

Investigating
**RELIGIOUS
TERRORISM**



and

**RITUALISTIC
CRIMES**

DAWN PERLMUTTER



CRC PRESS

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and
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D A W N P E R L M U T T E R



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*2001 was a year of both national and personal loss.
This book is dedicated to two American heroes.
In loving memory of my brother and father:*

*Lance Elliot Perlmutter
Abraham David Perlmutter*

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Contemporary Religious Violence

1

Regardless of how heinous, irrational or inexplicable, religious violence is always justified and never considered terrorism by the religious groups that practice it. Throughout history and across cultures, sacred violence has been sanctioned, condoned and deemed necessary for religious principles. Today sacred violence is still sanctioned, condoned and deemed necessary for religious principles, only now man has the technology to at best terrorize the world and at worst completely destroy it. Understanding the religious beliefs, ethics and ritual practices of unfamiliar religions is imperative to preventing future acts of terrorism. Some religions not only justify violence but specific acts of bloodshed are often ritually required for proper worship. Analyzing religious practices from each individual group's theological perspective provides insights into the nature of these seemingly inexplicable acts of violence.

The purpose of this book is to provide law enforcement investigators, academic scholars, forensic scientists and criminal justice professionals with a resource guide to assist in intelligence gathering, criminal investigation, crime scene identification, prevention and understanding of religious violence and ritualistic crimes.

Defining Religious Terrorism

Definitions of religious terrorism are problematic because it is a relative concept that essentially is determined by the theological, moral, political, sociological and legal perspectives of each group. Hence, religious terrorism is most often attributed to groups designated as "cults," a pejorative term ascribed to unfamiliar religions. The problem can be summed up in two basic concepts: "One man's God is another man's devil" and "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

Relative Concepts

- One man's god is another man's devil.
- One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

There are many contrary definitions of religion and terrorism that are dependent upon the perspective of the author. While religious scholars debate where to draw the line for religious freedom, political philosophers and legal scholars attempt to distinguish between political freedoms, terrorism, anarchy and justice. The concept of violence or more specifically force is intrinsic to the definition of terrorism but that only further complicates the issue because not all acts of violence are considered negative. One political view will deem an action terrorism and another political view will deem it justifiable retribution. Furthermore, the distinction between terrorism and retribution is dependent upon the perception of who was violated first. Hence, religious terrorism is a culturally relative construct that varies in place and in time and is intrinsically intertwined with issues of political and religious freedom even if that freedom entails the subjugation and harm of others.

Building upon both the Federal Bureau of Investigation's and the State Department's definitions of terrorism, the following operational concept of religious terrorism is posited: religious terrorism is defined as any act of violence or threatened use of violence by a group or individual with the intent of intimidating individuals, citizens or governments in the furtherance of religious objectives. Religious terrorism is frequently characterized by the

Definition of Religious Terrorism

- Religious terrorism is defined as any act of violence or threatened use of violence by a group or individual with the intent of intimidating individuals, citizens or governments in the furtherance of religious objectives. Religious terrorism is frequently characterized by the imposed or self-imposed infliction of either physical, psychological, symbolic or spiritual assaults in order to achieve the group's and/or individual's objectives.

imposed or self-imposed infliction of physical, psychological, symbolic or spiritual assaults in order to achieve the group's and/or individual's objectives.

Defining Ritualistic Crimes

Ritualistic crime not only encompasses particular manifestations of religious terrorism but also entails a wide variety of both sacred and secular violent acts perpetrated by groups and individuals. Ritualistic crimes are most often attributed to practitioners of occult ideologies such as Satanism, Palo Mayombe, Brujeria, etc., or to serial killers and sexual sadists who ritually murder their victims. Similar to religious terrorism, ritualistic crimes have no agreed-upon definition.

Building upon a 1989 California Law Enforcement study of occult crime, ritualistic crime is defined as any act of violence characterized by a series of repeated physical, sexual and/or psychological actions/assaults combined with a systematic use of symbols, ceremonies and/or machinations. The need to repeat such acts can be cultural, sexual, economic, psychological and/or spiritual.¹ Crimes entailing ritual violence are generally referred to as cult or occult crime. It is significant to note that religious terrorism and ritualistic crimes are not mutually exclusive and frequently manifest aspects of both.

Definition of Ritualistic Crime



- Ritualistic crime encompasses ceremonial actions and/or ritualistic acts, and often involves occult-related behavior patterns, and is frequently motivated by a belief in some occult ideology.

Palo Mayombe crime scene. (Photo courtesy of Ocean County Sheriff's Department, Criminalistics Investigative Unit, Detective William Pozanlante, Toms River, NJ.)

Since the ritual practices of alternative religions are generally unknown and contrary to traditional Western beliefs, investigating a crime that is the result of unfamiliar religious practices can be disturbing, problematic and often overlooked. The phenomenon of ritual activity can be comprehended when situated in sacred rituals of initiation, sacrifice, healing, protection and worship of gods and ancestors. Due to the many legal, practical and ethical controversies that surround the investigation of spiritual practices the study of contemporary religious violence is in its infancy. There have been no serious empirical studies of occult crimes or classifications that adequately distinguish ritual homicides committed for sacred versus secular motivations. In the final chapter of this book, a ritual homicide classification system based on forensics and symbolic evidence found at crime scenes is put forth in an attempt to standardize the identification, investigation and analysis of ritual murder.

This book will help you distinguish religiously motivated ritualistic crime from other motivations, recognize the rituals, symbols and practices of distinct groups, differentiate legal religious practices from criminal activity and objectively identify organizations whose religious ideologies pose a potential terrorist threat.

Religion

In addition to the hundreds of established major religions of the world, there are literally thousands of unrecognized and new religious movements. The textbooks about world religions can only briefly describe some of the better known beliefs. For law enforcement purposes, it is necessary to understand the complexity of religious differences and the enormity of the problems to which they give rise. The significance of religious belief is astounding when you appreciate that it determines ethics, morality, politics, laws, manners, etc.

For many societies, religious belief also determines significant daily activities such as what their members can wear, eat, drink, read, listen to, and whom they can marry. Additionally, religion is intrinsic to political conflicts and justifies violence, war and terrorism. Knowledge of specific religions is essential to understanding the motivations, justifications and prevention of terrorism. To comprehend the enormity of the variety of religions, a few terms will be clarified. The corresponding simplistic chart (see next page) illustrates them. The chart is by no means inclusive; categorizing religions is problematic because (1) the concept of religion is not easily defined, (2) many religions are absolutist, which means they only acknowledge their own doctrines and often do not recognize other religions as valid, and (3) the chart reflects a traditional Western perspective.

Categories of Religious Groups	
<p>Occult Religions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satanism • Neo-Pagan/Witchcraft • Syncretic beliefs: Santeria, Voodoo, Palo Mayombe, Brujeria • Goth, Vampire, Fetish 	<p>Cults (non-mainstream or new religions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennial groups (apocalyptic beliefs) • White Supremacist (Militia/Patriot) • UFO Religions
<p>Traditional Religions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christianity • Judaism • Islam 	<p>Extreme Orthodox</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental extremists • Sects (branched off from traditional religions)

Traditional Western religions refer to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all of which are monotheistic (believe in one god), highly organized and well established. A sect usually refers to a dissident group that has separated from another usually mainstream religion, often proclaiming its intent to recover principles and practices from an earlier time that the mainstream religion abandoned. For example, the Protestant Reformation split Christianity into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, which further divided into many churches and sects. Sects can evolve into recognized religions such as the Lutheran, Baptist and Methodist churches or they may dissipate for lack of support. Most new religious movements aspire to become recognized as valid churches.

Fundamental extremist religions or fundamentalism are also considered sects and can branch off from any religion but most often derive from Christianity and Islam. Fundamentalist theology usually entails a return to what is considered a purer or truer form of the original religion. Fundamentalist world views are consistently dualist with the world being sharply divided between the forces of good and evil. Unfortunately, many fundamentalist religious groups have become actively militant in the form of domestic and international terrorists and will be the subject of Chapters 3 and 4.

New Religious Movements, sometimes called New Age Religions, can either be new sects that have branched off from more established religions or entirely new religions. For example, the Branch Davidians were a Christian sect of the Seventh Day Adventists that derived from the 19th century Millerites established by Baptist leader William Miller. Christian Identity is a new religion based on British Israelism, which was not originally a racist religion. Bonnie Lu Nettles and Marshall Herff Applewhite, the leaders of Heaven's Gate, combined Christian and Theosophical doctrines with a belief in unidentified flying objects (UFOs) to create a monastic community of followers. Although they have entirely unrelated and distinct doctrines, these

Cult vs. Occult	
<p>Cult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any group with a shared ideology (belief system) and usually a charismatic leader. 	<p>Occult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any group with a shared ideology whose members believe they can magically intervene in the universe through specific rituals. Individuals can also practice occult beliefs.

groups are all considered New Religious Movements or more commonly referred to as cults.

In academia, *cult* is not only a politically incorrect term; it is viewed as a method of stigmatizing entire groups of people. The term is used to designate religious groups as aberrant and dangerous. According to religious scholars, *cult* is a word that expresses prejudice. It portrays an oversimplified and bigoted stereotype that dehumanizes the religion's members and their children and labels them subhuman. Religious scholars maintain this position even if a group has been proven to be dangerous and has committed heinous acts of violence. Their arguments against stigmatizing unfamiliar religions certainly have merit, but simply eliminating the term will not eliminate violent religious groups. *New Religious Movement* is the current politically correct term for non-mainstream religions, although many of them are not new and are derived from established religions. *Alternative Religion* is another expression, but *alternative* implies *other* and retains pejorative connotations. The most accurate and neutral expression is *unfamiliar religions*.

Essentially, a New Religious Movement is a group with a shared ideology, a charismatic leader and little else in common. The movements differ in their theologies, structures, practices and attitudes toward the government. This is why assorted millennial religions, white supremacists and UFO believers can all be designated as New Religious Movements.

Another important distinction is the difference between New Religious Movements and occult religions. This can be very confusing because they are often grouped together and are not mutually exclusive. *Occult* literally means *hidden* and refers to various methods of developing hidden powers through extensive training and discipline of the will. *Occult* also refers to any matter concerned with the supernatural and encompasses a variety of religions with occult beliefs. Essentially an occult religion is any group with a shared ideology whose members believe they can magically intervene in the universe through specific rituals. Individuals also practice occult beliefs.