

## *Religious roots of terrorism: Perceptions of God playing out in world politics*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The violent god-concepts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam had probably been one of the main driving forces behind the bloody histories of these three religions and their influence in world politics through history. Although these concepts have changed through the ages, modern religious terrorism in its various forms is still basically influenced by the different violent god-concepts and related rhetoric. The paper investigates this phenomenon by looking at examples of violent god-concepts and rhetoric employed by religious terrorists relating to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A combination of a cognitive and a body phenomenological approach is implemented to indicate that research in the field of terrorism must take cognizance of human embodiment in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the roots of religious terrorism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is confined to a discussion of embodied rhetoric of religiously inspired terrorists originating from Judaism (including modern, secular Israel), Christianity, and Islam. The first part of the paper argues against some of the voices that want to direct research on terrorism predominantly into a mode of *praxis only*, that is, if the research does not lead to direct problem solving pertaining to the threat of terrorism, then it is an obstacle to *real* research on the topic. The second and main section will explore a selection of violent metaphors for God and related violent rhetoric as employed by terrorists sprouting from the abovementioned three religions respectively. Such metaphors result from bodily experiences and related mental image schemata. The analysis is primarily based on Mark Johnson's (1978) cognitive approach to human imagining and understanding, and Drew Leder's (1990) body phenomenological approach. Both these sources take the human body seriously as the means through which humans engage with and respond to the world around us. Conclusions on violent metaphors used for the divine by religiously inspired terrorists as well as by their adversaries will be drawn in the last part of the paper.

In conjunction with other relevant approaches of studying terrorism, the bodily and cognitive approach used in this paper might help us understand some of the fundamental reasons for the implementation of violent actions based on or expedited by religion.

### **SEARCHING FOR ROOT CAUSES OR NOT**

It is comprehensible that, especially after 11 September 2001, the exigency for rapid and practical solutions to the threat of terrorism is high on the priority lists of governments,

politicians, and academics. Bjørge (2005, 262) is of the opinion that by searching for “root causes” of terrorism in the general sense such as poverty, globalization and modernization, the problem of terrorism is generalized, which obstructs the main endeavor “to address and handle the more specific causes of terrorism by targeted intervention or preventive measures.” He wants the more immediate causes and circumstances that motivate and facilitate terrorist acts to be the priority of future research.

To an extent, one can concur with this argument, but in my opinion, it is limiting. The more we understand of the human being in its entirety (e.g. individual, social, political, religious, psychological, bodily), the more theoretical and practical avenues of human research are being explored, the closer we can get to possible theoretical as well as practical solutions to the complex phenomenon of terrorism. I am in accord with Sinai (2005, 215) who asserts that it is crucial to understand all possible root causes underlying terrorism “because terrorist insurgencies do not emerge in a political, socio-economic, religious or even psychological vacuum.” He sees root causes as consisting of “multiple combinations of factors and circumstances, ranging from general to specific, global, regional or local, governmental-regime, societal or individual levels, structural or psychological, dynamic or static, facilitating or triggering, or other possible variations, some of which may be more important and fundamental than others” (ibid.).

Another argument is, for example, that of Jameson (2002, 301), namely, that the role of religion in society today is overestimated and that religion, in essence, is “really politics under a different name ... Indeed, maybe religion has always been that.” This argument negates the deepest makeup and purpose of religion, namely that it is a search for human “roots” and meaning, and it provides “wings” to deeper, higher, beyond the limitations of suffering experiences—to transcend everyday realities (Krüger et al. 2009, 7-8). This is not to deny that almost all religions have an extremely violent component as well. It is because religion cannot be separated from other spheres of human life (e.g. politics, culture). However, religion should not be treated as identical to other facets of human life. Because of the integrated nature of human life these different spheres do overlap or influence each other. In many cases religion is being implemented to influence political violence today and cannot be ignored or played down. Therefore, when the expression “religious terrorism” is used in this research, the notion of political terrorism strongly complemented or inspired by religion is meant.

Notwithstanding these limiting views, it remains our obligation to study all possible

root causes of terrorism, whether religiously inspired or not. We need to gain a profound understanding of the human being performing such deeds, however within the various socio-cultural contexts within which he/she operates.

## **THE BODILY ROOTS OF VIOLENT METAPHORS FOR GOD AND OTHER RELEVANT RELIGIOUS RHETORIC USED BY RELIGIOUS TERRORISTS: A COGNITIVE AND BODY PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### ***Human Rationality is Bodily Based***

In order to understand the very basic embodied reasoning and the consequential acts of religious terrorists, one must first realize that human rationality is embodied and that “[t]he centrality of human embodiment directly influences what and how things can be meaningful for us, the ways in which these meanings can be developed and articulated, the ways we are able to comprehend and reason about our experience, and the actions we take” (Johnson 1987, xix). It is, therefore, necessary to briefly discuss certain phenomenological aspects of the human body in general before approaching religious terrorism from this angle.<sup>1</sup>

All human experience is embodied and it is via bodily means that one is able to respond mentally, verbally, and physically to the world (Leder 1990, 1, 133). The human body is the orientational centre in relation to everything else that exists or takes place outside the body (ibid., 22). The body experiences itself as always situated *here*. However, the body can project away from itself by means of its senses or by means of thoughts. That is why metaphors or projections of God, for instance, can be constructed. That is also why we can distinguish between “them” and “us”. The latter is typical of the rhetoric in a conflict situation such as religious and political hostilities where “you are part of us,” or “you are not part of us.”

The human body is a very complex organic unity comprising the outer body and the inner body.<sup>2</sup> The *outer body* or ecstatic body consists of the perceptual organs situated on the head: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin; the limbs, the visual parts of the sexual organs, the excretion pores and orifices, all of which make up the sensorimotor part of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term “body” used in this study as the “lived body” refers to “the embodied person witnessed from the third-person and first-person perspective alike, articulated by science as well as the life-world gaze, including intellectual cognition along with visceral and sensorimotor capacities” (Leder 1990, 7). Furthermore, it is used “as a generic term for the embodied origins of imaginative structures of understanding, such as image schemata and their metaphorical elaborations” (Johnson 1987, xv).

<sup>2</sup> The distinction made here is for practical reasons only and does not introduce a dualism. The human body in itself is not dualistic in nature.

body. It is through the bodily surface that one engages with the world (ibid., 11). The *inner body*, including the viscera, the blood system, the nerve system, the digestive system, the skeleton, the muscles, and the brain, to name but a few, each with its own complex functioning, is the recessive sphere of the body. A reciprocal relation exists between one's sensorimotor functions (outer body) and one's visceral processes (inner body). When I experience physical pain, I may start crying emotionally and maybe even show signs of fury or revenge. My mouth, eyes, muscles and mood are all involved and, therefore, influence my reactions towards the environment.

We always experience our environment through a particular mood. Emotionality is rooted in the secretion of hormones, the change of visceral processes (ibid., 117). Human desires and emotions directly relate to visceral and ecstatic features. While the external body mirrors the world around me (e.g. my culture, the clothes I wear, my hairstyle, tattoo marks), the inside body, which cannot be seen, also forms part of a wider context. Each breath that is inhaled or each piece of food I take in makes the body dependent upon the environment.

Bodily movement, the handling of objects, and perceptual interactions with the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin involve recurring organizing mental patterns without which our experience would be chaotic and incomprehensible (Johnson 1987, xix). These patterns can be called "image schemata" of meaning because they function primarily as abstract structures of images. This is why one can become skilled in playing a piano or learn to become a pilot. Endless repetition of bodily movements results in abstract mental structures based on these bodily movements or experiences. A specific image schema may initially develop as a structure of bodily interactions. However, it can be metaphorically developed and extended as a structure around which meaning is organized at more abstract levels of cognition. This symbolic expansion comes forth in the form of metaphorical projection from the realm of physical bodily interactions onto so-called rational processes (ibid., xx). Therefore, image schemata and metaphors emerge from our embodied experiences and are vital in making sense out of our bodily experiences.

Johnson (ibid., xiv) defines an *image schema* as "a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience." Unlike mental pictures, which are fixed, image schemata are flexible in that they can take on any number of specific examples in varying contexts (ibid., 30). Examples of important basic image schemata that can be mentally formed as a result of recurring

bodily experiences are: container (in-out orientation), verticality (up-down orientation), surface, path, cycle, part-whole, full-empty, near-far, attraction, matching, contact, balance, counterforce, link, centre-periphery, splitting, collection, compulsion, and so on (ibid., 126). Without being normally aware of such structures, combinations thereof make up the fabric of our experience and understanding. The container schema, for example, emerges from the fact that our bodies are containers in which we pour liquid or food, and from which liquids and solids are excreted. The container schema is the abstract imaginative structure of such container experiences, images, and perceptions. Similarly, our bodily experience of up-down orientation creates the pattern or imaginative schema of verticality (ibid., xiv). “Up” is associated with “more” or “high” or “positive” or “good,” while “down” is associated with “less” or “low” or “negative” or “evil.” The prone posture of the body relates to passivity, while the upright posture relates to activity, livelihood.

Mental pictures or real images are fixed temporary representations and differ from image schemata, which are flexible permanent structures of embodied experience (Gibbs & Colston 1995, 356). We can illustrate this by means of the image schema of a cat.<sup>3</sup> When you see a cat walking in the garden, you form a clear fixed mental picture of the specific animal. But when you feel something soft and hairy rubbing against your leg without looking down, a ‘fluid’ cat structure presents itself. It can be any cat. It is a fixed mental structure that can take on many shapes or colours but it is still a mental structure of a cat. The same happens when you hear the miaow of a cat, or when you just see part of a swinging tail exposed around the corner of the house. These kinds of experientially based imaginative structures are integral to meaning and rationality (Johnson *Body in the Mind*, xiv).

The second type of imaginative structure, resulting from image schemata, namely *metaphor*, is “conceived as a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind” (ibid., xiv-xv). According to Lakoff and Turner (in Brown 1989, 5-6) we use metaphors to map certain aspects of the source domain onto the target domain, thereby producing a new understanding of that target domain. Metaphor is, therefore, not merely a linguistic device to express oneself but it is one of the main cognitive, experientially based images structures to organize our more abstract understanding (Johnson *Body in*

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<sup>3</sup> This example is borrowed from D’Andrade (1990, 98).

*Mind*, xv). Metaphorical projection from the concrete to the abstract is, therefore, based on physical experience. Humans define the world we experience via image schemata in terms of metaphors and then we proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 158). It is by means of metaphors, based on the mental structuring of our experience, that we draw conclusions, set goals for ourselves, commit ourselves, and carry out our plans. This is one of the core suppositions in our discussion of the violent metaphors of religious terrorism in this paper.

The truth or falsity of a metaphor is important for the person who constructs the metaphor (e.g., whether either President Bush or Osama bin Laden is metaphorized as the devil or not). However, still more important when we use a metaphor are the perceptions and deductions that follow from a metaphor and the actions that are sanctioned by them (ibid., 158). Lakoff and Johnson (ibid., 156) suggest that a given metaphor “may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies.”

The televised rehearsals of the events which took place on 11 September 2001, and which were perceived through vision and sound, imprinted image schemata first on American minds, but also on a global scale, intending to mobilize the world against terrorism. Similar image schemata were structured in the minds of the sympathizers of the terrorists; however, the intention of the metaphors they produced was just the opposite. Both sides produced and implemented incompatible religious, political, and social metaphors for their own causes. The acceptance of the metaphors led each side to the belief that their own metaphors were true respectively (ibid., 157) and, therefore, worthwhile implementing for either retaliation or for further attacks.

An important trait of the body is that it is self-concealing. One cannot see one’s own eyes without a mirror. One cannot see one’s own viscera. When you focus attentively on an object, you are not aware of your own body; it disappears. It is this tendency of self-concealment of the body that allows for the possibility of its neglect or deprecation (Leder *Absent Body*, 69). This is often experienced in the social sphere because the awareness of the body is an extremely social issue. Other people’s gaze at me, for example, might have the effect that I experience myself as an object, which might result in corporeal alienation. We experience this phenomenon in feelings of shyness, embarrassment, and self-

deprecation (ibid., 93). Especially when one is confronted with someone who has potential power over one's life, there is a tendency on the part of the powerless to a heightened self-awareness leading to loss of identity and control. The loss of identity and control, according to Juergensmeyer (2008, 254), is an underlying "cause" of political activism. Supporters of religious terrorism perceive the secular state as representative of oppression. They experience this oppression as an assault on their pride, and feel insulted and shamed as a result. Religion is then used as an ideology of empowerment and protest. The body is therefore always vulnerable in both the biological and the socio-political sense.

The yearning for liberation of the individual and the societal body is based on another important characteristic of the human body, namely, that the experience of dysfunction or dys-appearance<sup>4</sup> generates a telic (futuristic) demand for repair (Leder *Absent Body*, 86). This bodily trait also plays itself out in the case of religious terrorism, in two ways. Firstly, inherently the terrorist has this yearning for change and repair of his/her socio-political situation, and secondly, he/she is motivated by desire for future reward in heaven as promised in the Qur'an or by the messianic expectations in other Scriptures.

The human body, through conception and birth, originates from the mother's body. It is composed of the same matter as the surrounding world, and lives only by endless metabolic exchanges with it. In this sense "we form one body with the universe we inhabit" (Leder *Absent Body*, 157-158). Our embodied relation with nature and with people implies that we can have *compassion* (a moral experience) for other people. The natural expression of compassion is service to others, especially to the "in-group." Insofar as I embody within myself the suffering and needs of others, it follows naturally that I will make an effort to alleviate such sufferings and to fulfil the needs. Through their violent deeds, terrorists give expression to their compassion for their in-group. They are guided by the desires of their fellow men and women in distress. They use their bodily motoric possibilities (see ibid., 163) in favour of their own needs and those of the societal body they think they serve.

Characteristic of the human body is also that s/he can experience *communion*. Religious practices such as ritual, prayer, meditation, reading or reciting of the Holy Scriptures and the like are to be found at the heart of all spiritual traditions (ibid., 168). Such practices in which the human body is intensely involved are designed for

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<sup>4</sup> Dys-appearance is when the body is physically and/or emotionally in a bad state, in contrast to disappearance that characterizes ordinary functioning of the body (Leder *Absent Body*, 84).

*communion* and are expressly intended to facilitate a sense of involvement with God, the ground of being. For example, by reciting the Qur'an in the right way, Muslims experience a sense of transcendence, of an ultimate reality beyond this world (Armstrong 1993, 169). The body is, therefore, intimately involved in spiritual experience. Religious terrorists all claim to have a personal contact with God and they also make use of such practices. The same is true of their rivals (e.g. heads of state) who, in their effort to combat terrorism, play the same kind of game.

With these few theoretical remarks on bodily based mental image structures and the metaphors and conduct that emanate from such structures, I shall now illustrate how these theoretical matters can be applied to the field of religious terrorism. The discussion of violent metaphors pertaining to God will be limited to only a few examples. The purpose is to illustrate that these metaphors and the deeds that follow from them derive from mental image schemata that are based on bodily experiences. Because of time and space constraints and the illustrative nature of this paper, I will not pay attention to detailed socio-cultural aspects, which are of vital importance in any research on terrorism.

### ***Metaphors for God and Other Rhetoric Implemented by Religious Terrorists***

Leder (*Absent Body*, 68) asserts that it is characteristic of the human body itself to experience transcendence, mystery, and interconnectedness. This trait of the human body enables us to construct metaphors for God or gods. However, the specific metaphors will be in harmony with our individual knowledge and experience of God in our personal lives and influenced by the religious community and culture we form part of.

It is interesting to note that statements about God derive from analogies based on human behavior (Malina 1993, 77). It is, therefore, natural to imagine God or gods in one's own image as in feminist-, liberation- or 'black' theology (Larsson 2004, 123). This means that statements about God are metaphors derived from the human body itself. That is why interpretations of the same Scriptures may vary widely and are often contradictory. It is not only true of one specific religious tradition but also across the borders of conflicting traditions. The radical cleric, whether ayatollah, rabbi or priest, uses sacred text very selectively to justify violence in the name or under the will of God (Post 2005, 57-58).

For our discussion it is important to keep in mind that the most basic values in a culture will be consistent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture (Lakoff & Johnson *Metaphors*, 22). Individuals, like groups, vary in their



priorities and in the ways they define their bodily experiences (ibid., 22). That is why the same metaphor can be used by rivals in a conflict, though with different intentions and produced by different bodily and cultural experiences. In the case of both religious terrorists and their religious adversaries, e.g. heads of state, their rhetoric and conduct flow from their own experience, understanding and interpretation of the will of God. The metaphors, including those for God and his attributes, and the consequential actions employed during and after terrorist events, are thus bodily based.

The Scriptures and traditions of all three monotheistic religions under discussion are full of bloody conflicts, sometimes showing that God elected certain people and rejected others. These accounts of holy or just wars present a variety of causes, motivations, surrounding circumstances, and strategies that are being absorbed by subsequent generations who read these accounts. Role models such as Samson, David, Mohammad and their war stories become part of our faith and metaphorical expressions and can inspire a believer to carry out similar actions of violence as these role models in specific circumstances. As Cobb (2002, 140) puts it, “These archetypal hostilities are engrained in our cultures, and at the deepest level influence the sense we make of unfolding crises.”

In what follows, I will explore examples of bodily based roots of violent metaphors for God utilized by terrorist adherents of the three related Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Both Judaism and Zionism are culturally (the first also religiously) spoken direct offshoots from ancient Israel, whereas Christianity and Islam derived from ancient Israel historically. All share to a large extent the same metaphors but from different religious and cultural angles.

### **EXAMPLES OF BODILY BASED VIOLENT METAPHORS FOR GOD IN ANCIENT ISRAEL, JUDAISM, AND MODERN ISRAEL**

#### ***Ancient Israel***

In order to explore examples of the bodily and culturally based roots of violent metaphors in Judaism and Zionism, we must first visit ancient Israel from which Judaism and modern Israel derive. Although the people are ethnically the same (Jews), a deep ideological breach exists between (orthodox) Judaism and Zionism. However, as we shall see below, the ideology of modern Israel draws upon their cultural and religious background even as a secular state.

The way the authors of the Hebrew Bible depict the corporeal side of God relates

directly to that of the human being. Malina (1993, 73-81) speaks of a three zones model, which forms the makeup of the dyadic personality of the people of the Mediterranean world of biblical times. The model comprises emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech, and purposeful action. God has ears, eyes, a mouth, feet, hands, and a face. He acts like humans act. Human traits of attitude, feeling, and joy are metaphorized onto God. This model is applied to the God of the Bible in exactly the same way as to humans albeit in superlative terms. The social aspects of personality are specified as well. Just as Israel declares God to be unique, so God declares Israel to be unique. God exhibits precisely the social attributes that human beings do (Neusner et al. 2002, 73).

Culturally spoken ancient Israel's ideal body was the 'whole body' (Berquist 2002, 19).<sup>5</sup> For Israel almost everything was at stake in the wholeness of bodies. Their theological, cosmological, and anthropological thinking and producing of metaphors comprehensively form part of this concept of one-bodiedness and whole-bodiedness. And so was every other aspect of their individual and cultural life driven by this notion (e.g. economics, politics, societal issues). As Berquist (*ibid.*, 181) asserts, "[s]ecular life and religious life came together in the practices of the body and the metaphors of society related to the body. The overall effect was an integrated vision and practice of reality, thoroughly connected to the entirety of society." It is, therefore, obvious that ancient Israel's metaphors for God were also whole-body metaphors. Ancient Israel's metaphor of the "one and only God," the ultimate, complete body, which developed from henotheism to monotheism through the history of Israel, was inherited by the later Judaism, Christianity, and also Islam.

The metaphor "God is the one and only God" goes hand in hand with "God is on our side," both being key metaphors for God used by the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Both these metaphors are projections from the human body. Because the human being (body) is essentially one, a single unity, it is obvious that the metaphor of "God is the one and only God" can be derived from human experience of oneness. Within the broader social context where relationships between individuals exist and communion and compassion are bodily based, "God can be on our side," part of the in-group. This is a very strong metaphor implemented by both sides of religious terrorist

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<sup>5</sup> Berquist mentions two primary aspects involving whole-bodiedness in Israel: a) A whole body contains all its parts and functions; b) A whole body contains itself within fixed boundaries. See Berquist for the explanation of these remarks.

conflicts. Although Volf (2008, 7) argues that monotheism is not inherently violent because of the metaphors of “one single God,” “one universal truth,” and “God is on our side,” there does exist a natural tendency in monotheism towards the notion of elected people as well as of arrogance (Bruce 2003, 225).

In the Hebrew Bible war is assumed from the outset as an essential part of the world in which the people of antiquity lived. The depiction of “God as a warrior” who leads his people in battle is foundational for most of the understanding of war in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ex 14-15) (Hess 2008, 19). The role of God as a warrior is the model against which all other fighters such as Gideon (Jd 6-8), Samson (Jd 13-16), and David (2 Sm 8-10) are measured. This metaphor developed through the history of Israel from traditions regarding divine acts of salvation on behalf of God’s people, to a God who acts against his own people due to their sin, and finally to a God who is the embodiment of righteous judgment (ibid., 24). The metaphor affirms God’s superiority over all other gods and nations. It is evident that the human warrior is metaphorized onto the domain of the divine as the ultimate warrior. Human struggle and the telic demand of the individual and the societal bodies to overcome their struggles against foreign nations form the basis for this metaphor for their God. It is based upon ancient Israel’s bodily experience of vicious wars and their belief that God saved them. This metaphor played a major role in the history of the occupation of the Promised Land. The ancient belief was that no war was entirely secular and that battles amongst nations simultaneously involved battles amongst their gods—a cosmic war.

Another important metaphor depicting God’s violent and wrathful character, and which links up with the “God is warrior” metaphor, is the “God is king” metaphor. The metaphor of God as king depicts his sovereignty and the maintenance of righteousness, and originates from the introduction of kingly rule in the history of ancient Israel (1 Sm 8-9). God was seen as the King who rules through his earthly king who was his adopted son (Ps 2; 24). Divine sovereignty means that the forces of chaos and evil are under God’s control (Martens 2008, 52). Again, this metaphor is bodily based and reflected in the societal body. Ancient Israel believed that their God was in full control of both the good and the evil forces, which they experienced in and through their bodies and the history of God with his people. The book of the Psalms in the Hebrew Bible presents us with beautiful poetic reflections of such bodily and societal experiences (e.g. Ps 7; 9; 60). The depictions of God as King reflect in all aspects the human king, however in superlative

terms (Malina *New Testament World*, 78).

Lastly, the metaphor describing God's military power, namely, "the mighty hand and outstretched arm of God" (e.g. Ps 77:15; 136:12; Jr 21:5, etc.), also emanates from the human body's experience of using the arm to strike at an object and from similar human war experiences.

### ***Judaism and Zionism***

Culturally and religiously spoken, Judaism originated from ancient Israel. Like ancient Israel, Judaism also holds the view that the one and only God is their God with whom they stand in a covenant relationship. They are God's elected people (the relational "God is on our side" metaphor). Based on the covenant between God and Israel and the belief that Israel is God's elected people, "the enemies of Israel are the enemies of God" (Neusner *Three Faiths*, 215).

Due to the specific way Judaism thinks about its relationship with God, namely that God uses other nations to humble his own, elected people, Weiss 2002, 15) is of the opinion that the Diaspora Jews developed into passive, "melancholic," "effeminate" Jewish bodies, which gave rise to Zionist ideology.

Although modern Israel is a semi secular democratic state in which the Orthodox rabbinate has a privileged position (Almond et al. 2003, 131), Judaic criticism of Zionism reflects deep-seated theological convictions because Zionism strikes at the heart of messianic redemption (Rabkin 2006, 15). What is interesting is that the language of redemption is omnipresent in most versions of Zionist ideology but translated into secular concepts. Zionism eliminates the metaphysical content of Judaic religion but uses the social function thereof, as well as the Torah and the historical narrative of ancient Israel, to unite the people (ibid., 26) and to justify their claims to the Land of Israel. Adaption of metaphors can be traced in Modern Hebrew, for example, the word *biṭaḥon*, which means "trust in God," came to mean "military security" (Weiss *Chosen Body*, 57). The metaphor "the arm of the Israeli Army" has replaced the "mighty hand and outstretched arm of God" metaphor so often found in the Hebrew Bible.

It was particularly the Eastern European Zionists, the majority in the Zionist movement, who rebelled against the orthodox Jews, whose interpretation of the messianic message was a major obstacle to Zionist aims (Weissbrod 2002, 6). The metaphor "humankind restored to Paradise" is for Judaism realized in the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel where the Messiah will eventually appear. It expresses the yearning (telic

demand) for restoration of the human body and the societal body in distress (see Coetzee 2009, 554-563). Jewish messianism is a core value and metaphor found in the Book of Isaiah chapter 11: an offspring of the royal House of David will bring back to Zion the scattered Jews from all their countries of exile and institute in Zion a social order of perfect justice as well as perfect peace in the world (Weissbrod *Israeli Identity*, 7). Modern Zionism utilizes this messianic metaphor for its own secular purposes, especially to justify their occupation of the land of Israel (Zion) and to establish, according to their interpretation, a “perfect just society”, which is a bodily based metaphor of balance.

Justice is a moral value not only inspired by Holy Scriptures but it is also a metaphor based on bodily experiences. Because the body always longs for and endeavors to maintain balance or equilibrium (both the inner and outer body as a unity, as well as the societal body) and whole-bodiedness, it is natural to project the image schemata formed by various experiences and acts of balance of the body onto the moral domain. According to Johnson (*Body in the Mind*, 90), “civil and criminal justice are founded upon a basic notion of balance,” and “[j]ustice itself is conceived as the regaining of a proper balance that has been upset by an unlawful action.” Both the individual and the societal bodies strive towards avoiding damage and will perform various physical and psychological acts, based on the justice metaphor, to protect them or to regain balance.

The Zionist Israelis, therefore, interpreted the separation between Israelis and Arabs as an ethical act in line with the messianic metaphor and principle of perfect justice. The outcome was a complete rejection of Palestinian Arab claims to the same territory (Weissbrod *Israeli Identity*, 37). Within this context Zion, God’s abode on earth amongst his chosen people Israel, and a symbol of his redemption, has acquired new metaphorical meaning in secular Zionism: political and military self-redemption. The main offshoot of this shift is a highly tensed territory in which vicious terrorist attacks from both the Israeli and Arab sides are executed on a regular basis. The current and past terrorist violence in the Middle East originate from this messianic metaphor of hope, based on the telic demand for salvation of a body in distress, as realized in the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

It is thus clear that metaphors such as messianism (including perfect justice and perfect peace), separation between Israelis and Arabs, Zion as God’s abode, all relate to and originate from bodily experiences of various kinds and their related mental image structures. These metaphors are then specifically selected and implemented by Zionists to

fit their socio-political needs and to execute violent actions accordingly.

### *Christianity*

From the outset Christianity defined itself as the true Israel and that their God is the only God. Similar to ancient Israel, the church (*ekklesia*) is said to be the elected or “called out” people of God after the first coming of Christ. The same notion of elected people is also found in Islam (*ummah*). As mentioned above it is in a sense typical of monotheistic religions to tend to be exclusive. The ethical dualism in which the “armies of light” oppose the “armies of darkness” frequently surfaced from church history. These metaphors are founded upon human experiences of war. The crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and the resultant terror are an obvious example (Griffith 2002, 101). There is little difference in *praxis* between the crusades and modern day Christian terrorism. When the Christian faith (or any faith for that matter) is employed to legitimize violence, Christians also declare “God to be on their side” and they see “themselves as soldiers of God” (Volf *Christianity*, 7), two biblical war metaphors imprinted in the minds of Christians.

Christian fundamentalists,<sup>6</sup> operate with a model of clear-cut right and wrong, good and evil. Good and evil are bodily based experiences that are metaphorized onto the moral sphere and they involve emotionality. Emotionality is based in the visceral of the human body (Leder *Absent Body*, 136). We are satisfied by delicious food, for example, which evokes the emotion of something “good.” Or a harmful situation can evoke fear through the production of increased adrenaline. This can then be morally metaphorized as “bad” or “evil.” Good and evil can be personified by applying them to specific persons depending on whether they are one’s rivals or one’s friends. Within the context of terrorism, the labeling of someone as “evil” or “the devil,” *makes* that person evil from the perspective of the speaker. In the dichotomy of cosmic dualism, therefore, that which is not part of “us,” (the bodily and social experiences of communion and compassion), is metaphorized as evil (Larsson *Understanding Religious Violence*, 119). As opponents become satanized and regarded as “forces of evil,” the world begins to make sense to those who label their rivals. Those who felt oppressed can now understand which horrific forces are behind their humiliation. The ultimate way out in times of such despair is to commit oneself (or the

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<sup>6</sup> Juergensmeyer (*Global Rebellion*, 5) is correctly of the opinion that *fundamentalism* is not a proper category for making comparisons across cultures because the term can only be used within a Christian context. The term *antimodernism* should rather be used when referring to fundamentalism as a global concept.

society) to cosmic war where good and evil, darkness and light, God and Satan, fight the real battle (Juergensmeyer 2003, 188). Acts or counteracts of religious terrorism display symbolically the depth of such a struggle in worldly terms.

Within the context of our discussion, President George W. Bush is an appropriate example of a Christian displaying fundamentalism in his violent rhetoric. When we consider the metaphor “war on terrorism,” coined by him, it generated a complex network of issues involved, for example, terrorists are the enemies; terrorism must be defined; religion’s role in terrorism must be established; root causes of religious terrorism are to be investigated; strategies must be plotted; differences between state war and terrorism must be spelt out, and numerous other issues linked to religious terrorism.

Arrogance and the election myth formed part of his war on terrorism rhetoric after the 9/11 events. This can, of course, also be said of Osama bin Laden. The logic of having God on one’s side, shared by Bush’s “God Bless America” rhetoric and Osama bin Laden’s “in compliance with God’s order” rhetoric is the most powerful logic of all (Cornell 2002, 331). It is an argument from authority of the highest order. With God on my side I am no longer weak but am the center of the circle of power. Argument from authority is most widely used in fundamentalist circles in an abusive and absolute way (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 305-306). It has to do with prestige, not only of the person using the authority argument and who must be believed by his/her audience, but also with the prestige of the authority invoked. The greater the authority, the more unquestionable does his pronouncement become. Divine authority, of course, overcomes all the obstacles that reason might raise (Ibid., 308). The bodily experience that one is inspired by God and is doing his will, which will be rewarded in the life hereafter, can inspire people to perform acts of extraordinary bravery and folly (Bruce *Politics and Religion*, 12). Religious violence is particularly cruel since, by drawing God into the picture, its executors experience it not merely as part of a worldly political battle but as part of a scenario of cosmic conflict (Juergensmeyer *Global Rebellion*, 255).

Numerous remarks from presidential speeches of President Bush link the freedom of America to the will of God. America is in this way presented as the bearer of freedom, which is God’s gift also to the rest of the world (Riswold 2008, 69). This faith-based foreign policy reflects the Bush administration’s narrow, fundamentalist Christian views of God, good and evil, and American privilege (ibid., 70). Bush employed his own bodily based religious and ethical metaphors in a way that drew the whole nation into the cosmic

battle against religious terrorism of the Muslim kind. Johnson (2008, 55) calls this “instrumental civil religion.”

An additional rhetorical device employed by President Bush was the distinction between Muslim practitioners of “true religion” and those who practise “false religion.” This objectivistic view, which serves the Bush administration’s own political needs, led him to distinction between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims,” a moral distinction based on bodily metaphors and an idea that has become the driving force of American foreign policy (Mamdani 2004, 15-16, 23). It is evident that this over-simplistic distinction (metaphorization) without justification aims at mobilizing “those Muslims who take side with American ideology” against “those Muslims who are not part of us,” metaphors already discussed above.

### *Islam*

Similar to Judaism and Christianity, the center of Muslim faith is “one God alone” and the *ummah* is God’s chosen people. The whole Qur’an, written in the holy Arabic language, is God’s verbatim speech, which is a revelation of his will and his dealings with his creation. God’s justice and his omnipotent sustenance of his creation form the foundation of the world order. An important message of the Qur’ān is that God is revealed to all human beings not only in the Qur’an but all over in the natural world, where his signs are plentiful (Neusner *Three Faiths*, :27). The Qur’an urges Muslims to see the world as an epiphany, signs and messages of God which must be deciphered and interpreted (Armstrong *History of God*, 167-168). This, of course, can be fertile soil for religious terrorist violence when a charismatic terrorist leader imposes his/her own metaphors subjectively onto the realm of the divine while interpreting a specific socio-political context.

The experience of transcendence by Muslims when reciting the Qur’an makes the reading thereof in the sacred language of Arabic a spiritual experience (ibid., 169). Their belief in and reciting of the mantra that “God is one,” points to more than a numerical designation of God. This belief is culturally conditioned (ibid., 176) and is embodied as a driving factor of one’s own life and society. The daily prayers in a specific direction and with a specific body posture are bodily based acts and experiences which form the basis for mental image schemata and related metaphors that describe both “human humbleness” and the “greatness of God.” Zuesse (quoted in Leder *Absent Body*, 168) writes the



following with reference to religious ritual:

Ritual centers on the body, and if we would understand ritual we shall have to take the body seriously as a vehicle for religious experience....Much ritual symbolism draws on the simplest and most intense sensory experiences, such as eating, sexuality, and pain. Such experiences have been repeated so often or so intimately by the body that they have become primary forms of bodily awareness. In ritual, they are transformed into symbolic experiences of the divine, and even into the form of the cosmic drama itself.

It is thus evident that religious terrorists (of whatever faith) who regularly perform such religious rituals can easily metaphorize their bodily experiences of unification with God in such a way that their metaphors serve their terrorist purposes. One can then understand why Osama bin Laden, for example, made the following exhortation in his fatwa in February 1998:

In compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, 'and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together', and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.' We—with God's help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. (In Horgan 2005, 58-59)

Bin Laden's firsthand experience of God and his direct knowledge of God's will are embodied experiences through ritual and Scripture reading. Note that it is God's command, according to bin Laden, to kill the Americans. He is only God's herald, the messenger of *al-Qahtar*, the war name for God in the Qur'an, which means "he who dominates and breaks the back of his enemies" (Armstrong *History of God*, 176). Bin Laden's experience of communion or oneness with God, the ground of being, complemented by his bodily based negative emotions towards and experiences of America and the West, enable him to make such a statement from authority in order to involve Muslims individually and as the corporate *ummah* (Muslim community). Because he experiences communion with all Muslims, he can attempt to involve the *ummah* in his terrorist activities.

The intolerance that Muslims are often condemned for, especially by the West, does not always spring from a rival vision of God but from their intolerance of injustice (ibid., 177). The doctrine of *jihad* shared by all Muslims stems from the fact that the Qur'an is very clear that "God is a just God" and that a Muslim's first duty is to create a just and

classless society in which poor people are treated with respect. This demands a *jihad* or struggle on the spiritual, social, personal and political spheres of life (Mamdani *Good Muslim*, 50). The so-called greater *jihad* is a struggle against personal weaknesses where the personal body plays a fundamental role. The lesser *jihad* is about self-preservation and self-defense, which, when directed outwardly, can take on the form of a just war. Both the greater and the lesser *jihad* thus relate directly to the personal body as well as to the societal body or *Ummah*.

As stated above, justice is a moral value, a metaphor based on bodily experiences of balance. It is implemented in order to restore the imbalances brought about by illegitimate action. When a person or a society is in danger or is humiliated, attempts to rectify the imbalance can take on violent forms because injustice is experienced. Bjørge (*Conclusions*, 260) is of the opinion that the experience of social injustice is a main motivating cause behind social-revolutionary terrorism and that a charismatic ideological leader is capable of transforming widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle, sometimes by implementing religious rhetoric. In the case of Osama bin Laden it is not so much that he attempts to politicize his religion, but rather that he draws socio-political struggles into the sphere of cosmic battle, based on the metaphor of a just God who commands a just war (Juergensmeyer *Global Rebellion*, 131). A charismatic political leader such as bin Laden is able to mobilize his own bodily based metaphors in such a way that they can serve his personal socio-political needs and then to transform them into appropriate actions to fulfill the explicit needs of his followers. He is able to transfer his experiences and metaphors onto a group or groups of people sharing the same or similar negative experiences, sentiments and ideologies. Eventually it is the group or organizational pathology that provides a sense-making explanation to the youth that he draws into his group (*Post Socio-cultural underpinnings*, 55).

### CONCLUSION

I attempted to illustrate that a body phenomenological analysis of religious terrorism should make all researchers in the field of terrorism aware of the fact that terrorist violence is a complicated, deeply *bodily based* phenomenon and that we need to understand the phenomenon of embodiment in this regard. The actions of a terrorist are motivated by his sensory-motor experiences, emotions, needs, and desires that originate in his personal body and which are reflected in the societal body of which he forms part. But these bodily based sensory-motor experiences, emotions, needs, and desires are transformed into mental image schemata and

metaphors and eventually into violent terrorist action, which must all form part of the investigation or religious terrorism in order to obtain an inclusive understanding of the underlying bodily based motivations for such deeds. By carefully analyzing terrorist actions and related metaphors they use in their rhetoric, one can attempt to trace the possible image structures and bodily based experiences underlying and producing such metaphors and actions. In the case of religious terrorism it is particularly the influence of bodily based, violent metaphors for God and related religious rhetoric, which give their actions a religious colour and which serve as further motivation and authority for their violent political conduct. Because the human body is culturally shaped, the investigation cannot be performed without taking the cultural and socio-political contexts of the person or group investigated into consideration, as well as the context in which these acts are being executed. Due to the illustrative purpose of this paper, this aspect did not receive particular attention. It is also necessary to analyze the responsive acts, metaphors, relating image schemata, and bodily experiences of those on the receiving end of terrorist violence in order to obtain the full picture. Because, in most of the cases, terrorism is countered with terrorism.

It is evident from the analysis above that violent religious rhetoric and resultant actions are highly authoritative in nature and are not only commonly but rather preferably implemented particularly by religious fundamentalists and anti-modernists. But this is perhaps the sting of religion in its relationship with political terrorism. Most violent religious metaphors display aspects of absolutism, justification of violence, and demonizing of opponents, which deepen the problem of religious terrorism and the related search for possible solutions to it. A body phenomenological approach to the problem introduces a complementary method, which might enhance a more comprehensive comprehension of just these intensifying factors.

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