CHAPTER 1

Material Religion, Conflict, and Violence

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This volume explores relations between materiality, conflict, and religion. Although connections between religion and materiality, and between conflict and religion are currently widely studied in academia, the intersection between religion, conflict, *and* materiality remains underexplored. This is, as we will show in this introduction, not surprising. Scholarly understandings of conflict are often focused on political, historical, and socio-psychological models that tend to obscure how perspectives on materiality may contribute to efforts to comprehend conflict. We seek to foreground relations between materiality, conflict, and violence by using insights from different academic fields like religious studies, conflict studies, and anthropology. Doing so, we argue, creates possibilities to understand how things matter in religion-related conflict, what they do, and how they contribute to how people understand the causes, dynamics, and effects of violent conflict. As such, this volume addresses the following key questions: How do *religious actors* engage and mobilize 'things' to physically and symbolically position themselves in conflict situations? What role do sensational experiences of *violence* have in religion-related violent conflict and in processes of reconciliation? How do things mediate *'presence'* of divinity/ies, spirits, powers within conflict situations? And finally: how do things contribute to religious infrastructures that play a role in violence and conflict dynamics?

Building on insights developed in different academic fields, particularly the so-called 'material turn' in religious studies, and research on the role of religion in violent conflict, this introduction sets the stage for the development of conceptual and methodological directions in the study of religion-related violent conflict. Specifically, we aim to discuss the questions introduced above by focusing on two ways in which the intersection between materiality, religion, and (violent) conflict can be understood, namely (1) how conflicts arise around specific things that symbolize what particular religious communities hold 'dear' and 'special' and/or that mediate divine presence, and (2) how 'religious infrastructures' – understood as the material arrangements on which (religious) practices of particular religious communities depend – are shaped by, and simultaneously affect conflict and violence.

In this introductory chapter, we will first highlight how this volume builds on insights developed within research on religion and conflict on the one hand, and on the 'material turn' in religious studies on the other, and explain how this volume contributes to these two different fields of research. Second, we clarify how materiality provides a productive methodological entry point to the study of conflict and violence. Third, we explain how certain objects can function as 'things of conflict' in diverse settings that are characterized by (violent) conflict. And finally, we further specify and explain two ways in which the role of material religion in (violent) conflict can be understood.

1   Things Missing

In this volume, we take inspiration from the two different academic fields we mentioned above: material religion and conflict studies. These research fields strongly intertwine notions from different disciplines from the humanities and social sciences. Still, these fields rarely explicitly engage with one another (see also Van Liere 2020b). Conflict studies often uses specialized analytical terms to focus on (discourses of) violence, exclusion and marginalization, identity-formations, authority structures, and – most conspicuously – conflict actors such as states, institutions, and insurgent groups. Although some studies highlight the roles that religion plays in conflict settings, these studies less often focus on the materiality of both (violent) conflict *and* religion. By contrast, the 'material turn' within religious studies has produced only few studies that include some reflections on the relation between materiality, religion, and violence (Oosterbaan 2005; Larkin 2014; Ibrahim 2017; Fallon 2017).

Studies of conflict that include 'religion' are scattered across many disciplines. Paul Powers (2021) distinguishes between maximalist and minimalist perspectives (21–40) on the role of religion in conflict and violence. 'Maximalist' studies take religion as a source of world-views legitimating violence. Often, certain doctrinal and social traits ascribed to religion are identified and used to explain why intolerance and violence are justified within religious traditions. For example, Regina Schwartz's classic and popular study on monotheism (1997) in which monotheism is held responsible for the sharp distinction between true and false religion (Schwartz 1997),[1] Mark Juergensmeyer's

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1   See also Walter and Assmann 2005; Assmann 2008, 106–27; Assmann 2009; Sloterdijk 2009; Beck 2010, 44; Chirot 2012, 4–5.

influential studies on 'cosmic warfare' (2000; 2018; 2020) and Hector Avalos's elaboration on religions as sources of unnecessary scarcities that are based on illusory criteria (2013) share a robust focus on religious practices of intolerance and violence as resulting from essential religious traits. Outside the scholarly fields that focus on religion, researchers sometimes understand religion on the basis of modernist or secularist aversions and stress the anti-individualist authoritative traits and moral dualism that supposedly characterize religion (see for example Galtung 1994; Volkan 2004, 48–9; Fiske and Rai 2015, 50–7, 89–91, 107–31).

By contrast, minimalist approaches nuance the role of religion by arguing that most violence is not about religion but about preservation, socio-political and economic interests, or historical trauma. For example, in a landmark study William Cavanaugh (2009) argues that discourses on 'religious violence' in the West often contain sharp ideas about the distinction between religion and the secular state which leads to an overemphasis on violence perpetrated by 'religious' actors that is legitimized by particular religious beliefs, and an ignorance of state violence or nationalist violence as sources responsible for massive slaughter (see also Palaver, Rudolph and Regensburger 2016). Others approach the role of religion in violent conflict not by nuancing the impact of religious ideas and motives on conflict practices, but by pointing out that religion 'adds to' rather than 'causes' conflict. For example, Stuart Wright contends that it is important "to understand how religion can effectively fuel violence and exacerbate hostilities by invoking divine imprimatur on what are essentially ethnic, tribal, or political conflicts" (Wright, 2009, 17). Other approaches take their entry point not so much in religion or politics but in global and local contexts to understand how world-views, politics, social relations, and established symbolic registers work and how they contribute to conflict and violence (Appleby 2000; Wellman and Tokuna 2004; Wellman 2007). In 2006, religion scholars Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres published a volume on (religious) memorializations of violence linked to sites like Auschwitz, Medjugorje, and Ground Zero. Although the book contains fascinating case-studies, the focus is predominantly on religion, politics, and memory. What 'sites', and things related to these sites precisely contribute to religious modes of the memorialization of conflict is hardly addressed and needs to be explored more deeply.

The enormous increase of terrorism studies (often with vague understandings of religion, see Gunning and Jackson 2011; Francis 2016; Nanninga 2017) has at least partly dominated scholarly conversations in the last two decades, leading to diminished attention for more general studies on religion and conflict. As a result, topics such as radical belief, radicalization, religious militia,

jihadi groups, and human rights violations have become leading.[2] One significant line in these studies is the attention for authority structures. In such studies, some scholars trace a lineage of violence back to scriptural sources and authoritative hermeneutical traditions to explain current practices of believers. The term 'fundamentalism', which held a central place in scholarly and public debates at the beginning of this century, was predominantly built around such notions of scriptural authority, religious ideas and doctrine, and leadership in uncertain secular times (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003, 23–89; Bruce 2008; Herriot 2009, 148–51; Juergensmeyer 2008, 17–38). In most of these studies, materiality is only considered by implication. If things are addressed, it is because they are attacked, destroyed, or erected *because of* socio-religious tensions or traumatic pasts. Materiality rarely has a place in the analysis of religious conflict, fundamentalism, and terrorism. More often, transcendent themes such as 'cosmic war', the central theme in Mark Juergensmeyer's analyses (2008; 2018; 2020), an ontological dualism between good and evil (Ellens 2007) or the afterlife as (material) reward (Hoffman 2002, 33) are used in relation to peoples' willingness to commit violence under circumstances they consider as unjust or unreal. No doubt, these can be valuable perspectives, but they are also rather mentalistic approaches that understand religious identities one-sidedly formed by as theologized mindsets of religious traditions constructed around specific ideas and symbols and responding to current (political) topics that are perceived as threats.

In studies on genocide, attention for religion is predominantly focused on the reification of religion-based group differences, the content of beliefs (theologies), texts, or on the role of religious institutions (see for example the volume edited by Jacobs 2009). This special attention for religion in genocidal contexts as a cause or motive runs the danger of isolating, decontextualizing, and even reifying 'religion' as a causal element of mass death, but also of losing track of the complex discursive and material structures of genocide. Some detailed studies on genocide as complex case-studies, however, pay more attention to the complexity of religion as worldview, resonance, and community. Alexander Hinton's study on the cultural and religious dimensions of the Cambodian genocide (2005), for example, offers an interesting perspective on a genocidal infrastructure that resonates with Buddhist beliefs, patronage structures, and cultural models of social organization and revenge.

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2 For a critical discussion of the ways in which a binary distinction between 'moderate' and 'radical' Muslims currently informs popular and policy-oriented understandings of Islam, see Van Es, Ter Laan, and Meinema 2021. For a critical assessment of the development of terrorism studies in the US, see Mills and Miller 2017.

In a similar vein, Vlekoslav Perica's detailed study (2002) on the role of religion and nationalism in Yugoslavia and during the Balkan War has keen interest in the impact of entanglements of discourses and religious identity on religious difference and geographical places like burial sites and mass graves (110, 118, 120, 152–4). But here too, the material dimensions of violence are addressed only by implication and a theoretical or methodological approach to study the role of things in conflict situations is not explicitly articulated. The materiality of weapons, death, or the dead body as trophy (see Larson 2014), the visual hierarchy of clothes, the impact of the destruction of religious symbols, the architecture and structure of concentration and destruction camps, but also the material visualization of group reifications, the erection and ritualized memorizations of mass violence in post-conflict situations, are all subjects that should be taken into account while studying genocide and genocidal structures. Breann Fallon's study on the 'fetishization' of the machete during the genocide in Rwanda (2017; 2020) may count as an exception and offers an interesting fresh material approach (see below).

2   Looking for Things

We thus see that a thorough analysis of materiality is often missing in the study of religion-related conflict. The study of *material religion*, by contrast, concentrates deeply on the role of materiality in the ways humans construct social relations and experience a 'beyond' or 'the divine'. Material religion scholars have studied the intimate interplay between materiality and meaning, often criticizing mentalistic interpretations of religion as situated in some "inner self" (Meyer 2015; Keller and Rubinstein 2017). A material religion approach takes "sensational operations of human bodies" and human interactions with various material media as the starting point for understanding religion (Plate 2014, 8; Meyer 2011). This means that smell, touch, vision, sound, all contribute to people's understanding of the world and to how people understand themselves and transcendental realities through sensed things. Birgit Meyer writes about "sensational forms" which she describes as "fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes" (Meyer 2011, 29–30). These forms are part of organized networks in which people act and through which people have a sense of community and a sense of immediacy. Form, Meyer asserts, is related to content, meaning, substance, and does not stand in opposition to it, because ideas and experiences are always mediated through material forms. Mate-

riality thus forms an important methodological entry point to study social life, because the construction of a sense of community always relies on the relations between physical human bodies, social practices, memories, and particular things. In the context of religion, sensational forms are complex socio-material hybrids that mediate ideas, presences, aesthetics, emotions, and epistemologies of immediacy. The term 'material form' combines form and senses in a non-duality of subject and thing. This means that the Kantian divide between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, the subjectivity of the 'I think' and the subjugation of what is thought to the categorical forms of the thinking subject is challenged by perspectives that focus on the interplay between form, senses, and content.

From this view, some studies on material religion have also focused on the ways in which objects may become 'things of conflict' in settings that are characterized by plurality. For example, in the edited volume *Taking Offense – Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*, Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Annemarie Korte (2018) explore how tensions and conflicts may arise around purportedly offensive images, which reveal conflicting sensibilities, value systems, and visual regimes of religious and non-religious groups in diverse societies. In other words, in diverse settings, particular images or visual performances may be considered offensive by one group, because they feature images or objects which usually play a different role – as cherished or rejected things – in the sensational forms of other (religious) groups (see also Van Es 2020). Thus, conflicts around allegedly offensive images often arise in socially and religiously diverse settings, in which various groups of people have different normative understandings about the ways in which people should relate to particular images or objects, or how images and objects can or should play a role in the mediation of divine 'presence'.

Scholars within the 'material turn' of religious studies, however, have less often focused on the materiality of violence *itself* and its impact on (religious) communities, on the ways in which religions manifest themselves materially in settings that are characterized by (violent) conflict, or on changing material infrastructures as a result of (violent) conflict. This may be the case, because various religious studies scholars who study religiously diverse settings, some with an emphasis on material religion, have warned that a focus on peace and conflict in religiously diverse settings may lead to one-dimensional analyses (Soares 2016, 676; Janson and Meyer 2016, 616). In studies with such a focus, 'peace' and 'conflict' are often used as uncritical terms which indicate differences *between* different religious groups, and which take religious boundaries for granted. Since this is indeed a weakness of some research on religion and conflict, we agree with this warning and argue that it is important to study how

religious boundaries are constantly drawn, contested, and negotiated within settings that are characterized by (memories of) conflict and violence. To do so, we feel that it is important to closely study the *material* aspects of religion and (violent) conflict in relation to which contestations around religious boundaries arise, because the ways in which social formations are 'imagined' (Anderson 2016) must become materialized through media in order to become tangible and experienced as 'real' (Meyer 2009). Before we will further reflect on different ways in which religion 'matters' in (violent) conflict, we will therefore explain why we think it is important to study conflict and violence from a material perspective.

3   Violence and Things

As argued above, the question of how materiality relates to conflict is not clearly addressed in most academic literature. Within conflict studies, conflicts are often understood in line with what Chris Mitchell formulated in 1981 as "any situation in which two or more 'parties' (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals" (17). Indeed, conflict is often understood as goal-oriented, and this might also be one of the reasons why materiality is not in the center of conflict-research as goals are often defined in non-material terms like justice, representation, inclusion, or recognition. Another reason why materiality is neglected in the study of conflict and violence might be related to sociological and philosophical perspectives on so-called epistemic, symbolic, and discursive violence. These understandings of violence as indirect and *nonphysical* have dominated academic discussions since the late 1960s when wide definitions of violence entered the academic arena of social sciences based on the writings of scholars such as Johan Galtung who introduced the term 'structural violence' (1969). Since the 1970s, the Bourdieuan concept of 'symbolic violence' gained popularity. With this term, Pierre Bourdieu coined a form of nonphysical violence that is always inherent to power differentials and exercised through often unconsciously accepted norms, relations, and duties. The term 'symbolic violence' has contributed deeply to the conflation of understandings of violence, power, discourse, and structure. Bourdieu's ideas had and still have a significant impact on racism studies, gender studies, and media studies. In these views, violence is often addressed without explicit consideration of materiality. These developments, although very important, have led to a blurring of conflict, power, representation, and violence. Nowadays, the term 'violence' is often used in such a broad manner across different disciplines within the

humanities, the social sciences, and in the media, that it is difficult to grasp its meaning (see Yates and Eckstrandt 2011, 1). Especially in studies working from post-structural perspectives, violence is understood in such a wide way that it loses especially its *material* significance and settles in human thinking, speaking, acting as an ever-present reality. Such views have understood violence not as a human possibility but rather as an omnipresent human reality (see Alexander 2012, 31–97). These understandings do not go without consequences. As Diane Enns (2012) has shown, these wide interpretations of violence have a deep and significant impact on how people understand and experience victimhood.

Taking this tradition seriously, Michel De Certeau discusses the interplay between discourse and violence and points to an important topic that interests us while writing about material religion and (violent) conflict. Whichever way we define violence, De Certeau claims, every definition "is inscribed in the place from which I speak of it" (De Certeau 1997, 29). The "place" in or by which one speaks and defines 'violence' is subject to one's standpoint and positionality (see also Talal Asad's comments on definitions as related to the interest of those doing the defining, Asad 2012, 37). De Certeau's focus is here on discourse and points to the impossibility to analyze and define violence without politicking it. However, such definitions also grant scholars the possibility not only to speak, but also to study the material aspects of the *place* from which she or he speaks, as a site. In *Religion and Violence*, Hent de Vries asks in a similar vein if we do "know, then, precisely where violence comes from, where it begins, resides, or ends, and what (or whom), exactly, it is directed at? Is it a (…) 'fact of life', even of 'spiritual life'?" The episteme of violence, whether to justify or speak against it, is always charged with the potentiality of (justifying) violence itself. De Vries asks rhetorically and almost ironically whether the silent individual gesture or the utopian end-state of nonviolence is the opposite of violence, and whether nonviolence is really nonviolent, "in the strict sense of the word?" (De Vries 2002, 137). While De Certeau, De Vries, and many other scholars (like Beatrice Hanssen 2000, Slavoj Žižek 2008, or Judith Butler 2007) discuss predominantly this intimacy of discourse and violence and – as a result – explore the vague and ever-shifting definitions and boundaries of violence, the question of conflict and violence related to objects, matter, things in networks and infrastructures is hardly addressed. Matter is often seen as part of discursive epistemologies and thus as always part of a wide socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious context. As a result, things run the danger to become liquid and fade into the background of conflictual discursive regimes. Things become vague, bodies become a category (or become mere statistics about casualties), sounds soft, and contrast, colors, shapes less important. At this point we need to clarify how we conceptualize

conflict and violence within this volume. We use the term 'violence' in a narrow sense to describe an infliction of physical harm that is directed against bodies and/or material objects. We use 'conflict' as a wider term, to describe any situation in which ideal social relations, as they are imagined by different social actors, are consciously or unconsciously disturbed (see below).

It is our conviction that more emphasis on the materiality of conflict situations, conflict dynamics, and conflict effects, could contribute to a sharper analysis of how, when, and why conflict turns violent. This means that the analysis of conflict situations should consider social relations that are shaped by 'sensational forms', geographical sites and material environments, the presence and places of objects such as weapons, buildings, and material resources such as food or oil, histories that are memorized through monuments and (ritualized) story-telling on sites, and media that transmit particular imageries of violated bodies and buildings. We will therefore discuss various scholarly works that provide us with ideas on how the role of materiality in conflict situations may be understood and point into directions that lead us on a track of a scholarly approach to religion-related conflict that takes materiality into account.

Recent quantitative research has contributed to questions of conflict moderating the overrepresentations of 'identity' in conflict studies and asking more attention for accidental circumstances and social relations based on data gathered from conflict zones (see Berman et al. 2018). We think that this focus on accidental circumstances and direct social loyalties (see also Kippenberg 2012) provides possibilities to include a material perspective in the analysis of religion and (violent) conflicts. Stathis N. Kalyvas' study *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006) and Randall Collins' influential micro-analysis of violence (Collins 2008; 2015) provide methodological entry points to pay attention to micro-dynamic features and accidental circumstances that contribute to eruptions of violence. These studies do not give analytical weight to explanatory terms in the analysis of conflict like 'ideology', 'religion', and even some well-established definitions of what 'violence' should be. Kalyvas argues that "the habitually cited causes of group division (e.g., ideological, social, or ethnic polarization) often fail to account for the actual dynamics of violence" (2006, 5). Collins' micro-sociological research in turn directs our attention even sharper to the circumstances and social dynamics that characterize conflict situations, in order to understand how people interact *physically* during (violent) conflict. His research has yielded valuable insights into the impact of the positions of bodies, faces, and sites on erupting social tensions becoming violent. Collins' analysis shows how the human senses experience the realities of violent conflict; how bodies behave and what people (think they) see. He understands violence and conflict as strongly ritualized human interac-

tions around situational effervescence and asymmetric emotional relations between victim(s) and perpetrator(s). Based on this view, which has impacted social science analyses of violence (Weenink 2014; Weininger, Lareau, and Lizardo 2019), Collins denies the idea that humans are naturally prone to violence and criticizes the wide definitions discussed above. Similarly, Max Bergholz' much appraised case-study *Violence as a Generative Force* (2016) on eruptions of violence in the Kulen-Vakuf region (Bosnia) in 1941, is, as we see it, an exploration of how particular material and social circumstances impact how and why people commit violence. Bergholz shows how eruptions of violence are not so much the result of identity-constructions and deep ethnic or religious cleavages, but rather the result of complex social dynamics, accidental events, the use of alcohol, narratives, gossip, leadership, geography, confrontations with burial sites, and so on. He concludes his book by showing how violence creates, or at least 'hardens' identities instead of the other way around.

These foci on conflict dynamics do not take boundaries between groups for granted and criticize understandings of violent conflict as the result of (religious, ethnic or other) boundaries. As such, these studies help us to sharpen our focus on the social and material circumstances in which conflict arises and is played out. These studies have certainly not yet become mainstream in the study of *religious* conflict. An exception is Ziya Meral's study on religion and violence. He emphasizes the importance of analyzing conflict dynamics when he argues that religious identities are "often shaped by exposure to violence" (Meral 2018, 21) instead of the other way around. From these authors, we learn that 'religion' is not a generic category to explain violence, and that we should not prioritize the role of religion above political and economic circumstances per se. Although these studies do not discuss religion separately, they contribute highly to analyses of religion-related conflict and should be considered when studying the role of religion in conflict situations. Besides having sensibility for the circumstances in which (violent) conflict occurs, what is striking in these studies is that they all point to the role of materiality in constructing the dynamics of conflict without explicitly reflecting on materiality as an analytical term or tool. Still, these studies provide possibilities to pay more attention to materiality as part of conflict dynamics. For example, Bergholz points out how exhumations in Kulen Vakuf in 1941 triggered feelings of revenge and new episodes of violence which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Muslim and Croat men, women, and children. Not the feelings of being different, having a threatened identity, or being excluded, but material characteristics such as the exhumation and presence of dead bodies of acquaintances and relatives determined the course of the conflict.

Another branch of research that we deem important for creating possibilities to include materiality in the analysis of religion-related conflict are studies on the visuality of conflict and the mediatization of violence. For example, Meral asks attention for the role of media and shows how the spread of violence, in contexts such as Nigeria and Egypt, is for a substantial part related to the broadcasting of visuals, allegations, and rumors about violence (Meral, 21, 79; see also Sampson 2012, 123–4; Spyer 2002; Stewart and Strathern 2004; van Liere 2020b). The notion that mediatization of violence impacts understandings of enmity, encouraging hatred and revenge, has been part and parcel of propaganda machines throughout the 20st century (see Keen 1988). More recently, and especially since 9/11 and the accelerated development of the world wide web, a substantial amount of literature has seen the light discussing relations between the ways in which people understand conflict and visual media (Žarkov 2008; Marsden and Savigny 2009; Tulloch and Blood 2012; Bräuchler 2013; Nanninga 2019). Although the direct impact of modern media visualities on human aggression is disputed (Freedman 2013), there is little doubt that the epistemology of human conflict is influenced by visual media, as has for example clearly been shown by the rise of islamophobia in the wake of 9/11, or by the impact of online films about the Syrian war on mostly young Muslims (Vacca 2020; Valentini, Lorusso, and Stephan 2020). Seeing mediated destruction, and watching mediated suffering and violence, contributes to how people understand conflict situations. Fragile and violated human bodies are often part of visual strategies to raise awareness or evoke particular interpretations of violence. If medialized violence is related to religious symbols and to actors, both as perpetrators or as victims, identity formations are often along religious lines, whether in conflict situations or online (Van Liere 2020a).

These insights in the material dynamics of conflict and digital media direct our attention to complex microsocial relations, material environments, and the depiction of violence instead of deep divisions of religious and political identities (see Kalyvas 14–15). This drives us away from easy frames of religious conflict and violence as predominantly issues of power, authority, or texts. Instead, our attention should be on compound circumstances and accidental situations, on discourses (speeches, gossip, rumor) that are mediated via material means, in the sense that various media always have a particular material presence (in the form of photographs, phones, internet connections, etc.). Understood in this sense, performances, specific acts, and indeed visualities such as pictures, images, and videos contribute to how people grasp and imagine conflicts and violence, and act in an intermingled network that often blends social identities. Indeed, from this perspective, 'identities', are often

results of conflict rather than causes of conflict. Consequently, we believe that it is productive to study conflicts and violence from a material perspective because it helps us to analyze how conflict dynamics are shaped by accidental circumstances, microsocial interactions, and the visual mediation of violence.

Our contribution to this field is that things can be conflict triggers, conflict enhancers, conflict relaxers, and conflict changers. Of course, we do not want to neglect or bluntly deny the importance of discourse and how language can stereotype or stigmatize, create tensions between people and groups, or (re)create discursive imageries of pasts and presents. Many scholarly studies have been written on this subject already. The point we want to make is that violent conflict can be understood more fully by comprehending how matters become 'things of conflict' and function in conflict settings. This means that we need to understand what things 'do', why and when. To this topic we will turn in the next section.

4   Religion and (Violent) Conflict: A Network Approach

How can materiality be a point of access to understand conflict and violence in which religion plays a role? We understand a 'thing' as an actual entity that can enter relationships through practices of seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and, as such, as an important part of vibrant and complex social and material networks that, in co-action with human actors, discourses and practices, establishes specific situations that may or may not involve tension, conflict, and/or violence. Also, more than the term *object*, which is often invoked in relation to 'subject-object' binaries and defines objects primarily in terms of their use and utility, a *thing* refers to what is excessive in objects in ways that go beyond the realm of rationality and utility (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 16). Understood in this sense, things contain a "force as a sensuous presence or metaphysical presence" (Brown 2001, 5). A thing may break through its 'objectness' and disturbs the Kantian subject-object binary by not being subjugated to a subjective epistemology but by having an overwhelming power of its own. Things belong to the material infrastructure of social life and play an important role in the construction of social networks. With 'networks' we understand heterogeneous clusters of actions, things, and discourse, that constantly create specific social situations, dynamics, and practices. These networks are not necessarily limited to social groups and value-systems although this might be the case. As a result, actions, and thus also acts of conflict, are always embedded and must be situated within such complex networks.

Reasoning from a network analysis in terrorism studies, Charles Tilly has criticized dispositional approaches that "fix on orientations of actors that precede and presumably cause action" (Tilly 2005, 19). Such studies on terrorism reduce conflict to the individual's worldview and try to identify biographical points of radicalization without giving much attention to the complexity of networks. To put it bluntly: many governmental and scholarly understandings of terrorists try to inscribe individual practices into wide metanarratives of 'terrorism'. Tilly proposes relational perspectives that "take interactions among social sites as their starting points" (2005, 19) and understand the characteristics of these sites as the results of interactions. This emphasis on social networks can be taken widely as related to a complex variety of communications, connections, relations, but also narratives, circumstances, and social nodes of meaning-(re)construction. In short, as phrased by A. Abbott, actions, not actors are "the primitives of the social process" (Abbott 2007, 7, see also Collins 2008). This view, that stands in a Durkheimian tradition, has a sharp focus on circumstances and asks how conflict actors define and position themselves and are defined and positioned through actions and networks in which these actions are deemed meaningful.

This network-perspective provides possibilities to include perspectives on materiality as an essential part of conflict-analysis. Jacob Stump and Priya Dixit (2013) for example point to 'sites' as integral parts of networks. They usefully define sites as places where human actions occur that are symbolically, materially, and informationally linked. A network is a "set of sites connected by ongoing relations" (143). As the boundaries of networks are often blurred, making sense of (conflict) situations becomes a complex and ongoing process related to changing circumstances while 'identity' pertains directly to an intermingled process of defining "who 'I' and 'we' are in relation to some other site or set of sites" (148). This focus on networks thus includes the analysis of interrelated socio-material sites. The question that is important for us now is what things 'do' in conflict-situations, how things are positioned on these sites (also digitally), how they are constructed as 'talked about' topics of social concern and attention, and become symbolic forms foregrounded by, and affecting social relations, and how they inform and contribute to conflict dynamics. As we are interested in things of conflict and religion, we must ask how things are positioned, perceived, narrated in networks that include religion, and how religion contributes to these positionings, perceptions, sensations, and narrations. In our view, things can become 'things of conflict' if they discursively (through narration, gossip, texts, media), materially (as sites, places, on people, as human bodies), and sensationally (when they overwhelm, comfort, or provoke anger and fear) disturb social relationships. We understand 'disturbed' in the

sense that the expectations people have and the virtuous models they practice and feel as 'right' to mark these expectations (see below), are troubled.[3]

Before we will further clarify the role of religion in networks in which 'things of conflict' figure, it is important to further develop a perspective on how things of conflict work, what they 'do', and when they 'do' something. As we discussed above, we understand things as integrated into complex networks, as charged by, and charging social relationships. Most networks in our context of study are at the same time local, global, social, cultural, religious, and material. In this sense, we defined a 'thing of conflict' as an essential part of vibrant networks that, in co-action with discourses and practices, contribute to conflict situations (see above). A thing is never alone, never 'equal' to other things as if we could establish a category of things (despite the economic reproduction of some things on a large scale) and identify the meaning of things. Although we could understand things as actualized multiplicities, as hybrids, or as Deleuzian assemblages, for our subject the materiality of a thing in its socio-historical context, its complex representation of what it is to some but not to others, its being in or out of place, its fragile or powerful appearance, and the way it medializes and is medialized are important elements to understand how a 'thing' relates to conflict. Indeed, while we underscore the importance of analyzing the discursive dimensions of conflict, we also emphasize that a perspective on religion-related conflict that does not show how discourse and materiality are entangled, or that neglects the analysis of things in particular contexts and infrastructures is too narrow and runs the danger of overlooking certain aspects of conflict and violence. Thus, things may be special, but they are not alone. They do have "social lives" (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) as they are moved, cherished, venerated, destroyed. They have an agency as they stare back, provoke, and evoke feelings of (un)ease or (un)security like certain clothes, a separatist flag, a holy book, food, a building. Earlier in this chapter we wrote that anything could become a thing of conflict. To understand this, it is important to see things as implicated in social networks. Things can be gendered, religionized, ideologized, and may function differently in the "aesthetic formations" (Meyer 2009, see below) of different

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3   We are aware that 'social relationships' can be taken wide and must also include non-human relationships, relations with and between living organisms such as plants, animals, viruses, and also between surroundings and molecular systems and orderings. From this perspective, some scholars have argued that matter "becomes" rather than "is" (Coole and Frost 2010; Keller and Rubinstein 2017). Our focus in this volume is on relations between humans and things. The dynamic interplay between matter, religion, and (violent) conflict almost per definition rejects the idea that a 'thing' is static.

groups of people. They always raise possibilities of being disputed, displaced, or forgotten as social relations alter. Thus, while things may play vital roles in social networks, we feel that it is important not to over-emphasize the agency of things, since, in our view, the agency of a thing ultimately depends on the social network in which they are embedded, and its relations to "people, animals, plants, places, and other things, for its existence and its functioning" (Latory 2018, 25).

Things of conflict may be special things that may be owned and put at special places but can also break into the social (symbolic or physical) space of communities and become disputed or even feared. Things of conflict are so to say charged with the moral views of communities, which may reshuffle communications and mark an exceedance of expectations regarding social relations. A thing of conflict disrupts these expectations, establishes, or affirms anxious perspectives. Inspired by scholarship within material religion, we propose a sharp focus on how people interact, how they behave, what they wear, eat, and how places and spots are amalgamated with processes of inclusion and exclusion. For us, the question becomes imperious of how, when, and why various things like clothes, food, places, machines, structures, statues, weapons, photographs, paintings, (are used to) negotiate social relationships. How do 'things' become meaningful within communities and signify how communities relate to 'others' and to themselves? How are these things charged with meaning that mark these social relations? When do things mirror, look back, and affect? How does discursive attention, the arrangement of things at places, and social projection create a 'thing of conflict' out of matter? To get some grip on this subject we need to relate things closely to the imageries, histories, and practices of communities to understand when and how things become contested, charged with meaning, and play a role in the construction of conflict positions.

5   Becoming a Thing of Conflict

David Morgan argues that members of communities need "symbolic forms such as songs, dance, images, and food to allow them to participate in something that is larger both spatially and temporally than their immediate environment" (Morgan 2005, 59). Writing about the relation between things and communities, Birgit Meyer (2009) stresses how a sense of community is not simply imagined in the minds of its members, but closely connected to aesthetic formations, a term which she coined to point to the ways in which communities are performed, mediated, and sensationally experienced. This

means that things are part of networks that negotiate social relations, but also that particular things may play highly diverse roles within the aesthetic formations of different groups that live together in plural configurations. Social relations are determined by what people expect from each other, by the norms and values that are normally met, and by practices and rituals that sustain and recreate these expectations. Conflict disturbs so to say these relations people have with others within and outside their communities and networks.

At this point, the 'virtuous violence theory' developed by Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai can be helpful. This theory argues that people live together in complex relationships that are structured according to several relational models such as equality, proportionality (such as fair distribution), hierarchy, and unity. These models determine what is considered to be right and wrong in the relationships that are established within and between different social groups. They define what is normally expected in social relations. What different groups of people consider to be moral and immoral behavior is determined by their (implicit) perspectives on these models. Fiske and Rai define morality as those intentions, motivations, evaluations, and emotions that are active in realizing ideal models of social relationships in a culturally meaningful way (Fiske and Rai 2015, 135). So, most social actions that people perform are moral and related to these models. Morality in this sense can be understood as an attempt to realize ideal relationships that underline the coherence and consistency of the community and the relations between different groups of people. How 'we' interact with others, what 'we' can expect from each other and from others, and how 'we' assess and give meaning to our own actions towards others, are aspects that are inherent to moral frames. Violent conflict emerges from social relationships, Fiske and Rai assert, and can best be understood as an effort to 'restore' or 'regulate' these relationships (273–4). At the same time, moral frames are formed by these expectations and practices. Our daily lives are structured through ritual chains that are embedded in social expectations and are often (although not always) focused on conflict prevention.

The ritual dimension of the quotidian is convincingly stressed by Collins (in line with Erving Goffman) who has argued that social interaction is determined by ritualized gestures and practices that create social energy and dynamics. In Collins' view, content, value, belief and conviction are determined by ritual chains and float on the social energy by and through which people communicate and add value to situations (Collins 2004, 75–88). These rituals are material through and through; people adapt how they act, move, and touch to what others do. They share things (from sacred objects like the hostess to food shared during religious celebrations), move things, appreciate

things together (like clothes, music), exchange things, or relate themselves to objects in ways that are deemed appropriate within particular material settings (such as a mosque). Things are often at the heart of social relations and mediate, and are mediated by, these relations. Conflicts and violence may not only arise because of efforts to restore ideal social relations between various (groups of) people, but also to restore ways in which people interact with specific things (which for example should be treated with respect or avoided). Because things are at the heart of social relations, the damaging or destruction of things can also communicate perspectives on social relations. In a compelling study, Andrew Herscher reflects on the role of architecture and the meaning of its destruction during the 1998–99 conflict between Serbia and the Kosovo Liberation Army. Herscher argues that the destruction of architecture that took place in Kosovo must be understood as an important form of social inscription and cultural production (Herscher 2010). Targeting architecture in conflict zones is a form of political violence that (re)forms agencies, determines heritage, and contains views on social relations between different groups. However, things also play an important role in restoring social relationships, like gifts, money, places, or food (see Tarusarira, this volume) while unexpected rearrangements of things in relation to human bodies in the public space can be understood as efforts to challenge stereotypes (see Van Es, this volume).

Things of conflict thus pertain to the interrelatedness of social networks and material infrastructures. Through this interrelatedness, ordinary objects may become 'things of conflict', for example when people interact with objects in ways that do not match the sensibilities or expectations of others. Things and what is done to things can breach what is commonly expected and disturb ideal relationships, like bulldozers that are sent by the government to break down parts of a neighborhood and destroy people's livelihood, sunglasses put on the head of a Buddha statue, the portrait of a political leader in a monastery, a nationalist flag, etc. Things can suggest structures of inclusion and exclusion and raise political or religious quarrel. In these examples, some of them discussed in this volume, things of conflict disrupt the ritualized forms of what is normally expected and may become symbols of unease and conflict.

Thus, a focus on how things of conflict function within social networks helps us to understand more deeply how conflicts emerge and develop. Indeed, things are entangled with the complexity of actions, perceptions, practices, beliefs, emotions, and discourses. Materiality however often remains 'unseen' in the analysis of religion-related conflict (and in conflict studies more generally). Therefore, we opt for a more complete understanding of religion-related conflict by including materiality as part of conflict networks.

In this section, we wrote about the complicated contexts in and through which objects become 'things of conflict' which provoke unease, tension, disruption. In the next section, we dive deeper into this subject and identify two different ways to approach 'things of conflict'.

6   Religion and (Violent) Conflict: A Material Approach

How can we approach the intersection between religion, conflict, and materiality? First, building on existing scholarly work within the 'material turn' within religious studies, we take inspiration from scholarly literature on 'iconoclasm', which focuses on conflicts that arise around particular objects within the context of religious practice, which are thought to mediate the presence of the divine or something 'beyond'. In this volume, we seek to expand the interpretation of iconoclasm to conflicts around objects that evoke an idea and experience of particular religious groups or communities. Secondly, taking inspiration from the recently developed 'infrastructural approach' to religion and the study of religion in urban settings, we focus on the wider material arrangements on which religious communities and practices rely. Such a perspective on religious matters not only allows us to theorize how objects are a part of the material infrastructures of religious networks and may become 'things of conflict' as outlined above, but also to reflect on the ways in which religions manifest themselves materially in settings characterized by (violent) conflict.

6.1   *Iconoclasm and Idolatry: Conflicts around 'Iconic' Objects*
The study of material religion and conflict often pertains to conflicts that arise around objects that are thought to mediate a divine presence or access a transcendental 'beyond'. Such conflicts have often been studied through a focus on iconoclasm, both within religious studies and within the fields of visual arts and visual semiotics. The term 'iconoclast' (from the Greek *eikon* – image, and *klastes* – breaking) appeared in literature for the first time in 1595 (Noyes 2013, 3) and is used for episodes of 'image breaking' especially in Christian and Islamic histories (although the word does not exist in Arabic). The term has long been reserved for 'iconoclast' movements in the 8th and 9th centuries and during the 16th century Protestant revolutions in Western Europe. Gradually, the term 'eikon', James Noyes writes, covered 'idol', 'image', and 'icon'. These conflated meanings make Noyes conclude that the term iconoclasm refers to an "attack on or destruction of an object, be it a statue, a painting, a tomb, a building, or a natural object like a tree that is believed to have some kind of

spiritual power of sacred significance, and which is 'worshipped' in the place of the 'true' God" (Noyes 2013, 3–4). This understanding of iconoclasm reveals how people in diverse settings may have conflicting 'semiotic ideologies', or different understandings of the role that particular objects play in mediating divine presence (cf. Keane 2009; Meyer and Stordalen 2019). Throughout various histories of Christianity, for example, indigenous religious traditions have been accused of 'idolatry', and the objects that figure in indigenous religious practices dismissed as human-made idols (Latour and Weibel 2002; Meyer 2019).[4] In such settings, iconoclastic violence may be directed towards these idols that are, in the eyes of those who perform the iconoclasm, falsely worshipped in the place of the 'true' God.

In a similar fashion, the concept of 'fetishism' also points to conflicting understandings about (the value of) human relations with things and their attitudes towards objects (Latory 2018, 31; Ellen 1998, 219). In European languages, the term is often used to refer to 'a scandalous materiality' in which people mistakenly imbue objects with power and agency (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 14). Like the term 'idolatry', the concept of fetishism spread to non-European contexts through missionization and colonization, where it was used by European observers to denote religious ideas and practices which were deemed to be dark, backward, and primitive (Meyer 2019, 88–9; see also Chidester 1996; Keane 2009). As such, concepts such as 'idolatry' and 'fetishism' informed theories of socio-evolutionary difference between Europeans and subjected populations in ways that legitimized and supported colonialism, which not rarely was enforced with violence (Latory 2018; Chidester 1996).

Lately however, the term has received fresh attention from scholars who are aware of this painful history but use the term critically to denote a thing or concept that exercises power, manipulates, or draw people into actions. For example, Bruno Latour (2010) has reflected on ideas of difference and (power-)relations that were and still are inherent to the term 'fetish'. By proposing the term 'factish' as an alternative for 'fetish', he reshuffles the modernist division between 'facts' as 'truths' and 'fetishes' as 'beliefs' in order to save the power of the fetish and the objectivity of facts. Alternatively, Roy Ellen has written about the conflation of ideas with 'objects' through which the object (a thing or concept) becomes spirited by the idea (of for example an ideology, a religion, a conviction) (Ellen 1998, 221). This has been critically adopted by Breann

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4   Islamic movements may similarly dismiss things that figure in indigenous religious practices as idolatry (*shirk*), see for example: Kresse 2018.

Fallon (2017; 2020) who has written a keen study on the machete as a fetishized object during the Rwandese genocide. In our view, these scholarly works provide interesting possibilities to further reflect on the roles of 'things of conflict' as sensational forms, and on the social relations and power relations in which these things are embedded.[5]

Critical studies into the genealogy and politics of terms such as iconoclasm, idolatry, and fetishism provide important avenues to theorize the relation between materiality, religion, and conflict. The chapters in this volume, however, mostly do not focus on conflicts around different material ways to mediate divine presence or to access a transcendent realm. It is vital for our argument not to confine 'things' that effect and affect religious relations to sacred objects with iconic reputations, but to extend the interpretation to objects that evoke the idea and experience of the (religious) community. Thus understood, we think that particular things function in such ways that they are vested with iconic powers, in the sense that they occupy a special place in the collective memories, understandings, and experiences of religious communities. Jeffrey Alexander writes that the iconic is first of all a social experience, not a form of communication: "To be iconically conscious is to understand without knowing (…). It is to understand by feeling, by contact, by 'the evidence of the senses', rather than the mind" (Alexander 2008, 782). Iconic things have a symbolic power that consist of the experience of the actors who connect and reconnect within a dynamic web of meaning. "Actors", Dominik Bartmanski and Alexander contend, "have iconic consciousness when they experience material objects, not only understanding them cognitively or evaluating them morally but also feeling their sensual, aesthetic force" (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 1; see Qin and Song 2020 on the power of Buddhist symbols). Objects may thus become 'things of conflict' not only because people have conflicting views about ways to mediate divine presence, but also because particular objects play 'iconic' roles in the collective understandings of the social relations that characterize particular societies or religious groups. Examples may range from a synagogue that is surrounded by a 'ring of peace' organized by Muslims to mark their inclusion within Norwegian society (Van Es, this volume), or discussions about the ways national calendars include or exclude particular religious groups (Baumgartner, this volume), to photographs that are used in specific settings to shock, convince, and strengthen social ties (van Liere, this volume) or the houses, schools,

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5   Also, in our view, these approaches of 'fetishization' could benefit and be enriched by taking microsociological perspectives on derailment into account as discussed by Collins (2008; 2015) and Weenink (2014).

and religious buildings on which the religious life of Nubian Muslims in the diverse neighborhood of Kibera in Kenya depends (Wilks, this volume). In cases where such objects would be (violently) destroyed, altered, or threatened, iconoclasms are not so much about the destruction of things that are falsely worshipped in place of any true God, but rather understood as an attack on the social relations and sensational experiences that are cherished by certain groups of people. The destruction of an object is at the same time a reshuffling of relations and can create violent responses from people who feel the iconic power of objects even more so at the moment of their destruction or demolition. Iconoclasm is not only about the Gods; it is about resettling human relationships.[6]

6.2   *Conflicts around Religious Infrastructures*

As indicated previously, we find it important not to confine a material analysis of religion-related conflict to objects that play a role in mediating divine presence or in the experience of a transcendental realm. Things are embedded in social relations, made important by actions, rituals, memories, and discourses, while actions, rituals, memories, and discourses imbue materiality. Disturbances of social relations ripple through their material dimensions. To further develop a focused theoretical perspective on the ways in which religion 'matters' in (violent) conflict, we take inspiration from the recently developed 'infrastructural' approach to the study of religion (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020). Drawing on the material turn within religious studies, the study of 'religious infrastructures' aims to direct attention towards the (socio)material arrangements that act as enabling conditions for religious practices and the communal lives of religious groups. Here, an 'infrastructure' is conceptualized as the relations between people, objects, technologies, ideas, regulations, and capacities which are gathered in shifting configurations and circulated across space (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020). Similar to our conceptualization of 'networks' (see above), the concept of 'religious infrastructure' thus points to the complex relations and arrangements between (human) agency, things, and semiotics, although the concept of 'religious infrastructure' more narrowly points to material, technological, and semiotic arrangements that sustain religious practice and communal life.

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6 An unexplored but related field is the material imagination of iconic things that appears in and around conflict situations in the forms of visions and dreams. In a short overview of narratives collected after the Ambon civil war (1999–2002) it was striking that iconic things like Bibles, churches, and church bells regularly played a strong protecting role in post-conflict narratives (van Liere and van Dis 2018).

This understanding highlights how religious practices and communal life are entangled with material arrangements which are not commonly coded as 'religious', and how religious practices and these wider material arrangements may affect one another. Thus, where the material turn within religious studies has often focused on the ways in which objects mediate religious experiences, the concept of 'religious infrastructure' more broadly focuses on the ways in which specific material arrangements enable or restrict religious life. Examples range from the funding streams behind evangelization campaigns to work-free days necessary to celebrate religious holidays; from market stalls that benefit from the proximity of mosques, to the provision of health care, education, or other social services by religious groups or organizations. In this sense, the study of religious infrastructures is also closely related to the study of religion in urban settings, in which scholars have studied how religions spatially inscribe themselves into cities through places of worship or living pious lives in particular neighborhoods (Oosterbaan 2005; Knott 2008; Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016), how secular governments have managed the physical presence of various religious groups in diverse societies (Verkaaik and Tamimi Arab 2013; Burchardt 2021), or even how religious 'matters' such as church buildings are re-evaluated and valued as 'cultural heritage' within secularized societies such as the Netherlands (Meyer 2019).

In our view, this focus on the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life rely is relevant for the study of (violent) conflict, not in the last place because infrastructures are also deeply political (Larkin 2008; Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020; Wilks, this volume). They are not neutral conduits of people, objects, ideas, or resources. Instead, they provide and foreclose various possibilities for action and feeling through material and relational arrangements, which can both strengthen or reduce social bonds, tensions, and socio-spatial patterns of inequality. From this perspective, it becomes clear that conflicts can arise in settings that are characterized by religious plurality, in which different religious groups with divergent infrastructural capacities may compete for limited space, resources, or political power. Also, conflicts may arise in political constellations that are characterized by a form of political secularism, in which states seek to protect the equal rights and freedom of religion of different religious groups. In such settings, tensions may occur that result from unequal infrastructural access of various religious communities to resources, livelihoods, or political opportunities, or of the varying possibilities different religious groups have to engage in religious practices within particular material arrangements (Baumgartner, this volume).

Furthermore, religious infrastructures can tremendously be affected by conflict or violence, which may damage or destroy the material arrangements

on which religious practices depend, while religious infrastructures may also adapt themselves accordingly. Episodes of tension, conflict, or violence (in past, presence, or potential future) may inscribe themselves into geographical landscapes and cities and affect the physical organization of religious practice and communal life (Stockmans and Büscher 2017; Bou Akar 2018; Wilks, this volume). The presence of (potential) violence or conflict may also affect the ways in which different religious groups live together in plural configurations (Buckley-Zistel 2006; 2008; Larkin 2014; Kirby, Sibanda and Charway 2021), for example through the physical separation of Muslim and Christian communities in different neighborhoods (Van Klinken 2001; Ostien 2009; Bou Akar 2018). At the same time, religious infrastructures may (be forced to) adapt to the presence of tension, conflict, or violence. Religious groups may physically prepare themselves for the possibility of violence in settings characterized by mistrust and tension, in ways that increase the likelihood that actual violence may occur (Spyer 2002). Religious groups may also offer necessary health care or relief in conflict settings, offering recipients of aid an infrastructure on which their survival depends, which may simultaneously tie them more closely to particular religious authorities or groups (Meinema 2020). In other situations, conflicts and violence may force people to flee from warn-torn areas, presenting them – as well as those who stay behind – with material challenges to sustain communal ties and religious practices (Meyer and Van der Veer 2021; Wilks, this volume). Finally, the occurrence of violent conflicts may also inspire acts of solidarity or attempts to restore peace, for example by symbolically marking and protecting the buildings in which the religious practices of a community that is threatened take place (Van Es, this volume; Tarusarira, this volume).

Thus, in our view, the attention to religious infrastructure relates well to the network approach we discussed above and the attention for local contexts and accidental circumstances as co-determining social tensions. A focus on religious infrastructure furthermore opens two important avenues to study how religion matters in situations of (violent) conflict. First, it directs our attention to the ways in which conflicts can occur around the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life depend. This includes situations in which different religious groups compete for resources, space, or opportunities, as well as conflicts that arise around particular infrastructural inequalities between different religious groups (Baumgartner, this volume). In such situations, particular objects which are not necessarily coded as religious may become 'things of conflict', because they play crucial roles in the material arrangements on which religious practice and the flourishing of particular religious communities rely (Wilks, this volume). Second, a focus on religious

infrastructures makes us attentive to the ways in which the occurrence of conflict and/or violence may affect the material arrangements on which religious practices and communal life depend. Here, the question is how the infrastructural possibilities and limitations of particular religious groups are affected, influenced, and adjusted in situations that are characterized by tensions, conflict, and/or violence (Van Es, this volume; Meinema, this volume).

7   Approaching Material Religion, Conflict, and Violence

As stated, this volume discusses the interface between materiality, violence, and religion from a perspective that focuses on social micro-dynamics, circumstances, networks, and religious infrastructures. The things of conflict discussed are not necessarily 'religious things' that connect religious practitioners to sacred or spiritual entities. Instead, as we have emphasized, a thing of conflict can be anything that is part of religious infrastructures and contributes to understandings of social networks. It can be something that may suddenly attract attention and become important, that may open up deep memories and fears of exclusion and mediate complex histories, but that may also be 'just there', something that becomes meaningful and negotiates power struggles, provides comfort, or points to the presence of social groups who are understood as 'others'. This multilayered approach to religion, materiality, conflict, and violence is addressed in the chapters of this volume.

Younes Saramifar proposes a specific focus on how to access things of conflict. In his thought-provoking chapter, he rejects the idea that objects should be accessed as representing or signifying religious ideas, feelings, or doctrines. In the process of unpacking acts of killing, things are 'partners' rather than significations of human relations. Using Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, Saramifar describes how things gather around religion, relate to religion, shape religiosity, help believers to believe, but without becoming religious things. Using his fieldnotes which he took during his participant observation in combat zones among Shia combatants fighting the Islamic State of Iraq between 2015 to 2018, he shows how things of conflict such as weapons, collaborate with combatants in such ways that they can make sense of their lives under tense circumstances. Stressing 'objectness', he acknowledges how humans attempt to access things of conflict based on their potentials and accidental features. Saramifar believes that this emphasis helps to gain a better understanding of – what he calls – people's socialization *in* violence. Thus, religions and ideologies should not be overemphasized in analyzing violent conflict, but attention should be given to how objects shape specific situations

during combat. Concentrating on the presence and presentation of a rifle for example may help to comprehend how humans relate to what they do and why they do it. Violence, so to say, is a specific entanglement as it always takes place in specific situations charged with things, actions, and relations.

Daan Oostveen explores how the religious traditions of Buddhism and Islam within the People's Republic of China (PRC) are approached in radically different ways, even though both religions are legally recognized in China. Through a comparison of the material politics of the Chinese state towards these two religious traditions, Oostveen analyses how Buddhist groups have been supported by the government to develop large infrastructural projects, while the religious infrastructures that support Islamic worship and practice have increasingly been closed or put under surveillance. As poignant examples, Oostveen describes how on the one hand, the PRC has developed internment camps and surveillance practices which significantly undermine Islamic worship and practice of the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang province of China, while on the other hand, the PRC has developed several state-funded 'Buddhist universities' which formally train Buddhist officials of the Buddhist Union of China. Through this analysis, Oostveen shows how despite the PRC's adoption of a more permissive stance towards religions since the opening and reform era, the PRC continues to hold tight control over the religious infrastructures of different religious communities in China. This demonstrates how the PRC not only aims to regulate religious views, but also directly impacts the material forms through which followers of different religious traditions express themselves within the PRC.

In a similar vein, but from a bottom-up perspective, Tammy Wilks shows how state violence becomes intimate, emotive, and embodied. In 2018, bulldozers demolished houses, schools, and communal places of religious groups to start a new project to construct a bypass-road through the heart of Kibera, Kenya. In a sensitive study based on participant observations and interviews, Wilks studies what this meant for the physical and material landscape of the neighborhood in relation to religious and interreligious life. She understands the bypass as a symbol of state violence that fundamentally reshuffled the way Nubian Muslims in Kibera related to their past, present, and future. Since land, buildings and homes were demolished, the existential and religious places of people became endangered. Wilks traces the consequences of state violence in the biography of Bibi Jaina, a Nubian Muslim lady in her sixties whose life intertwines with the Kiberan land. For her, as for many Nubians, property holds significant religious and moral meanings as *barakat* and sustains a religiosity that relates Nubians to their past and their futures. Wilks describes this as "performing property", a mediation of *barakat* through property, which

contributes to the sensitivity that Kiberans belong to this land and the other way around. Land, property, and the burial site mediates Bibi Jaina's connection to the Nubian community's past, present, and future which informs her understanding of being a Nubian Muslim. Thus, the demolishing of materiality by the bulldozers does not only destroy Bibi Jaina's property, but also affects her performance as a Nubian Muslim, her being-there as related to her past, present, and future. Through this argument, Wilks shows how religious practices and wider material arrangements of property and land are connected, and that the destruction of these wider arrangements may significantly impact the social and religious practice of particular communities.

Discussions about official temporal religious forms, in particular Good Friday as silent public holiday, and disputes on the introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany, is the topic of Christoph Baumgartner's contribution. He shows how these discussions contain political aspects that relate to views on how democratic societies are and should be committed to political equality and social inclusion. Taking from Marian Burchardt that religions actively shape urban morphology and appearances through symbols and architectural languages, Baumgartner points to an uneven material presence of different religions in current societies. This, he argues, is politically significant because it includes and excludes possibilities of different groups of people to relate to the place they live and work. This becomes particularly important if these religious forms are not only materially visible but also taken by the state as characteristics of national culture or as significant for politics and society at large. These *official* religious forms, as Baumgartner refers to them, run the danger of becoming things of conflict in circumstances of rapid social change (increasingly secularized and religiously pluralized societies), when political-discursive fortifications of culture block the times that are being out of joint. Taking the recognition of Good Friday as silent public holiday in Bavaria, Germany as a case, Baumgartner traces the conflicts arising around this holiday and shows how temporal forms can be charged with significant ethical and political dimensions. This way, in contexts of social change, temporal forms are about perspectives on political inclusion and exclusion.

Based on extensive ethnographic research, the chapter by Erik Meinema explores how the circulation of discourses about witchcraft and terrorism politicizes and shapes the ways in which various religious groups materially manifest themselves in the urban environment of the coastal Kenyan town of Malindi. He explores how discourses on witchcraft and terrorism, which occasionally intersect in complex and ambivalent ways, both provide a way of speaking about hidden enemies: both witches and terrorists are thought to covertly plot violence that threatens to disrupt social relations from within.

Furthermore, as state actors attempt to expose these hidden enemies, they may formulate suspicions that particular people or groups covertly involve themselves in witchcraft or terrorism. In response, people aim to evade being linked to these vices by avoiding particular material religious forms that are commonly associated with 'witches' and 'terrorists'. As a result, the circulation of discourses about witchcraft and terrorism sets in motion complex dynamics of revelation and concealment which shape the material ways in which various religious groups express themselves in Malindi. Furthermore, these dynamics often impact Christians, Muslims, and so-called 'Traditionalists' in divergent ways, since terrorism is often primarily associated with Islam, and witchcraft with indigenous African religious traditions. Based on this analysis, the chapter demonstrates how discourses about witchcraft and terrorism privilege the public expression of Christianity in Malindi, since Christianity is only rarely associated with witchcraft or terrorism.

In his chapter, Lucien van Liere explores how photographs and videos of suffering human bodies are invoked to shock, appeal and move, and how they shape particular understandings of violence and conflict. Van Liere argues that the ways in which people see images of conflict are often tied to long-standing trajectories of picturing and viewing human suffering and violence, as well as particular epistemological stances towards the knowledge that images of conflict are thought to reveal. Building on these arguments, Van Liere maintains that contemporary Western perspectives on suffering human bodies in humanitarian and conflict photography are often indebted to religious iconography and the historic repertoires of meaningful human suffering that are connected to it. Through such an analysis, Van Liere shows how photographs may become 'things of conflict', in the sense that they invoke an 'iconic consciousness' that is deeply rooted in cultural-religious trajectories, which often suggest simplifying understandings and binary perspectives on violence and conflict. In this way, Van Liere demonstrates how images of pain and suffering are charged with religious meanings that clearly separate meaningful suffering from atrocious violence, and innocent victims from violent perpetrators.

The focus on materiality is not only a valuable approach to study violent conflict but also to study attempts to achieve peace and reconciliation in situations characterized by (violent) conflict. Margaretha van Es studies the materiality of an organized interreligious public performance in Oslo, where predominantly young Muslims organized a 'Ring of Peace' around a synagogue as a response to violent incidents against Jews. The event was covered by many media, many photographs appeared on news-sites and on the internet, and the happening was heavily discussed in Norway. During the event, place,

body-relations, and buildings became important descriptors of perspectives on the avoidance of violence and the fight against antisemitism. As she connects these material things, it becomes clear that the Ring of Peace in Oslo was a ritual in which imaginations of interfaith solidarity and peaceful coexistence were embodied and played out. Views on religious mediation (Birgit Meyer) and affective economies (Sara Ahmed) help Van Es to ask how sensory experiences, materiality, and affects work to enact an imagination of peaceful coexistence and interfaith solidarity. Affects align people with each other and with communities, but also create an outline of a common threat. This way, fear and hate can result from views on what 'we are not'. Strong emotions materialize in how things are ordered and put into relation to each other. This way, materiality helps to understand particular imaginations of a (religious or national) community and how communities are made and remade in relation to threat and violent conflict.

In an argumentative chapter, Joram Tarusarira thinks through the consequences of the 'material turn' in security studies for views on the role of religions in violent conflict. He argues that the claim that violence is inherent in the beliefs and doctrines of religious traditions is not very fruitful for understanding and resolving conflict. Using well-known cases of religion-related violence from the field of conflict studies like the Hezbollah attacks in 2006, the uprising of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka until 2009, and the destruction of the Sikh Golden Temple in Armistar in 1984, he shows how land, place, and commemorations matter in how people understand and relate to violence. If materiality and visuality play such a great role in violent conflicts, it should also play an important role in processes of conflict-resolution and reconciliation. Tarusarira makes a convincing plea for bringing in more substantial knowledge of how things matter to people involved in restoration and reconciliation processes. As material objects and bodies are the primary location and targets of violent conflict, these should also play an important role in restoring and healing social relations.

In her afterword, Birgit Meyer reflects on the theoretical and methodological implications of the approaches for the study of religion, materiality, conflict and violence as proposed in this volume. She offers a theoretical reflection on the agency of 'things of conflict', and argues that in her view, "matter always exists in excess of what humans can apprehend of it". Subsequently, Meyer offers five methodological lessons that can be drawn from this volume and describes ways for further research.

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