I
The year 1972 was the three-hundredth anniversary of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew’s day, and French historians in many lands marked its bloodshed and cruelty by conferences and scholarly papers. Alfred Soman invited me to present a paper at a colloquium on the massacre in Chicago. I accepted with alacrity, partly because I was impelled toward the subject of violence for several reasons at once. Both the scholarly stakes and the political stakes seemed high.

In the years just before 1972, I was figuring out how to combine classic social history with the descriptive and semiotic approaches I was learning from reading cultural anthropology, ethnography, and literary criticism. Essays I wrote in the tradition of classic social history were, for example, ‘Strikes and Salvation’ and ‘A Trade Union in Sixteenth-Century France’ on the printing workers of Lyon; ‘Poor Relief, Humanism, and Heresy’ on welfare reform in Lyon; and ‘City Women and Religious Change’ on women and the Protestant Reformation.1 Within structures of power and property, I was attentive to the social, geographical and gender origin of the actors, and to what they said or wrote or did in the form of resistance or reform or

* This essay is dedicated to the memory of Robert M. Kingdon (1927–2010) and Thierry Wanegffelen (1965–2009), whose writings brought us deep insight into the history of religion, religious conflict, and the possibilities for coexistence in the sixteenth century. I am grateful for friendship and shared learning with Robert Kingdon over many decades and with Thierry Wanegffelen until he was snatched away before his time.

domination. I sought connections between patterns of experience and the adoption of social identities, aspirations, and religious beliefs. To account for choices, I talked about how people perceived their socio-economic interest, and also about their sense of worth and their hopes for community. I tried to give reason to behaviour through the ideas people had about themselves and their interests, ideas inherited or newly introduced, read about or heard.

At least some of the violence initiated by these sixteenth-century people could be understood in this fashion. The grain-rioters in the Grande Rebeine of Lyon in 1529 targeted grain merchants and hoarders; their actions were among the elements that pushed the city notables into welfare reform a few years later. The journeymen printers in their Company of the Griffarins beat up men they called Forfants, who refused to join the *compagnonnage* and were willing to work for ‘beggar’s pay’; the Griffarins even cut the Forfants’ hamstrings, which incapacitated them from working at the press.

In these social history essays, I did little with the meaning of symbol systems or the character of performance. Rather I reflected on the consequences or functions of symbolic action. So the psalm-singing of the printing workers as they marched through the streets of Lyon drew them together in solidarity and pitted them against the pretensions of the canon-counts of the Cathedral of Saint Jean. So the Protestant attack on the Catholic ‘god of paste’ and the replacement of the Mass by the Lord’s Supper were ways to unseat the Catholic priests and their claims to religious monopoly and elevate the lay community.

Yet all along, there were puzzles in the events I was uncovering, patterns of behaviour that in their full detail were baffling. What was going on in the elaborate ritual by which a printer’s journeyman was initiated as a Griffarin? Surely this signified more than secrecy and comradeship. What was going on when the Seigneur de la Coquille—that is, the Lord of Misprint—led other artisans in a charivari, a noisy demonstration when a man was led backward on a donkey because he had been beaten by his wife? Surely this involved more than artisans simply enjoying themselves. What was a Lord of Misprint anyway, besides a witty title? What really was a charivari?

In pursuit of some answers, I turned during 1968–9 in a new direction: to the ethnography of Arnold Van Gennep, his great *Manuel de folklore français*, organized around the life cycle and around the seasons of the year.\(^2\) There I found context and some meaning for the charivaris and the Abbayes de Maugouvert, the Abbeys of Misrule, cropping up in village after village, often associated with marriages where there was a gross disparity in age.

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between the partners. By the time I had explored sixteenth-century sources across France, I was reading about rites of passage in Victor Turner’s *Ritual Process* and the carnivalesque in Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World.*3

Now I began to take seriously social groups and symbolic actions usually ignored by historians at that time: youth groups and urban vocational or neighbourhood groups, with festive and local jurisdiction; and costumed and noise-making performance, in which social or community criticism was legitimated under the licence of the world-turned-upside-down. Ordinarily these festive activities ended in restored community, the rupture repaired; sometimes they tipped beyond truth-telling and mockery into violence, as when a target was chased out of town or even killed, and into actual uprisings against the city fathers, as in the Carnival of Romans at Mardi Gras, 1580. But, to use the title I gave to my essay, there were always ‘Reasons’ to the Misrule: protecting the local marriage pool or the hierarchical arrangements in marriage, targeting royal officers for corruption and oppression, and the like.4

But religious violence posed more of a problem. George Rudé, Eric Hobsbawm, and Edward P. Thompson and others had written about popular riots and uprisings with economic or social goals.5 The hydra-headed mob became a crowd with actions organized towards a goal; rebels, though sorted into ‘primitive’ or pre-political and political, had some rationale to their violence. Thompson’s ‘Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, published in 1971, expanded on that rationale: the belief that the people should rightly have bread to eat was shared by governors and subjects, and when the hungry rose up against hoarders of grain, they saw themselves as taking on the role that magistrates should properly be filling.6 But these important interpretations stopped short when the bread involved


was, say, the holy wafer of the Mass or the Lord’s Supper. If popular violence against religious targets had a rationale, it was reduced to a socio-economic one such as the poor against the rich. At best, the religious indignation of crowds was misguided, and could not be read in its own terms. At worst, religious violence remained a supreme example of passionate disorder, an irrational lashing out against a terrible other.

My hope in 1972 was to explicate the religious violence of sixteenth-century French crowds in the decades leading up to Saint Bartholomew’s day both in social terms, familiar to me, and in cultural terms, some of which I had to invent. Through ‘social’ interpretation, I would be attentive to the origins of the actors—who they were, and what they did and where they came from—and consider how their experience and relations might inform their understanding of the world. Through ‘cultural’ interpretation, I would read the violent actions of crowds as guided at least in part by religious beliefs and sensibilities and the prescriptions of ritual performance. What were the stakes that rioters invested in their violence? What meaning did they give to their actions and how did they legitimize their conduct?

More generally, I wanted to deepen my understanding of Protestantism and Catholicism as systems of meaning, sensibility, and performance, sometimes overlapping systems and similar to each other, sometimes sharply different. (I am using Clifford Geertz’s language here, even though I did not read his ‘Religion as a Cultural System’ until it appeared in his Interpretation of Cultures in 1973. I surely posed the question more haltingly to myself in 1972). It seemed to me that the sharp confrontation called forth in popular religious violence might make it a privileged setting for examining these systems.

II

Popular protest and violence were also part of my own political world in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both contemporary and remembered. Resistance movements against the Vietnam War were widespread, and I participated in marches and demonstrations in Toronto and Berkeley. I stood with other demonstrators while young men burned their draft cards in front of the army induction centre in Oakland; I shouted slogans along with many other marchers in the streets of Berkeley, while unexpected violence cropped up around the edges: a car overturned by demonstrators, gun-fire from somewhere against the marchers, and finally the smell of tear-gas in the air and the sound of us all running away. In Toronto, I was one of the many witnesses to a

form of ‘non-violent resistance’: professors (my husband among them) and
students standing in front of a University of Toronto building so as to prevent
interviews with recruiters from American companies manufacturing napalm.
Counter-demonstrators supported the war against Communism and did not
want trouble-makers interfering with their chances to apply for a good job.

My closest encounter with disruptive action was during the day-care sit-in
at the University of Toronto in March 1970. For several years I had been close
to a small group of graduate students and faculty women who were trying to
get university support from an indifferent, even hostile administration for a
day-care centre for their young children. (My own children were by then in
school). We were pleased when all of a sudden a group of undergraduate
activists took up our cause on their own and organized a campus protest
meeting. To my surprise, one of the speakers called for the occupation of the
administration building, and many in the crowd poured through its doors,
moving up the stairs and into the Senate chamber.

I followed with a sinking heart: on the one hand, I cared deeply about
means to increase and facilitate the presence of women in the university
(women were still a small number in the graduate school and a very small
presence on the faculty); on the other hand, I found the breach of order, the
transgressive act, quite frightening. I also found it fascinating. The august
Senate chamber became the scene for carnivalesque reversal; students took
turns relaxing triumphantly in the ‘throne chair’. Was my ‘Reasons of
Misrule’, penned the year before, coming to life? I left after a time, and the
next day turned to a role I found more congenial: arguing before the presi-
dent’s council, together with another woman professor, for university sup-
port for day-care facilities. A moderate sum was allocated for building repairs,
and the sit-in ended (though it would take three more years and the appoint-
ment of a woman vice-president before proper support was established).8
This experience and the anti-war demonstrations intensified my hunger to
understand the performance of protest, especially when it went in seemingly
unexpected, disruptive or violent directions.

Along with these lived experiences, there was a ghost of violence from the
past which had haunted me for years: the Holocaust. How had this come
about, from the smallest acts of exclusion to the massive project of extermination? What could fuel such hatred, what could lead to cruelty on such a scale and with so much popular fervour behind it, to the invention of such seemingly unthinkable means of mass murder? I asked myself these questions as a historian, but even more as a woman who, if she had grown up Jewish in Europe rather than in Detroit, Michigan might well have ended up on a transport train to Auschwitz. I also asked them as a person who wished to view human behaviour as historically conditioned and, thus, susceptible to at least a tiny nudge toward the better. For the Holocaust itself, I could read during the 1960s Raul Hilberg’s deeply researched *Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) and Hannah Arendt’s provocative *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) among other works. But ‘The Rites of Violence’ of 1972 was my effort to address ‘the holocaust problem’: by giving shape to extreme violence and seeing how it was understood and legitimated by popular crowds in the sixteenth century, I was presenting an example of how murderous and destructive actions were historically and culturally conditioned, not the simple expression of timeless demonic force.

To be sure, the religious violence of the sixteenth century could not be read as a replica of the racial extermination of the twentieth: the ‘race’ of hateful heretics was not an enduring biological category of persons who must be exterminated (the word ‘race’ had a different meaning in the early modern period), but a socio-religious category which must be effaced and from which one could escape by converting back to Catholicism. But the sixteenth-century example might still suggest additional ways to reflect on, say, Kristallnacht and the murder of Jews by some of their neighbours in various eastern European towns during Nazi times.


III

Let me sum up for current readers the principal features of the essay. Though I used some archival materials from Lyon, my sources were Protestant and Catholic accounts of crowd violence, circulated and printed at the time. I was especially hungry for concrete details on what was shouted and done, and when and where. Though I took it seriously when Catholic and Protestant accounts of a violent event converged, as an indication of ‘what actually happened’, even a single unpaired description could provide evidence for how contemporaries interpreted and legitimated their actions.

In tracking religious violence, I sought crowds and rioters acting independently of official and governmental orders and independently of military command. (I was in dialogue in this essay with the literature on popular resistance and on the nature of social violence as much if not more than with the literature on the French Religious Wars). Under the rubric of ‘violence’ I included the wide range of behaviour so defined by sixteenth-century people, from disrupting the flow of a sermon to desecrating and destroying religious objects—a deeply wounding act for those who believed in their holiness and even miraculous power—to the public mockery of persons, to murder and the mutilation of corpses.

I found you could subsume these popular actions under three forms of defence of what was believed to be sacred. One was the affirmation of true doctrine and the refutation of falsehood by dramatic tests against, say, the Catholic holy wafer and relics in one direction or against the Calvinist French Bible in the other. A second defence was to cleanse the community of the pollution of heresy or vile religious practice: the lascivious and sinister practice of the Huguenots in one direction or the diabolic magic and debauchery of Catholic clerics in the other. Failing such purification would bring down the wrath of God. (Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* alerted me to the importance of the language about filth and defilement in the riots).

In such defence of the sacred, rioters were enacting in symbolic and violent expression the roles of preachers and priests. In a third form of action, they were imitating magistrates. Here was a version of the mentality that Edward Thompson had found for the English grain riot: when the magistrates had not

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done their duty, the people must do it for them. So the crowds rang the tocsin to assemble people. Protestants had mock trials of their captives and in some instances bore them off to prison ‘bound like galley slaves’. Catholics killed their victims at the official places of execution in other instances.

Among the forms of legitimation drawn upon by crowds to take matters into their own hands were the sermons of a zealous priest or pastor, who cited appropriate verses from Deuteronomy. And much of the religious violence was timed to and clustered around ritual events: a Protestant baptism or funeral or psalm-singing procession, a Catholic Mass or Corpus Christi day procession or feast-day celebration—these stimulated a response from opponents and fights ensued.

Though the violence of Catholic and Protestant crowds was fed by a perceived deep cleavage in belief, there were some overall similarities in their conduct and goals, as just suggested. These groups were drawing on a shared repertory of actions derived from Scripture and popular folk justice, and the presence of women and young men and teenage boys in both Catholic and Protestant riots guaranteed their access to certain forms of opposition, resistance, and techniques of humiliation.

But there were contrasts, too, and the ones that seemed to me most significant were those linked to differences in ritual sensibility and the location of the sacred and the polluting. Especially, I noted the heightened targeting of heretical persons and bodies by Catholic rioters and the heightened targeting of defiling objects by Protestant rioters. The contrast was by no means absolute, and I gave examples of overlapping conduct: Protestant crowds broke religious statues on Lyon churches; a Catholic crowd demolished the newly built Reformed Temple of Le Paradis in the same town; Catholics tore French Bibles to shreds, Protestants disposed of Catholic missals. Both Catholic and Protestant crowds left dead opponents in their wake.

But overall, the privileged actions of the Catholic and Protestant rioters (and I stressed that I was talking about riots and crowds, not military battles and soldiers) differed somewhat, not just in number, but more importantly, in significance. For Protestants, relics, statues of saints, sacramental wafers, chalices, priestly vestments, and church buildings were embodiments of pollution. Cleansing here was a godly ritual. And when Protestant crowds assaulted, mocked, or killed persons, the preferred targets were priests as the essential producers of defilement, all the worse for their spurious claims to purity. For Catholics, with a different sense of the body social and religious and its internal links, all heretics were contaminating in their persons, rebels against God, a scandal in his eyes. Effacing their presence was a godly act. Telling evidence for this contrast were the targets favoured for extravagant rites of cleansing, the Protestants multiplying ways to show their contempt.
for Catholic holy objects (rubbing boots with baptismal oil; shitting in holy-water basins), the Catholics to show their contempt for the dead bodies of heretics, by mutilation and ghoulish display.

In this specific contrast, I was to some extent doing a version of Weberian ‘ideal types’. Not only were there overlaps and similarities in behaviour, as I noted, but also any individual Protestant or Catholic participant might have distinctive sentiments or grudges of his or her own. This is inevitably the case in describing group behaviour. But two of my goals in ‘The Rites of Violence’ called for such description: to take as seriously as sixteenth-century Catholics and Protestants did their differing locations of and relations to the sacred, and to see how this played out in their violent conduct; and (using a phrase from a sociological study of contemporary violence) to show the ‘conditions for guilt-free massacre’. A key transformation effected through these rituals and beliefs was the dehumanizing of victims, at least for a time: they were ‘vermin’ to be stamped out, ‘devils’ to be destroyed. These dehumanizing mechanisms, found in some form in both Catholic and Protestant moments of violence, were among the most important insights I acquired from the whole quest.

I concluded my essay insisting that ‘the rites of violence are not the rights of violence in any absolute sense’. Giving mindedness and shape to extreme violence incorporates it more readily into the range of human behaviour and offers us a chance to understand it and think what to do about it.

IV

‘The Rites of Violence’ was first published in Past and Present in 1973, and in the next years I read with great absorption studies—including some by contributors to this volume—which took the story of violence and response to religious cleavage in important new directions. Here I will point briefly to three approaches, two giving different structure and frame to the question of violence, the third asking a different question.

Denis Crouzet’s magisterial Les Guerriers de Dieu. La violence au temps des troubles de religion (vers 1525–vers 1610), published in 1990, made violence the central thread in his narrative of religious innovation and conflict in sixteenth-century France. Considering religious violence and religious/political violence in all its forms, from the street riot to military operation to assassination, the book follows the changes in mood, religious thought, and

action of Catholics and Protestants throughout the century. Among many contributions, the picture of mood and mentality emerging from *Les Guerriers de Dieu* is especially illuminating: the society breathes in and out with expectation and fear of the Last Days, of which the prophetic signs are everywhere. Transformative hope alternates with penitential guilt depending on the advance or retreat of the Protestant or Catholic cause. Crouzet contrasts the desacralizing iconoclastic violence of the Protestants with the assaults of Catholics, inflated with mystical sentiment, on heretical bodies; but he also shows that eschatological excitement cuts across religious lines. It is not just the property of radical religious groups, but can grip a whole society.

David Nirenberg’s *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (1996) reframed persuasively the long-term history of ‘tolerance’ and ‘intolerance’ in Christian Aragon and southern France through closely observed events of violence, which he compared in their targets (Jews, Muslims, lepers, prostitutes), geographical location, and timing. The interests and beliefs invested in different episodes were surprisingly varied and complex. Local politics generated factions supporting violence and factions opposing it; both must be examined. The systemic character of violence emerged dramatically in the yearly Holy Week stoning of the Jewish quarter by young clerics and students. With an ancient ritual structure, timed to follow the celebration of the Passion of Christ, the violence was a condition for the coexistence of Christians and Jews: it reaffirmed the boundary between the two groups, reminding everyone of the sufferance and dangers under which the Jewish minority must live in a Christian land.

If wide frames and comparisons brought new insight into the moods, meaning, and social dynamics of violence, studies focused on one locality also deepened understanding. Barbara Diefendorf’s ‘Prologue to a Massacre: Popular Unrest in Paris, 1557–1572’ asked what could have led the Catholic majority of Paris to fall upon the Protestant minority within its walls in ‘a citywide orgy of violence’ at Saint Bartholomew’s day, 1572. She answered this question with a sensitively chosen sequence of events over a fifteen-year period, which enhanced in waves the feelings of religious hatred and fear and a Catholic desire for vengeance. This explosive emotional economy was

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16 Nirenberg, *Communities*, ch. 7.

centrally fed by religious events: Protestant desecration at the church of Saint Médard or even permitted preaching in a private house enraged Catholics at a given moment. Short-lived royal edicts of pacification and efforts of the city authorities to protect Protestants from mob violence and thus to keep order in the town were regarded as betrayal by the Catholic populace. (Nirenberg found similar crowd hostility toward Catholic authorities trying to put a stop to the Holy Week stoning of Jews in Girona; in both instances we see the kind of situation in which crowds believe the magistrate has failed them and they must righteously take action). Along the way ‘the climate of fear’ in Paris was darkened by other events, such as the high price of grain in 1565–6.

Diefendorf’s sequential narrative builds to late 1571, to the disorders around the authorities’ removal of the cross of Gastines, which had been erected by Catholics on the site of the demolished house of an executed Huguenot to symbolize the destruction of heresy. The removal incited attacks on the authorities’ agents and Catholic stoning, pillaging and burning of Protestant houses. Eight months later, ‘tensions rose to a fever pitch’ with anger at the forthcoming marriage of the Protestant prince Henry of Navarre and the Catholic princess Marguerite, and with the fear of Protestant revenge for the murder of Admiral Coligny. Diefendorf concludes with a wise remark about royal responsibility for the mass murders of August 1572. Whatever was hatched at the late-night meeting of Catherine de Medici, Charles IX, and the Prévôt des marchands on Saint Bartholomew’s eve, ‘we can . . . scarcely avoid the conclusion that anyone in a position of responsibility at the moment would have known, or should have known, that the sound of the tocsin in the night would touch off massacre’.18

Narrative sequence, effect, and political interests also played a role in Allan Tulchin’s account of the Michelade of Nîmes in 1567, which brought other valuable perspectives as well.19 Unlike Paris, the Protestant movement of Nîmes was large and powerful and had won control of that city from late 1561 to 1563 by political means and without an armed uprising. Most of the city councillors and royal judicial officers had converted to the Reformed religion, and with support from the menu peuple had been able to rid Nîmes of the Mass. Then in 1564 to 1567, through royal intervention, the minority Catholic party was gradually restored to power, the clergy returned, and the Mass was performed once again in the churches that had for a time resounded with Protestant psalms. At the end of September 1567, as part of a planned uprising of Protestants throughout France on St. Michael’s day, the Reformed

18 Diefendorf, ‘Prologue to a Massacre’, 1091.
leaders of Nîmes formed ‘a provisional governing committee’, known as *les Messieurs*, and organized companies of the city’s faithful to march through the streets and round up and imprison Catholic suspects. During the night of 30 September, *les Messieurs* ordered their soldiers to take more than a hundred of the prisoners to the courtyard of the bishop’s palace, murder them, and dump their bodies down a well.20

‘The Michelade shows’, says Tulchin, ‘that Protestants could be just as violent as Catholics’; in this regard he sees it as a counter-example to ‘The Rites of Violence’, whose argument in his view (though not in mine) is ‘that sixteenth-century French Protestants were less violent or practiced different forms of violence than Catholics’.21 In fact, various forms of ritual violence were described in Tulchin’s richly documented study, all of them ordered by *les Messieurs*: every Catholic church in the town was razed, except one saved as a site for making gunpowder; every scrap of church furnishing burned.

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21 Tulchin, ‘Michelade’, 2, 34. ‘The Rites of Violence’ was not about ‘French Protestants’ and ‘Catholics’ in general, but about the behaviour of Protestant and Catholic *crowds* during riots; there might well be wider implications for my findings for other settings, but I explicitly tried to exclude the behaviour of soldiers or militias acting under command and formally government-sponsored assault because I wanted to explore issues of popular legitimation. The essay’s purpose was not primarily quantitative—to assess more violence here, less violence there, but was rather to find semiotic typologies, characteristic performances in the religious violence of crowds, and, as suggested in my summary here, some of these were similar in the two religious groups, some different. Tulchin says ‘Davis’s interpretation cautiously endorses the Calvinist *Histoire ecclésiastique*, whose authors wrote that ‘those of the Reformed Religion made war only on images and altars, which do not bleed, while those of the Roman religion spilled blood with every kind of cruelty’’ (33). I did, indeed, cite that quotation, but immediately added, ‘Though there is some truth in this distinction, Protestant rioters did in fact kill and injure people, and not merely in self-defense; and Catholic rioters did destroy religious property’. After explicating the Protestant attention to religious objects because of the danger of defilement, I turned to a contrast between the victims of Protestant and Catholic crowds, pointing out that Protestant targets were most often priests, monks, and friars ‘usually unarmed . . . [but that] did not make them any less harmful in Protestant eyes, or any more immune from the wrath of God’. I went on to say that ‘lay people were sometimes attacked by Protestant crowds’ and gave examples of stoning and murder of lay people, then concluded ‘there is nothing that quite resembles the style and extent of the slaughter of the 1572 massacres’. ‘The Rites of Violence’, in *Society and Culture*, 173–5.

Authors must give leeway to their readers, but my comment here is intended to discourage a simple social science reading of my essay (‘Protestants smash, Catholics kill’) and encourage an anthropological and semiotic one.
murdered Catholics were not just dumped in the streets, but thrown in the water of the bishop’s own well.

In particular, Tulchin’s analysis of the Michelade offered new understanding of Protestants as killers. Murders by Protestant crowds had figured in my ‘The Rites of Violence’, if not as frequent a form of violence as with Catholic crowds, but I had been able to assign meaning only to the privileged Protestant attacks on and killing of priests. In the Michelade, half the known victims slain were clerics, and half were laymen. The killings were done not at the initiative of a street crowd, but at the order of les Messieurs, and thus reveal an important feature of Protestant mentality in a situation of power. One Protestant captain of Nîmes saw the killings as revenge, ‘because the papists did the same thing throughout the kingdom of France’, but Tulchin finds a deeper explanation in a sense of political entitlement among the Nîmes Protestant elite. The conviction that they should rule came not only from their desire for religious restoration, but from their linking of political and religious reform in the remarkable cahier de doléances they had submitted to the Estates-General in 1561 and from their previous leadership in the city. ‘The Protestants of Nîmes felt deprived of what they saw as their right to rule’ and they resented, indeed hated the pretensions of Catholic usurpers. Catholicism must not be allowed to revive: its leaders must be slain, its buildings demolished. In the words of one of the Messieurs, ‘The nests must be destroyed, so that the birds will not return’.

The Nîmes example thus shows the entwining of religious and political `m motives’ (as Tulchin says) in religious massacre, or as we might also put it, a chilling fear both of pollution and of powerlessness. The Michelade yields not a generalization about power and mass murder, but a case whose detailed configuration provides important questions to ask about analogous seizures of power.

V

Another way of approaching religious violence is to turn the subject upside down and ask what people do to avoid it: what were the practices that early modern Catholics and Protestants sometimes undertook so as to live side by side during the precarious regime of the Edict of Nantes and even during the Wars of Religion that preceded it? Among my moving memories here is of the late Elisabeth Labrousse telling me of Protestants and Catholics in early


23 Tulchin, ‘Michelade’, 14, 29–33.
seventeenth-century Languedoc who accommodated to the differing rhythms of their ceremonial lives in a neighbourly fashion. Then in 1994, I heard Penny Roberts’s electrifying talk, ‘Huguenottes and bigottes. Women and Confessional Identity in Sixteenth-Century France’, in which she gave examples of strategies of coexistence and called for their further study. Not long before, Gregory Hanlon had published an ethnographic study of coexistence in Layrac, a small Gascon town whose Protestant majority gradually dwindled over the course of the seventeenth century. Local identity was more important than confessional loyalty, and the townspeople crafted institutions to assure balance in the town’s political life, and served as godparents for each other’s children across religious lines. Intermarriage was not uncommon, and if the wife converted to her spouse’s religion for the event, she was able to return as a widow to her own faith. Recent doctoral dissertations on Saumur and Loudun have searched the archives for evidence on coexistence: economic life was found to be an area for open transaction, for instance, while intermarriage was charged and infrequent.

Keith Luria has given important new perspective to these social histories by his use of the symbolic notion of boundaries. Religious identities in France were partly formed and changed by relations across boundaries: some were porous, permeable, as in trade or neighbourly exchange; some were negotiated, as in agreements about the use of space and time for religious worship; some were sharp, clear (the kind I link with fears of pollution), initiated perhaps internally by both confessions for better self-definition, but in seventeenth-century France increasingly used by the Catholic monarchy.

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24 Penny Roberts’s paper was delivered at the Women’s History Workshop held at the University of Warwick in October 1994 and will be published in the volume of Hommages in memory of Thierry Wanegffelen. The late Thierry Wanegffelen himself made important contributions to the study of strategies of coexistence, as in his book Ni Rome ni Genève: des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIe siècle (Paris, 1997).


and clergy to exclude Protestants. The historical anthropology of Luria’s *Sacred Boundaries* revealed the possibilities of and constraints on coexistence.

Benjamin Kaplan has now extended the geographical range of this story of accommodation across Europe. Local populations found ingenious ways to get around, say, the Religious Peace of Augsburg, which permitted only one confession in a polity: churches were built just across a political boundary, on-the-spot authorities looking the other way as their citizens walked to worship. Catholic services in private dwellings or in embassy chapels in the Protestant Netherlands were another arrangement. Kaplan insists that such practices, ‘limited, tension-ridden, and discriminatory’ though they were, are as much a part of the history of tolerance as the philosophical arguments of the Enlightenment. Indeed, Stuart Schwartz has found in the Iberian world on both sides of the Atlantic a folk philosophy of tolerance, extending beyond Christians to Jews and Muslims. In the words of a peasant woman of Aranda in 1488, ‘the good Jew would be saved and the good Moor, in his law, and why else had God made them?’ To be sure, Schwartz found these affirmations in the records of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, which indicates how the road to tolerance is strewn with land-mines.

VI

In the years just after publishing ‘The Rites of Violence’, I tried to fulfil the anthropological programme behind that essay in regard to the location of the sacred—though here drawing implications for city life and commerce rather than for violence. In ‘The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon’ (1981), I conceived of Protestantism and Catholicism as two ‘languages’, sharing some vocabulary and metaphors, differing strongly in others, yet both adequate to certain needs of urban life. Catholic sacred space had hot spots and enclosures, marked by processions, relics, and holy ritual: the bounds of the city and the parishes, church buildings, special places on or along the Rhône and Saône. Protestant urban space was more uniform and made holy by the usage to which it was put: any place was available for holy action, so long as the believers attended it. Sacred or liturgical time—the rhythm of festivals and holy days—contrasted in a similar way. Both

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28 Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 358 and Part II, for the various ‘Arrangements’ Europeans worked out to try to avoid violence.


Protestantism and Catholicism used the human body as a metaphor for conceiving human alliance, but the Catholic visualized especially the organic connections in the body social—as in the child nourished in the womb of Mother Church—while the Protestants imaged especially the communication network of nerves and ligaments.

In writing 'The Sacred and the Body Social', I hoped in part to reformulate two theories of Max Weber. Rather than his dichotomy of a Protestant transcendent God as against a desacralized world, I suggested a sacred presence in the Protestant world through communication and usages. Rather than his evolutionary model of Protestantism as the path toward capitalist acquisition and modernity, I suggested features of Catholic sensibility that could expand and contract with the rhythms of capitalist commercial enterprise. As I had tried to show a common engagement in violent performance by Catholic and Protestant crowds, with certain differences in identifying the sources for and cleansing pollution, so here I tried to show a common engagement in urban and commercial life, with certain differences yielding alternate paths to modernity. The location of the sacred was important in both instances.

The late 1960s and 1970s were also the years of the women’s movement, or ‘second-wave feminism’, as it came to be called, and I was busy teaching courses and trying to conceptualize issues in the history of women and gender. The relation of gender to violence—to the perpetration of violence in warfare, uprisings, protest movements, and personal or family life—was especially perplexing. Some of the early feminist literature tended to idealize women as peacemakers and to see them only as victims of violence. Such a view, devoted to the cause of women though it was, offered little challenge to the nineteenth-century split between the domestic female and the public male. In the words of a republican opponent of the women wishing to bear arms for the French Revolution, ‘We must not overthrow the order of nature. Nature has not destined women to kill; their delicate hands were not made to handle steel or to raise deadly pikes’.31

I addressed these questions in essays of the 1970s, especially in ‘Women on Top’ and ‘Men, Women and Violence: Some Reflections on Equality’.32 In the


late medieval and sixteenth-century view of things, both men and women had a capacity for violence: the male humours led to pride, the female humours to anger, and both of these vices were spurs to violence. On the whole, the male temperament was thought more capable of generating violence of an ethical or socially approved kind: the just war or the honourable duel. Women’s violence, lit by disobedience and vindictiveness, would more likely lead to more unpleasant disturbance. There were exceptions, to be sure: a biblical Judith, who could rise up and save her people by slaying the drunken general Holofernes; the historical Jeanne d’Arc, leading the French army to righteous battle against the English. Even the poet Christine de Pizan in her City of Ladies was of two minds about women and violence: on the one hand, she said that women’s weak body ‘agreeably excused [them] by default, in so much that they do not do the horrible cruelties and wrongs done to the world by men because of strength’; on the other hand, she described women who had used their courage and strength in great conquests.33 Her last poem was dedicated to Jeanne d’Arc.

Within this frame, women turned to violence when they wished to, but used loopholes or symbols or festive practices drawn from the cultural system to legitimate or facilitate their actions. Some young women ran off to join European armies dressed as men as one might do at carnival. Mademoiselle de Montpensier leading troops openly against the king during the Fronde was an unusual figure. (It was these practices of inversion that the women soldiers of the French Revolution were trying in vain to replace). The significant participation of women in street protests, including religious riots, drew its legitimation from the belief that women as mothers or as oppressed poor or as simple Christian believers in a hierarchical society could sometimes reverse the order of things, rise up to tell the truth and right wrongs. On the other hand, the allegedly weak brains and poor emotional control of women could provide excuses for uprisings after the fact: women were less ‘responsible’ than men and could not be held as accountable as men by the authorities.34

34 Among many fine studies of women and violence published since the 1970s, those concerning the early period include Darlene Gay Levy, Harriet B. Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson (eds), Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795. Selected Documents Translated with Notes and Commentary (Chicago, 1980); Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol, The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe (Houndmills, 1989); Arlette Farge, La vie fragile: violence, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1986); Cécile Dauphin and Arlette Farge (eds), De la violence et des femmes (Paris, 1997);
VII

The 1980s were for me a period of interest in storytelling, that is, in finding out how people told stories about themselves and the events around them and in using such literary evidence as a path to wider understanding of social values and cultural sensibilities. If I started with an analysis of the rhetoric of Judge Jean de Coras’s account of Arnaud du Tilh’s ‘prodigious’ imposture of Martin Guerre, I soon embarked on the stories people told of murder, that is, of a capital criminal crime for which they hoped to win a royal pardon.\(^{35}\)

In each case a homicide had to be narrated in the words of the perpetrator, genuine and colloquial enough so that he or she could repeat them convincingly one day before a judge. The story had to be plausible enough to be attested to before the judge by neighbours or acquaintances of the person seeking pardon. But it also had to be shaped to the legal requirements for a pardon, otherwise this would never be signed by the king’s chancellor. The violence of murder was not exactly tamed in the telling, but it could not be described as planned or premeditated, but only as done on the spur of the moment in self-defence, and/or hot anger, or by accident. An honourable duel between two gentlemen had to be recast for the king’s official ears as a surge of sudden anger. Village lads who had killed in defence of their honour and repute had to modify their stories in appropriate ways. A long-battered wife could not aim to kill a violent husband; he had to fall on her knife as she was cleaning a chicken for his dinner.

Pardon tales differ from accounts of religious riots published by Catholics and Protestants in their authorship and in their self-presentation. A pardon tale is a collaborative venture between a royal notary and a person, whether an unlettered villager or a country gentleman; descriptions of religious uprisings incorporate popular voices—say, in the last letters of Protestant martyrs smuggled out from prison and reproduced in Jean Crespin’s *Livre des Martyrs*, or in the cries, slogans, and quotations incorporated into the pamphlet literature—but authorial control was in the hands of educated and experienced writers. Further, the rules for a pardon plea obliged supplicants to conceal or downplay certain facts about themselves, such as their concern for reputation and esteem or their righteous indignation at abuse, whereas descriptions of religious riots and massacres allowed authors to fully develop their own religious values.

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Nonetheless, the genres resemble each other when it comes to issues of festivity and religion. As religious riots clustered around holy days, liturgical events, and even Mardi Gras, so a significant number of individual homicides are set on days of holiness or festivity, which the pardon tales make intrinsic to the violent action. A young baker knifes a young toolmaker in the town of Senlis on Corpus Christi day 1530: the baker had been playing the crucified Jesus in the theatrical performance to mark the day’s sanctity. The two men exchanged insults about the state of each other’s genitals, and the baker found the toolmaker’s ‘dishonest words’ not only insulting to him but ‘to our Lord Jesus Christ and the holiness of the day’. In 1567 in Novaro, a Protestant officer for the Queen of Navarre killed a turbulent Catholic school teacher, who was also a leader of popular Catholic festivity. Though the killing took place close to Easter and was, the officer claimed, in line of duty, he began his story weeks before at Mardi Gras when his victim, known as Captain Shovelpurse (Pellebourse), led a transvestite carnival through the streets of the town.36

VIII

Exploring the representation of violence has been developed in important ways in recent years by such works as Shahid Amin’s Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992 (1995) and Philip Benedict’s Graphic History: The Wars, Massacres and Troubles of Tortorel and Perrissin (2007). In the former, Amin compared many accounts of an anti-police riot that took place in the small North Indian market town of Chauri Chaura in 1922.37 Police had fired into a crowd of Gandhian volunteers who were urging boycott of British products and had killed three persons. Whereupon the volunteers had attacked the police, finally pushing them into the police station, setting it afire, and burning twenty-three men to death. Nineteen men were executed as leaders of the riot; 110 more were condemned to life imprisonment. Amin explored many tellings and retellings of these events: the trial records, especially that of a young farmer who testified against his fellow rioters; the initial condemnation and exclusion of the rioters by Gandhi for their violence and their later reincorporation into the nationalist narrative; and especially the memories of old people who had lived through the events, relatives of condemned rioters or slain policemen. Here violence has another life after the historical happening: it lives in contested and changing accounts and memories, which leave their mark on identity and on the possibilities for hostility or reconciliation in the future.

36 Ibid., 30–1, 33–4.
Philip Benedict’s multi-layered study of the historical print series by Jean Perrissin, Jacques Tortorel, and two other artists also reveals new dimensions to the place of violence in the thought and imagination of sixteenth-century people. The *Forty Tableaux or divers memorable histories concerning the wars, massacres, and troubles that have occurred in France in these last years* was published in Geneva in 1569–70 and was, as Benedict shows us, an innovative venture in depicting recent historical information and news in graphic form; a Protestant vision of events, but with some balance to it; and a commercial enterprise reaching an international readership, even beyond the Reformed fold (it appeared in French, German, Italian, and Latin, and Benedict traces a wide ownership and reuse of the *Tableaux*). Violent actions of various kinds constitute the most important news: the Estates General and Colloquy of Poissy of 1561 and the Peace Treaty of 1563 were outnumbered by scenes of battle, siege, execution, and popular massacre.

The popular massacres—Cahors, Vassy, Sens, and Tours—are all perpetrated by Catholics against Protestants, but three scenes of Protestant town seizures portray vindictive and excessive bloodshed: Valence, Montbrison and, most dramatically, the Michelade of Nîmes. (Protestant iconoclasm is not depicted, however; it was left to Catholic artists to portray it with vehemence in their depiction of Protestant ‘crimes’ and ‘cruelties’). Benedict gives us the textual sources used by Perrissin and Tortorel for their *Tableaux* and suggests the visual traditions from which they drew: for the popular massacre scenes, paintings of the Massacre of the Innocents and Antoine Charon’s *Massacre of the Triumvirs* are among the influences. The early generations of readers of the *Forty Tableaux* must have often witnessed scenes like those portrayed by the Protestant artists. We may wonder whether the prints left an impression on their memories and imagination, as television and film do today on our own expectation of what violence looks like.

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39 Pictures of Protestant iconoclasm are found in the manuscript *De tristibus galliae* (1567), Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, Fonds ancien, MS 156 (reproduced in Davis, ‘Sacred and the Body Social’, 56, fig. 3); and in Richard Verstegen, *Theatrum crudelitatum haereticorum nostril temporis* (Antwerp: A. Hubert, 1588), ‘Horribilia scelerata ab Huguenotis in Gallijs perpetrata’ (reproduced in Davis, ‘The Rites of Violence’, in *Society and Culture*, 187, fig. 17). The classic treatment of this subject is by David Freedberg, *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands* (New York, 1988).

My own path in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century took me to a different site from which to write about religious violence. In my scholarship, I had been looking at processes of social and cultural exchange, of cultural crossings and mixtures, along with my long-term interest in the polarities of domination and resistance and cultural contrasts and choices. During the mid-1990s, the surge of identity politics worldwide, with its pressure for sharp boundaries and exclusive loyalties, increased my sense of urgency in exploring porous borderlands and cultural entanglements. Then came the Gulf War, the mass murders of 9/11, and the ensuing upsurge of hatred, fear, and war.

Such were the intellectual and political contexts for my writing a book about the man Europeans called Leo Africanus, known to himself as Hasan ibn Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Gharnati al-Fasi. Diplomat for the sultan of Fez and observant traveller, al-Wazzan was kidnapped by Christian pirates and delivered to Pope Leo X in 1518. For several years, he remained in Italy, living outwardly as a Christian, and writing books for Christian Europeans about the lands, peoples, and learning that he had known since boyhood: Africa, the theology and law of Islam, Arabic poetry, and more. In 1527 he returned to North Africa and to Islam, leaving several manuscripts in Italian and Latin behind him, one of which, *The Description of Africa*, was to become a learned best-seller.

Al-Wazzan’s worlds were infused with violence, much of it connected with religion. From North Africa, he heard with approval of the Sunni Sultan Selim’s conquest of the Shia Safavid ruler of Persia, and then witnessed himself the sack of Cairo by Selim’s Ottoman troops. In Morocco, he fought at his sultan’s side against the Portuguese assaults on the Abode of Islam. On both sides of the Mediterranean, he heard eschatological preaching which called for attacks against the infidels and which identified world conquerors—Charles V or Selim or his successor Suleiman—who must lead the holy war and usher in the Golden Age.

*Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*, as I called the study, described two processes which may be pertinent to the dialogue in this present book. First were the cultural strategies that al-Wazzan drew upon or developed in Italy to survive as a Christian and a Muslim simultaneously—not just as an ‘outward’ Christian and ‘inward’ Muslim, but more interestingly as a man with a sustained commitment to Islam but entangled with and influenced by certain features of Christian learning (*not* belief in the

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divinity of Jesus, but certain approaches to sacred texts). These strategies included finding equivalences between the religions through the experience of translation and scholarly collaboration, and practices of distancing and maintaining ambiguity so as to keep some areas of belief safely apart. (Some of these individual strategies are similar to the ‘practices of tolerance’ described by Benjamin Kaplan and the adage ‘all can be saved’ unearthed by Stuart Schwartz).

Al-Wazzan’s other accomplishment was one of writing: the creation of texts—especially the great Africa book—which were astonishingly free from the religious polemic and partisanship characteristic of almost all writing of his day. In a sense his circumstances demanded this tone: he was writing his manuscripts in a Christian land and yet, as he said toward the end of the Africa book, he planned to return one day ‘safe and sound’ to North Africa. He had to write with enough discretion and balance so as not to offend powerful Christian masters and yet to be excusable one day to powerful Muslims who might learn of the manuscript.

But the tone of the Africa book also projects a model state of mind: battles between Christians and Muslims, with a heavy toll in death and enslavement, described without taking sides; references to the Prophet, Muslim holy men, and Islamic learning that are descriptive, sometimes favourable, sometimes not, but free of the invective of the ordinary Christian account and of the litany of praise always found in Arabic rhetoric. To be sure, al-Wazzan condemns the Shia ‘heresy’ and ridicules certain popular practices among Muslims, but for contemporary European readers this gave greater authority to his picture of the true spirit of Islam.

Al-Wazzan’s Africa book did not prevent any religious wars, especially in its published versions, to which European translators and editors added some Christian polemic; but the manuscript still stands as a testimony to the creation of and legitimation for communication across a religious divide, an alternative to bloody confrontation.

As I conclude this reminiscence and reflection on New Year’s Day 2010, news comes in from many lands of violence on holy days and at holy sites, and eschatological visions are afloat, sanctioning land seizure and slaughter. But the internet hums, too, with practices of peace and rituals of rebuilding. The essays by my colleagues in this volume will give us new understanding of the mixed and complicated story of the past and the possibilities for the future.