

THE MYTH OF GODS AND GUNS

Misconceptions of the religious and the secular in counterinsurgency theory

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Summary: *This thesis applies a critical study of religion to counterinsurgency theory, a specific practice and field of study within military science. The question that the thesis treats is how a critical understanding of religion can contribute to a better understanding of modern insurgency and counterinsurgency theory. According to this thesis liberal-secularist understandings of 'religion' dominate the COIN field. These are revealed by examining the work done by religious scholars such as William Cavanaugh and José Casanova and applying it to prominent scholars of COIN such as Edward Luttwak and Frank Hoffman. Equally useful is the application of the perspectives of the religious scholars to paradigmatic theoretical works of the modern COIN field such as the Field Manual 3-24 of the United States Marine Corps it shows that 'religion' is treated as something 'sui generis', as something in itself. COIN theoreticians approach it with multiple different assumptions or an a priori definition, without actually critically questioning how their understandings came about or what the consequences of their assumptions are. They often overlook the powerrelations that lay behind the concept which they understand as 'religion', as Cavanaugh explain. They also overlook the social dynamics behind the process of secularization as Casanova explains, thereby running the risk to antagonize the people who they say they want to help through the application of COIN practices.*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Counterinsurgency and the modern military challenge

“[t]o hear the marines describe it, Ramadi is the Chernobyl of the insurgency, a place where the basic proteins of guerilla warfare have been irradiated by technology and radical Islam, producing seemingly endless cells of wide-eyed gunslingers, bomb gurus, and aspiring martyrs. Globalization wrought with guns and God. A place devoid of mercy, a place where any talk of winning hearts and minds would be met with a laugh, both sides seeming to have decided, ‘*This is where the killing will never stop, so give it your best shot*’.”¹

This excerpt, from the award winning essay *The Big Suck*, written by former marine David Morris, is a soldier’s perspective of the reality of what in military jargon is called ‘counterinsurgency’ (henceforth abbreviated as COIN). It is a mode of warfare where the United States military has been engaged in ever since it has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the Olympian efforts and investments made by the United States, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq do not seem to have moved any closer to a peaceful resolution. It drives soldiers involved in the actual ‘on the ground practice’, like David Morris, to despair. All their sacrifices seem to be pointless as victory continues to elude them.

The inability of the U.S. military, still the most powerful military on the planet, to command a definite resolution of the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan after nearly 18 years of incessant fighting has driven the American policy makers in Washington to turn away from these conflicts. Thereby possibly leaving a war-torn anarchy behind. According to journalist Adam Wunische, the Trump administration desperately turned away from the cursed COIN focus by having let the U.S. military ostentatiously return to ‘great power competition’ and the more conventional use of military power that accompany it.² Why has America failed so much despite its powerful military, wealth?

In the same article Wunische writes how the U.S. military is subsequently in danger of forgetting the lessons learned from the past decades, thereby nullifying the sacrifices it has made. Something similar happened after the intervention of the U.S. in Vietnam.³ Yet, that is not the only thing which the Vietnam campaign of the sixties and the contemporary campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have in common. In an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* James F. Jeffrey writes that it must not

¹ David J. Morris, “The Big Suck: notes from the jarhead underground,” *VQR*. <http://www.vqronline.org/dispatch/big-suck-notes-jarhead-underground> (accessed April 3, 2017).

² Adam Wunische, “America is losing its counterinsurgency operations capabilities,” *The National Interest*, 2 October, 2018. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/americas-military-losing-its-counterinsurgency-operations-capabilities-32462> (accessed January 26, 2019).

³ *Ibid.*

come as a surprise that the campaigns in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq all ended the same way. Namely with a shameful retreat of the U.S. military without having implemented a truly sustainable solution to the conflict. All have ended in the same way because, according to Jeffrey, the strategy underlying each campaign was the same. There were only superficial differences, such as the use of more modern materiel used and a slightly different manner of implementing the strategy.⁴ Jeffrey has observed this correctly indeed and it is exactly that idea which lies at the heart of this thesis, namely that each COIN campaign, but especially the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, were based on incomplete ideas.

It is important to analyze these ideas instead of dismissing all the experience and knowledge that has been gathered since 9/11 regarding COIN. First of all, all COIN experience must not be forgotten because all sacrifices will be for naught. Secondly, despite the reorientation of the Trump administration towards great power competition, knowledge about COIN remains relevant and is even likely to become more relevant in the future. Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, both employed as instructors at the U.S. Army War College, underline that insurgencies have existed throughout history, but that they will become more common and ‘strategically relevant’ in the future because of reasons mostly related to globalization.⁵ Max Boot, a senior fellow of the American think tank *Council on Foreign Relations*, notes in an article in *Foreign Affairs*:

“[c]onflict within states continues to break out far more frequently than conflict among states. Although the world has not seen a purely conventional war since the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, more than 30 countries [...] now find themselves fighting foes that rely on guerilla or terrorist tactics.”⁶

Rupert Smith, a highly decorated British general, acknowledges the changing nature of warfare. He even opens his *magnum opus* with the statement ‘war no longer exists’, with which he means that conventional war in the Clausewitzian sense is becoming less and less likely.⁷ In *The Utility of Force* Smith argues that the wars of the future will be what he calls ‘war amongst the people’. In

⁴ James F. Jeffrey, “Why Counterinsurgency Doesn’t Work,” *Foreign Affairs*, no.2 Vol. 94 (March/April 2015). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-02-16/why-counterinsurgency-doesnt-work> (Accessed January 26, 2019).

⁵ Steven Metz, and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004). p. 1.

⁶ Max Boot, ‘More Small Wars; Counterinsurgency is here to stay’, *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014): p. 5.

⁷ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force : The Art of War in the Modern World* (London : Allen Lane, 2005), p. 1.

other military jargon such wars are also referred to as ‘insurgencies. According to Smith these wars are inherently more complex than the inter-state and industrial wars of the past.⁸

In the meantime Smith also acknowledges how badly modern soldiers are equipped to deal with wars amongst the people. War is no longer just a question on how to destroy the fighting capability of the enemy, it is also about winning the hearts and the minds of the people. As such a broad range of activities must be developed, and vast amounts of information need to be gathered. Not only on the strength and location of the enemy, but also about the culture and political views.⁹ This thesis aims to be a contribution to the solution of challenges that modern COIN faces.

1.2 Justification and objectives

John Kiszely, another retired British general, acknowledged the same problems as Boot, Millen and Metz. He summarized the difficulties that modern soldiers face quite comprehensively:

“The asymmetric challenges posed to modern armed forces, particularly those of liberal democracies, by opponents who refuse to engage them in modern, conventional warfare, but instead choose a different style of warfare, for example insurgencies, are not new, but they are largely of a different sort: post-modern challenges – challenges that are not primarily overcome with the tools of modernity: more advanced technology, firepower, lethality, speed, stealth, digitization, logistics, network-centric warfare or hi-tech ‘shock and awe’.

[...]

The nature and characteristics of these operations point towards the roles in which military professionals may expect to find themselves, and the competencies they require.

[...]

These competencies require practitioners (soldiers, ed.) to have a high level of understanding across a wide range of subjects, including: the political context; the legal, moral and ethical complexities; culture and religion; how societies work; what constitutes good governance; the relationship between one’s own armed forces and society; the notion of human security; the concept of legitimacy; the limitations on the utility of force; the psychology of one’s opponents and of the rest of the population.”¹⁰

⁸ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force : The Art of War in the Modern World* (London : Allen Lane, 2005), p. 202-206.

⁹ Ibid, p. 398-404.

¹⁰ John Kiszely, *Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors*. (Shrivenham, England : Defence Academy of the United Kingdom), 2007, pp. 7 – 8.

The most interesting facets of his analysis is his acknowledgement of the ‘post-modern challenges’. Not material questions which ‘can be solved with the tools of modernity’ dominate the modern counterinsurgency agenda, but immaterial, almost philosophical questions on society. It requires knowledge about things which are not normally associated with soldiering, like culture and religion.

Currently it does not seem the case that the discussion regarding these issues is progressing much. Morris’ excerpt which opens this thesis is not meant as an analysis of the role and influence of religion in an insurgency. It is merely a description of the experiences of a soldier who has fought in one of the most vicious battles of the war in Iraq. However, military academics have not come much further than Morris’ analysis, ‘Globalization wrought with guns and God’. Most military academics seem to believe that religion, radical Islam in this case, has produced an endless stream of ‘wide-eyed gunslingers, bomb gurus and aspiring martyrs’. In short, the common belief is that religion always inspires rabid and irrational violence.

To substantiate these military academics usually refer back to the history of Europe and all the wars that have been fought over confessional differences. Since the West has managed to secularize ourselves and shed the troubling veil of religion it has managed to attain an unparalleled level of peace and prosperity. Or at least, so goes the story. If only all those ‘wide-eyed gunslingers’ would only jump on the train of modernity. Examples of scholars who have addressed the relationship between religion and insurgency in such fashion are Frank Hoffman, Edward Luttwak and Ralph Peters. Their work will be addressed thoroughly in this thesis. For now it suffices to say that their approach to the role of religion in armed conflict is uncritical and unhelpful.

As mentioned already this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on proper manner to improve COIN theory and practice. Specifically by facilitating a limited cross-pollination between the fields of military theory with religious studies. It will do so by critically engaging certain concepts that military scholars use in their analysis of what they consider to be ‘religious’ insurgencies. By investigating the contemporary work done on insurgency and COIN, and introducing its most important finding to the work done on the relationship between religion and violence, this thesis hopes to open up new paths for further investigation.

1.3 Main research question

In order to fulfill the objectives stated above this thesis revolves around the following research question:

How can a critical understanding of religion contribute to a better understanding of modern insurgency and counterinsurgency theory?

In order to answer the main research question properly there are three sub-questions. These sub-questions will be addressed in three separate parts. Chapters two and three are devoted to introducing COIN theory in general. Hence is the first sub-question ‘what are the central assumptions of COIN theory on war, violence and religion?’.

Chapter four will concentrate on the work done in the field of Religious Studies on the relationship between religion and violence. The sub-question will be ‘what is religion and how does it relate to violence?’. The focus will first be on the discussion surrounding the difficulties of defining religion, because contrary to popular beliefs it has proven to be very difficult to clearly define ‘religion’. The work of William T. Cavanaugh is particularly relevant in this respect. The second half of the second part will then focus on how religion relates itself to the secular in the public political realm.

Cavanaugh will be complemented by an analysis of how modernity and secularism manifest themselves in COIN theory. The aim is to reveal the dominance of secularism, or secularist modes of thinking in COIN theory, and the absence of a critical perspective on religion. It will explain that the scholars working on COIN theory missed out on the discussion which rages in the academic study of religion, and that they can benefit greatly from taking notice of it. Ultimately this will lead to the conclusion, where the main question will be answered. It will summarize and provide an overview of the findings, and make suggestions for further inquiry.

2. On insurgency and counterinsurgency

2.1 *Insurgency and counterinsurgency versus traditional war*

Men and women who have entered service in a Western army since 9/11 probably experienced war completely different than their grandparents who lived through the Second World War. Soldiers are expected to engage in much more activities than just the ‘simple’ application of violence. Something which the excerpt of Kiszely quoted earlier illustrates. The challenges soldiers face in insurgencies are completely different from those they encounter in ‘traditional’ inter-state war. Instead of meticulous combat operations they are expected to conduct diplomatic ‘hearts and minds’ operations. This means that they have to get involved in reconstruction activities and, in the words of Kiszely, answer philosophical questions such as ‘*what constitutes good governance?*’.¹¹ Also, soldiers are expected to have ‘cultural understanding’ of the society in which they fight an insurgency. Such things are unnecessary, or at least less necessary in traditional war.

Before turning to the discussion on insurgency and COIN, it must be explained what is meant with ‘traditional’ war and the manner in which it differs from COIN. In military jargon ‘traditional’ war is generally used interchangeably with ‘Clausewitzian’ war. In their book Dutch military historians Christ Klep and Rein Bijkerk explain how Carl von Clausewitz caught the essence of war around 1800. He was the first to study the unchanging nature of war in a rationally, scientific manner.¹² In effect Clausewitz created the field of military science.

Clausewitz is most commonly known for his definition of war as ‘the continuation of policy by other means’, while he has actually never stated it in this fashion. He actually defined war as ‘an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will’.¹³ Scholars distilled the classic quote attributed to Clausewitz as the logical conclusion of Clausewitz’s proposition, and it is still the root of all modern ideas regarding war and warfare. Through this conceptualization of war it is possible to approach it as a scientific-philosophical question which can be solved by the proper application of reason. The weapons with which wars are fought may have evolved, but the philosophies behind the use of them have not made great paradigmatic shifts since the time of Clausewitz.

Doctor Martijn Kitzen, a military scholar specialized in insurgency warfare and instructor at the Dutch Royal Military Academy (KMA), explains that ever since Carl von Clausewitz’s classic

¹¹ John Kiszely, *Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors*. (Shrivenham, England : Defence Academy of the United Kingdom), 2007, pp. 7 – 8.

¹² Rein Bijkerk and Christ Klep, *De Oorlog van Nu: Een rationele kijk op militair geweld*. (Amsterdam:Hollands Diep), 2018.

¹³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War; book 1*, . ed. Tom Griffith. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wadsworth Editions Limited), 1997.

On War, national armies are constructed around the paradigm that they must pursue a decisive battle with their enemy.¹⁴ To this end modern armies are composed of large, often highly mobile formations such as brigades, divisions and corps, which carry with them a bristling array of weaponry. During a confrontation the objective of these formations is to damage the enemy through the application of deadly force to such an extent, that he is unable or unwilling to continue the conflict.¹⁵

This approach to war is uprooted in (counter-)insurgency. Whereas Clausewitzian war is characterized by large army formations maneuvering around each other in large, sweeping battles, COIN is a drawn out form of war. Instead of a ‘real’ war, it is more a political struggle in which the use of lethal force is allowed. Therefore COIN is sometimes also seen as a form of civil war. Nonetheless, the ultimate goal of the undertaking remains the same. Namely to bring your opponent to the point on which he or she is unable or unwilling to continue the fight.

The drawn out nature flows from the material inferiority of most insurgents. Insurgents intentionally avoid the grand military clashes that characterize ‘traditional’ war, because they lack the expensive weaponry that a Clausewitzian army fields. Instead, the insurgents hide from their opponents. Either in difficult terrain, such as the mountains or the jungle, or among the local population. Then they resort to indirect warfare, which encompasses measures aimed at breaking the morale of their opponents through pinprick attacks, stretched over a long period of time. Such measures range from a mix of guerilla and terror tactics, but also to propaganda and political mobilization of the population are considered part of this form of warfare.¹⁶ With these measures they annul the material and organizational superiority that a classical army possesses.

Due to the asymmetrical and irregular approach of insurgents, traditionally organized armies find it nigh impossible to grapple with insurgencies. Throughout history there are only a handful of successful cases where a traditional army conducted a successful counterinsurgency. The ‘Malayan Emergency’ being the paradigmatic example.¹⁷ The campaign lasted from 1950 until 1954, and from it the central doctrine within modern COIN emerged, namely the ‘hearts and minds approach’.¹⁸

¹⁴ M. Kitzen, “Westerse militaire cultuur en counterinsurgency, een tegenstrijdige realiteit” *Militaire Spectator* 177, no. 3 (2008): p. 125.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 127.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 127.

¹⁷ Karl Hack, “The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 3, (2009). Pp. 383-414.

¹⁸ Paul Dixon, “Hearts and minds? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32 no. 3 (2009): p. 354.

The approach is attributed to Robert Thompson. He served as a civil relations officer under the generals Richard Templer and Henry Briggs, who are worth mentioning since they heavily influenced Thompson's thinking. The approach focuses on winning over the population of the theater of operations through a variety of means. Thompson deemed these means to be largely located in the civil sphere of governance. Therefore he stressed that it is much more important for a counterinsurgent deliver 'good governance', such as providing proper public services and creating an accountable government, rather than military tasks. He termed it 'outgoverning the opponent'.¹⁹ This idea still lies at the heart of modern COIN doctrine. Also, it is one of the fundamental ideas underpinning modern COIN handbooks such as the Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24) of the United States army.

2.2 Definitions of insurgency and counterinsurgency in military science

The paragraph above explained what the differences are between classical, or 'Clausewitzian' war, insurgency and COIN, but it did not give an exact definition of these concepts. This paragraph will discuss several definitions that are used in the theoretical COIN debate. First of all the definitions which are used by the most prominent contemporary COIN handbook, namely the FM 3-24. Also it will treat the definition which is used by David Kilcullen, an internationally renowned thinker on the subject. This paragraph is not meant as an enquiry into which definition is best the best. Rather it will introduce the most influential definitions of the concepts. The one given by the FM 3-24 is of particular interest in this respect, because the FM 3-24 is the principal COIN handbook of the American military and therefore the definition which shapes the way of thinking of American soldiers who are involved in COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The first edition of the FM 3-24 (2006) emphasizes the primarily political aspect of an insurgency. It defines insurgency as an 'organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government'.²⁰ The second edition of the FM 3-24 (2014) defined it as 'the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region'.²¹

It is unclear as to why the definition got changed in the second edition, but what is noticeable is that the definition has become broader. Cases that can be labeled 'insurgency' subsequently increase under the 2014 edition. All instances of an 'organized use of subversion and violence' to alter

¹⁹ Alexander Alderson, "Britain," in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 34.

²⁰ Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, Dec. 2006), paragraph 1-2.

²¹ Ibid, paragraph 1-3.

‘the political control of a region’ can be labeled an insurgency, instead of only those situations where there is a ‘protracted politico-military struggle’ against an ‘established government’ as the 2006 version spelled out. In the 2014 edition an established government is no longer a qualifying factor. Therefore, according to the 2014 definition, non-governmental entities which do not necessarily target the government or pursue a political cause but do control a territory can also be subject to an insurgency, such as drug cartels in Mexico for example.

This difference in focus can also be recognized in the definition of COIN each edition gives. The 2006 edition defines COIN as ‘military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency’.²² The 2014 edition defines COIN as ‘comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes’.²³

It is immediately clear that the government is again taken as the subject in the 2006 edition of the FM 3-24, but that this has been taken out in the 2014 edition. In the 2006 edition the government of a state is taken as the subject of the counter-efforts to an insurgency. In the 2014 edition the governmental aspect is taken out, thereby making it less restrictive when it comes to actors being able to conduct COIN. This vagueness is complemented by another point of obscurity.

Namely what is to be understood as ‘efforts’. In the 2006 edition it covers all ‘military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions’ which are employed to defeat an insurgency. This raises the question which other actions are left then. Basically any action or policy taken by a government can be placed in one of these categories. This means that any action taken by a government aimed at defeating the insurgency becomes COIN. Therefore, the risk of definitional overstretch lurks.

The authors of the 2014 edition seem to have realized this and simply reduced all the terms of the 2006 edition into ‘comprehensive civilian and military efforts’. However, this does not solve problem of vagueness. On the contrary, an argument can be made that this only increases the vagueness, because there is no further definition of what ‘comprehensive civilian and military efforts’ entails. With some imagination and creative writing any measure can be categorized as a ‘comprehensive civilian and/or military effort’. Definitional vagueness is an important part of the problem which lies at the hearth of the FM 3-24.

²² Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, Dec. 2006), paragraph 1-2.

²³ Ibid, paragraph 1-3.

However, a certain level of definitional vagueness may be inherent in COIN theory. David Kilcullen, a soldier-turned-scholar who specializes in COIN theory and an important contributor to the FM 3-24, explains that it is important to realize that insurgency and counterinsurgency are two different, but interdependent concepts. There it is difficult to create one clear-cut definition of either one. He wrote:

“The concept of ‘counter-insurgency’ is logically contingent on that of ‘insurgency’. Counter-insurgency is ‘all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency’. Thus, the nature of counter-insurgency is not fixed, but shifting: it evolves in response to changes in insurgency. There is no constant set of operational techniques in counter-insurgency; rather, this is a form of ‘counter-warfare’ that applies all elements of national power against insurrection.”²⁴

So Kilcullen works backwards. By clearly stating that COIN is contingent on insurgency he manages to explain the reason behind the initial vagueness. Every insurgency is unique, and if that is the case it becomes impossible to determine a fixed definition of COIN. If every insurgency is unique, and the meaning of COIN is contingent on insurgency, COIN can indeed encompass any action that attempts to counter an insurgency. So the definition of insurgency carries much more weight, as it also determines the definition COIN. Like in both editions of the FM 3-24 the aspect of political control is central. Kilcullen’s definitions highlight that insurgency is the challenge to an existing framework of political control, and that COIN are the measures taken to preserve this framework. Subsequently, Kilcullen defines insurgency as:

“[a] struggle to control a contested political space, between a state (or group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers.”²⁵

In another essay Kilcullen underlines his focus on the state as the principal agent in COIN efforts. He even argues that the ability to conduct a successful COIN campaign can be considered a defining feature of a successful state. Literally he writes:

²⁴ David Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006): p. 112.

²⁵ Ibid.

“[c]ounterinsurgency – the broadly-defined activity of countering insurrection, suppressing internal rebellion in order to control societies – is an ancient human institution, a traditional (perhaps even a defining) activity of government. It has at least existed as long as the state itself.”²⁶

Thereby Kilcullen lifts COIN to ‘perhaps’ a defining feature of a successful state. Kilcullen’s thinking appears to hinge on the idea that COIN enables a state to ‘control societies’. It allows a state to exercise effective governance by establishing its unchallenged authority. In fact Kilcullen states in the same article that ‘counterinsurgency seems to have been central to the development of the ancient state, and hence of the state as we know it today’.²⁷ Thus, he seems to equate COIN with the ability to establish a durable monopoly of force, which is a crucial characteristic of a state.

The omission of the governmental aspect in the definition of the 2014 edition of the FM 3-24 becomes confusing then. Unfortunately Kilcullen, nor any other contributor to the field manual, never explained the reason why the definitions of both ‘insurgency’ and ‘counterinsurgency’ were changed in the 2014 edition. As stated in the introduction it is not the aim of this thesis to provide an answer to this question, the aim is to introduce a critical study of religion to COIN theory and contribute to its continuing improvement. Until now military scholars have not yet done so and thereby overlooked a key issue in contemporary COIN theory. The next chapter will elaborate on the historical development and the current state of COIN theory.

²⁶ David Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency; The State of a Controversial Art,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 129.

²⁷ Ibid.

3. Historical development of COIN theory and the FM 3-24

3.1 *Origins of COIN theory; Colonial warfare and Imperial policing*

This chapter will trace the historical development of COIN theory from its origins during the colonial era, until the FM 3-24. The FM 3-24 is considered the culmination of over two centuries of military theorizing on insurgency and COIN. The main author of the FM 3-24, Conrad Crane, noted how no other US military manual ‘has ever caused a stir like the finished FM 3-24’, because there has never been such a thorough review of COIN theory.²⁸ However, the road to the FM 3-24 has been long.

A complete historical review of COIN theory falls outside of the scope of this thesis. Therefore an overview of the historical development of COIN theory the created by the Dutch military theoretician Maarten Huizing will be helpful.²⁹ He has divided the development of COIN theory in three consecutive periods. Each period is characterized by its own ‘school’ of COIN theory. Appendix I on page 55 illustrates Huizing’s three era’s.

The theory of COIN can trace its academic lineage back to the era of imperial policing. Otherwise known as colonial warfare. This era was during the heyday of European imperialism. It revolved around the domination of ‘primitive’ societies for economic exploitation. The period lasted from approximately 1870 until 1945.

Many of the COIN practices of this era revolved around the use of brute force. In short the aim of colonial warfare, or imperial policing, was to incorporate the ‘primitives’ into the empire by ‘simple’ subjugation. This was considered a military affair. Although peaceful subjugation was preferred and often tried, but it was not an absolute goal. An abundant use of violence was considered acceptable, and according to many colonial officers perhaps even unavoidable. These theories and practices of the colonial era are interesting to investigate further, but somewhat irrelevant to this thesis due to their out datedness and the extent to which they are discarded by practically every military now. However, a better examination of the ideas might prove valuable for future research.

3.2 *Second generation COIN; decolonization and the ‘classical’ school*

After the colonial era came the ‘classical’ era. For Huizing this era runs from 1945 until approximately 1960. The evolution of the classical school is considered to run parallel to the era of

²⁸ Conrad Crane, “United States,” in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 68.

²⁹ See Huizing’s periodical table of the history of COIN theory, which is attached to this thesis as appendix I, page 58.

decolonization. The military was deployed for an (for as far as possible) orderly dismantling of colonial empires, or for desperate attempts to preserve them. The larger framework of superpower rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet-Union is occasionally also mentioned as a characterizing facet of this era. Since both superpowers were aware that open war would mean mutually assured destruction, they fought each other through proxy wars which often resulted in long drawn out insurgencies.

There were three principal authors who contributed to the classical school, and their theories are still of great influence on COIN thinking today.³⁰ According to Huizing the FM 3-24 lends much of its theoretical rigor to these men, and particularly to the Frenchman David Galula.³¹ Also, Conrad Crane, main author of the FM 3-24, admits that Galula was one of the most influential classical COIN theorists on the new manual.³² However, there are some who argue that Galula's writings are somewhat overrated.

One such military academic is Etienne de Durand, former director of the *Institut Français des Relations Internationales* (IFRI). He doubts Galula's gravitas in the discussion on insurgency. Firstly he believes the American authors of the FM 3-24 have greatly overestimated the influence of Galula's ideas and the extent of their applicability. In short de Durand believes that Galula's techniques were effective because of the unique environment in North-Africa. The terrain was relatively accessible because it was not very urbanized and lacked natural complicating factors like thick jungles.³³

Secondly, he believes that the American authors simply misunderstood some of writings of Galula and other French COIN authors. De Durand argues that Galula's writings were not as universally applicable as the American theorists generally assume. They were visceral anticommunist, even to the extent that they greatly distorted Galula's perception of the political realm of COIN.³⁴ Taking de Durand's criticism into account, it would perhaps be too simple to structure COIN theory into the periods that Huizing suggests.

Nonetheless, Huizing's overview suffices as a general overview of the development of COIN theory for this thesis. Whether or not the amount of influence attributed to Galula et al. is justified, or whether the authors of the field manual have interpreted their theories correctly, as de Durand argues, is part of another discussion.

³⁰ See Appendix I.

³¹ M. Huizing, "Basisprincipes van Klassieke Counterinsurgency", *Militaire Spectator* 181 no. 2 (2012): pp. 47.

³² Conrad Crane, "United States," in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 61.

³³ Etienne de Durand, "France," in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 16, 20-21.

³⁴ Ibid.

Huizing's work is also helpful in analyzing how the classical school inspired modern COIN theory. Several assumptions that lay at the foundation of modern COIN theory find their origins in the classical school. So much so that paradigmatic school of this moment is labeled the 'neo-classical school'. Huizing analyzed both schools and distilled ten basic laws of the classical COIN school which are still applied today. Huizing identifies these ten basic principles as follows:

1. The aim of the operation is to win the support of the local population, so as to restore government authority,
2. In order to win the support of the population, a combination of political, economic, psychological, judicial and military measures need to be taken,
3. In order for the population to join the side of the government the counter-insurgent needs to show that he can beat the insurgents,
4. Psychological operations play an important role to create popular support for the mission of restoring government authority and the mission to defeat the insurgents,
5. A properly functioning state apparatus is important to ensure a concerted effort between all civil and military components of the counter-insurgency mission,
6. It is necessary to separate the insurgents from the general population in order to win the support of the population,
7. Intelligence is essential to eliminate the insurgents and to discover the attitudes of the general population,
8. The role of the armed forces is to create security for the civil components of the counter-insurgency and to separate the insurgents from the general population,
9. Establishing and expanding government control starts with controlling the important population centers, after which the control is gradually expanded [to other areas of the operational arena, ed.],

10. COIN is a long process which demands much endurance.³⁵

One reason why these ten ‘laws’ are still so vehemently applied is that both the classical and neo-classical school have stabilization in mind as their end goal, instead of subjugation, which was the goal during the colonial era. The theories of the authors of this era focused more on reconstituting a stable political order before leaving the area. Often this was done in preparation of diplomatic negotiations concerning independence. Therefore a fundamental idea which undergirds the ten basic principles is that the use of force is restricted.

3.3 Modern COIN; the neo-classical school and the FM 3-24

Lastly there is the neo-classical COIN era. Huizing explains that the FM 3-24 internalized the ten principles mentioned in section 3.2 and slightly adapted them to be compatible with the modern context of insurgency. As such classical COIN theory almost seamlessly evolved into the neo-classical COIN school.³⁶

Frank Hoffman has served as an officer in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and currently is a distinguished research fellow at the U.S. National Defense University. He researched the insurgencies that have predominated the twenty-first century so far and came to a similar conclusion as Huizing. Namely that neo-classical COIN is nothing more than ‘a merger of traditional approaches with the realities of a new world’.³⁷

These ‘realities of the new world’, or differences between the world of the classical school and the neo-classical school, include such things as the transformed role of the media, globalization and changes in the mindset of insurgents themselves, thereby referring to the increased saliency of religious motivations.³⁸ In order to deal with these new circumstances better, both Hoffman and Huizing propose different things.

Huizing argues that the western militaries have successfully adapted their classical conception of COIN into a neo-classical school by adapting its central assumptions to contemporary circumstances, but the western militaries have not gone far enough. He concludes by asking whether Western nations dare to go back to ‘neo-colonial counterinsurgency’, because he believes that the neo-classical

³⁵ M. Huizing, “Basisprincipes van Klassieke Counterinsurgency”, *Militaire Spectator* 181 no. 2 (2012): pp. 49-51. Translated from Dutch to English by the author as literally as possible.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47.

³⁷ Frank Hoffman, ‘Neo-classical counterinsurgency?’ *Parameters* 41 no. 4 (2011): pp. 91-93.

³⁸ M. Huizing, “Basisprincipes van Klassieke Counterinsurgency”, *Militaire Spectator* 181 no. 2 (2012): pp. 46-47.

school seems to have forgotten valuable lessons of colonial rule.³⁹ Yet, what he seems to miss, is that a return to these lessons does not constitute a grand theoretical overhaul where foundational assumptions of COIN theory are questioned. It is still only a reshuffling of already existing COIN theorems, or COIN theorems which are considered already out-dated. Also, colonial administration rested on many assumptions which are morally questionable by today's standards to say the least.

On the other hand Hoffman has called the FM 3-24 an embodiment of the neo-classical school. His main point of critique is that the manual is more of an update of the theories espoused by Galula than a thorough revision of them. Such a revision is necessary according to him because the religiously motivated insurgents of the 21st century pose a far greater challenge than the secular, Marxist insurgents of the 20th century. According to Hoffman, secular Marxists at least pursued material goals, and can therefore be reasoned with. Contrary to the Islamic Taliban, who pursue otherworldly goals and are irrational and irreconcilable because of it.⁴⁰

It is exactly this last proposition which is under scrutiny in this research. Modern insurgencies of today are indeed different than those of the 20th century, every insurgency is unique after all, but the insurgents are only half of the equation. The current pinnacle of COIN theory, the FM 3-24 is blind to the relationship between the religious and the secular, and the intricate dynamics surrounding modernity. Moreover, it does not even wield a clear definition of what is meant with the term 'religion'. Something which is far less clear than it appears at first glance. In this respect the manual is just another document in a long line of historical works on the issue written by authors of liberal-secular western states. A tradition which, moreover, started in the era of colonialism and imperialism.

Possibly authors of the FM 3-24 apparently did recognize the Western liberal-secular roots of the manual. As Conrad Crane notes early drafts relied too much upon a definition of political legitimacy that was rooted in 'Western liberal values of political participation' and ignored how other factors such as 'security concerns or religious beliefs, could shape local definitions of legitimacy'.⁴¹ Supposedly they adapted this in the final version, but their success is arguably questionable. For one they did not reevaluate what they understood under the generic term 'religion', or how it relates to their own secular worldviews. The next part will explore some of the research done on critical approaches towards the study of religion, before turning towards the last part where the critical approaches are applied to COIN theory.

³⁹ M. Huizing, "Basisprincipes van Klassieke Counterinsurgency", *Militaire Spectator* 181 no. 2 (2012): p. 58.

⁴⁰ Frank Hoffman, 'Neo-classical counterinsurgency?' *Parameters* 41 no. 4 (2011): pp. 96-97.

⁴¹ Conrad Crane, "United States," in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 62.

4. The myth of religious violence

4.1 William Cavanaugh's proposition

This chapter aims to recast the conceptualization of religion in general COIN literature by referring to the work on the critical study of religion by several scholars. First and foremost there is the work of William T. Cavanaugh. He is a professor of Catholic studies at DePaul University, and the author of the book *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. In it he advances his argument about the misunderstood relationship between religion and violence, which he deemed 'The Myth of religious violence'. Literally he phrases 'The Myth' as follows:

“[w]hat I call the “myth of religious violence” is the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from “secular” features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence. [...] I challenge this piece of conventional wisdom, not simply by arguing that ideologies and institutions labeled “secular” can be just as violent as those labeled “religious”, but by examining how the twin categories of religious and secular are constructed in the first place.”⁴²

Cavanaugh's *myth* is remarkably applicable to much of the COIN literature discussed earlier. This chapter will explore Cavanaugh's argument that there is no such thing as 'ahistorical and transcultural religion', and that the categorization of ideas and practices into those that are 'religious' and those that are 'secular' is cannot be seen to stand apart from certain power relations.

This is equally true in COIN theory. As explained at the end of section 3.3 the authors of the FM 3-24 did recognize a bias towards Western, liberal-secular ideas in the manual, but did not fundamentally interrogated this bias. With the help of Cavanaugh this can be done and the full extent of the bias can be illustrated better.

Particularly his inquiry into *the myth* as the cornerstone of the foundational narrative of the modern liberal-democratic nation-state of the West is helpful. Cavanaugh explains that *the myth* places an irrational and violent, because religious, other against a rational and therefore peaceful secular. This social construct has become prevalent, yet unnoticed throughout Western thinking. Its effects in both Western domestic and foreign politics are legion, and if one looks closely they are also distinguishable in general COIN theory. Inadvertently it shapes certain attitudes of Western soldiers

⁴² William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p.3.

and academics alike. This creates tensions not only between the West ‘and the rest’, but with Muslim societies in particular.⁴³

4.2 Misgivings regarding Religion; a transcultural and ahistorical concept

In the first chapter of *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* Cavanaugh analyses nine of the most preeminent scholars who have written on the nexus of religion and violence. He explains how all of them, in one way or the other, fell into the fallacy of analyzing a constructed dichotomy between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’, without questioning the accuracy of the. The arguments of the COIN theorists treated above match remarkably well with the arguments of the nine scholars addressed by Cavanaugh.

He argues that these nine scholars all make one of in total three misunderstandings regarding religion’s connection to violence. They all believe that religion causes violence because it is either ‘absolutist, divisive or insufficiently rational’.⁴⁴ He dismisses all arguments in each category on the notion that they do not manage to provide a stable definition of religion and proves that their concepts are either too vague, or ‘unjustifiably clear’.⁴⁵ This means that all of their definitions either encompass ideologies which they would actually rather exclude, or exclude ideologies which they would rather include. Hence all attempts to prove that religion inclines people to violence on the account that it is absolutist, divisive or insufficiently rational becomes shaky at best, and untenable at the worst.⁴⁶ Moreover, the attempt to isolate religious ideologies from secular ideologies on the basis of their inclination to incite violent behavior is not only unhelpful, but even counterproductive because it blinds us to forms of secular violence which are equally destructive as the religious forms that are normally so vehemently criticized. Cavanaugh’s final remark is noteworthy in this respect, namely that ‘people kill for all kinds of reasons’.⁴⁷

Looking at *the myth* more closely, there one thing that the nine scholars criticized by Cavanaugh and the FM 3-24 and its critics have in common. They all accept the notion that religion is something *sui generis*, something in itself, which is universally and ahistorically present in human societies. It is this universal and eternal presence has a tendency to induce violent and nasty behavior

⁴³ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.17-18.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

in otherwise peaceful human beings. Subsequently they juxtapose this ‘religious’ in opposition to a secular other, which is inherently rational and thus less violent.⁴⁸

Rather than accepting this conventional wisdom, Cavanaugh urges that both categories must be understood as socially constructed concepts which are used to label certain ideas and practices.⁴⁹ Then it creates a dichotomy by placing two fantasized concepts against each other and presents this, together with the concepts on which it is constructed, as immutable facets of human life. This needs to be challenged if a better understanding is to be developed by academia about the social dynamics of places where armed (religious) violence currently takes place.

Finally it must be noted that this does not mean that Cavanaugh excuses religion. He is clear that he does not want to exempt the beliefs of people generally considered ‘religious’, such as Hindus, Christians or Muslims, from scrutiny. He deems it very well possible that such beliefs can contribute to violent behavior.⁵⁰ He simply challenges the idea that religion is uniquely disposed to incite violence. ‘Secular’ practices can be just as violent, but *the myth* shields these from scrutiny by creating an artificial dichotomy and labeling one of the two categories (the religious one) as more violent because it is believed to be either absolutist, divisive or insufficiently rational.

4.3 *Serving a need: the myth in the domestic and foreign political realm*

A final feature of Cavanaugh’s work which connects well to the criticism on COIN theory that this thesis aims to formulate is the use of *the myth*. According to Cavanaugh it exists because it fulfills an important need for its western consumers. It creates an ‘other’ which can serve as the enemy against which the ‘liberal’ western societies can structure themselves. This us-them antithesis manifests itself both in the domestic as in the foreign policy domain of western, liberal-democratic states.

Domestically it connects to a broader enlightenment narrative, where killing and dying for religion became idiotic, but doing the same for the newly created nation-state was considered laudable. Cavanaugh notes that the implementation of this combined narrative had a profound effect. De facto the newly formed nation-states monopolized the willingness of the people to sacrifice and kill. Ecclesiastical institutions, or other actors deemed ‘religious’ no longer had a legitimate claim to the use of lethal force.⁵¹ From hence on states were the only institutions who could legitimately declare

⁴⁸ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 4.

⁴⁹ For a particularly clear explanation on the theoretical discussion surrounding ‘religion’ as a *sui generis* concept, I see the work of Russel T. McCutcheon. Russel T. McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers: Redefining the Public Study of Religion*, Albany: State University of New York Press (2001).

⁵⁰ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 54.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

and undertake wars, or crusades. He explains how the concept ‘religion’, which we use today to describe certain practices in society often involving deities and ideas of transcendence, was designed by a range of classical liberalist philosophers. He quotes men like John Locke, David Hume and Thomas Hobbes, and shows how their ideas covering ‘religion’ helped to cement the emerging social order of the secular nation-state.

The ‘wars of religion’ of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are often referred to as the proof of the destructive influence religion has on the peace and order of society, and function as a foundational narrative for the secular state. Something which the early liberal philosophers mentioned above propagated enthusiastically.

However, by analyzing a vast amount of literature from both the era itself and historians who covered the era, Cavanaugh argues that the ‘wars of religion’ were actually much less about religion than is often assumed. Rather, the emergence of ‘religion’ and ‘secular’ as two independent concepts was a contributing factor to the breaking out of these wars. The creation of ‘religion’ allowed the state to marginalize certain practices and institutions, thereby enhancing its own authority position within society. Eventually it were the mundane leaders of the states, rather than the heavenly ecclesiastical institutions who won, thereby creating a new normal. So the religious-secular distinction is not a logical conclusion of a rationally constructed secular theory. Rather, it was the result of a contingent shift in power distribution between civil and ecclesiastical authorities that was mediated, and eventually established, through violence.⁵²

According to Cavanaugh a similar dynamic of obscurantism is noticeable in the foreign policy domain of (mainly) western states. He uses the case of Islam to convey his message. He notes that contemporary liberal-secularism has found its ‘nemesis’ in ‘the Muslim’ who allegedly refuses persistently to distinguish between politics and religion. Subsequently ‘the myth’ allows for the justification of interventionism.

Coercive measures are legitimized by secular authorities by referring to the danger that Islamic religious ideology poses. Muslim societies are particularly targeted by the West because of their alleged inability, or unwillingness, to cleanse the political arena of religious beliefs. So Islamic societies and individual Muslims are believed to remain irrational and inherently prone to fanatical violence because they continuously mix politics with religion.

On the contrary the West is, being secular, capable of rational violence. ‘Secular violence’ is measured, precise because it is considered rational. The result is that it is as bloodless as possible.

⁵² William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 6.

The mix between religion and politics excludes the possibility of measured violence, because it is irrational. Violence which is religious is not only irrational, it is frantic, uncontrolled and therefore excessively bloody.

The above line of reasoning justifies the use of force on the basis that, unfortunately, the only manner to contain the violence of the religious other, is to employ secular, or rationally driven violence. As Cavanaugh puts it, we (meaning ‘the West’) ‘find ourselves obliged to bomb them into liberal democracy’.⁵³ Following the logic of *the myth* the world can only be free of erratic violent behavior if all societies adhere to the separation of church and state.

Thus *the myth* continues to provide a defense of interventionist policies. Western states intervene in traditionally structured, non-western societies and proclaim to ‘set things right’ or ‘liberate’ them. The narrative surrounding these assumptions is based on the allegedly divisive, absolutist and irrational effects religious ideologies have within these societies. The presence of these in the public realm is considered the principal point of difference with the peaceful and successful western societies, and therefore need to be remedied.⁵⁴ Therefore it would be logical if the policy programs would focus on taming these ‘religious passions’ in the public sphere.

Approaching the question of the place of ‘religious passions’ in the public sphere in the manner described above fits within a framework of José Casanova. He has written on the different manners on which ‘the secular’ manifests itself, and his work is of help when analyzing the way on which the FM 3-24 and its critics think about religion and secularism.

⁵³ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 12.

5. Constructions of the Secular

5.1 *The Secular*

From Cavanaugh flows the idea that religion does not necessarily encourage violent behavior. Secular ideologies can be as equally violent, or, as Cavanaugh puts it ‘people kill for all kinds of reasons’. The Myth simply obscures secular violence and hence lets it go unquestioned. To an extent this can also be seen within COIN literature, but before doing so it might be helpful to further unpack ‘the secular’. This chapter aims to do that, so that a more complete analysis can be made.

José Casanova stresses that we must keep the ‘basic analytical distinction’ in mind between three different three categories of secularism. First of all there is ‘the secular’, which is understood as a central modern epistemic category. Secondly there is ‘secularization’, which is ‘an analytical conceptualization of modern world-historical processes’. Lastly there is ‘secularism’, which is understood as a specific worldview or ideology.⁵⁵ Furthermore, he points out how all these categories have several different dimensions. As such it has a theological-philosophical, legal-political and cultural-political dimension. In each case it is always posited against ‘the religious’, as Cavanaugh also indicated.⁵⁶ The secular, which used as a generic term for the three different categories, is therefore politically constituted, not naturally. Cavanaugh described this as well.

Casanova’s work is a historical exposition of the historical origins of ‘the secular’. Relevant from this historiography is the notion that ‘the secular’ is often implicitly understood as the residual, ‘natural’ reality which remains after the ‘toxin’ of religion has been purged out of it. Hence in Casanova’s depiction religion is seen as a ‘super-structural and superfluous additive’.⁵⁷ At most this is of value for the individual, but for society as a whole it will only interfere with the rational debate on matters of state.

In this respect he seems to be on the same line as Cavanaugh, who departs from John Locke. According to Cavanaugh Locke argued that stately officials have no power, nor right to meddle with the ‘inner reaches of the personal conscience’, by which ‘Locke draws a distinction between the “outward force” used by the civil magistrate and the “inward persuasion” of religion’.⁵⁸ Locke subsequently constructs a sharp division of labor between the state and the church in society on the basis of this distinction. The church’s concerns are in the private realm of individual subjects of the state,

⁵⁵ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms”, In Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. *Rethinking Secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, p. 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

⁵⁸ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, New York: Oxford University Press (2009): p. 78.

whereas the concerns of the state are public in nature. The state pursues the interests of the collective of all individual subjects, the church only pursues interests that are for the benefit of the individual. Generally considered to be the wellbeing of the individual spirit or mind.⁵⁹ Thus Locke crafted a world divided along those who hold power over the public sphere, and those who carry responsibility for the interior wellbeing of the individual.

The problem is not so much that ‘the secular’ is always posited against ‘the religious’, and is subsequently interpreted as something which is somehow better or truer. From this a reality is constructed which is said to be undeniable. However, when Cavanaugh’s description of how power relations between the state and the clergy were delineated during the middle ages using this dynamic, it must be considered as a political construction and not a natural reality. Even though many people today experience ‘the secular’ as a natural way of being, it is not an objective truth and can therefore be challenged. Religion can have a prominent place within the public (political) sphere.

Casanova makes his most important conclusion at the end of the part discussing ‘the secular’. He proposes to see the secular, or ‘secularity’ in its historical context and to approach it as a ‘historical condition’.⁶⁰ Despite the continuing progress of modern technology, he observes how the secular does not seem to establish itself automatically. Too often it is simply accepted as a result of a natural process of development and therefore not in need of justification. To stay in his words, secularity has become a doxma, or an ‘unthought’.⁶¹

With this approach Casanova relies heavily on Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*. He refers to Taylor’s thesis that the secular is a product of ideals that have been put forward in the Enlightenment. He primarily cites Taylor’s ‘stadial consciousness’ idea. This is the idea that secularization is experienced as ‘a process of maturation and growth’ until one has overcome, or, to stay in the metaphor of maturing, outgrown the ‘irrationality of belief’.⁶² This metaphor is very applicable, because it creates the image of the religious person as an ignorant child that cannot be given any responsibility, and the secular person as the wise adult who can be entrusted with the responsibilities of government. The secular, then, is posited as a superior state of being. As Casanova puts it:

“[to] be secular means to be modern, and therefore, by implication, to be religious means to be somehow not yet fully modern. This is the ratchet effect of a modern historical stadial

⁵⁹ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, New York: Oxford University Press (2009): p. 79.

⁶⁰ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms”, in Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. *Rethinking Secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, (2011), p. 59.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

consciousness, which turns the very idea of going back to a surpassed condition into an unthinkable intellectual regression. The function of secularism as a philosophy of history, and thus as ideology, is to turn the particular Western Christian historical process of secularization into a universal teleological process of human development from belief to unbelief, from primitive irrational or metaphysical religion to modern rational post-metaphysical secular consciousness.”⁶³

5.2 Secularization

This section will explore the other leg of Casanova’s secular triptych, namely ‘secularization’. The quote above already touches upon secularization as an analytical conceptualization of world-historical processes, Casanova opens with a reference to his work *Public Religions in the Modern World*. He proposes to ‘disaggregate analytically what was usually taken to be one single theory of secularization into three disparate and not necessarily interrelated components.’⁶⁴ Namely the ‘institutional differentiation’ of secular spheres, ‘progressive decline’, which means that religious beliefs and practices will slowly disappear due to continual modernization, and the privatization of religion as a precondition to modern, secular and democratic politics.⁶⁵ Particularly the latter is relevant when reevaluating how COIN theorists generally approach questions of religion.

The second and third sub-theses of the ‘secularization thesis’, meant as the category encapsulating all three sub-theses, have been subject to contestation. The first component on the other hand, being the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres in modern societies (like the economy, politics, religion etc.), has escaped criticism. Like with ‘the secular’ as epistemic category, ‘secularization’ has also become a doxma. It is unquestionably assumed that in a modern society all spheres of life inevitably differentiate. Yet, it is questionable to what extent this is appropriate when taking into consideration the historical specificity of the Secular as a western-European, Christian concept.⁶⁶

Casanova leans on Talal Asad for his explanation. Asad pointed at the etymology of the secular and secularization. He noted how it originates from the latin *saeculum*, meaning something

⁶³ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms”, In Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. *Rethinking Secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, p.59.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 61.

like ‘a lifetime’. Asad explains how the meaning of the theological term *saeculum* changed and eventually restructured the entire reality of the western-Christian world in the course of the middle ages. It divided reality into two ‘worlds’ which were each to be administered by their own clergy. There was the ‘religious-spiritual’ world of salvation which was administered by the clergy, and the ‘secular-temporal’ world of the profane which was administered by the feudal lords.⁶⁷

This explanation appears to run contrary to the explanation given by Cavanaugh and described in sections 4.2 and 4.3. Casanova seems to be aware of this, but only briefly goes into this paradox:

“[t]hus, any thinking of secularization beyond the West has to begin with the recognition of this dual historical paradox. Namely, that “the secular” emerges first as a particular Western Christian theological category, while its modern antonym, “the religious,” is a product of Western secular modernity.”⁶⁸

Unfortunately the discussion on the precise moment the world was divided in the secular and the religious realm, and how those terms can best be understood within their historical context falls outside the scope of this thesis. It is valuable to understand how these two concepts are used in the labelling of practices and the subsequent justification of power relations. The interrogation of contemporary policy documents that concern state building within the framework of COIN strategy will hardly be affected by the conclusions of such a research.

To better understand narratives of development, modernization and secularization within such documents as the FM 3-24, it is worthwhile asking whether the authors are aware of the origins of ‘the secular’ and ‘the religious’. Moreover, the specific western-European experience with the process of secularization must also be seen as a specificity, instead of as universal path of development. Also, the dogma that ‘to be modern means to be secular’ and vice versa, described in the previous section needs to be challenged in this respect. The next chapter will illustrate the dominance of the approaches towards questions of modernity, ‘the secular’ and ‘the religious’ in general COIN literature.

⁶⁷ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), 2003. p. 192.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 61.

6. The religious and the secular in the FM 3-24 and its critics

6.1 Religion in the FM 3-24

Religion in COIN literature is conceptualized in a particular manner. In order to catch all different formulations of religion, such as ‘religious’ and ‘religiously’ etc., a search has been conducted through the 2014 edition of the Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24), the principal COIN handbook of the American military and the blueprint for the handbooks used by many other Western militaries. For the sake of brevity the search has only been conducted on the most recent 2014 edition.

A search on the etymological root *religio* reveals 65 hits. Not every single instance will be discussed here, but only those cases which illustrate the general conception of religion in the document. The short conclusion is that religion is defined nowhere. The authors never question which beliefs are to be considered religious beliefs, or which beliefs are ‘mere’ political beliefs.

As such the military personnel which has to use the manual are never provided with a clear understanding where to draw a line between religious beliefs, which are to be respected, or political beliefs which are negotiable. The manual seems to assume a difference between these two sets, religious and political beliefs, but never really explains why. It emphasizes that religious beliefs can inform such things as culture and political beliefs, and consequently that religious beliefs are important factors which should always be respected, but they never concretely define them. Therefore it remains to the military official using the manual to decide what is a religious belief and what not.

The first instance where this vague division manifests itself is in paragraph 2-5. It mentions that globalization and modern information and communication technology makes ‘ideologically or religiously motivated insurgencies more prevalent due to closer contact between traditional and modern societies’.⁶⁹ Although this particular statement seems plausible at *prima facie*, it is not so.

There are indications that increased contact between human societies does indeed lead to more conflict.⁷⁰ However, that religiously or ideologically motivated insurgencies will rise due to the fact that modern and traditional contacts will be in closer contact is an unsubstantiated assumption by the authors of the FM 3-24. Moreover, what exactly are religiously and ideologically motivated insurgencies and what is the difference between them? Is it even possible that an insurgency is not religiously or ideologically motivated? Questions such as these remain unanswered in the manual.

⁶⁹ Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, May 2014), paragraph 2-5.

⁷⁰ See for example Niall Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power*, (United Kingdom: Allen Lane), 2017.

Next to that they also fail to provide definitions of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ societies. The argument of the manual that the number of insurgencies will rise as contact between societies which qualify as ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ increases, seems incomplete. What exactly is it in the differences between these societies which will make the chance of an insurgency larger? The traditional-modern dichotomy receives little to no attention in the rest of the manual, which begs the question as to whether the authors were even aware of what this dichotomy means.

The next chapter where religion is discussed is the third chapter, which is called ‘culture’. Instead of devoting a chapter to religion and how it inspires contemporary insurgents, the authors chose to subsume it under the denominator ‘culture’. From the perspective of the authors it might be logical to use this specific layout, because the FM 3-24 is not a scientific work. It is a handbook for military personnel which generally have not received extensive academic education. Hence it is logical to an extent to omit the academic discussion on what religion is and whether it informs culture, or the other way around. Yet, considering the fact that soldiers will use the manual when they conduct their COIN campaign and try to address the root causes of the insurgency, an explanation on the relationship between culture and religion is likely valuable.

The manual neither gives a better definition of culture. Culture is defined in paragraph 3-3 as ‘a web of meaning shared by members of a particular society or group within society’.⁷¹ According to the manual it is important for any counterinsurgent to be culturally aware, because culture to a large extent determines which actions are open to a counterinsurgent. Insurgents are considered to have an upper hand in this respect, because they are much better embedded in the local culture, and hence are much more sensitive to its norms.

Particularly salient is not so much the definition of culture in the manual, but its relation to the creation of norms. Paragraph 3-1 states how ‘culture forms the basis of how people interpret, understand, and respond to events and people around them’.⁷² The subsequent section of the manual (paragraphs 3-4 until 3-8) is titled ‘Understanding Culture’ and is an explanation of this principle through the lens of ‘holism’. It is the idea that ‘all socio-cultural aspects of human life are interconnected’.⁷³ Religion is subsequently named as one of those socio-cultural aspects.

⁷¹ Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, May 2014), paragraph 3-3

⁷² Ibid, paragraph 3-1

⁷³ Ibid, paragraph 3-6

Paragraph 3-9 then assesses that human behavior is guided by a belief system which is largely the product of culture. It sets norms and provides a structure for organization. Religion is poised as one of the bases upon which to ground such a belief system. Next to ‘tradition, narratives or history’.⁷⁴ Again, the differences or similarities between these three remain unexplained. Does religion inform tradition, or is religion traditional, in that the traditions shape what religion is? What is the difference between a religious and a historical, or a political narrative? This interpretation is repeated in paragraph 3-14, which states:

“[c]ultures are characterized by a shared set of beliefs, values, norms and symbols that unite a group. These beliefs may come from many sources, such as a person’s background, family, education, religion or history.”⁷⁵

Again religion is interpreted as a source for ‘beliefs, values, norms and symbols’ which unite a group. The manual remains vague in this respect, because why is political ideology not named in at this point then? Political ideologies are capable vehicles for group formation who equally use values, norms and symbols. It is possible that the authors of the manual intended political ideology to be included in this list, and would therefore agree to include it when it is suggested to them. Yet, the extent to which they would agree political ideologies informs an entire culture is to be seen.

The crux of the matter is, is that the manual wields extremely vague definitions which do not inform the reader on how to understand culture. Particularly with its introduction of holism in paragraphs 3-4 to 3-8, the answer to *how to understand the cultural context*, basically becomes *everything which informs its values, norms and beliefs*. Religion is seen as one of the important factors which informs these things.

Taking the emphasis on holism as an important lens through which soldiers should look at the foreign cultures to understand the boundaries within which they have to operate, the manual becomes even more confusing. In paragraph 3-9 the manual states ‘all people have some kind of belief system, whether based on religion, tradition, narratives, or history’.⁷⁶ As cited earlier, paragraph 3-14 introduces religion as one possible source for communal values. Both paragraphs appear it to be that these things are mutually exclusive. Both persons and communities can draw their set a set of

⁷⁴ Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, May 2014), paragraph 3-9

⁷⁵ Ibid, paragraph 3-14

⁷⁶ Ibid, paragraph 3-9

beliefs from a range of things, including religion. The thing is that in both cases religion is conceptualized as an important category of human life which creates norms and structure life, both of an individual as well as a community. It is conceptualized as something next to other aspects, such as tradition and history. In short, it is seen as something *sui generis*, or ‘in itself’ which is present in all human societies. It can both be understood as something which informs local norms and values, but also as an important driver behind insurgencies. Particularly modern insurgencies.

The conceptualization of religion as a source for grounding of belief systems is not done entirely consistently though. In paragraph 3-12 religion is connected to group identity. It is stated as one possible group identity which can be emphasized in times of conflict.⁷⁷ Although the conceptualization of religion as ‘group identity’ comes close to the concept of religion as a fundament for common belief systems, there is a nuanced difference. Religion conceptualized as group identity is undergirded more by a constructivist assumption. Together people create religion and identify themselves as a group according to that. Hence paragraph 3-12 wields a more flexible idea of religion, as it can change as the group members simply change beliefs. In paragraphs 3-4 to 3-8 religion is something which informs beliefs systems. It is ‘out there’ *a priori* to the group of humans. The belief system is drawn from this presence.

The authors do not seem to have been aware of this small, yet consequential nuance. Despite their initial hint at the socially constructed nature of religion, they continue to work with their *sui generis* notion of religion. For example, paragraph 4-9 states that:

“[t]he nature of an intrastate conflict is a grievance between segments of a state’s population with its constituted government. There can be a single root cause or a variety of causes perceived as so severe that they impact the population’s social contract with its government”.⁷⁸

Subsequently, religious difference is named as one of these possible root causes for grievances or the breaking of the social contract. How exactly intrastate conflict develops from these differences the manual fails to explain. That conflict arises from differences about a range of topics, including religion, is not such a controversial observation. Clausewitz already said as much when he recognized that war was simply the continuation of politics by other means. It is unclear is what the authors see as religious differences when they name them as a root cause for intrastate war. Again

⁷⁷ Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, May 2014), paragraph 3-12

⁷⁸ Ibid, paragraph 4-9

they do not define ‘religious’, and in particular what sets this apart from for example ‘political’ differences which may lay at the basis of a civil war. They do not inquire into the reason behind violent escalation, rather, they assume that religious differences are a root cause for violence.

This raises questions when considering that the liberal-democratic United States of America (where the manual is written) has many different religious communities. While there may be strife or conflict among them, these differences do not develop into an insurgency. As a matter of fact, next to religious differences western liberal-democracies also know many ideological and political differences. By omitting this data the authors fall short on diagnosing the reasons for violence which is inspired by religion, and will hence have a hard time formulating solutions to it.

Others also criticized the FM 3-24 on a similar basis, namely that it did not adequately address questions of religion. However, they did not criticize the FM 3-24 on the basis that it inadequately reevaluated what it conceptualized as ‘religion’, or that it was constructed around secularist ideas which find their origins in the liberal-democratic West, but that it simply did not appreciate the nefarious influence of religion enough. Frank Hoffman is among this group of critics. Others are Edward Luttwak and Ralph Peters. The next section will explore their critiques on the FM 3-24 and their approach towards religion as a complicating factor in an insurgency.

6.2 Religion in other COIN literature

The idea that the presence of a religious factor in an insurgency greatly affects its nature, and greatly complicates a counterinsurgency has become deeply rooted in modern scholarly literature on COIN. Although there are other academics who have written on the role of religion, its relationship with what are popularly known as Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO’s) and insurgency, this thesis will only treat some of the work of the scholars Frank Hoffman, Edward Luttwak and Ralph Peters. The reason being that these three were the most vocal critics on the FM 3-24, and each of them focused on the failure of the manual to acknowledge the nefarious influence of religion.

Hoffman criticizes the neo-classical COIN school in general, and the FM 3-24 in particular because both have simply adjusted already existing ideas regarding COIN. In effect he believes that this leads to an anachronism by taking old ideas and projecting them on a current situation, which is subject to entirely different dynamics due to changed technological means, for example. In an article in the renowned military journal *Parameters* he argues that the COIN campaign against the Vietcong in Vietnam can impossibly be compared to the American COIN campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Next to different technologies an important factor according to Hoffman is the presence of a religious

component in the form of (militant) Islam. He writes how Muslim Iraqi and Afghani insurgents are different from the Maoist Vietnamese in that they ‘do not seek clearly defined political objectives or attainable goals [...], just participating in the jihad is enough’.⁷⁹ In short, Hoffman believes that the insurgents are different on the basis of their goals. Whereas the Vietcong had clearly defined political goals which were inspired by their secular Marxist ideals, insurgents inspired by the Islam do not seek such things. They seek participation in a war they themselves believe is holy. Waging war seems to be both the action and its goal at the same time, so war for the sake of war.

Another influential critic is Edward Luttwak. He is a political scientist who concerns himself with issues of strategy, war and peace and currently is a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. In February 2007 he severely criticized the FM 3-24 in an article in *Harper’s Magazine* after its publishing in late 2006. Even though the manual was well received by the military community, Luttwak concluded that the form of COIN that it promoted was ‘malpractice’.⁸⁰ He reasoned that the religious loyalties of the Afghani and Iraqi simply complicated the matter too much,

According to him the authors of the FM 3-24 were naïve in believing that victory will be achieved if the troops succeed in providing good government and functioning public services. He juxtaposes these goals with the aforementioned religious loyalties and concludes how the general population rather has ‘indigenous and religious oppression’ than ‘the freedoms offered by foreign invaders’.⁸¹ In short, he believes that the general population cannot be won over by western concepts such as good governance, simply because they rather commit to their (in Luttwak’s eyes) archaic, oppressive religious loyalties. His critique stops there though. He does not expand on his understanding of ‘religious loyalties’ and how they inspire violent behavior. He simply assumes that ‘religious loyalties’ continuously inspire insurgent behavior and violence.

Furthermore, Luttwak claims that this phenomenon is not new, but a historical trend. To prove his point he draws a parallels between the contemporary situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Napoleonic Spain. He explains that in 1808 king Joseph Bonaparte, elder brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, tried to pass the Statute of Bayonne. It was a royal charter which would create an independent judiciary. Thereby it would greatly improve the legal standing of the peasantry, which was since long oppressed and exploited by the Roman-Catholic clergy. However, the priests declared the new statute

⁷⁹ Frank Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?,” *Parameters* 41, no. 4 (2011): p. 93.

⁸⁰ Edward N. Luttwak, “Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice,” *Harper’s Magazine* 314, no. 1881 (February 2007): p. 42.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

a mortal threat to the Catholic church. So doing they managed to mobilize the peasantry against the foreign king and their own best interest. The insurgency succeeded. The Spanish ousted the French king and his progressive ideas.

Luttwak sees this as an example where religious loyalties proved to weigh heavier than social progress and the chance of a better life.⁸² He argues that the United States finds itself in a similar situation as king Joseph I. Despite offering a chance on a better life, the indigenous population allows itself to be deceived by religious clerics and fights the benevolent outsider.⁸³

After having established how religious loyalties have trumped rational self-interest in the past and in the present, he continues with a detailed exposition of everything that is wrong with the FM 3-24. He disentwines every chapter of the FM 3-24 and methodically explains its flawed assumptions. The conclusion he draws is as remarkable as it is disturbing.

He concludes that the only effective COIN methods that have ever been developed were those of the Romans and Nazis. According to Luttwak both models were so successful because they combined ‘sticks with carrots’, with which he meant that a counterinsurgent must be benevolent to the population that it tries to help, but that he must be equally willing to ‘out-terrorize the insurgent’.⁸⁴ Insurgents often win because they are prepared to terrorize the population into cooperating with them. The counterinsurgents are usually much more reticent to apply terrorist tactics because of the moral disapproval connected to it, especially today. Yet, in order to win an insurgency one will be forced to apply a certain amount of terrorism. As already mentioned, it must be enough to ‘out-terrorize the insurgent’. The Nazis and Romans realized this and subsequently applied it. Successfully if Luttwak is to be believed.

So the advice he gives to contemporary policy makers concerning themselves with COIN, is to take the Nazis and Roman models as an example. Contemporary counterinsurgency strategy, for Luttwak embodied by the FM 3-24, seems to have forgotten the lessons of the Romans and Nazis and will be ineffective because of it. He predicts that the United States and its allies will only be able to quell the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan by resorting to terrorist tactics such as collective lethal punishments. Basically, systematic murder. Like the Romans and Nazis did.⁸⁵

Apart from Luttwak’s questionable historical analysis regarding the effectiveness of Roman and Nazi COIN campaigns (because, for example, how successful was the Nazi COIN strategy in

⁸² Edward N. Luttwak, “Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice,” *Harper’s Magazine* 314, no. 1881 (February 2007): pp. 33-34.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

their occupied territories really?), the measures that come with his conclusion can hardly be relied upon to provide a long term solution. First of all, due to modern day media coverage such measures can impossibly be kept secret from the population back home, who will undoubtedly have moral objections. Next to that, such measures are likely to create a lasting grudge among the victim population, which will increase increases the chance that the insurgency flares up again in the future. A peace where the root causes of a conflict have been solved and the legitimate grievances of people have been addressed. Finally, in addition to the aforementioned objections, Luttwak's work does not prove the link between religion, religious loyalties and persistent insurgency whatsoever.

A third thinker who exhibits the ideas similar to those of Hoffman and Luttwak, is Ralph Peters. He is a retired army lieutenant-colonel of the United States Army and a lauded author of both fiction and non-fiction books. The book *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* is a bundle of essays that he wrote for a range of military journals. In a number of essays he also comments on the FM 3-24.

The first essay in the bundle where Peters attacks the principal idea is called *The Hearths-and-Minds Myth*. He displays the same beliefs as described in the quote taken from Morris' essay. Literally Peters states:

“The well-intentioned drafters of our counterinsurgency doctrine are mining what they’ve recently read without serious analysis.

[...]

We are in the middle of a multilayered, multisided struggle for supremacy between intolerant religious factions and age-old ethnic rivals. And we pretend that it’s just another political struggle amenable to political solution.

[...]

The political insurgencies of the last century were easy problems compared to this century’s renewed struggles of blood and belief. In a political insurgencies, some of the actors can, indeed, be converted. A capture may be better than a kill. Compromise may be possible.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ralph Peters, “The Hearths-and-Minds Myth,” in *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007), p.49.

Peters does not explain why the aforementioned is the case. He does not give any qualitative differences between religious and politically inspired insurgencies which might explain why one is amenable to compromises and the other is not. He simply poses religion as a causal factor.

In other essays Peters continues with this line of criticism. For example when Peters states that the FM 3-24 simply ‘ignores religious belief as a motivation’.⁸⁷ However, again it remains unclear what exactly he understands ‘religion’ to be. Like all COIN theorists discussed here, including the authors of the manual which Peters criticizes so vehemently, he wields an understanding about religion which he does not make explicit. He simply holds it self-evident that religion causes violence. He believes that it is impossible to come to a workable compromise with religiously motivated insurgents, because he implicitly believes religion immunizes people to reason. After all, it is impossible to reason with the irrational.

Apart from the uncompromising nature of religious insurgencies, Peters believes that the presence of a religious factor has another effect as well. He states that ‘wars of faith and tribe are immeasurably crueler and tougher to resolve than ideological revolts’.⁸⁸ So next to obstinate violence, faith also inspires more cruel violence. Yet, again Peters remains vague on the reason why such wars are more cruel and tenacious. Again he simply states religion as a cause, without further explaining why.

He does hint at an explanation, namely that ‘religious zealots behead prisoners to please their god’.⁸⁹ So he hints at the possibility that religious insurgents are compelled by divine command. In effect this is not a complete explanation though. It is rather a different form of his implicit assumption that religion is irrational and inspires violence through some ill-founded notion of divine command. The introduction of religion as something which changes the nature of an insurgency, making it more obstinate and as something which exacerbates the cruelty and violence employed in a war is further expounded upon by Peters in another essay.

He opens one essay with a letter written by the Protestant leader Thomas Muentzer, who fought during the Thirty Years’ War. Yet he replaces all instances of the word ‘God’ with ‘Allah’.⁹⁰ The effect is a text which you expect to be written by an Islamic extremist from the Middle-East, but is actually written by an extremist Protestant German farmer-turned-rebel commander. By doing so he intends to draw a parallel with the modern wars in Afghanistan and the Middle-East, and the devastating ‘wars of religion’ of the late Middle Ages and Pre-Modern era’s. His aim is to show that

⁸⁷ Ralph Peters, “Politically Correct War,” in *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007), p.61.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.63.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.81.

religious fervor not only inspired to extreme and irrational violence today, but on other moments in history as well.

Peters continues to build the rest of his essay on this parallel. He writes how Muentzer managed to inspire the citizens of Allstedt rebel against the Catholic Habsburg dynasty with his inflammatory rhetorics. This popular uprising became known as *Der Deutche Bauernkrieg* and ended disastrous for the peasants who followed Muentzer. They got butchered by the German aristocrats who opposed them.

Most interesting is Peters' analysis on how Muentzer managed to become so popular. He writes how Muentzer was able to exploit 'existing secular discontents' by 'embracing extremist religion', which enabled him to 'publicly defy the powerful'.⁹¹ Subsequently Peters remarks how similar Muentzer is to modern Islamic extremists, such as former Iranian President Ahmedinejad, 'who is anxiously awaiting the Twelfth Imam', or Iraqi insurgency leader Muqtada al Sadr and Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. His conclusion is telling;

"Muentzer and the gruesome rebellions of his age, when politically frustrated men fervently embraced extremist religion, have more to tell us about the challenges we face from Islamist extremism today than do more recent waves of revolutionary struggle, when secular ideologies briefly eclipsed the appeal of faith."⁹²

By acknowledging how leaders like Muentzer and Ahmedinejad manage to mix 'secular discontents' with 'extremist religion' Peters unwittingly undermines the argument he made before, namely that religion causes violence on its own, moreover not just any kind of violence, but violence of the particularly cruel kind. If we are to believe Peters on the basis of the quote cited above, religion is not a causal factors. There are logical, political frustrations which are subsequently framed through religious extremist rhetoric. Religion is then coopted by these leaders who subsequently justify their deeds with it, but that is not a cause. This contradicts with other statements of Peters.

For example with his constant appeals to military thinkers to approach contemporary terrorism not in terms of the 'political terrorism' that the West faced in the late twentieth century, but as a

⁹¹ Ralph Peters, "Politically Correct War," in *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007), p.82.

⁹² Ibid.

uniquely new phenomenon.⁹³ He wishes to make clear time and again that the inspiration of modern terrorists and their willingness to apply such ferocious violence stems from their belief that their “god’s will trumps our mortal convictions”.⁹⁴ Subsequently efforts to find ‘logical’ explanations for such things as suicide bombings are pointless. Peters urges us to acknowledge that ‘politics inspire action, but religion inspires sacrifice’.⁹⁵ He remains vague on why exactly this is.

Peters continues to contradict his own point of view that we must treat religious terrorist on their own ‘irrational’ terms, instead of approaching them ‘rationally’ as we do now. For example, when Peters writes how unrest in the German lands was rising already due to growing tension between the privileged citizenry, local princes and the emperor over the increasing centralization of public authority. The centralization eroded long established common law and nurtured a sense of injustice. Hence, the general population ‘felt disoriented by rapid change originating from distant sources’, and ‘turned to biblical law upon which a new social order could be based’.⁹⁶ So Peters concludes that the general population turned to religion as a source of justice and a provider of an alternative power structure. Literally Peters writes that religion provided ‘divine reassurance in a time of disorienting change’.⁹⁷ He does not expand on how religion causes violence in this dynamic.

According to Peters a similar pattern as described above is happening in the Middle-East today. Popular grievances are continuously left unanswered and the sense that legitimate rights are being denied or violated lingers. Subsequently, the clergy split between an ‘approved establishment’ and ‘radical renegades’ which introduced a radical religious current to the public anger. Ultimately this radical religious current ignited the current war of all against all.⁹⁸

Peters analysis is interesting and his conclusions carry some profound insights. Yet, they do not support his claim that religion causes conflict. At times he even contradicts himself. In the examples listed above, the actual problem seems a perception of injustice and other local grievances which are actually quite ‘secular’ in nature. In that case religion is no causal factor whatsoever in Peters’ explanation. Merely a complicating factor.

Admittedly, this does not necessarily dispel Peters’ claim that religiously and ethnically motivated conflicts are more tenacious and cruel, but it does not prove anything neither. His bottom-line

⁹³ Ralph Peters, “Politically Correct War,” in *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007), p.82.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.83.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.84.

argument, namely that ‘fundamentalist religion is always lurking nearby’ there where ‘traditional or perceived rights’ are continually aggrieved remains intact and is not even that different from conclusions drawn by academic scholars of religion.

It is just that Peters’ analysis remains incomplete. Why would ‘fundamentalist religion’ always be lurking by in situations where legitimate rights are aggrieved? Why is (fundamentalist) religion disposed to such uniquely savage violence? Weren’t the Marxist insurgents in the Vietnam war truly any less tenacious than the Islamic insurgents of today?⁹⁹

These questions arise primarily because of one important omission. He does never give a definition of religion or politics. In that case he cannot explain how they differ in their relationship with violence. He simply uses such terms as ‘Christian’, ‘Islam’ or ‘Islamist’ and ‘Marxism’ without further giving them further attention. He works with an a priori assumption of what these terms mean and argues that some of them incites people to extreme violence.

This would not be a great problem, were it not that it leads Peters to advise soldiers to take drastic measures when they are confronted with insurgents who are allegedly inspired by religious beliefs. Like Luttwak, he concludes that excessive bloodshed is unavoidable:

“[o]nly shedding blood ruthlessly can eliminate or at least reduce the problem - the enemy enraptured by faith must become more terrified of you than he is of his god. Usually, you must kill him.”¹⁰⁰

Even though an amount of killing will undeniably be unavoidable in war, after all killing is an intrinsic part of war, killing anyone who alleges to be inspired by religious motives seems undoable, if it is even possible to distinguish religion clearly among other motivators. Moreover, to refer back to Peters’ earlier writing, when religious extremism is merely a garment in which to dress profound (secular) injustices, killing anyone who uses these rhetorics is actually not a religious extremist,

⁹⁹ Watch for example the documentary *The Vietnam War: A Film by Ken Burns*. It paints an image of an ill-equipped, but not less fanatic Vietcong when they are compared to, for example, the Taliban. Although one of the two insurgent groups, namely the Vietcong, held secular beliefs (Marxism), it does not seem that they were any less fanatic. Nor was the violence employed by both sides any less extreme than the scenes of the Iraq war which Morris describes in his essay.

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Peters, “Rebels and Religion,” in *Wars of Blood and Faith: The Conflicts that will Shape the Twenty-First Century* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007), p.86.

but someone trying to address injustice. Killing these ‘religious extremists’ indiscriminately is unlikely to take away the root cause then, namely sense of injustice. It is likely that this sense of injustice will only grow if lethal force is applied excessively.

Apart from the paucity of empirical proof which shows that that is actually the case, the assertions that ‘the secular’ is inherently less violent becomes doubtful if the critics of the FM 3-24 are to be believed.¹⁰¹ The logic of ‘bombing them into liberal-democracy’ resonates eerily with such prominent military scholars such as Edward Luttwak and Ralph Peters, who in some form or another propose to ‘out-terrorize’ the terrorist. According to them it is the only possible way to sway them from their zealous, barbaric ways of thinking. Religious insurgents are not susceptible to any other logic apart from that of lethal force.

Thus the ideas of Luttwak and Peters et al. ideas fit remarkably well within the framework provided by *the myth*. Like the FM 3-24 they do not question what they understand as religion or religiously inspired insurgency. They associate the religious with the irrational and the rabidly violent. So in the FM 3-24 *the myth* not only justifies secular violence, for its critics it necessitates it.

Apart from the assumption of religion as a source for irrational violence, the COIN community also fails to step outside the idea that secularization is a condition *sine qua non* for modernization. As Casanova described secularization is not an unchallengeable teleological reality. The COIN community fails to step outside of this framework and thereby they are in risk of operating with a blind spot towards the intricate manifestations and influences of confusing modernity and secularization.

6.3 Modernity and secularization in the FM 3-24 (2014)

Section 6.1 already discussed some of the contents of the FM 3-24. Among others it discussed the *sui generis* use of religion in paragraph 4-9 of the FM 3-24. However, that paragraph is interesting for another reason, because it introduces the term ‘social contract’ in paragraph 4-9. The term is relevant, because it betrays a particular presumption about the modus of social order and the manner in which it is legitimized. Paragraph 4-9 is cited in full on page 34 of this thesis.

The social contract has a long tradition within western moral and political philosophy. By formulating the root cause for violence between governed and government as a breaking of the social contract they make their previous plea for cultural sensitivity somewhat hypocritical. They encourage readers of the manual to relativize their own cultural norms, but fail to question their own assumptions regarding the constitution of legitimate political order. More on this in the next part.

¹⁰¹ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009: p. 5.

The omission of political differences as a possible root cause for intrastate war becomes more salient in paragraph 4-51. The paragraph explains that ‘the political cadre are the force behind the ideology of an insurgency’, and that ‘modern noncommunist insurgencies rarely, if ever, use the term cadre; however, these movements usually include a group that performs similar functions. In a movement based on religious extremism, religious leaders can play a role similar to political cadre’.¹⁰² Again this passage is so full of implicit assumptions that it is hard to decide where to start.

First of all it is unclear what the authors mean with a ‘modern noncommunist’ insurgency. From the rest of the paragraph it seems that they make their distinction on the basis of the ideology-religion binary. Modern insurgencies are religious in nature, which is to say that they are noncommunist and therefore non-ideological. Yet, on the basis of what criteria do the authors make this distinction? Likewise, why is the role of religious leaders in an insurgency can be ‘similar’ to that of the political cadre and not identical? Again the authors seem to have an idea about what religion is, but they fail to make it explicit.

Moreover, it is not clear how their idea of religion in this paragraph relates to their earlier conceptualization of religion. If religion is to be equated with the basis of a common belief system, how come that these political cadre have not accepted the religious source of this common system? Have they adopted a different religious source, and if so, why do they use violence? Similar questions remain when religion is conceptualized as a vehicle for group identity. Why would religious cadre differ from ‘political’ cadres, what is so different in their idea of group identity?

Despite these questions the religious-political/ideological dichotomy persists through the rest of the FM 3-24. For example, paragraph 4-57 elaborates on the different goals that insurgencies can have. It makes a distinction between different attitudes insurgencies can adopt regarding political and religious change.¹⁰³ Yet, the authors fail to explain what exactly they consider the difference between ‘political change’ and ‘religious change’. Moreover, isn’t change always political in nature, because people striving for change will unavoidably have to engage in some form of politics? There are many more examples throughout the FM 3-24 where a vague and ill-informed distinction between the political and the religious is made, but for now enough examples have been provided to illustrate which questions remain unanswered in the FM 3-24.

However, there have been COIN theorists who have questioned the current shortfalls of COIN theory when it comes to questions of modernity. Michael Fitzsimmons is one scholar who

¹⁰² Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army; HQ, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, May 2014), paragraph 4-51

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, paragraph 4-57

attempts to address the western liberal, and thereby implicitly secular, bias towards the questions of establishing legitimate public authority. A similar dynamic is discernable when it comes to the approach of the COIN community to issues of secularization understood as explained by Casanova.

6.4 *The Religious, The Secular, and The Fundamentalist: fighting modernity*

Michael Fitzsimmons is currently a senior research fellow of the Institute of Defense Analyses in Washington. He emphasizes how western thinking on COIN depends on creating a ‘perception of legitimacy’ for the incumbent among the ‘critical portion of the population’ by the ‘improvement of governance in the form of effective and efficient administration of government and public services’.¹⁰⁴ From this logic follows the ‘winning-hearth-and-minds-model’.¹⁰⁵ Through the improvement of the material living standards of the neutral majority of the population the counterinsurgent would win their hearths, and by establishing an effective liberal-democratic government it would win their minds. Of course the unquestioned assumption here is that rational liberal-democracy is the best form of government. Western concepts of COIN were centered on this idea. Fitzsimmons then recites a long list of Western COIN scholars who had this idea at the hearth of their theories.

However, Fitzsimmons brings forward that ‘good governance’ is not the only claim to political legitimacy. He argues that ‘in environments where the ethnic or religious identity of the ruling regime is contested, claims to legitimacy may rest primarily on the identity of *who* governs, rather than on *how* whoever governs governs’.¹⁰⁶ It is an argument which appears similar to Luttwak’s idea that religious loyalties count more for people in traditional societies than the benefits of western progressivism.

The association of political legitimacy with good governance stems from Western political philosophy. Particularly from such early-modern thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau who construed the relationship between the rulers and the ruled as a social contract.¹⁰⁷ His argument connects well to Cavanaugh’s proposition that *the myth* finds its origins with these thinkers.

However, Fitzsimmons turns away of these early-modern thinkers and leans more towards Max Weber to explain that humans use three possible structures to legitimize structures of authority.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Fitzsimmons, “Hard hearts and Open Minds? Governance, Identity and the Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Theory,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 no. 3 (2008): p. 338.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp.342-343.

The reliance on traditional hierarchies is but one of these forms. The others are the charismatic form and the rational, or legal form. Weber identified the latter as the principal concept upon which the West conceptualizes legitimacy, whereas non-western societies tend to lean on the ‘traditional’ and ‘charismatic’ forms. In the latter two forms legitimacy to rule was derived from traditional social hierarchies or an individual personality deemed fit for rule, rather than from codified laws.¹⁰⁸

Fitzsimmons then observes that the ‘rational, governance-based view of legitimacy’ not only ‘formed the basis for political development’ in the West, but also formed the ‘foundation of the most prominent revolutionary philosophy of the twentieth century -Marxism’.¹⁰⁹ Fitzsimmons stresses how Marxism is deeply modern because it emphasizes ‘developmental aspects of capitalism and on economic classes as the basic units of political life’. Consequently, Marxism, in all its variants, too was hostile to traditional structures of authority. All communist insurgents of the twentieth century held a materialist view of social justice, as they believed that redistribution of material means over the population would bring about a free and socially just society.¹¹⁰

The West developed its own theory to counter the Marxist narrative. During the 1950’s and 1960’s ‘modernization theory’ made its entrance in Western policy circles. Fitzsimmons describes it as a theory of development which ‘emphasizes a teleological convergence of societies through several stages of modernization’, which would eventually end in ‘western-style industrialization, secularization and political pluralism’.¹¹¹ Together with the ‘hearths and minds’ approach it would become the core of American developmental policy in the third world.

Within the framework of the Cold war this led to a competition in the Third World between the modernist Marxist revolutionary ideology of the U.S.S.R. and the modernist hearths-and-minds counterrevolutionary ideology of the U.S.A. According to Fitzsimmons this is only superficially a fierce, antithetical relationship between two ideologies. In fact they are opposite sides of the same modern coin. They differed on the paths which lead to the most socially just society, but they started out from the same foundational assumptions regarding development, namely that of material progress and ‘rationalist grounds for legitimate authority’.¹¹² Basically both posit two different systems, but compete on equivalent fundamental terms. Referring back to Weber, both systems are rooted in the

¹⁰⁸ Michael Fitzsimmons, “Heard Hearths and Open Minds? Governance, Identity and the Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Strategy”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 no. 3 (2008): p. 343.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 344.

¹¹² Ibid. pp. 345-346.

‘rational’ or ‘legal’ form of political authority, whilst it is only one of three variants to legitimize public authority.

According to Fitzsimmons the failure to recognize the Weberian categorization of legitimacy in COIN theory is at the basis of the problems that the military community experiences today. During the Vietnam war some efforts were made to correct the shortfalls of modernization theory. Among the scholars leading these efforts were the future highly influential Samuel Huntington and Charles Tilly. Despite their efforts COIN and modernization theory was reduced to an ‘intellectual backwater’ after American involvement in the Vietnam war ended in 1973.¹¹³ It received little attention and saw little innovation because of it. Hence, when the American army got involved in large scale COIN operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, it worked with an incomplete theories and ill-informed doctrines. As Fitzsimmons puts it:

“One of the most conspicuous faults of this mixed legacy was its relative silence regarding the role of ethnic and religious identity in determining how people relate to their government.

[...]

What if legitimacy is sometimes conferred to governments not according to the quality of their governance, but according to their conformance to group loyalties and traditional hierarchies of power?”¹¹⁴

Fitzsimmons answers his own question by moving into the discussion on what is to be understood by terms as ‘ethnic’ and ‘religious’ and how they relate to political violence. He quotes a number of scholars who have written on the subject, and eventually seems to concur the most with Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. These two scholars interpret ethnicity as a sort of container concept which encompasses such different identity markers as religion, language and national origin. He agrees with them on the notion that all of these facets have in common that they are very effective ‘foci for group mobilization for concrete political ends’.¹¹⁵ However, it is unclear that all of them can be grouped together under the denominator ‘ethnicity’. To conceptualize ethnicity as a corollary of religion, language and national origin is a doubtful assertion.

¹¹³ Michael Fitzsimmons, “Heard Hearths and Open Minds? Governance, Identity and the Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Strategy”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 no. 3 (2008): pp. 348-350.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 350-351.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

Fitzsimmons seems to realize this, because he refers to the ‘nationalism expert’ Walker Connor, who made the point that such a thing as ‘national origin’ must not be lumped together with other dimensions of ethnic identity. This conflates ‘nation’ with ‘state’, while both are delineated by different boundaries. The nation is delimited by political boundaries, and the nation by ethnic boundaries.¹¹⁶ From Connor’s work Fitzsimmons wishes to take the notion that ‘nation’ and ‘state’ are often used interchangeably due to the paradigmatic position of the concept ‘nation-state’ in (western) political philosophy. Today this term is taken for granted, while originally it referred to a mere ‘occasional correlation between an ethnically-based nation and a politically-based state’.¹¹⁷

Fitzsimmons’ also quotes Anthony Smith, who distinguishes between ‘civic-territorial nationalism and ethnic nationalism’. The former of which is allegedly a particularly ‘Western conception of the nation’.¹¹⁸ Again the legal-political form of legitimacy is emphasized in this western conception, because Smith describes the nation as ‘historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members and common civic culture and ideology’. This makes the nation a fictive ‘super-family’. According to Smith the big difference with this Western model and the ethnic model is ‘the basis on which membership and allegiance rests’. In the west they are ‘matters of location and individual choice’, whereas in the ethnic model ‘they are matters of birth and group history’.¹¹⁹

Subsequently Fitzsimmons points out that COIN theorists have largely overlooked the salience of ethnic political identities and the lengths people are prepared to forgo their own narrow, rational self-interest in favor of them. Western COIN theorists have been focusing too much on economic factors and improving the standard of living for people, whilst overlooking the ethnic identity and its importance in legitimizing rule.¹²⁰ He concludes that there where ‘ethnic identities are salient, it seems quite possible that the individually-based social contract of Western political philosophy can be displaced by a “contract” based on groups or communities, and that the quality of governance would then take a back seat to identity in the conference of legitimacy on political institutions’.¹²¹

He uses Iraqi insurgency to substantiate his conclusion. Particularly the futile American attempts of COIN through winning hearts and minds in an insurgency that is obviously sectarian in

¹¹⁶ Michael Fitzsimmons, “Heard Hearts and Open Minds? Governance, Identity and the Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Strategy”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 no. 3 (2008): p. 353.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.356.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.359.

nature. He quotes one Stephen Briddle, which states that Sunnis will hardly get over their fear of Shiite domination if the material living conditions are ameliorated.¹²²

Fitzsimmons work is a step in the right direction, but it is still not the revision necessary to reinvigorate COIN theory. Nonetheless Fitzsimmons recognition that different models of legitimacy exist and the recognition that ideas of modernization, which implicitly often introduces a process of secularization, can lead to resistance within cultures who hold to other ideas regarding what counts as a legitimate social hierarchy and the proper place of religion within society is promising. It might be an indication that the COIN community is starting to move away from the misunderstanding of religion as something which is inherently irrational and thus prone to violence. Rather, it might point towards a development where insurgencies, at least the recent ones in Afghanistan and Iraq, were not so much religiously inspired, but reactionary.

COIN theorists like David Kilcullen also speculated on this. He suggested that the contemporary insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan might be reactionary, or conservative in nature. They were fought to preserve a status quo.¹²³ The insurgencies of the 20th century on the contrary, were about revolutionary change. This detail is small, yet crucial.

Steven Metz also touched upon this in 2004. He pointed out how the US COIN doctrines applied in Iraq since 2003 were almost completely based on those applied to El Salvador in the twentieth century.¹²⁴ The only problem was, according to Metz, that these doctrines were not attuned to instill a liberal democracy in a society which was opposed to that:

“The United States also faced another problem: history suggests that outside forces in insurgencies can strengthen their local allies – whether revolutionaries or counter-revolutionaries – but they cannot create them. The United States sought to create the forces of democracy and moderation, not simply strengthen existing ones. Outside jihadists on the other hand, had only to strengthen preexisting jihadis and anti-american forces rather than create them from scratch. This was a much easier task. Applying existing counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine, derived from 20th century ideological conflict, to Iraq thus was pounding a round peg in a square hole.

¹²² Michael Fitzsimmons, “Heard Hearths and Open Minds? Governance, Identity and the Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Strategy”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 no. 3 (2008): p. 360.

¹²³ David Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006): p. 113.

¹²⁴ Steven Metz, and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004): p. 83.

[...]

Many, probably most Iraqis saw the anti-American violence as part of a centuries-long effort by Muslims, particularly Arabs, to resist Western Influence, not as something designed to stop democracy and freedom.”¹²⁵

The quotes above illustrate that Kilcullen and Metz do not fully interrogate the intricacies of fundamentalism. Also, they do not question their conception of religion. They simply assume it as something ‘out there’ which immunizes people from rationality and pushes them to extremely violent behavior. With their eyes open Kilcullen et al. walk into the fallacies regarding religion that were described by Cavanaugh. Also they seem unaware how secularism and secularization is embedded within their mode of thinking, but which is an influential factor in fanning the potency fundamentalist narratives in traditional societies.

The distorting effects that modernity can have on traditional forms of public authority has not gone unnoticed by critical scholars of religion neither. Here the work of Emerson and Hartman becomes relevant.

Although they wield a somewhat more narrow understanding of the process of secularization when compared to Casanova, their ideas connect well to Casanova and can also prove valuable to expand the understanding of Kilcullen, Metz and other COIN theorists. Emerson and Hartman see secularization as the ‘the individualization of religion and the marginalization of its role in public life’.¹²⁶ This is narrower than Casanova, who saw secularization as an idea of progressive teleology and part of a triptych which he called ‘the secular’. This does not pose a problem though, Emerson and Hartman specifically focus on the relationship between fundamentalism and modernity-secularism. They formulate their point as follows:

“[w]ithout modernization and secularization there would be no fundamentalism, many scholars now write. For centuries, it has been understood that the processes of modernization - such as urbanization and cultural and structural pluralism - lead to secularization.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Steven Metz, and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004): p. 84

¹²⁶ Michael Emerson and David Hartman, “The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism“, *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, (2006): p. 128.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 127.

Emerson and Hartman note that secularization, introduced or forced through with modernization, is ‘fuel for fundamentalism’.¹²⁸ Those who hold religious values in high regard secularization is experienced as a direct assault on their perception of the universe and their way of life. Emerson and Hartman show that the attack on old religious values is broad. They note how the process of secularization, in the Weberian sense of ‘demystifying the world’, continues until ‘whole strata of people operate without any apparent reference to or reliance upon religion’.¹²⁹ As a reaction, those who hold religious cosmology dear can only entrench themselves in their fundamentalist bunkers.

However, anyone devoted to a set of values and cosmologies, whether religious or secular in nature, can turn to fundamentalism as a reaction to incessant attacks on their worldview. For those clinging to a religious-traditional worldview secularism has been a source of constant attack, and it has generally been propagated through modernity, as Casanova also explains. Hence, modernity and fundamentalism cannot be seen loose from one another.¹³⁰

Emerson and Hartman define modernity as the division of life in distinct spheres, something which again has its similarities with the idea of Casanova. However, Emerson and Hartman also include the ever increasing ‘rationalization’ of the world as part of modernity, which entails that the laws that govern daily life are cleansed of all religious concepts.¹³¹

These processes, together with other socio-economic trends such as urbanization and industrialization, encouraged cultural pluralism. According to Emerson and Hartman it is inevitable that in pluralism religions would be relativized not only to one another, but also to ‘secular’ ideologies. This is a problem according to them because most religions are incompatible with relativization.¹³²

The thing which subsequently triggers violent behavior Emerson and Hartman call the ‘clear violation of the Durkheimian meaning and role of religion in society’.¹³³ Thereby they mean to say that it is a breach of the classic role that Emile Durkheim accredited religion as social phenomenon, which is the function of binding a community of subjects together.¹³⁴ Reverence for a God, idea or object is making that which is revered a totem, a symbol, of the community.

¹²⁸ Michael Emerson and David Hartman, “The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism“, *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, (2006): p. 127.

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp. 127-128.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 129.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 130.

¹³⁴ Durkheim, Emile, translated by Joseph Swain, *The Elementary Forms of the religious life*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1912): p. 201.

The above arguably contradicts the Cavanaugh's argument that religion is inherently more violent than secular ideologies, because from Emerson and Hartman it is possible to argue that religion actually is a cause for violent behavior. After all, at the basis of the reactionary move lies the belief in the social order proscribed by the religion/tradition.

However, such an argument is only partially correct. As Emerson and Hartman show, fundamentalism is a subjective understanding. If the subject tries to define fundamentalism from a secular-modern viewpoint, he or she sees it as a reactionary and perhaps even 'radically' regressive movement. The 'modern' subject in this insistence places itself as the 'good and reasoned', note the echoes of Cavanaugh and Casanova here, person who can think clearly because he or she believes in empirical evidence and individual rights. The fundamentalists then, are misguided and a dire threat because they are unable to think rationally.¹³⁵ Conversely, for the 'religious fundamentalist' the western modernist is actually the fundamentalist. Inexorable they impose their views in name of human progress. Thereby they become Vandals who tear apart social ties, meaning and community values.¹³⁶

The COIN community can benefit much if they take these ideas to heart. Their actions may push traditional leaders who see their positions threatened to mobilize the local populations against them. Luttwak's example of the Spanish, catholic clergy during the Napoleonic occupation fits neatly into this description. In this case the insurgents are not irrational or keen on rabid violence. They simply aim to defend their way of living, or preserve a social hierarchy which they value.

¹³⁵ Michael Emerson and David Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism", *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, (2006): p. 130.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

7. Conclusion

The question that this thesis set out to answer was how a critical understanding of religion would be able to contribute to a better understanding of insurgency and COIN theory. The question arose due to the disinterest, or even backlash COIN has received recently. The Trump administration has announced that the United States will orient themselves to great power struggle instead of such things as COIN. Adam Wunische warned in the journal *Foreign Affairs* that the American military is in risk of losing all the knowledge and experience which it has accumulated over the years, and at the cost of many casualties.

That COIN is a very challenging undertaking and one which has met with little success over the years is undeniable. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the two most recent great COIN campaigns of the American military, failed or are close to failure. Respected former generals such as John Kiszely and Rupert Smith analyzed the challenges soldiers face in a COIN operation. These are of a completely different nature than the ‘traditional’ or ‘Clausewitzian wars’.

Instead of only applying lethal force as effectively as possible, soldiers also need to act as a diplomat and a social worker. Things for which their training has not prepared them. One part with the problem lies there. Another part lies within modern COIN theory itself. Contemporary COIN theory has proven ill-adapted to the insurgencies of the 21st century, which are according to great majority of military scholars religious in nature.

Although there is some truth in the claim that the insurgencies of the 21st century are different from those of the past century, it is a mistake to think that the presence of a religious factor completely alters the conditions on which a COIN campaign has to be waged. As this thesis aimed to show, military scholars simply misunderstand the relationship between religion, violence and insurgency. Their way of thinking about these questions fits remarkably well within an idea proposed by the critical scholar of religion, William T. Cavanaugh. Military scholars who aim to improve modern COIN theory can benefit much not only from his work, but also from the work of several of his colleagues.

Chapter three illustrated that military scholars have studied the ‘art’ of COIN long. During the colonial era it was called ‘Imperial Policing’, and revolved around the subjugation and internalization of local populations into the larger colonial empire, with the final aim of economic exploitation. The second era came to be known as the ‘classical’ era, and covered the historic period of the decolonization. Much of the basic COIN principles were constructed during this era, including those

of David Galula, the primary inspiration for the ideas of the Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24), the manual of the United States military which is considered by many the pinnacle of modern COIN doctrine.

Two editions of the Field Manual 3-24 were published, and each had a slightly different definition of COIN. Despite these nuanced differences, both had in common that COIN is a contingent concept. It depends on what form the insurgency takes. Consequently they define insurgency as a 'protracted politico-military struggle' which revolved around political control of a territory or social group. COIN could be understood to be any measures a government, or another party, could take to counter the efforts of the insurgents.

Despite being a thorough overhaul of the entire COIN field according to its main author, Conrad Crane, it has been heavily criticized as well. The most important point of criticism was that it was 'too soft' for the religiously inspired insurgents, because contrary to the insurgents of the 20th century, the insurgents of the 21st century were inspired by religion. Unlike their Marxist predecessors of the 20th century, who fought for a worldly goal, the goals of these modern insurgents are out of this world and fight to please their God. Hence they cannot be reasoned with.

As chapters four and five showed that this way of thinking fits neatly into a framework of thought which William T. Cavanaugh describes as *the myth of religious violence*. He challenges the generally accepted truth that religion and violence are inextricably linked. Cavanaugh urges to stop seeing religion as something *sui generis* which is 'out there' seeking to incite people to irrational violence. Instead 'religion' must be approached as a concept is a social construct which arose during the reformation and the pre-modern era, when philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes were developing new visions on the order of society and the legitimization of public authority.

Cavanaugh describes that time in western history as marked by competition between monarchs, who sought to expand the influence of their ever-centralizing state, and ecclesiastical institutions fighting to preserve their powerful positions within society. The conception of religion de facto laid the foundation for the secularization of Western society, because allowed the labelling of certain practices within society as 'religious' and thereby marginalizing them. Their public authority was challenged on this ground and their reach reduced to the private sphere. Henceforth they were to preside over the internal, spiritual wellbeing of the individual. Not matters of state.

Cavanaugh explained that the centralization of state power in the seventeenth century culminated in what is now known as 'the wars of religion'. The competition between the ecclesiastical institutions and the central state culminated in the notorious Thirty Years War, where large parts of

Western-Europe were subjugated to war and laid to waste. Following the victory of the worldly authorities over the clerical ones 'religion' was relegated to the private sphere and the state assumed authority over the public realm. The relegation of religion was accompanied by the Myth that the Thirty Years War was so devastating because it was fought over religious differences. Subsequently *the myth of religious violence* was born. The state was to be neutral so as to restrain these 'religious passions' in the public sphere.

In COIN theory *the myth* works in a similar fashion. Often unnoticed *the myth* leads professionals to marginalize or disregard certain practices as unimportant because they are labeled 'religious'. The opening quote of this thesis by former marine David Morris is telling in this respect. As he describes it, religion irradiates the basic proteins of insurgency and creates 'wide-eyed gunslingers, bomb-guru's and aspiring martyrs.

Chapter six analyzed both the approach enshrined within the FM 3-24 to questions of religion, as well as several COIN theorists who criticized the manual particularly on its approach towards religion in insurgency. According to these critics it is because of the vicious irrationality which religion induces in people that insurgencies last longer and are more cruel than 'secular' wars. They criticize the FM 3-24 on the notion that it does not recognize this fact. The only way to resolve such insurgencies decisively is the use of an excessive amount of force. There is no necessity for a deep understanding of the host society in order to impose a new, legitimate regime, nor a soft 'hearts and minds approach', because these things do not interest religious insurgents. It is exactly this line of thought which Cavanaugh seeks to challenge by pointing towards the specific origins of the concept 'religion', and the implicit beliefs that come with it.

So how has a critical understanding of religion contributed to a better understanding of modern insurgency? By its revelation of certain flawed ideas. It has shown the mistake that both the pinnacle of modern COIN doctrine, the American Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24), and its critics make is that they all have a too narrow understanding of 'religion'. Not only does the COIN community wield a limited understanding of what religion is, they also see it as inherently violent, because it allegedly infuses people with irrationality. Exactly those things which Cavanaugh warns us for. Religion is seen too much as something which is 'out there', and which is always in danger of inspiring people to commit the most atrocious acts of violence.

The misunderstanding about religion is complemented by a misunderstanding of modernity. COIN theorists have overlooked the full significance of modernist ideology on 'traditional' societies. Theorists such as David Kilcullen and Michael Fitzsimmons have touched upon the subject, but did

not go nearly far enough. They both acknowledge that contemporary insurgencies are different in nature, but not necessarily because religion is involved. On one side is Kilcullen, who argues that contemporary insurgencies are conservative in nature, contrary to the insurgencies of the twentieth century, which were revolutionary in nature. On the other hand Fitzsimmons argues that modern COIN theory applies modernist ideas to traditionally organized societies. According to him this is an ill fit and evokes aversion, and even resentment if it is pushed, among both the traditional power holders of that society and the general public. Fitzsimmons' concludes that many people are still not 'ready' to live in a modern liberal-democratic society, because they do not care 'how' is governed, but rather 'who' governs. Meaning that many in traditional societies care more that the ruling party is of the same ethnic or tribal group.

The work of José Casanova, also discussed in chapter five, becomes of importance. He argues that modernity and secularization have long walked hand in hand. As he puts it, 'to be secular means to be modern and therefore, by implication, to be religious means to be somehow not yet fully modern'.¹³⁷

Both Fitzsimmons and the FM 3-24 connect well with Casanova's description of secularization. Particularly their focus on the 'legal' or 'rational' form of legitimate authority resonates with Casanova's description of the modernization-secularization nexus and the implicit judgements that often accompany it. Fitzsimmons argument that 'traditional' societies, as he describes the Iraqi and Afghani societies where the American army has been conducting the recent COIN campaigns, were not welcoming to the implementation of the Weberian 'legal' form of public authority. It caused much resistance among the local populations, who held to their traditional form of public authority. Luttwak would likely agree with Fitzsimmons on this point.

Although Fitzsimmons et al. are moving closer to a better understanding of the dynamics which are at play when attempts at modernization are made, they do not make the final analytical move. The resistance against modernity can be caused by resentment of upturning certain social orders, but it can also lay at a deeper level which does not necessarily connect to the legitimation of power relations. Often these reactionary movements are misunderstood as fundamentalism.

Michael Emerson and David Hartman argue in their paper *The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism*, fundamentalist sentiments are often seen as an attempt to return to an essence of religion,

¹³⁷ José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms", in Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. *Rethinking Secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, (2011), p. 59.

which is coupled almost automatically with violent behavior. Yet, instead of religion being an inspiration and causal factor for violence, it is actually a reaction to an ever encroaching modern-secular worldview. A better understanding of this specific dynamic allows counterinsurgents to better shape their policies in the field.

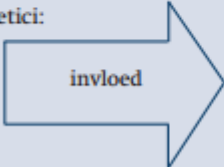

In the end this thesis can conclude that a critical study of religion can be of great benefit to general COIN theory. Not only does it allow to reevaluate some of the attitudes with which some prominent military thinkers and COIN theorists approach questions of religion, but it can also serve as a first step into a better understanding of those people who continue to pursue the settlement of their (political) conflicts with violence and dress these attempts in religious language.

One potential fertile path of inquiry is the investigation to what extent liberal-secularist modes of thinking are the default within the currently popular practices among diplomats of ‘state-building’ or ‘capacity-building’. David Chandler has already made an interesting suggestion with his work *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-Building*. In it he makes the point that the world is entering a ‘new age of empire’ through the dominance of certain ideas about what constitutes proper state or governance practice. He argues that these ideas are particularly ‘Western’ in nature and subsequently project western and neoliberal ideas across the globe. Thereby other, non-western ideas of governance and state-building are overruled.¹³⁸

Another topic which would make an interesting subject for further study is the striking amount of former servicemen who are now doing academic research on COIN theory and advise the people in the field. Although practical experience is invaluable for good military academia, it also shows that some ideas and conceptualizations remain unquestioned because of this. Subsequently, it is possible that these unquestioned assumptions are ‘passed on’ to new generations of military professionals. Improvement can only come if everything which is deemed certain is questioned at times. This counts for scientific research in general, so also for COIN theory.

¹³⁸ David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-building*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006): pp. 10-13.

APPENDIX I

Omgeving: Koloniale periode (1870-1945)	Omgeving: Dekolonisatieperiode (1945-1960)	Omgeving: Moderne tijd (vanaf 2000)
Koloniale oorlogen	Dekolonisatieoorlogen/nationale bevrijdingsoorlogen	Crisisbeheersingsoperaties
<i>Small wars</i> <i>Imperial policing</i>	Klassieke counterinsurgency	Neoklassieke/moderne counterinsurgency
Westerse koloniën	Onder meer: - Maleisië (1948-1960) - Kenia (1952-1960) - Algerije (1954-1962)	Onder meer: - Afghanistan (2001-heden) - Irak (2003-2011)
Koloniale theoretici: - Callwell - Lyautey - Gwynn 	Theorieën van de 'klassiekers': - Thompson - Kitson - Galula } 10 basisprincipes van klassieke counterinsurgency 	Moderne westerse denken over counterinsurgency: - (VS) FM 3-24 - (VK) ADP - (NLD) LDP II C

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¹³⁹ M. Huizing, "Basisprincipes van Klassieke Counterinsurgency", *Militaire Spectator* 181 no. 2 (2012): p. 45.

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