to realize his ideals.

For Hare, the fanatic's willingness to trample the ideals and interests of other people is an expression of his contempt for those ideals and interests. There are many ways of trampling on other people's interests and ideals, but the fanatic is prepared to use violence or the threat of violence to do so, and to compel others to accept his ideals. If there are non-violent ways of forcing others to accept his ideals, then the fanatic need not be violent. However, in cases where there is no alternative, fanatics can be expected to turn to violence to get their way. It is in this sense that, as Katsafanas points out, fanaticism generates 'a *propensity* or *disposition* toward violence' but 'does not necessitate violence' (2019: 17).

There is one thing that is missing from (i) and (ii). In his 1963 account, Hare stipulates that the fanatic's ideals are *perverted* and that fanatics are prepared to trample on others' ideals and interests because of the nature of their own ideals. This makes Hare's account substantive rather than purely formal. It is not just his own nature that makes the fanatic willing to impose his ideals on other people, by force if necessary, but the nature or content of his ideals.[17] In this sense, there is no such thing as a fanatical liberal because liberals are

forbidden by their own ideals to compel other people to accept them.[18] Thus, (i) should be replaced by: (i)* A fanatic is willing to trample on the interests and ideals of other people in pursuit of his own *perverted* ideals. There is more than one way for an ideal to be perverted. However, even if there are perverted ideals that neither condone nor condemn trampling on the ideals and interests of others, ideals that do condone this count as perverted in virtue of that fact.[19]

In the case of Nazi and ISIS fanatics, one would be hard pushed to list all the many ways in which their ideals are perverse. The Nazis had an ideal of racial purity, which they did not expect Jews to share. However, their ideal of racial purity not only condoned but required them to trample on the ideals of interests of Jews. They trampled on Jewish ideals and interests by killing Jews. Furthermore, the willingness of Nazis to do this was at least partly accounted for by the nature of their ideals. ISIS' ideals condone trampling on the interests and ideals of women, who it regards as second-class citizens. It regards itself as justified in imposing its ideals on women because these ideals are themselves deeply misogynistic.

Condition (ii) makes the fanatic look like an almost heroic figure. As Hare points out, the fanatic 'might even claim to be morally superior to his opponent, in that the latter abandons his principles when they conflict with his own interest in hypothetical cases' (1963: 162). A person who satisfies condition (i)* but not (ii) is a bully rather than a fanatic. On this account, an extremist who recruits others to act as suicide bombers is not a fanatic if he is unwilling to put his own neck on the line. Those who carried out the 9/11 attacks were fanatics as well as extremists, whereas those who ordered the attacks while keeping themselves out of harm's way were extremists but not fanatics. A person who only satisfies condition (i)* is, at best, only a fanatic in a weak sense. Full-blown fanatics satisfy both conditions.

Pulling all this together, we have arrived at the following account of fanaticism, which shows it to be both morally and epistemically vicious:

> (F) Fanatics have perverted ideals about which they are unwilling or unable to think critically. They have contempt for other people's ideals and interests and are willing to trample on those ideals and interests in pursuit of their own ideals. They are prepared to impose their ideals on others, by force if necessary. They are also willing to sacrifice themselves and others in pursuit of their ideals.

Are there forms of fanaticism to which (F) does not apply? The perverted ideals that Hare attributes to the fanatic are *political* and (F) is a characterization of political fanaticism. Now consider a very different case. In his novel *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth has the character of Merry Levov.[20] Having once planted a bomb in a post office as an act of protest against America's involvement in Vietnam, Merry subsequently undergoes a complete transformation. She becomes a Jain and subscribes to a particularly extreme version of its doctrine of non-violence.[21] She barely eats because of her aversion to harming any living creature and wears a veil to avoid harming airborne microscopic organisms. She does not wash or walk about after dark for fear of crushing any living creature. She literally wouldn't hurt a fly and is starving to death when her father finds her.

One might think of Merry as a kind of fanatic, but she is a pacifist who has no desire to impose her ideals on anyone else, let alone to do so by force. If this is correct, then (F) does not do justice to all forms of fanaticism, even it provides a compelling account of political

fanaticism. Merry has some things in common with the political fanatic. There is, for example, her willingness to sacrifice herself. Nevertheless, it is clear that (F) misdescribes her. One might see this as a reason not to classify her as a fanatic, but a more cautious approach is to leave room for non-(F) forms of fanaticism, while continuing to insist on (F) as an account of political fanaticism.

(F) does not support that notion that fanaticism is a malady of the head or a rational failing in Laqueur's sense. For Laqueur, the fanatic is a hot-headed and mentally unbalanced religious zealot, a self-flagellating maniac who glories in self-sacrifice and the destruction of his enemies. As far as (F) is concerned, fanaticism can be 'cold' rather than 'hot'. Consider Reinhard Heydrich, a leading architect of the Holocaust.[22] His cold-blooded and calculating fanaticism was off the scale. He was the perfect Nazi, described by Himmler as someone who 'from the deepest reaches of his heart and his blood…. felt, understood and realized the world view of Adolf Hitler'.[23] The historian Richard J. Evans observes that:

> anyone who reads his written memoranda and statements must surely be impressed by their mindless and total assimilation of Nazi ideology, their permeation by the thought-patterns of Nazism, their lack of recognition of any possible alternative to the Nazi world-view…. Nazi ideology appeared to be for Heydrich something utterly impersonal, an unquestioned set of ideas and attitudes that it was his ambition to put into effect with cold, passionate efficiency.
>
> *(Evans 2008: 276)*

This is far removed from Laqueur's picture of fanaticism, not least because Heydrich was not motivated by religion. Yet there is no question that he was a fanatic, in line with (F).

Is fanaticism an essential part of terrorism? The simplest way of showing that it is not is to produce a compelling example of non-fanatical terrorism. A more theoretical approach is to reflect on the proposed conceptualizations of fanaticism and terrorism to determine whether there is anything in them that would support Laqueur's view. Starting with the first approach, it is easy to think of examples of terrorism that have little to do with fanaticism. There is the case of the armed struggle of the ANC (African National Congress) against apartheid in South Africa. In 1983, the ANC's armed wing detonated a bomb in the rush hour outside a building in Church Street, Pretoria, that was occupied by the South African Air Force.[24] The explosion killed 19 people, including a significant number of non-air force personnel. Assuming that the primary purpose of the bombing was to send a message to the South African government, this was an act of terrorism. However, the ANC leaders who ordered the attack cannot plausibly be regarded as fanatics.

In defence of the claim that this was a case of terrorism without fanaticism, it should be noted that the ANC's fight was against systematic, state-sanctioned racial oppression and in favour of the implementation of the ideal of one person one vote in South Africa. The latter is hardly a perverted ideal. Furthermore, ANC leaders did think critically about their ideals and their methods. Nelson Mandela defended the ANC's methods on the basis that it was fighting for a just cause and 'violence was the only method that would destroy apartheid' (1994: 182). Non-violent, passive resistance 'is effective as long as your opposition adheres to the same rules as you do. But if peaceful protest is met with violence, its efficacy is at an end' (1994: 182–183). For Mandela, 'non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon (1994: 183). These are not the words of an unbalanced or unthinking fanatic, and the ANC was neither divorced

from rational thought nor in the grip of persecution mania. The persecution to which it was responding was real rather than, as with many fanatics, a figment of its imagination.

A more delicate question is this: was the ANC not fanatical at least in the sense that it was prepared to trample on the ideals of the pro-apartheid white minority in South Africa and impose its own ideals by force? Is this not fanaticism by the lights of (F)? However, it was not in the nature of the ANC's democratic ideals to require their imposition by force. The force exercised by the ANC was in response to the South Africa government's forceful imposition of *its* ideals on the black majority. It was necessary for the ANC to trample on apartheid because there was no other way to put an end to it. Fanatics have a generalized and contempt for ideals that are different from their own. The ANC had no such generalized contempt, and it might also be relevant that its contempt for apartheid was warranted.[25]

The theoretical case against regarding fanaticism as an essential part of terrorism is no less straightforward. Terrorism is a tactic, and there is nothing in the proposed characterization of this tactic that supports the notion that fanaticism is an essential part of it. If the terrorism that is at issue here is 'new' rather than 'old, and new terrorism is *defined* as fanatical, then of course it follows painlessly that fanaticism is an essential component of *this* type of terrorism, if not of terrorism more generally. However, Laqueur's notion of new terrorism is problematic in several different ways. For example, he insists that new terrorists are religious fanatics who make no clearly defined political demands. However, he also includes in his list of new terrorist groups organizations such as the LTTE that had clear political objectives but no religious agenda.[26]

Even in the case of Al Qaeda, the archetypal 'new' terrorist organization, it is not true that it makes no clearly defined political demands and that its concerns are religious rather than political or territorial. Its goal of expelling American military forces from Saudi Arabia and Muslim countries is territorial. Its objectives are both religious and political and it is, in any case, doubtful whether there is a sharp distinction between politics and religion.[27] It is true that Al Qaeda does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, but 'old' terrorists were no less lax in their targeting.[28] Furthermore, the weapons used by new terrorists are no different from those used by traditional terrorists. These do not include WMD, however much Osama bin Laden might have fantasized about obtaining such weapons.

There remains the issue of suicide missions. Is suicide terrorism not an indication of precisely the type of fanaticism described by Laqueur? The evidence indicates otherwise. In a seminal study, Robert Pape observes that 'suicide terrorism is undertaken as a strategic effort directed toward particular political goals; it is not simply the product of irrational individuals or an expression of fanatical hatreds' (2005: 27). A suicide mission is a terrorist attack that is 'designed in such a way as to make the death of the perpetrators strictly essential for its success' (Gambetta 2005: vi). By this definition, 9/11 was a suicide mission; there was no way of flying aircraft into buildings without killing all on board, including the terrorists. The ANC's Church Street bombing was not a suicide mission. The two terrorists who planted the bomb were blown up by their own device, which detonated prematurely, but their demise was inessential to the success of the mission.

Although suicide terrorism is sometimes religiously motivated, there are many cases of secular suicide terrorism. Suicide terrorism is most commonly a response to foreign occupation and 'an extreme strategy for national liberation' (Pape 2005: 23).[29] Assuming that instrumental rationality consists in adopting suitable means for one's ends, then those who *order* suicide missions may well be instrumentally rational since such missions can be

highly effective. It does not follow that those who voluntarily *carry out* suicide missions are rational. However, as Jon Elster notes, 'in itself, there is nothing irrational in the willingness to sacrifice one's life for a cause' (2005: 234). Suicide terrorism might be the work of fanatics but there is also suicide terrorism that has little to do with fanaticism, least of all with the overblown and hot-headed fanaticism described by Laqueur.

None of this is to deny that some terrorists are fanatics or that some terrorists groups think and act in ways that are consistent with the new terrorism paradigm.[30] However, such groups are sufficiently atypical to call into question the idea that they represent a new and significant form of fanatical terrorism. For all the talk of the 'new' terrorism, there is still no justification for characterizing fanaticism as an essential part of terrorism, rather than as an attribute of some members of some highly exceptional terrorist groups. However, there remains the issue of whether terrorism is an inevitable or highly likely consequence of fanaticism. Not all terrorists are fanatics but are all fanatics likely to end up as terrorists? It is easy to see why one might think so. If fanaticism generates a propensity towards violence, is it not also likely to lead to terrorism?

The example of Merry calls into question the extent to which fanaticism *per se* involves violence or a propensity towards violence. In Roth's novel, Merry Levov was violent before her pacifist turn but one can imagine a character like her who was always fanatically non-violent. The fanaticism that involves a propensity towards violence is the type of fanaticism described by (F). Katsafanas notes that 'the central cases of fanaticism involve attempts to impose some ideal or value on others who do not share it' (2019: 5). How can the fanatic hope to do that without resorting to violence? Surely, talk of *imposing* something on someone else implies violence or the threat of violence. However, there are also non-violent forms of imposition. Governments impose speed limits by threatening to fine people who speed. Violence need not be involved. Furthermore, most violence is not concerned with communicating a message and so is not terrorism. The violence employed by the fanatic to impose his ideals on someone else may have more to do with changing another person's behaviour than with sending a message.

It seems, then, the terrorism and fanaticism are more loosely connected than one might think. Especially if fanaticism is conceived of as religious, there is little to be said for the idea that it is an essential part of terrorism. There is little more to be said about the theory that fanatics are likely to be terrorists, or even for the idea that terrorism is integral to *political* fanaticism. Heydrich was a political fanatic who terrorized his victims but was not a terrorist. He was not interested in sending a message to European Jews. He was only interested in killing them. Why, in that case, is fanaticism *thought* by some to be an essential part of terrorism? Where does this notion come from, and what is the significance of the thesis that 'new' terrorists like Al Qaeda are distinguished from 'old' terrorists by their fanaticism?

17.3 The Genealogy of Fanaticism

A key text in post-9/11 thinking about fanaticism and new terrorism is a paper by David Rapoport. In 'Fear and trembling: Terrorism in three religious traditions', which was originally published in 1984, Rapoport focuses on what he calls 'the ancient lineage of terrorism' (2012: 4). He claims that before the nineteenth century, religion provided the only acceptable justifications for terror and that 'the holy terrorist believes that only a transcendental purpose which fulfils the meaning of the universe can justify terror' (ibid.).

Rapoport's three examples of ancient and holy terrorists are the Hindu Thugs, who were active in India from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, the Ismaili Muslim Assassins, who were active in the Middle East from around the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, and the first-century Jewish Zealots-Sicarii.[31]

For the holy terrorist, 'the primary audience is the deity' and 'it is even conceivable that he does not need or want to have the public witness his deed' (2012: 5). The Thugs strangled their victims and dismembered their corpses. They terrorized their victims and killed for the pleasure of Kali, the Hindu goddess of terror and destruction. According to Rapoport, they were terrorists: 'as persons consciously committing atrocities, acts that go beyond the accepted norms and immunities that regulate violence, they were…. clearly terrorists' (ibid.). Estimates of the number of people murdered by the Thugs range from half a million to a million. Either way, 'the Thugs murdered more than any known terrorist group, partly because they lasted so much longer' (2012: 6).

Even without going into Rapaport's account of the Assassins and Zealots-Sicarii, it is easy to detect the influence of his discussion on theorists of the new terrorism. As religiously motivated fanatical terrorists, the Thugs had much in common with so-called 'new' terrorists. Indeed, if Rapaport is right, then 'new' terrorism should be renamed since it is a throwback to an extremely old form of terrorism. However, Rapoport's account should not be taken at face value. In describing the Thugs as terrorists, Rapoport assumes that the distinguishing feature of terrorism is 'the extranormal character of its violence' (2012: 21). However, extranormal violence need not be terrorism. The gruesome violence of the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer was extranormal, but he was not a terrorist. He terrified his victims but was not in the business of sending a political message. If Thugs killed in secret, without any communicative intent, they were not terrorists even if their violence was 'extranormal'.[32]

Questions can also be raised about the historical accuracy of Rapoport's account. Kim Wagner notes that 'rather than being ritual stranglers motivated by religious belief, the "Thugs" may more appropriately be described as bandits' (2018: 3).[33] Thug gangs might be made up of vagrants or runaway servants who eked out a living by robbing lone travellers and disposing of their bodies. Others served as retainers to local elites. If Rapoport misrepresents the Thugs, the obvious explanation is that he relies for his information about them on British colonial sources whose reliability is, to put it mildly, questionable.[34] There are parallel concerns about his account of the Ismaili Assassins. He describes them as having carried out suicide attacks, but there is little evidence of this. In effect, Rapoport recycles myths about the Assassins that have been debunked by serious scholars.[35] Furthermore, by concentrating on terrorism in the Orient, he 'invokes some of the most pervasive tropes of Orientalism, namely, that of religious fanaticism and irrationality – or, to put it differently, cultural incommensurability with Western "enlightened" modernity' (Wagner 2018: 1).[36]

The association of fanaticism with the Orient is hard to miss in the literature on the new terrorism. For example, while admitting that not all new terrorism is Islamic, Laqueur asserts that the 'rage, fanaticism, and lack of restraint' that he associates with the new terrorism 'occur more often than not in Islamic countries' (1998: 173). In contrast, 'terrorism with a human face, the self-restraint shown by certain terrorists, was limited by and large to Europe, where fanaticism and extreme cruelty, with some notable exceptions, have been out of fashion since the days of crusades, inquisition, and witch hunts' (1998: 171). It is hard to imagine a starker expression of the view that today's fanatics, like their supposed ancient predecessors, belong in the benighted Orient rather than the civilized West.

This points to the possibility of a genealogical approach to terrorism and fanaticism that concerns itself not so much with the emergence of such phenomena themselves as with the emergence of the corresponding *ideas*, *concepts*, or *conceptions*.[37] In his *A Genealogy of Terrorism*, McQuade argues that many of the descriptions associated with modern terrorism 'were originally articulated and rehearsed in colonial settings like British India' (2021: 15). Might the same not also be true of fanaticism? This may seem unlikely. After all, thinkers as diverse as Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel offered philosophical analyses of fanaticism that were not shaped by the British colonial experience in India. However, this leaves open the possibility that the conception of fanaticism that figures in the new terrorism paradigm is best understood as having emerged from forms of colonial discourse.[38]

Consider the following example given by Mark Condos.[39] In 1901, Captain Johnson, a British officer in India, was killed with an axe by a Pashtun man called Doulat. On his arrest, Doulat was identified as a fanatic, and dealt with under the Murderous Outrages Act of 1867.[40] This was a law passed to deal with a special type of crime in British India. These crimes were known as 'murderous' or 'fanatical' outrages. Perpetrators were assumed to be both religiously motivated and mentally ill.[41] Although their actions were regarded as politically meaningless, they were dealt with neither as ordinary criminals nor as insane. Many were summarily executed, and it was for colonial officials to decide who was and was not a fanatic. There are few detailed records of trials under the Murderous Outrages Act or the thinking that led to some individuals being classified as fanatics. However, prejudice was doubtless an important factor.

Condos argues that the actions of individuals sentenced under the 1867 Act were more complex than the brief official accounts suggest and often deeply political. In most cases, 'the victims and intended victims were British officers, Indian sepoys, policemen, or prominent local Indians who were known to be in the employ or under the influence of the British' (2016: 739). The effect of describing the perpetrators as fanatics was to pathologize political acts against representatives of the colonial administration. As Condos points out, 'depictions of fanaticism as a sort of pathology were an integral part of European conceptions of this phenomenon dating back as far as the Enlightenment' (ibid.). To give just one example, Kant's 1764 'Essay on the maladies of the head' was prompted by the presence on the outskirts of Königsberg of a religious fanatic known as the 'goat prophet'. However, it is one thing to pathologize the goat prophet and another to pathologize Doulat. In the latter case, there is a real possibility that this classification amounts to pathologizing a person whose actions may well have been politically motivated.

Does the new terrorism paradigm pathologize the political in similar ways? Before answering this question in the affirmative, certain key differences must be acknowledged. It is not the case that Al Qaeda is fighting a war of national liberation, however much it pretends that this is the case. Religion is a much greater influence on its thinking that it was on the ideas of many who fought against British and other colonialisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of organizations like ISIS, one might be strongly tempted to regard its members as fanatics in the Enlightenment sense, even though the leadership of ISIS regards its extreme violence as communicative and strategic.[42] But if there is one lesson to be learned from the history of the new terrorism paradigm, and the extent to which it has been shaped by the theory and practice of colonialism, it is that it risks masking the political motivations of 'new' terrorists and representing them as less rational and strategic than they really are. What might be described as the 'fanaticizing' of new terrorists – the

representation of them as religious fanatics – 'elevates cultural stereotypes to analytical insights and constructs an image of the enemy for political purposes' (Wagner 2018: 2).

This approach has two related effects. The first is to obstruct a proper understanding of terrorism today. It is easier to dismiss terrorists as irrational religious fanatics rather than try to engage with their subjectivity in a genuine effort to understanding their political motives and objectives. The new terrorism paradigm also has serious implications for counterterrorism.[43] The greater the emphasis on the fanaticism and irrationality of new terrorism, the greater the temptation to resort to ethically suspect and ultimately counterproductive measures in response. Inadequate and flawed thinking about modern terrorism has resulted in inadequate and flawed counterterrorism strategies. This issue merits its own discussion since it highlights the extent to which theories of terrorism and fanaticism matter in practice.

17.4 Fanaticism and Counterterrorism

If terrorists are conceived of as irrational and mentally unbalanced religious fanatics, what are the implications for counterterrorism? Bruce Hoffman, an important terrorism scholar, addresses this issue in the following passage:

> Traditional counterterrorism approaches and policies may not be relevant, much less effective, in the face of religious terrorism. Strategies that have been used successfully in the past – including political concessions, financial rewards, amnesties, and other personal inducements – would be not only irrelevant but impractical, given both the religious terrorists' fundamentally alienated worldviews and their often extreme, resolutely uncompromising demands.
>
> *(2017: 136)*

Hoffman emphasizes the need for multiple, creative responses to religious terrorism, including non-violent responses, but the reality has been different. As Martha Crenshaw notes, the idea of a new kind of terrorism has been used to explain and justify 'the global war on terrorism, the establishment of the category of "enemy combatant", brutal interrogation methods, reliance on a strategy of military preemption' and 'other homeland security measures that restrict civil liberties' (2011: 63–64). In a similar vein, Richard English argues that 'the most serious danger currently posed by terrorists is probably their capacity to provoke ill-judged, extravagant, and counter-productive state responses, rather than their own direct actions themselves' (2009: 119).

Why should this be so? Terrorists who are assumed to be rational, to have limited objectives, and be prepared to compromise are terrorists with whom it should be possible to negotiate and bargain. IRA terrorism in Northern Ireland was ultimately ended by negotiation and the signing of the Good Friday agreement. However, the assumption that new terrorists are unbalanced fanatics removes any incentive to look for peaceful, negotiated solutions. How can one bargain with 'terrorists of the lunatic fringe' (Laqueur 1998: 171)? Force seems to be the only realistic option in these cases, and the use of harsh methods might be excused on the grounds that there is no alternative when dealing with enemies who, at least as far as their political thinking is concerned, are deluded and irrational.

In fact, there is an alternative. Having identified the weaknesses and dubious historical origins of the new terrorism paradigm, one might instead resolve to proceed on a quite different basis. On this alternative approach, so-called 'new' terrorists are no more irrational than their 'old' predecessors. They both make political demands, including some that are territorial. It is true that they do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, but no such distinction was drawn by the British pilots who bombed Dresden in 1945 or their American counterparts who used nuclear weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The claim that new terrorists' demands are non-negotiable should be put to the test. Above all, this alternative framework will refrain from dismissing terrorists as fanatics in Laqueur's sense, other than in unusual cases where this label is applied on the basis of evidence rather than cultural prejudice. Some terrorists might be (F)-type fanatics, but it is possible to be this type of fanatic without being on the lunatic fringe. It is not in this sense that (F)-fanaticism is a rational failing.

The practical significance of such a theoretical reorientation away from the new terrorism paradigm should not be underestimated. Different models of terrorism, fanaticism, and the relationship between them can be viewed as different constructions of the phenomena that constitute the subject matter of the field of terrorism studies. Each model presents an image of the terrorist enemy, and each image has implications for action. The new terrorism paradigm directs counterterrorists not to use traditional counterterrorism tools in response to terrorists designated as fanatical new terrorists. However, if we refrain from pathologizing terrorists, then there is no reason not to attempt the traditional counterterrorism approaches enumerated by Hoffman.[44]

Of course, we might be disappointed. We might discover that in some cases engagement and negotiation get us nowhere.[45] In these cases, the emphasis should be on containing the threat of terrorism as far as it is possible to do so, rather than on declaring a war on terror. It is not possible to declare war on an emotion or, for that matter, a tactic.[46] Furthermore, even in the case of those terrorists who we are most strongly tempted to classify as fanatics, we should acknowledge the importance of identifying and addressing the root causes of their terrorism. It should be remembered that terrorist violence 'often emerges out of very serious problems regarding such matters as contested state legitimacy and ethnic or national disaffection' (English 2009: 123). Above all, the classification of terrorists as fanatics should not be used as an excuse for an over-militarized response to terrorism or for failing to respect the human rights of so-called terrorist fanatics.

No doubt, this approach will seem too soft for proponents of the new terrorism paradigm, one of whom has gone so far as to recommend a policy of not even *attempting* to understand or eliminate the root causes of terrorism.[47] It should be pointed out, however, that the new terrorism paradigm has hardly been an unqualified practical success. It has been responsible for serious tactical and strategic blunders, including President George W. Bush's ill-fated 'war on terror' and invasion of Iraq in search of non-existent WMD. The fact that those responsible for these blunders appear to have been deeply influenced by the new terrorism paradigm makes it plain that the hackneyed image of the implacable Oriental fanatic is no more accurate or useful today than it was in the heyday of colonialism. It is time to abandon such stereotypes and concentrate instead on developing a less fanciful analysis of terrorism and its links with fanaticism.[48]

Notes

1 See English (2003).
2 As Isabel Duyvesteyn notes in Duyvesteyn (2012). My account of the new terrorism draws on this paper, as well as Crenshaw (2011a).
3 See Crenshaw (2011a: 54).
4 See Crenshaw (2011a) and Duyvesteyn (2012).
5 ISIS stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham or, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The group is also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). In 2014, it adopted the name the Islamic State (IS). For more on ISIS, see McCants (2015), Gerges (2016) and Wood (2018).
6 This would place Laqueur's work squarely in the Orientalist tradition, as described by Edward Said. As Said understands it, Orientalism is 'better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine' (2003: 42). Its essence is 'the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' (ibid.).
7 See Crenshaw (2011a: 63–64).
8 On Orientalism, see note 6.
9 English (2009), Chapter 1, is one of the most useful and perceptive accounts of the concept of terrorism, along with Richards (2015).
10 In describing Richards' account as accurate, I don't mean to suggest that it is flawless. However, it is the best succinct definition I know. For a fuller characterization of terrorism along similar lines, see English (2009: 24).
11 See Kant (2007).
12 See also Katsafanas (2019). For Katsafanas, as for Hare, fanaticism is a peculiar kind of vice or practical defect which 'blends a purely rational failure with a distinctively moral failing' (2019: 1–2).
13 As Paul Katsafanas has noted in private correspondence, the refusal to think critically can be quite localized. Some fanatics produce detailed reasoning in support of their goals. See Adler (2007).
14 To have an *ideal*, for Hare, 'is to think of some kind of thing as pre-eminently good within some larger class' (1963: 159). To have a *moral* ideal is 'to think of some type of man, or, possibly, of some type of society as a pre-eminently good one' (1963: 159). To have an *interest* is 'for there to be something which one wants (or may want), or which is (or may be) a means, necessary or sufficient, for the attainment of something which one wants (or may want)' (1963: 157). Ideals can conflict with other ideals and with interests, just as interests can conflict.
15 My emphasis.
16 Compare Katsafanas (2019: 5): 'The central cases of fanaticism involve attempts to impose some ideal or value on others who do not share it'.
17 Hare's position in *Moral Thinking*, published 18 later, is different. Here he claims that 'one may be fanatical about moral opinions even when they are sound ones' and that 'it is not the content of a person's intuitive principles that makes him a fanatic, but his attitude to them' (1981: 175). In my view, the less formal account of fanaticism given in *Freedom and Reason* is preferable.
18 As Hare puts it, the liberal is forbidden 'to force his own ideals down the throats of other people by legal or other compulsion' (1963: 178).
19 There is much more to be said about what makes an ideal 'perverted' but this is too large a question to be taken up here.
20 Roth (1997).
21 Jainism is an ancient Indian religion with a core commitment to non-violence.
22 In the words of his biographer, Heydrich was 'one of the great iconic villains of the twentieth century' (Gerwarth 2011: xiii).
23 Quoted in Gerwarth (2011: 279).
24 Church Street, Pretoria bombing – Wikipedia.
25 This raises the question whether the contempt referred to (F) in should be conceived of as unwarranted. I'm inclined to think that it should but do not insist on this here.
26 The LTTE was a secular group with a specific territorial objective, the creation of a Tamil homeland in the north of Sri Lanka.
27 See English (2009: 39).

28 See, for example, the harrowing account of the IRA's 1987 bombing of religious ceremony in Enniskillen in English (2003: 255–256).
29 The most committed and effective suicide terrorists in the history of terrorism belonged to the secular LTTE. See Chapter 2 of Gambetta (2005).
30 ISIS is the obvious example.
31 Another influential account of religious terrorism is Juergensmeyer (2017). This is a form of terrorism 'for which religion has provided the justification, the organization, and the worldview' (2017: 6).
32 It is not clear that strangulation counts as 'extranormal' violence.
33 'The historical "Thugs" were not terrorists in any meaningful sense of the word, nor are they "normally identified as such in the academic literature" as Rapoport claims' (Wagner 2018: 7).
34 As Wagner notes, 'the only sources available to historians examining the "Thugs" of early nineteenth-century India are those produced by the very authorities who persecuted them' (2018: 3). See also McQuade (2021).
35 See, for example, Daftary (2011) and Cook (2018). Daftary points out that the Western tradition of referring to Ismailis as Assassins can be traced to the Crusaders (Daftary 2011: 3).
36 Another concern is that Rapaport subscribes to what William T. Cavanaugh calls 'the myth of religious violence', the myth that religion is inherently prone to violence. For a critique of this myth, see Cavanaugh (2009) and Armstrong (2014).
37 Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson characterizes 'genealogy' in this context as 'the study of the empirical – material or discursive – conditions of the emergence of terrorism' (2018: 3). My conception of genealogy is closer to McQuade's, which concerns itself with the origins of the *idea* of terrorism (McQuade 2021). In practice, though, the two forms of genealogy are closely related. If terms like 'terrorist' do not refer to 'a natural kind that exists in the world independently of human thought and practice' (Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018: 5), then a study of the emergence of the idea of terrorism is, in a certain sense, also a study of the emergence of terrorism.
38 See McQuade (2021: 39).
39 Condos (2016: 718).
40 Condos (2016: 719).
41 'This twin emphasis on religious motivation and mental illness reappears again and again throughout the colonial records documenting these crimes' (Condos 2016: 719).
42 As is apparent from Naji (2006), which is an insider's guide to the methodology and strategic thinking of ISIS.
43 Crenshaw (2011a: 63–64).
44 On the extent to which terrorism can be rational, see Crenshaw (2011b) and the discussion of the 'rational agent model' (RAM) in Cassam (2018).
45 On the prospects of negotiation as a way of ending terrorist campaigns, see Chapter 3 of Cronin (2009).
46 English (2009: 122–123).
47 Dershowitz (2002).
48 Thanks to Paul Katsafanas for very helpful comments on an earlier draft.

References

Adler, J. (2007), 'Faith and Fanaticism', in L. Anthony (ed.) *Philosophers without Gods: Reflections on Atheism and the Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 266–285.
Armstrong, K. (2014), *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (London: Vintage).
Cassam, Q. (2018), 'The Epistemology of Terrorism and Radicalisation', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 84: 187–209.
Cavanaugh, W. T. (2009), *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Condos, M. (2016), '"Fanaticism" and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58: 717–745.
Cook, D. (2018), 'Ismaili Assassins as Early Terrorists?', in C. Dietze and C. Verhoeven (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online): 1–21.

Crenshaw, M. (2011a), '"Old" vs, "New" Terrorism', in M. Crenshaw (ed.) *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes and Consequences* (Abingdon: Routledge): 51–66.
Crenshaw, M. (2011b), 'The Logic of Terrorism', in M. Crenshaw (ed.) *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes and Consequences* (Abingdon: Routledge): 111–123.
Cronin, A. K. (2009), *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
Daftary, F. (2011), *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismailis* (London: I. B. Tauris).
Dershowitz, A. (2002), *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
Duyvesteyn, I. (2012), 'How New Is the New Terrorism?', in J. Horgan and K. Braddock (eds.) *Terrorism Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge): 27–40.
Elster, J. (2005), 'Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions', in D. Gambetta (ed.) *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 233–258.
English, R. (2003), *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan).
English, R. (2009), *Terrorism: How to Respond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Erlenbusch-Anderson, V. (2018), *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press).
Evans, R. (2008), *The Third Reich at War 1939–1945* (London: Penguin Books).
Gambetta, D. ed. (2005), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Gerges, F. (2016), *ISIS: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
Gerwarth, R. (2011), *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
Hare, R. M. (1963), *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Hare, R. M. (1981), *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Hoffman, B. (2017), *Inside Terrorism*, 3rd edition (New York: Columbia University Press).
Juergensmeyer, K. (2017), *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 4th edition (Oakland: University of California Press).
Kant, I. (2007b), 'Essay on the Maladies of the Head', in G. Zöller and R. Louden (eds.) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 65–77.
Katsafanas, P. (2019), 'Fanaticism and Sacred Values', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 19: 1–20.
Laqueur, W. (1998), 'The New Face of Terrorism', *The Washington Quarterly*, 21: 169–178.
Laqueur, W. (1999), *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press).
Laqueur, W. (2003), *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum).
Mandela, N. (1994), *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little Brown and Company).
McCants, W. (2015), *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: Picador).
McQuade, J. (2021), *A Genealogy of Terrorism: Colonial Law and the Origins of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
Naji, A. (2006), *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, trans. W. McCants (Cambridge, MA: John Olin Institute for Strategic Studies).
Pape, R. (2005), *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House).
Rapoport, D. C. (2012), 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', in J. Horgan and K. Braddock (eds.) *Terrorism Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge): 3–26.
Richards, A. (2015), *Conceptualizing Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Roth, P. (1997), *American Pastoral* (London: Vintage Books).
Said, E. (2003), *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books).
Wagner, K. (2018), '"Thugs and Assassins": "New Terrorism" and the Resurrection of Colonial Knowledge', in C. Dietze and C. Verhoeven (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online): 1–24.
Wood, G. (2018), *The Way of Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State* (London: Penguin Books).