

Weaponizing the Sacred: An X-Ray of Religion and Violence

Emmanuel Richard Gokum and Michael Paul Pilani

Abstract

This paper examines the complex relationship between religion and violence across various faith traditions, analyzing whether religious doctrines inherently promote violent behavior or merely serve as tools appropriated by political actors for their own ends. Through a comparative historical analysis and case study approach, the research investigates how theological frameworks – particularly René Girard's mimetic theory and Charles Taylor's concept of numinous violence – help explain the persistence of religiously framed conflicts. The study explores manifestations of religious violence in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, demonstrating how doctrinal interpretations interact with socio-political contexts to either mitigate or intensify violent tendencies. Employing discourse analysis of religious texts, historical documentation, and contemporary case studies, the research reveals that while religions contain doctrines that can be mobilized for violent purposes, violence typically emerges from the interplay between theological justifications and underlying political, economic, and cultural tensions. The findings suggest that religious violence operates through mechanisms such as the “scapegoat mechanism” and “crusade mentality,” which transform political struggles into existential conflicts by framing opponents as impure or evil. This research contributes to ongoing academic debates by offering a nuanced understanding of how religious ideologies become weaponized across different traditions and historical contexts, challenging both essentialist views that religion is inherently violent and apologetic perspectives that dissociate religion entirely from violence.

Key words: Weaponizing, Sacred, X-Ray, Religion, Violence

Introduction

The relationship between religion and violence has long been a subject of intense scholarly debate and public discourse. In the post-9/11 era, this discussion has gained particular urgency as religious extremism has emerged as a prominent security concern across the globe (Juergensmeyer, 2017). This

paper examines the complex and often paradoxical relationship between religious doctrines and violent practices, addressing the fundamental question: Is religion inherently violent, or is it merely instrumentalized by social and political actors to justify violence that stems from other causes? Religious violence presents a theoretical puzzle for scholars. On one hand, most religious traditions advocate peace, compassion, and the sanctity of human life as core values. The Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – all contain prohibitions against killing in their foundational texts, while Eastern traditions such as Buddhism emphasize non-violence (ahimsa) as a central tenet (Armstrong, 2014). On the other hand, history provides abundant examples of violence committed in religion's name, from the medieval Crusades to contemporary terrorist attacks by groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and religiously motivated lone actors (Gokum, 2022).

Several theoretical perspectives have been advanced to understand this apparent contradiction. Essentialist approaches, exemplified by scholars like Samuel Huntington (1996), argue that religious differences inherently lead to conflict, particularly along “civilizational” fault lines. In contrast, instrumentalist perspectives contend that religion merely provides convenient justifications for violence motivated by political or economic grievances (Atran, 2010). A third perspective, which this paper adopts, suggests that religion is neither inherently peaceful nor violent, but contains internal resources that can be mobilized in either direction depending on historical, social, and political contexts (Appleby, 2000).

This study employs René Girard's mimetic theory and Charles Taylor's concept of numinous violence as theoretical frameworks to analyze how religious doctrines can contribute to violent outcomes. Girard's scapegoat mechanism helps explain how communities externalize internal conflicts onto marginalized groups, often framing this scapegoating in religious terms (Girard, 1977; 1987). Taylor's (2007) work illuminates how the pursuit of purity – whether religious or secular – can lead to exclusionary violence against those deemed impure or threatening to the community's sacred identity. Through comparative historical analysis and case studies across multiple religious traditions, the study demonstrates that violent manifestations of religion typically emerge from the complex interplay between theological interpretations and socio-political conditions. From Christianity's transformation from pacifism to crusade, to modern jihadist movements' selective interpretation of Islamic texts, to Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, similar patterns emerge: religious violence operates through mechanisms that transform political struggles into existential conflicts by framing opponents as impure or evil (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Sprinzak, 2000).

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on religious violence by offering a nuanced understanding of how religious ideologies become weaponized across different traditions and historical contexts. The paper

challenges both essentialist views that religion is inherently violent and apologetic perspectives that dissociate religion entirely from violence by analyzing the “scapegoat mechanism” and “crusade mentality” as cross-cultural phenomena. Instead, it argues that understanding religious violence requires attention to the specific theological, historical, and political contexts in which it emerges, as well as the psychological and social mechanisms through which religious meaning is constructed and contested.

2. Theoretical Frameworks: Understanding Religious Violence

2.1 *Mimetic Theory and the 'Scapegoat Mechanism'*

René Girard's mimetic theory posits that human desires are inherently imitative, leading to rivalry and, ultimately, violence. As individuals and groups mimic each other's desires, competition intensifies, culminating in societal tensions that seek resolution through what Girard calls the “scapegoat mechanism.” René Girard's book, *The Scapegoat*, explores the “Scape Goat Mechanism,” a concept he echoes in his work. Girard's theories, known as “*l'hypothèse girardienne*,” have sparked interdisciplinary and international controversy. The Scapegoat theory posits that the scapegoat is the lamb of God, and the study of the Christian Passion reveals the foolish genesis of blood-stained idols and false gods of superstition, politics, and ideologies. The Passion text serves as a model interpretation that has enabled Western culture to demystify its own violence, which Girard extends to mythology. Here, communities identify a marginalized individual or group as the cause of disorder and direct their collective violence toward them, restoring temporary peace. Religion, according to Girard, historically plays a crucial role in channeling and controlling violence through sacrificial mechanisms that legitimize and regulate conflict (Girard, 1987). However, when these mechanisms fail or are disrupted, societies may revert to religiously framed violence, often targeting scapegoats perceived as 'outsiders'.

The scapegoat mechanism operates on a fundamental psychological and social level. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*, highlights how individuals and societies project their anxieties and sense of evil onto external entities, creating a “contrast case” to define themselves as pure and ordered (Taylor, 2007). This contrast often assumes a religious dimension, as those engaging in scapegoating believe they are acting in divine alignment by purging impurity. The persecuted group is cast as an existential threat, justifying violent actions in the name of religious or moral righteousness. This mechanism manifests in two primary forms, namely internal scapegoating which involves societies targeting minority groups within their communities, blaming them for social decay or misfortune. Examples include the persecution of heretics, witches, and religious minorities. External scapegoating, like the Crusade Model, involves violence directed against external groups deemed impure or dangerous. Christian forces mobilized for territorial expansion and constructed a higher sacred meaning around warfare, combining divine purity with warrior ethos, turning conquest into a divine mission (Gokum, 2022).

Despite modern secularization, Girard argues that the scapegoat mechanism has not disappeared but evolved. Even societies that reject traditional religious violence recreate its structures in new forms. For instance, the French Revolution, while advocating for a rational and secular society, engaged in mass executions to purify the Republic. The guillotine became a symbol of technological and rationalized violence, replacing earlier forms of religious sacrifice while serving a similar social function (Taylor, 2007). Religious violence today often follows this same cyclical pattern, where political, economic, and cultural tensions are framed within religious narratives. From sectarian conflicts to acts of terrorism, the perception of a divinely sanctioned struggle enables participants to engage in extreme violence under the guise of moral duty (Atran, 2010). In this regard, Girard's mimetic theory and scapegoat mechanism provide a critical framework for understanding the persistence of religious violence. While modern societies have developed alternative ways to regulate conflict, the deep psychological and social structures that fuel scapegoating remain. Recognizing these patterns is essential for developing strategies to mitigate violence, fostering dialogue, and breaking the cycle of religiously framed conflict.

2.2 Numinous Violence and the 'Crusade Mentality'

The concept of numinous violence, as explored by Charles Taylor, builds on the intersection of religious fervour, purity, and violence. Taylor argues that religious violence often emerges as a response to perceived threats to a community's sacred identity. In this view, defining an external "other" as impure or morally corrupt serves to reinforce internal unity and justify violent action against those outside the group. This dynamic is particularly evident in the 'crusade mentality,' a historical and ideological phenomenon wherein violence is framed as a sacred duty. The medieval Crusades exemplify this mentality: European knights, under papal sanction, waged war against non-Christians, believing they were fulfilling a divine mission. However, this phenomenon extends beyond medieval Christendom. In contemporary contexts, extremist religious movements, such as jihadist groups, also invoke the rhetoric of holy war to justify their actions.

Taylor situates this phenomenon within a broader historical pattern, drawing parallels between religious violence in the Axial Age and the revolutionary violence of the modern era. He suggests that the sacred killings of pre-modern religious societies did not simply disappear with the rise of secularism; rather, they were reconfigured. The French Revolution, for example, saw the concept of purity reinterpreted in secular terms, with republican virtue replacing religious faith as the ultimate good. The executions carried out in the name of the Republic – most notably through the guillotine – reflected a similar impulse: the elimination of perceived corruption in order to establish a utopian order. This suggests that numinous violence is not exclusive to religious traditions but is a recurring human tendency, manifesting whenever ideological purity is

deemed more valuable than human life. Whether in medieval crusades, revolutionary purges, or modern religious extremism, the 'crusade mentality' transforms political or theological struggles into existential conflicts, legitimizing mass violence in the name of a higher cause (Gokum, 2022).

3. Religion and Violence Across Traditions

3.1 Christianity: From Pacifism to Religious Warfare

Christianity's historical relationship with violence is complex and paradoxical. The early Christian message emphasized pacifism, as reflected in the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament writers (Usman & Paul, 2024). Early Christians largely rejected participation in war, viewing violence as incompatible with Christ's command to love one's enemies (Juergensmeyer, 2016; Onukwuba et al., 2023). However, this stance shifted dramatically with the rise of the Roman Empire's Christianization. By the late 11th century, Christian identity became deeply entwined with martial power. Pope Urban II's call for the First Crusade (1095) reflected both religious and political motives. While ostensibly aimed at reclaiming the Holy Land from Muslim control, the Crusades also served to expand the influence of the papacy and unite warring European factions under a common cause. This period marked a significant shift in Christian thought, where violence was increasingly justified as divinely sanctioned.

The Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834) was another example of Christianity being used to justify systemic violence. Although framed as a means to root out heresy, it also functioned as a tool for consolidating political power, particularly in Spain, where it helped maintain internal order following civil war and fears of Ottoman expansion. Similarly, the European Wars of Religion (16th–17th centuries) illustrated how religious conflict often masked underlying political struggles. These wars, which included the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), devastated central Europe, causing massive casualties – estimated to be around 35% of the population in some areas.

In contemporary times, Christianity has continued to be used as a justification for violence in various forms. The sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, for instance, had both political and religious dimensions, with Protestant and Catholic factions deeply entrenched in their respective nationalist and unionist causes (Juergensmeyer, 2016). Similarly, the rise of radical Christian movements in the United States, such as the Christian Identity movement and elements of the Calvinist Reconstruction movement, have contributed to extremist violence against perceived enemies of the faith, including abortion providers and government institutions. The Calvinist Christian Reconstruction movement and the racist Christian Identity movement were involved in bombing abortion clinics and shootings with Federal agents, including the Ruby Ridge standoff in 1992 (Barkun, 2014). Timothy McVeigh, convicted and executed for the 1995 Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing, was motivated by William Pierce's "cosmotheism" religious ideology. He hoped his act would initiate a racial struggle and a guerrilla war to liberate the United States from its

anti-Christian secular disposition. Eric Robert Rudolph, another militant with ties to the Christian Identity movement, was convicted of the 1996 Olympic Village bombing and hid in the Appalachian Mountains before his arrest in 2003 (Juergensmeyer, 2017).

The story of religiously motivated violence is also rife in Africa. An example is *The Lord's Resistance Army* led by one Joseph Kony who has been terrorizing villagers in Uganda, claiming to protect Christian culture (McKinley, 1997). Christianity's trajectory from pacifism to participation in religiously sanctioned violence highlights the malleability of religious ideologies in response to political and social contexts. While Christian theology contains strong themes of peace and reconciliation, historical and modern examples demonstrate how religious doctrines can be weaponized to justify aggression. This historical transformation underscores the broader theme of religion's entanglement with power, war, and identity.

3.2 Islam: Jihad and Political Power

Like most religious traditions, Islam praises non-violence and its very name, the word Islam is a derivative from the word *salama* which means 'peace.' However, like all religious traditions it allows for the use of military force in certain situations, especially for self-defence. Additionally, it has also often been associated with both peace and warfare, with the concept of *jihad* at the center of these discussions. Derived from the Arabic root *j-h-d*, meaning "to strive" or "to exert effort," *jihad* has multiple interpretations in Islamic theology and history. In its spiritual sense, it refers to the inner struggle against sin and personal moral striving. However, in its political and military dimensions, *jihad* has historically been invoked in defensive and expansionist contexts, often shaped by the prevailing socio-political conditions of the time. Classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) distinguishes between different forms of *jihad*, most notably *jihad al-nafs* (struggle against one's soul) and *jihad al-qital* (armed struggle). The Qur'an and Hadith provide nuanced perspectives on the conditions under which military *jihad* is permissible. For instance, the Qur'an explicitly forbids the killing of non-combatants and emphasizes proportionality in warfare. However, throughout history, rulers and political leaders have often utilized religious rhetoric to justify conflicts, blurring the lines between theological principles and political ambitions (Gokum et al., 2024).

The late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed the rise of militant jihadist groups that reinterpreted classical Islamic teachings to suit their ideological and political goals. The Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989) played a crucial role in shaping transnational jihadist networks. Initially supported by Western powers as a resistance movement against Soviet occupation, the Afghan *mujahideen* later evolved into more radical organizations, such as Al-Qaeda (Juergensmeyer, 2016). Osama bin Laden and his contemporaries framed their struggle not only as resistance to foreign occupation but also as a broader

confrontation against perceived Western imperialism. Groups like Boko Haram and ISIS have similarly weaponized Islamic rhetoric to further their objectives, often distorting theological principles to justify acts of terror (Zenn, 2021; Kanu et al., 2024). Boko Haram, for example, emerged in Nigeria with the stated goal of opposing Western education (*boko* being a corruption of the English word “book” and *haram* meaning “forbidden” in Arabic) (Thurston, 2017). Despite its claim to defend Islam, the group has targeted both Muslim and Christian communities, killing thousands and displacing millions (Kanu et al., 2024; Agbiboa, 2013).

The ideological foundation for many modern Islamist movements can be traced back to thinkers like Hassan al-Banna founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He argued for modern Islamic law and adapted Islamic law, challenging European dominance and transforming Islamism (Euben & Zaman, 2009). Meanwhile, Maulana Abul A'la Mawdudi, founder of Jamaat-e-Islami. Al-Banna sought to integrate Islamic principles into governance, advocating for a society ruled by Sharia law. Mawdudi, on the other hand, introduced the concept of *theo-democracy*, emphasizing that sovereignty belongs to God and that governance must adhere strictly to Islamic principles (Ahmad, 2009). Their ideas have had a lasting impact, inspiring both moderate Islamic political movements and radical jihadist groups. The relationship between Islam, *jihad*, and political power is complex and deeply rooted in historical and theological contexts. While Islam as a religious tradition emphasizes peace and prohibits the killing of innocents, radical interpretations by extremist groups have fueled violent conflicts. These groups often manipulate religious texts to serve political ends, further complicating the discourse on religious violence. Understanding the interplay between theology, politics, and history is crucial in addressing the challenges posed by modern jihadist movements (Mandaville, 2020).

3.3 Judaism: Zionism and Religious Nationalism

Judaism has historically been viewed as a tradition with a strong ethical framework emphasizing justice and communal responsibility. However, in the modern era, certain factions within Jewish nationalism have combined religious ideology with political militancy, leading to extremist manifestations of violence. One key figure in the radicalization of Jewish nationalism was Rabbi Meir Kahane, who founded the Kach party, advocating for an exclusionary Jewish state that opposed Arab presence and secular Jews (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). His ideology promoted direct confrontation with perceived enemies, a sentiment that continues to influence some extremist groups today. Kahane's assassination in 1990 by an Islamist militant did not end his movement; instead, his followers continued to advocate for violent measures to establish a theocratic Jewish state.

A significant event demonstrating this religious-nationalist violence was the 1994 Hebron massacre, when Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a Kahane follower, entered the Cave of the Patriarchs mosque and killed dozens of Muslim worshippers.

This act shocked both Israeli and international communities, underscoring how religious zealotry can lead to terrorism. Similarly, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by Yigal Amir was rooted in messianic nationalism (CNN, 1995 November 5). Amir, who opposed the Oslo Accords and any territorial compromise with Palestinians, viewed Rabin as a traitor to Jewish sovereignty. His actions illustrated how religious nationalism, when interwoven with political conflicts, can incite individuals to commit violent acts in the name of faith. These cases highlight how, even in a tradition often seen as historically persecuted, religious violence can emerge when theological interpretations intersect with political grievances. The rise of messianic Zionism and militant groups demonstrates the risks posed by ideologies that frame territorial disputes as divine mandates.

3.4 Buddhism: The Paradox of Peace and Aggression

Buddhism is widely regarded as a religion of non-violence, emphasizing compassion and inner peace. However, historical and contemporary examples demonstrate that Buddhist teachings, like those of other religions, can be appropriated to justify violence. This paradox manifests most notably in Buddhist nationalist movements that advocate for aggression against perceived religious or ethnic threats. In Myanmar, radical Buddhist monks have played a significant role in inciting violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Prominent figures such as Ashin Wirathu, a leader of the ultranationalist 969 Movement, have promoted anti-Muslim rhetoric, leading to mob violence and the mass displacement of Rohingya communities. The persecution of Rohingya Muslims, which has been condemned internationally as ethnic cleansing, illustrates how religious identity can be weaponized in the service of nationalist agendas.

The violence in Myanmar has also had global repercussions. In 2013, the Bodhgaya temple in India was bombed, with the perpetrators claiming it was retaliation for the treatment of Rohingya Muslims by Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar (Friedlander, 2016). This cycle of violence underscores the potential for Buddhist nationalism to contribute to broader religious and geopolitical conflicts. Another striking example of Buddhist-related violence is the Japanese religious cult Aum Shinrikyo. Founded by Shoko Asahara, the group combined elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, and apocalyptic Christian prophecy. Asahara predicted an impending world war and sought to accelerate it through violent means. In 1995, Aum Shinrikyo carried out a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, killing 13 people and injuring thousands. Asahara and several of his followers were later convicted and sentenced to death (Juergensmeyer, 2016).

The case of Aum Shinrikyo demonstrates how Buddhist-inspired esoteric teachings can be manipulated to justify acts of terrorism. While this group was an outlier, its actions highlight the potential for extremist interpretations of Buddhist doctrine to fuel violence. While Buddhism is predominantly

associated with peace and non-violence, its historical and contemporary manifestations reveal that it is not immune to the dynamics of religiously motivated violence. From militant nationalism in Myanmar to apocalyptic cults in Japan, these examples underscore the complex ways in which Buddhist teachings can be appropriated for violent ends. This challenges the assumption that Buddhism is inherently pacifistic and highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of its role in both peace and conflict.

3.5 Hinduism and Sikhism: Religious Identity and Separatism

The Indic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism all have a reputation for advocating and honouring non-violence and subscribing rather to peace. This fact notwithstanding, images of warfare form parts of the legendary past of these religions. The epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are all about battles and Sikhs celebrate their struggles against the Moghuls in the seventeen and eighteen centuries, part of which is the martyrdom of some of its founding gurus. The legends of these past struggles are inspirations for militant Hindu and Sikh activists (Doniger, 2009). Meanwhile, Hindu nationalism, often linked to the ideology of Hindutva, has played a significant role in shaping contemporary religious and political conflicts in India. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 by Hindu nationalist groups sparked one of the deadliest communal riots in India's history, resulting in approximately 2,000 deaths (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). This event epitomizes how religious identity can be mobilized for political purposes, challenging India's secular framework and exacerbating Hindu-Muslim tensions. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with its strong Hindu nationalist base, has further solidified the fusion of religion and politics, posing challenges to India's pluralistic society (Gokum, 2022).

Similarly, the Kashmir imbroglio, a diverse Himalayan region, was contested before India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. The Indian Independence Act allowed Kashmir to accede to either India or Pakistan. A war erupted, leading to a UN-recommended plebiscite. In 1949, India and Pakistan agreed to establish a ceasefire line, dividing the region. Today, Delhi and Islamabad claim Kashmir, controlling only internationally recognized territories. This is one case of religious separatism in India which has involved terrorism. Sikh militancy in India has been shaped by historical grievances and the demand for an independent Sikh state, Khalistan. The Punjab region witnessed significant violence in the 1980s and 1990s, with Sikh separatist groups engaging in armed insurgency against the Indian state (Juergensmeyer, 2016). The Indian government's response, including Operation Blue Star in 1984 – which involved a military assault on the Golden Temple, Sikhism's holiest site – fueled further radicalization and led to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards (Axel, 2001). The Khalistan movement, though less active today, continues to have supporters both in India and in the global Sikh diaspora, demonstrating how religious identity can drive separatist aspirations. Both Hindu nationalism and Sikh separatism illustrate the ways in

which religious identity, when intertwined with political objectives, can serve as a catalyst for violence and conflict. The use of religious symbols, historical narratives, and perceived victimhood can sustain militant movements over time, making the resolution of such conflicts particularly challenging.

4. Is Religion Inherently Violent?

The question of whether religion is inherently violent remains central to academic debate. Some argue that religious doctrines inherently promote violence, while others contend that religion is merely a tool used by political actors. The case of ISIS has reignited this discussion, with scholars like Graeme Wood asserting that ISIS represents a 'very Islamic' ideology, whereas others argue that its actions distort Islamic teachings for political gains (Gokum, 2023). This debate is not confined to Islam alone. Indeed, from the foregoing discussion, it is obvious that there are numerous examples of religious violence across different traditions and time periods. The European wars of religion, the French Revolution's secular violence, and modern religious extremist movements across different faiths suggest that the relationship between religion and violence is neither monolithic nor one-directional. As Karen Armstrong (2014) argues, many religious conflicts are as much about political power as they are about theology. The entanglement of religion and violence can be traced to just war theories in various religious traditions, where violence is justified under certain circumstances. For instance, Zoroastrianism developed a theological struggle between good and evil, while ancient Judaism organized itself under a war-based confederacy. Christianity, historically known for its martyrs, also engaged in crusades, inquisitions, and even supported slavery, which only waned with the Industrial Revolution.

The interweaving of religion and violence persisted into modern ideological movements. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation struggles in Germany and England, as well as the anti-religious violence during the French Revolution and in the Soviet Union, illustrate how religious ideologies have influenced conflicts. Additionally, the Cold War was often framed as a struggle between "Christendom" and "godless communism" (Thompson, 2017). However, the mere existence of religiously framed violence does not necessarily mean that religion is inherently violent. Some scholars, such as René Girard, argue that violence associated with religion is a social construct, influenced by political and cultural conditions rather than an intrinsic feature of religious belief (Girard, 1977). The 9/11 attacks, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Northern Ireland sectarian struggles, and religious violence in Myanmar, among others, all share a common thread: beneath their religious veneer lie deeper socio-cultural and political forces that drive and sustain them.

Charles Taylor (Gokum 2022) suggests that religious violence stems from the human tendency to externalize evil, creating a contrast between purity and impurity. This 'scapegoat mechanism' results in violent expulsion or extermination of those deemed impure, seen historically in the Crusades and

the French Revolution's execution of "enemies of the Republic". Historically, Christianity has oscillated between pacifism and violent engagement. While early Christians promoted non-violence, the alignment of the Church with Roman imperial power introduced religiously justified warfare, such as the Crusades (Cavanaugh, 2009). The Troubles in Northern Ireland, although primarily political, had strong religious undertones, with Catholics supporting Irish sovereignty and Protestants advocating for continued union with the UK (Mitchell, 2006). Similarly, religious extremism in the United States, including groups linked to Christian Identity movements, highlights how Christianity has also been invoked to justify violence (Gokum, 2022).

Judaism, though often a minority religion globally, has seen its own share of religious violence, particularly in Israel. Rabbi Meir Kahane's ideology promoted a violent vision of Zionism, and his followers engaged in attacks such as the 1994 Hebron mosque massacre. Similarly, Yigal Amir, who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, was motivated by extreme religious nationalism (Gokum, 2022). Islam, while often associated with non-violence – its very name being derived from the word "salama" (peace) – has also seen its teachings used to justify violence. While the Qur'an prohibits killing non-combatants, radical groups like al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Boko Haram have employed terrorist tactics under the guise of defending Islam. These groups often reference the works of thinkers like Hassan al-Banna and Abū al-Ala Mawdudi, who advocated for the violent approach to religion.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationship between religion and violence across various faith traditions, using theoretical frameworks from René Girard's mimetic theory and Charles Taylor's concept of numinous violence. The research reveals that religious violence emerges from a complex interplay between theological interpretations, socio-political contexts, and psychological mechanisms of scapegoating and identity formation. The study reveals striking similarities in how religious violence manifests across traditions, with violent interpretations emerging in specific historical and political circumstances, often characterized by perceived threats to communal identity, competition for resources or power, and charismatic leaders who can articulate a theological justification for violence.

The scapegoat mechanism, as articulated by Girard (1987), provides a powerful explanatory framework for understanding how religious violence functions across different traditions. The analysis demonstrates that this mechanism operates in remarkably similar ways across different religious traditions, such as medieval Christian crusades, modern jihadist movements, and Buddhist nationalist violence in Myanmar. The projection of evil against an external "other" serves to unify the community, simplify complex political and economic conflicts, and justify extreme measures against those deemed impure or threatening. The study challenges essentialist claims about particular

religions being inherently more violent than others. All major religious traditions contain theological resources that can be interpreted to justify violence under certain circumstances, just as they contain resources that promote peace, compassion, and reconciliation. The crucial factor determining whether violence emerges is not the inherent nature of the religious doctrine itself, but rather how that doctrine is interpreted, by whom, and in what socio-political context.

Religious violence typically involves transforming political conflicts into existential ones, making compromise more difficult and extreme measures more justifiable. This process of “cosmic war-making” can be observed across different religious traditions and historical contexts, from the medieval Crusades to contemporary religious nationalism in South Asia. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the relationship between religious belief and violent action is neither inevitable nor entirely coincidental. Instead, religious violence emerges through specific mechanisms of scapegoating, purity-seeking, and cosmic war-making that transform political conflicts into existential ones.

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