

## CHAPTER FOUR

# KILLING THE HEIRS OF THE KILLERS: COLLECTIVE MEMORY, RELIGION AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

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### Executive Summary

This chapter considers the role of collective memory within the frame of religious traditions for the justification of violent conflict. In the first paragraphs, the relevance of the concept of cultural memory is explored in order to understand the way religious traditions relate to current situations of conflict. It is argued that these traditions are chains of memories and archives of symbols that are persistently referred to in texts, places, and rituals and are lived and interpreted through time. Parts of these chains are narratives, places, and rituals that provide insight about the opponents in tense situations where a religious group was endangered. These archival opponents can work as frames to deal with current situations. As a result, current conflicts may become religiously significant or meaningful as they are charged with the 'religious memory' of the group. The last paragraphs explain the Iranian Revolution where Reza Pahlavi was charged with the evil deeds of Yazid during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979 and with the killing of Copts by a group alleged to be IS, who were charged with the traumatic meaning of the word 'crusader' in 2015. In both cases, the negative frame of the archival opponent is projected on current opponents who become the 'heir' of the past opponent. Violence against this current opponent becomes justified based on frames of collective memories.

**Keywords:** Collective memory, religious memory, symbolism, religious traditions, Iranian revolution of 1979, crusader, Islamic State, collective trauma, narratives

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider the role of ‘religion-related memory’ in ‘religion-related violence’. The leading question is: how does the memory of past atrocities that have become part of religious traditions (through texts, rituals, discourses), work in justifying violence religiously? With ‘religious memory’, I do not refer to a specific way of religious remembering, but to a certain practice of remembrance as part of religious traditions, that mediates, or is mediated by, texts, rituals, materials and theologies. ‘Religious memory’ is thus understood as an ‘archive’ of texts, interpretations, rituals and practices that are explored as a historic imagery at the surface of the current self-interpretation of religious groups. Danièle Hervieu-Léger refers to ‘religion’ as a chain of memory that creates a metaphoric device by which collective and individual awareness is created, empowered and controlled (Hervieu-Léger, 65-82).

Within the scope of ‘religious memory’, I will focus on the religious understanding of current events (memory is always ‘at the surface’ of time), within a traumatic frame of the ‘past’, that is accepted as part of a religious tradition. More generally, I will consider the role of ‘traumatic religious memory’ in regards to the intensity of violent conflict. To study this, it is necessary to explore how religious traditions mediate between their ‘archive’ of texts, rituals, discourses and their interpretations on the one, and a problematic, tense present on the other hand. How is a ‘recreation’ of the past established in the present and how can this contribute to the development and intensity of violent conflict? My interest here is with religious memory as a conflict enhancer, but I am also aware of the fact that it can work the other way around; religious memory can also work in the de-legitimation of conflict.

Since the topic of this chapter deals with perspectives on ‘the past’, and on how this past is constructed and recreated in current perspectives on identity and otherness, I will understand ‘the past-in-the-present’ as a collective imagination and thus explore the constellation of ‘collective memory’ and ‘collective trauma’ for creating mnemonic communities. After exploring this constellation at a more conceptual level, I will study two cases of religion-related identity-formation that mediates between a problematic present and the imagery of the past: the effect of the – for Shia Muslims –important story of Karbala during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the use of the word ‘crusaders’ in a video of Islamic State that was put online in 2015.

## Collective Memory, Collective Trauma

The concept of ‘collective memory’ is explored predominantly within the field of memory studies (J. Assmann; Zerubavel; Misztal; Eyerman; Erll). ‘Collective memory’ entails a (current) collective reference towards the past that is perceived as constitutive for the unity and peculiarity of a group (J. Assmann, 130). Collective memory is not only a way of ‘collective remembrance’ but moreover a way of understanding and accepting certain perspectives of the past as a social, political or religious activity that creates and controls social senses of belonging. Wulf Kansteiner views collective memory as a negotiation between three historical agents, namely between persistent cultural traditions, the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interest of memory consumers (Kansteiner, 179). These three agents construct the rules of engagement; according to Kansteiner, their negotiations determine the success of memory politics. Within the scope of ‘religious memory’, religious traditions persist through texts, buildings, and rituals (although changing through translations, rebuilding and re-understanding); memory makers are ‘ingenious’ through hermeneutics and leadership, while memory consumers have a subversive interest in acknowledgment and legitimation. The negotiation between these three agents is fluid, sometimes contesting but always transforming. Religious ‘memory’ consists of texts, practices, discourses at very different levels from speeches and sermons to spiritual texts and daily conversations, and new strains of memory that – again – may produce texts, practices and interpretations.

It is important and relevant for this chapter to distinguish between memory and history. Memory is living, serving a current state of affairs, affective and active (A. Assmann 2003, 27-47). History, on the other hand, is – in the words of Pierre Nora – “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (Nora, 9). Collective memory is an affective, present reconstruction of what is ‘no longer’; it creates a perception of ‘history’ in the present, while its version of this ‘no longer’ serves the remembering community. What ‘really’ took place (the reconstruction of the ‘no longer’) is less important compared to how a group makes and consumes an event as constitutive. The ‘no longer’ fades in the actuality of remembering. In this way, some traits of ‘collective memory’ may also come close to the meaning of ‘myth’ in some understandings (Gedi and Elam, 30-32), as ‘myth-making’ constitutes social identities along the lines of strong narratives.

'Remembering' does not only sustain the group as connected by 'historical' bonds but may also (re-)create out-groups, based on narrative representations of the group's self-understanding as related to 'the other'. According to Jan Assmann, this distinction is an 'objective manifestation' of what he calls 'cultural memory'; the identificatory determination between 'we are this' and 'that is our opposite' (J. Assmann, 130). The opponent has an important role as showing the collective what 'we' are not and will not be, nor dare to become. Collective memory is forming and sustaining the group as a collective (through established discourses, memory making and memory consuming) and contains important information about how the group sees itself. This is not static because 'memory' is not static. Memory making changes over time; this is due to recontextualizations, developments in media technologies, but also due to contestations from the outside (migrations, diasporas) or through challenges from within the group. However, traditions may have produced persistent symbols, places (buildings) and personages that contribute to the division between what 'we are' and what 'we are not', like the Christian cross, the Dome of the Rock or Jesus, Judas, Amalek, Hussain, Muhammad but also Vishnu, Shiva, and Buddha. These persistent symbols, places, and personages are charged and recharged with meaning. They build religion as a persistent chain of tradition. They function as frames for memory makers and memory consumers and establish the possibility for groups to successfully perceive themselves as what 'they are' and what 'they are not'. The hermeneutics of symbols, places and personages can change, sometimes dramatically, as a result of political or ethnic memory making and consumption, but that there are these symbols, places, and personages, is part of the persistence of religious traditions. One deep point of reference for this persistence can be found in the stature of texts.

## Texts

Most 'traditions' have 'sacred' texts that find authority through frames of interpretation, leadership, consumption and different traits of spirituality that continually change and involve current situations. In a classic understanding, 'sacred texts' are canonized texts within specific traditions. However, the contents of sacred texts may gain a life of their own. They may become linked to new narratives, applied to certain traditions, spiritual stories, apparitions and emotions that may create new frames for understanding the basic 'sacred' texts, including creating new perspectives on its sacredness. The self-understanding of the community is mediated

by, and mediates, the sacredness of its texts. Texts ‘speak’ within communities. Texts are alive within the chains of memory or tradition; they are reread and retold, rephrased and relived, and as such, they touch upon different contexts in a continuous, complex and dialectical process.

The official or unofficial status of ‘texts’ within religious frames may differ, but somehow texts are reified and ‘speak’, suspending time and space. H. G. Gadamer grasped this process precisely when he wrote: “Written texts (...) contain a pure spirit that speaks to us in an eternal presence. The art of reading and understanding written traces is like a magic art (...) in which space and time are suspended.” And he continues: “In knowing how to read what is transmitted, we are partaking of and achieving the pure presence of the past” (Gadamer, 156, trans. A. Assmann, 1996, 126). Knowing how to read is part of authorities and legitimacies. Transmitting texts and suspending time and space, like the evangelical Christian who preaches “The Bible tells us...”, can indeed be understood as a magic art that brings to life, as a person, as a voice that comes in unison with the magician, the priest, imam, pastor, a text. In this way, a text becomes a voice that speaks in current times and about current issues. Personages of the text become present, and although they lose their ‘historical’ significance, they gain their actual significance and become ‘present’. This ‘pure presence of the past’ makes Moses, Muhammad or Shiva historical contemporaries or, even more so, historical frames for the present.

## Religion and Memory

Remembering through narrative, place and ritual belongs to the heart of ‘religious communities’. A religious community can thus be understood as a mnemonic community in a special way. The ritual reenactment of the Exodus during Pesach; the passion and crucifixion of Christ during Easter and the period before; and the commemoration of Karbala during Muharram in Shia Islam are examples of narrative practices with clear in-group and out-group divisions that constitute specific religious traditions of interpretation and hermeneutics. These narrative practices are commemorated over and over again within the group’s traditions along the spiritual calendar, retelling narratives, producing art, movies, comics and practicing rituals like the question-answer structure during Pesach, the celebration of the Last Supper during ‘white Thursday’ or the flagellation or – in modern varieties – the donation of blood during Ashura.

In the same way as texts, these rituals abolish time and space and invite the constituting narrative through a combination of words and practices. Narratives that are linked with rituals become very ‘present’; they establish the abolition of time and space as part of religious memory. What then is there to be remembered? The narrative mediated in the ritual, like the crucifixion of Christ or the defeat of Hussain, to mention two narratives of violence, may have an impact on present perspectives on ‘representatives’ of narrative personages that function for instance as ‘bad guys’ within these narratives, like Judas or Yazid.

Of course this dynamic changes over time and differs in different contexts. The narrative of Karbala for instance (telling the murder of Hussain in 680), received a deep revolutionary content in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century during the revolutions of 1963 and 1978-79. The narrative changed from a commemoration of defeat and failure into an empowering narrative that channeled revolutionary energy against the Yazid of the Age, namely: shah Reza Pahlavi (Ram, 67-68). With the retelling and re-forming of constituting narratives, the place of these narratives within specific traditions might instruct frames to understand and even perceive current situations within the light of these narratives.

While narratives constitute and reconstitute the communities’ practices, narratives may also play an important role during processes of disidentification, to clearly distinguish between the community and a social space that is ‘outside’. Under tense conditions, if the community sees itself contested from the outside, the past and present can implode while perceiving this outside. This implosion is not only the narrative past that becomes present in current representatives of the outside, taking upon them the threat towards the religious community that is narrated and commemorated in the original stories, but also the tension and perspectives that have guided former ‘implosions’. Sometimes, narratives and personages become ‘alive’, as can be shown by the personage of Amalek in the Jewish tradition. Amalek, the enemy of Israel in the Book of Exodus, becomes incarnate in other opponents of the Jews or the state of Israel. Elliot Horowitz has traced – what he calls – the ‘legacy of Jewish violence’ and analyzed what role narratives about violent opponents in Biblical narratives have in legitimizing violence against current opponents of – say – ‘the Jews’ or the state of Israel. ‘Amalek’, Horowitz claims, can be seen as a ‘moral or metaphysical category’ (Horowitz: 3). In tense situations, when people feel threatened, the narrative opponent is presented beyond his historical significance and projected upon ‘real opponents’. In this way, Amalek can be seen as an ‘archive’ of threat

against the Jewish people. The fact that Horowitz writes about Amalek as a ‘moral or metaphysical category’ is interesting. Amalek has become a category, more than a personage, a principle you might say, by which a group can dis-identify itself from the ‘Amalekish’ outgroup and (re-)constitute its own morals in opposition to what Amalek represents.

Problematic narrative figures like Amalek, Judas or Yazid, who are responsible for treason, violence or even mass violence in their specific narratives, may function as a moral horizon against which groups can not only understand a current, tense situation but also link what is happening to these specific metaphysical categories. Amalek is an almost impersonal cowardly enemy of the people of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. It is impossible to negotiate with someone with an ‘Amalekite’ attitude, for this person is only after the destruction of Israel. Amalek should be destroyed (see: I Samuel 15:2-3). A similar meaning can be given to Haman, who is looking to destroy Israel in the Book of Esther. In the Christian tradition, the figure of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, is ‘recognized’ or – better – projected onto betrayers of the Christian faith. These ‘betrayers’ are frequently Jews or – like in the situation of the Balkan War – Muslims who ‘betray’ Christian Europe (Sells: 53-60). In Shia Muslim traditions, the figure of Muawiyya, the opponent of Ali, and his son Yazid, responsible for the Battle of Karbala in 680 that established Shia identity as opposed to Sunni, is re-interpreted in modern history to label opponents like the shah Reza Pahlavi during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the Iranian protests against alleged corruption during the presidential elections in 2009. These core figures of religious traditions are important markers of collective memory. Referring to them can infuse an enormous amount of energy into a group and may facilitate – although of course not necessarily - symbolic violence.

Remembering past atrocities along the lines of strong, ‘living narratives’ that belong to specific traditions, linking social affects that ‘recognize’ certain traits of the past enemy in the current enemy, opens up the possibility of traumatizing the present or of understanding the traumatic present within the moral and metaphysical categories of a text. Understanding the traumatic past in the present and using this past in order to mobilize a group is linked to what Vamik Volkan has coined ‘chosen trauma’. This concept is important for understanding the transmitting of archival energy that comes with texts, narratives and rituals and frame present situations.

## Trauma, Memory, Religion

Although Volkan has not studied the frame of narrative as an important tool for analyzing trauma, his theory on ‘chosen trauma’ can be helpful to understand the mediation between a group’s self-understanding and current conflict situations. The concept of chosen trauma provides a way to understand how past atrocities become reactivated and dynamically twisted in current violence.

Volkan’s line of reasoning does not include reflections on tradition and hermeneutics either. He confines his research to transgenerational pathways of the memory of ‘real traumas’. A trauma can be understood in the context of a past that has never gone through the work of mourning. Volkan, in this context, speaks about ‘collective trauma’ as his primal interest is in how large groups can organize themselves around past atrocities that have been committed against ‘them’ as a group. He argues that “when a traumatized group cannot reverse its feelings of helplessness and humiliation and cannot effectively go through the work of mourning, it transfers these unfinished psychological tasks to future generations” (Volkan, 154). This ‘transmission’ occurs in many post-conflict situations and may be translated into patterns of behavior that are passed down from parents to children or from one generation to another. This makes the transmission transgenerational. The burden that lays implicitly on the shoulders of children charge them with the heavy task: “to complete the mourning over the losses, reverse shame and humiliation, and turn passivity into assertion” (154). If trauma is part of a whole group, this can be important for the formation of in-group solidarity and (re-)creates representations of the event within discourses of remembrance. Volkan speaks about ‘mental representations’, but material representations that become part of in-group solidarities are at least as important. If this ‘tie’ – whether mental and invisible or material and visible – becomes a transgenerational sensibility and thus a large-group identity-marker, the trauma becomes ‘chosen’ in a specific way. A chosen trauma is a historical hurt (154). Once a historical trauma has become ‘chosen’, the historical truth, the facts and data of the atrocity that is remembered, become less important and certain pathways of remembrance come to the fore as significant in the life of the group (155). Volkan refers to ‘historical facts’ that have become important parts of group-formations like the battle of Bila Hora in 1620 for Czech nationalism, the mass-killings of Lakota Indians at Wounded Knee in 1890 or the battle of Kosovo in 1389 for Serb self-understanding. These historical facts may become awakened from their ‘dormancy’ by strong leaders using these



facts to point to the group as a victim and to call for revenge (156). Slobodan Milosevic used the commemoration of the battle of Kosovo, for instance, to fuel the nationalist spirit. This was not the first time in history. In 1939, Kosovo was commemorated amidst an outburst of ethnic-nationalistic euphoria (Perica, 20). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the battle of Kosovo was revived from time to time, fusing the memory of the battle in 1389 with the struggle of the Serbian people for more freedom. Kosovo became modelled after Jerusalem and the battle for Kosovo became in some imaginations a battle for Jerusalem. For example, Archpriest and theologian Žarko Gavrilović argued in 1986 that “the Serbian people and their Orthodox Church, are the greatest martyrs of humankind (...) no other people in the world, except the Jews, have suffered so much for their faith and nation” (Perica, 124). From a Serbian perspective, the severe suffering of Serbs in the Jasenovac concentration camp is still under-recognized in many European political and religious frames. But this feeling of suffering that has not been recognized creates a ‘legitimate’ frame for the violence of the victim, as Dianne Enns has profoundly analyzed in other contexts (Enns).

Volkan does not address how a culture of mourning, forgetting, interpreting and reading contributes to this transmission, but only refers to the inability to reverse feelings of helplessness and humiliation. He also does not pay attention to the function of narrative as a persistent horizon that enables the group to victimize itself in the face of revenge, nor does he address religion as a persistent frame of mediation. Despite this omission, Volkan’s insights can be very helpful in considering the impact of religious discourses as part of large group self-perspectives, and the way these perspectives distinguish between how they are and how they are not, between what they are and what they are not, based on texts, places and rituals.

## **Trauma and Terror: The Heirs of the Perpetrators**

The already mentioned Iranian Revolution of 1979 may count as a classic example. Hans Kippenberg has shown how specific concepts of Shia martyrdom accommodated modern ideas of the self. Gradually through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, martyrdom in Shia (but also Sunni) perspectives became a matter of choice and a token of ultimate freedom. Martyrdom, Kippenberg argues, “is not a fate that overtakes a person. It is a freely chosen action” (Kippenberg, 58). The political and religious context of the Iranian Revolution is well documented (Zabih; Amineh and Eisenstadt;

Axworthy; Kippenberg, etc.). Kippenberg emphasizes the role of the Pahlavi's who responded violently against the Iranian White Revolution in 1963. This Revolution was not primarily focused on religious freedoms, but on the continually decreasing impact of Iranians on their own economy. This economy had been mostly in western hands since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and had destabilized the traditional economic structures and the power of the bazaars (Kippenberg, 64-65) with strong urbanization and an increase of the slums in bigger cities as a result (Kazemi). Common people could not expect much from the side of the government, but Shia institutions took their needs seriously, which resulted in more religious activities and a mushrooming of religious organizations and institutions. The religious-cultural frame of the Iranian Revolution was formed by the re-interpretations of the Ashura-ritual by Islamic intellectuals like Jalal al-Ahmad and Ali Shariati. Shariati in particular provided the Iranian population with a relatively new, dynamic religious frame. He battled against poverty and argued that Iran was heading in the wrong direction, the direction of Yazid (Rahnema, 240, 244). The revival of the Shia religion that preceded the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was not only the result of increasing poverty and a tragic disconnection between political rulers and the population, but also the result of a way of dealing with and understanding what occurred within the provided parameters of persistent Shia symbolism and culture. In this culture, a form of – what Heinz Halm calls – the ‘surrogate suffering’ of the faithful emerged. Through their narrative tradition, people could link themselves to the violent deaths of all 11 Imams (the 12<sup>th</sup> went into ghayba or occultation). This suffering of the faithful through martyrdom is mediated, however only partly, by the lives of the Imams (Halm, 137). Suffering during the 1979 Revolution was especially modelled after the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, who was slaughtered during the battle of Karbala. Due to this reconnection with the past that had been commemorated through texts (stories, histories), ritual (Ashura) and place (Karbala), the past became part of the present, as the present became a variety of the past. Suffering became martyrdom while martyrdom provided new energies of protest. Ashura became a paradigm to distinguish the good from the bad, flowing in new energy that made the revolution become part of a more essential, ‘moral and metaphysical’ battle. It is not only this narrative and place of Karbala that provided and still provides this revolutionary energy, but the way this narrative is imagined over and over again in Iranian culture, in paintings and cartoons, movies, theme parks and plays. Ashura and the battle of Karbala are part of popular culture and the entrance to this narrative is not only the reading

of the story during Ashura but (also) the imagery that this narrative created; the heroes of the tazieh-play, the good and ugly bad guys portrayed in movies and the nasty connotations of the old enemy names of the Shia: Yazid, Muawiyya etc. The heirs of the perpetrators are, as heirs, inscribed into a cultural-religious imagination. They thus become a cultural cluster of evil that is activated effectively through memory making, a projection of a new Yazid of flesh and blood in the current situation. The cultural reproduction of the narrative (that reproduces its reproduction) creates dialectically how the good and the bad are understood as ontological and moral modes, or, as Horowitz would have it, 'categories'. This process of reproduction is more important for understanding the religious framing of current events with reference to religious narratives, than the narratives themselves. The Iranian Revolution might count as a classic example of how religious imaginaries and re-interpretations of a traumatic past may succeed in providing revolutionary energies, by identifying the heirs of the ontological and moral opponents. Other contexts show how a more global and abstract perspective on themes might be related to interpretations of religious traditions and cause categorical violence.

Another example can illustrate what I have tried to understand as the archival energy that guides present situations. This example combines the Quranic infidels with collective memories about the antagonist: the crusader.

### **Killing the Crusaders**

On February 12, 2015, IS published a report in their online glossy magazine Dabiq, showing photos of 21 Egyptian migrant workers who were kidnapped in Sirte. On January 15, a grisly video message was uploaded unto the internet, showing the beheading of the 21 mostly Coptic Christians. Watching the video, we witness an extremely well-structured performance of what seems to be a mass-killing. The 21 victims are all dressed in orange, the color of Guantanamo Bay detainees. Groups alleged to be IS and formerly also Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) dress up their victims in this specific color before killing them in front of a camera. In the video, the victims are seen to be lead to a beach (although some specialists argue that the video was manipulated), each one of them guarded by a black-clad executioner, all bigger than their victims. The Copts are forced to kneel down and after a message is spoken out by a militant in fluent English who is standing in the middle of the row, they are beheaded. The camera does

not turn away but takes the right angle for bloody close-up shots. It appears extremely well-structured, a rationally calculated and esthetical organized massacre. The alleged place of these killings as assumed by the video, near Tripoli, as well as the discourse that goes with the video is full of symbolism. The captives in the video are called “people of the cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian Church”. The video is addressed to ‘the nations of the cross’ and later on to ‘the people of the cross’. Before the migrant workers are killed, the leader, standing precisely in the middle of the row, preaches: “Oh crusaders, safety for you will only be wishes, especially when you're fighting us all together, therefore we will fight you all together until the war lays down its burdens and Jesus - peace be upon him - will descend, breaking the cross, killing the swine. The sea you've hidden Sheikh Osama bin Laden's body in, we swear to Allah we will mix it with your blood.” At the end of the video, the speaker declares: “We will conquer Rome, by Allah’s permission” (Malsin; Ahram online) and we read on the screen: “The filthy blood is just some of what awaits you”. The video shows a red sea.

The killing of 21 people is a cruel and important example of memory making and the recontextualization of conflict. The violence against the Copts is presented as symbolic violence against the current representatives of past atrocities. The Copts become the heirs of past violence. However, they are more than that. An important aspect of this and other IS-killings is the medialization of it. The heirs of past violence are killed as symbolic representatives, replacing the viewers as the victims. According to the IS-commander, his victims were ‘crusaders’, a term generally used by jihadist leaders and groups to address Christians or westerners. The term is used to mark a historical trauma that is projected on current heirs of the historical perpetrators. Using the term, however, is not an explicit reference towards history. The crusades as a historical event do not play a role here, nor is the term ‘crusaders’ an established term in classical Islamic theology. However, Pakistani-British activist Kalim Siddiqui responded to Salman Rushdie’s book ‘The Satanic Verses’ as the latest product of a conspiracy against Islam that has been in the West ‘since the crusades’. Islamic scholars, as well as western academics, notice that Muslims ‘down through the ages’ speak about the West’s Crusader mentality (Tolan, Veinstein, Laurens, ix). The term ‘crusader’ here is an implusive category that covers a history of (violent) relationships. ‘Crusader’ is a hybrid and historically charged dense term that marks the power-relation between ‘the Christian West’ and ‘the Islamic East’, between Assmann’s distinction of ‘what we are’ and ‘what we are not’. This term also restyles the Islamic category of the infidel in the image of the crusader along the historical lines of violent

confrontations. ‘Crusader’ is a moral and ontological category comparable with Amalek in Jewish thought as the essential opposite of the faithful in-group. But the ‘crusader’ in this context also summarizes a collective memory that is remade within the context of the current conflict in Libya. The Copts, though historically never part of any crusade, become the heirs of the crusade-killers of the past, while at the same moment, through rapid media techniques, the western consumer of the video is soaked into the video and addressed as an heir of anti-Islamic violence. The blood of the Copts crosses the Mediterranean to reach Rome.

## Conclusion

How does the activity of remembering past atrocities within religious traditions work in justifying violence religiously? In the first two paragraphs, I first explored and then related the term ‘collective memory’ to religious traditions which resulted in a sharper understanding of ‘religious memory’. ‘Religious memory’, I argued, refers to an archive of texts, interpretations, rituals, theologies and practices that is explored at the surface of the self-interpretation of religious groups. Religious traditions are devices that create and control individual and collective awareness (Hervieu-Léger). What is there to say then about the role ‘religious memory’ plays in framing current conflicts that involve religious groups? At a conceptual level, I argued that remembering empowers the religious group as a group within the tense context of the present, where the archive can create perspectives on current outgroups based on the chain of symbols that belongs to the group’s perspective on its past. At a social-psychological level, the outgroup represents what the religious group is not, or what, based on its perspective of its past, it discards. If the opposing outgroup is reframed within the traumatic and persistent symbolism of the group’s past (based on and conserved through texts, places, rituals), a conflict becomes more difficult to solve. This is due to the non-negotiability that guides the traumatic frame in the archive or collective memory of the group, and which is projected on the current outgroup. There is no point in negotiating with Haman, Yazid, Judas or the crusaders. These personages are persistent symbols that make and consume the attitude of the group along the chain of memory and facilitate a traumatic self-perspective. During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Muslim clerics succeeded in using the archival frame of Yazid to reveal the violent attitudes of shah Reza Pahlavi and his administration. The story of Karbala opened up a traumatic self-perspective of many Shia activists and infused energy into a ‘just revolution’. The use of the word ‘crusader’

for Copts and western ‘kafirs’ in the video that was put online in February 2015 can be seen as a marker of a violent chain of historical memory. Using this word for Coptic migrant workers summarizes a history of violent confrontations in a symbolic act of killing. Although historic memory recreates the term ‘crusader’ over and over again in different settings of violence, the term is used at the surface of a conflict, framing current opponents within the traumatic perspective on the past and charges groups who are outside this frame (even historically) with the evil that is attributed to the image of the crusader.

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