

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR VIOLENCE BY STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

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Abstract: There's no gainsaying that the negative dimensions and the influence of various religions on humanity today is worrisome because most religions if not all, preaches peace, Justice and Equality, yet, same religions are used to fan embers of disunity amongst the people of our world. As seen in the various extremist attacks going on in our contemporary societies. Looking at the rise of various religious sects against one another and the society in general, some disturbing questions come to mind; "What is the very essence of religion? If religion preaches peace, what then, is the interplay between religion and violence? In an attempt to answer these questions, hence the birth of this research. The research uncovered that the very foundations in which most religions for example Islam and Christianity was built have been perverted over time due to human selfish desires. The research however recommends that there's a need for all State and Nonstate Actors to properly trace back to the very essence and foundations on which each religion was built to enhance the culture of religious tolerance amongst various religious sects.

Keywords: Religion, Violence, Creed, Faith, Fatwah

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INTRODUCTION

There is often a more persuasion that violence and crises since time immemorial are triggered by more economic and political reasons, but it is wrong to completely rule out the fact that religion has its fair share of global violence, directly or indirectly, (Cavanaugh 2006). Religion is synonymous with the creation and as long as man's existence is concerned (Hoberman et al. 2020). It has been a blessing to many, why some see it as a curse, (American Friends Service 2020). Little wonder, Karl Marx simply describes it as an opium of the masses, implying it is an effective tool deployed anytime the masses are to be maximally exploited, (McKinnon 2005). Wherein, rather than be a positive impact on the people, it has most often than not associated with violence and war. In the 21st century, there seems to be a shift in the pattern of wars, as the main actors have shifted to targeting more innocent civilians in whatever name is seen as a major score point, thus been in agreement with Mary Kaldor concept of "new wars", (Kaldor 2013).

Conflicts originating by way of religious motives are on the rise and fast becoming a reoccurring decimal, (Svensson and Nilsson 2018). Though, this position has been vehemently argued by a school of thought, which holds that those who use the name of religion to fight in the most situation do not have anything in common close to the religion as they claim, (Huang 2020). In this direction, one good example that can be cited is that of the Boko haram group in Nigeria who have been waging war for almost a decade now against the Nigerian state, with a self-acclaimed mantra of carrying out Islamic injunctions, but this has been strongly countered as a hoax, wrong and anti-Islamic teaching, (Omenma, Onyishi and Okolie 2020). Remarkably, the end of the cold war marked a turning point, as the rebel group's mobilization which use to

be ideologically based, now became concentrated more on ethnoreligious issues (Toft 2007). The rise of most fundamentalist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Qaeda, Boko haram, among others, who claim their obnoxious actions are in the name of God or in defense of their faith has activated critical debate, to dissect and separate religion from violence, and as well understand the influence of religion on conflict dynamics (Ogar and Ogar 2018; Löfström 2020). It is worthy to note that, peace which is the ultimate goal of humanity has also enjoyed a popular endorsement by the major faiths; Christianity, Islam, Judaism to mention a few, all appears to be on the same page, by seeking peace, whenever, and in whatever ways (Rapoport 1991). There are strong links to concede that violence and religion do exist, and some of these reasons as earlier mentioned are but not limited to the character of our present contemporary world (Haynes 2020). Disturbing facts have shown that where religion has been the principal justification for contemporary terror, the effects and consequences appear to be so devastating (Law 2016). It is with the above background that this paper seeks to provoke learning and further expose the arguments and salient issues that are inherently associated with religion and violence.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

One of the challenges associated with discussing religion is that of an acceptable definition, though, there abound a litany of beautiful scholarly definitions of religion, this position has been collaborated by Markham and Sapp, when they averred that; Religion has suffered the challenge of an acceptable definition that will be acceptable to all stakeholders, (Markham and Sapp 2020). For instance, Smith believes religion is simply a creation for academic convenience, he further asserted that

religion has no independent existence, (Smith 1982). Another view is that which believes that religion is nothing but "an article of methodological dogma" and nothing more, (Timothy 2000). With the above background, it becomes more difficult to sufficiently discuss the topic when it is already clouded in the ambiguity of its definition.

This paper, however, adopting the definition of Albanese, who defined religion as:

"a system and symbols,(creed, codes, cultures) by means which people orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meaning and values", (Albanese 2012).

Violence: the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (Kruget al 2002)

Creed – any system, doctrine, or formula of religious belief, as of a denomination. Faith – belief in a good or in the doctrine or teachings of religion (www.dictionary.com 2018)

Fatwah - is a nonbinding legal opinion on a point of Islamic Law (Sharia) given by qualified Jurist in response to a question posed by (Berger 2014)

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

To a large extent, religion has become like fashion to many of its adherence, (Kaufmann 2010). This is little wonder why the world might have been experiencing a large expansion of religious followers across the globe without any correspondence love for one

another, and lack of general peace and tranquillity,(Lovelace 2020). Be that as it may, there has been also a strong link to religion helping in maintaining civil order. Gopin supported this position when he posited that; all religions of the world have in one way or the other contributed at one point or the other in creating the ambiance and propagation of ethical values that are indispensable to peace and civil society, (Gopin 2002). Though this valid point has not completely expunged religion from elements of violence. Scholarly evidence has shown that violence has been associated with religion for quite some time. According to **Encyclopaedia of Religion (1987)** and Hasting's **Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (1927)**, war was an important part of the Indo-European religious (Graeco-Roman), and in particular the formative periods of religions, (Rapoport 1991). Religion has also been viewed to have encouraged acts of violence, most especially during the ancient days, where practices such as the sacrifice of animals and sometimes even with humans, has been viewed as acts strongly pointing towards and encouraging pogrom, this Girard labeled as "collective murder", (Girard 1977). This act though not too still common is still happening. For instance, a pastor in Nigeria was arrested for been involved in the killing of an undergraduate for religious rituals, (Ani, Nnanwube, and Ojkorotu 2018). Though this kind of heinous crime may not have been openly endorsed by the church, it was however perpetrated using the name of religion, and many of such pockets of examples still abound in other places.

There is also a conviction by some certain believers that provided you kill or die in the name of religion; you are going to enjoy heaven or paradise. This kind of belief also not so openly endorsed by the frontline religions/faiths, but can be seen

to have encouraged violence on people who are seen as "*infidels*", as can be seen in the beheading of Christians captured by groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the dreaded *Boko haram* (*Western education is bad*) among others, (Pennington and Krona 2019). It may have also been in the same light that the actors of 9/11 can be said to have done what they did, believing that they will be dying as martyrs and therefore perfectly justified, (Leming and Dickinson 2020),(Spaaij 2011).

There is also exist some medieval intra-religious rivalry, this is to say mistrust and face up among the same faiths, like *Shiite's* and the *Sunnis* in Islam or the Muslim brotherhood vs others, (Tamadonfar 2019). This kind of mistrust is what has created a perceived recurring decimal of hostilities between Iraq, Saudi Arabia on one hand who have traditionally large followership of the Sunnis brand of Islam, and the Iranians on the other hand who are mostly adherence to the Shiite brand of Islam, (Durrani 2019),(Clark 2019). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood who were continuously been manipulated out of power for several years, eventually became the main group that fronted and help the emergence of former President Mossi during the Arab Spring, they did not to a large extent enjoy the support of other blocks, who were not too comfortable with some of their hard-line stands, and this could be understood why throughout the one year or so of Mossi's/Muslim brotherhood rule, Egypt was thrown into endless crises of street protests that result to needless bloodlettings and deaths, (Ayoob and Lussier 2020),(Munson 2001).

Violent punishments among some religious faiths are another element that cannot exonerate religion from violence. For example, the *Al Shabab* extremist

Islamic group in East Africa use brutal punishment such as stoning to death for crimes such as adultery and gay, or the outright amputation of limbs of offenders for crimes as low as stealing of sheep and cattle are a typical example of how in the name of religion cruelty and violence is visited on the people, (Johnson 2018). Even though groups such as al Shabab have been vehemently argued not to have represented the main tenants of Islam in any of their *modus operandi*, but at best simply a ragtag group brandishing itself in the name of propagating or representing Islam, (Göldner-Ebenthal and Elsayed 2019). The above situation is neither too different from Christian adherence as some examples can be cited in this regard. For instance, the war and pogrom in Northern Ireland which last for so many years was primarily a result of major disagreement among the Catholics and the protestants, north and south divide, which went on for decades, claiming lives of thousands of people, even though all of them were sadly followers of the Christian faith, (Coakley and Todd 2020). No wonder Charles Kimball captured this situation best when he declared that, more people have been killed and more people evil has been unleashed using the name of religion than any other institution in human history, (Kimball 2008).

Subsequently, it will be totally incomplete without mentioning the clash of the West (mostly represented by the US) and Eastern ideologies, and the ensuing consequences. The import of western elements and interference in the Middle East has come with a lot of prices, which many blame the west for trying to foist a liberal order on the very conserved Middle East, (Green 2019). This understanding is extended to the level to mean an attack on Islam, which appears to be the pride of the Arab world, (Khalidi

2004). In response to these infractions by the West, some scholars see the 9/11 as an action indicating a strong message of resistance by the Arab world to the perceived attempts to fizzle/dominate the Arab world, even though none of the main Islamic blocks did openly endorse or subscribe to the philosophy of Al Qaeda the main master minders of the attack, (Green 2019),(Brown 2019).

Another dimension about the use of violence in the name of religion is linked to dictatorship and authoritarian regimes, it is believed that authoritarian regimes often use religion as a weapon of implementing their nefarious agenda, this example is cited in the case of Pakistan and Malaysia, (Hashmi 2007). Thus, justifying that religion is or can be used for the perpetration of violence. Though some of this example may not have come exactly in the form of Pakistan and the Malaysian, it is important to note that religion still plays a vital role in the execution of mostly unpopular government agendas, a typical and recent example is the new Indian citizen (amendment) act 2019. The law has been viewed as unconstitutional for a range of reasons, but of most importance, it has been considered highly discriminating on the grounds of **religion and origin**, and distortion of equal religious freedom in India, (Ahmed 2020). Furthermore, this law has been viewed as targeting cutting down the influence of the Indian Muslims, who are traditionally regarded more as immigrants and minorities against a mostly Hindus-dominated nation, (Birnie and Bauböck 2020). This development expectedly witnessed mass street protest with attendant police brutality and violence against the mostly peaceful Indian Muslim women and unarmed civilians that were protesting against the new law and calling for its reversal, (Gandbhir 2020).

Also, the issue of breach of certain laws that are considered unforgivable by some religious faiths. The seemingly lack misunderstanding of the *do's and don'ts* of the different religions to a very large extent, and when these do's and don'ts are breached by a perceived non-member of the faith, it is mostly viewed harshly as an affront and an open invitation for war. A good example is a **blasphemy** which ignorantly may be triggered by an unbeliever, which usually leads to the declaration of *fatwah* on such a person,(Gule 2019). Meanwhile, there is no guarantee that in the end, it is only such a person who intentionally or ignorantly committed the offense that is made to suffer the punishment or consequences. Most often, this situation usually snowballs into major crises that seem to consume anyone perceived to be of the opposing faith, (Asad et al. 2013). We can see this scenario when a Danish Journalist in September 2005 was reported to have cartooned the holy Prophet Muhammed (SWT) in the newspaper, *JyllandsPosten*, though it was in faraway Denmark, and wasn't endorsed by the leaders of the other faiths, the ensuing protest and violence that accompanied it spread up to countries outside of Europe where the act took place, (Khan et al. 2019). A similar situation was a witness in Nigeria in 1994 when one Gideon Akaluka was alleged to have desecrated the Holy Koran, he was subsequently beheaded, yet this did not end at that point, as the crises lead to the killing of Christians in Kano and other northern cities of Nigeria who had no relationship with the offender, (Ekhomu 2019),(Mustapha 2014). It is important to mention that any abuse or attempt to cartoon Jesus can possibly ignite a violent response by his followers, (Sider 2019). In the same light, attempts by people like the antisemitic Iranian leadership to demonize Zionism and attempt to deny

the Jewish holocaust, have been viewed harshly and are capable of igniting violence,(Vollhardt 2013),(Fermaglich 2007).

Other religious violence has been occurring with an ethnic coloration, mixed with religion, this example can for instance be viewed in crisis or what many describe as a genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar, (Akhtar 2019). The crisis which began on the 25 of August 2018, was targeted at the Muslim and minority Rohingya, it is one of the most senseless unprovocative violence against an ethnic group in modern time. The conspiracy and atrocities of the military regime in Myanmar, the inaction of the international community, and the silence of the vocal pro-democracy activist Aung San SuuKyì made it even more worrisome. According to Medicine Sans Frontiers, an estimated population of about 1,092,136 fled into Bangladesh, while an estimated number of between 9,430 -13,750 died as a result of the violence, (Ware and Laoutides 2019). Though many view this crisis as a direct attack on the mostly Muslim Rohingyas as a form of religious cleansing, some however contested this position, they argue that the crisis was rather more economic and political than religious,(Mahmud 2019). A similar but more damaging example was the killing of Muslims in Bosnia in 1992, the genocide was particularly targeted at the Muslims. For instance, the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo which is believed to have about 5000 manuscripts, the largest collection of Islamic manuscripts and literature in the Balkans, all in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Adzamijski were completely burnt, (Sells 1996). Still, on the Bosnian crises, the target was specifically at eliminating the Muslim Serbs and their identity; the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, and the coloured

mosque in Foca built-in 1551 were all destroyed, in total, about 8000 Serb Muslims were believed to have been killed in the crises, (Bell-Fialkoff 1993). This deliberate targeting of violence on an ethnic group based on religion is highly regrettable, as the only crime of the Rohingya or the Bosnian Serb was for no just cause but for the simple fact of their religion.

Another dimension to religious violence is the perpetration of individual violence in the name of religion. For the sake of this paper, we would like to describe it as "*sole proprietor actors*".Some of the examples are the gruesome murder of 51 Muslims in the "*Masjid AL 'Noor*" (the light), and the Linwood mosques on the 15th of March 2019, by one Brenton Tarrant, (Besley and Peters 2020). Another example of this sole proprietor act of religious violence is the Tree of Life Synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh on the 13th of November 2018 where 11 Jews worshippers lost their lives and were masterminded by one 46years old Robert Gregory Bowers,(Rubens 2019). None of the above mentioned did lay allegiance to any main know terrorist group, but this did not erase the fact that they are a deep heinous act of religious violence.

Religion really holds a very strong alliance that people with secular motive are easy to manipulate for their gains, Abraham Stern, leader of the Jewish group who fronted the actualization of Israelites Independence, though appearing as religious in nature, were however seen by the rest of the world as a terrorist group, (Rapoport 1991).

RECOMMENDATION

With the obvious links between religion and violence in our contemporary world, this paper, therefore, recommends strongly the need to trace back the very

essence and foundations of each religion so as to promote the culture of religious tolerance amongst various religious sects.

CONCLUSION

In all, it has become glaring that there has been a degree of violence that has a strong link with religion, though, the major religions and faiths of the world hold peace and the search for peace as their focus, however, not found a direct link with the main faiths been directly responsible for violence across the world, but rather it has been remotely acted by state and non-state actors who exploit or take advantage of perceived religious sentiments and loopholes. It is the view of this paper that the use of religion has not just been for the purpose of violence alone, but it has been used for general exploitation, including economic and political gains. Also worthy of mention is that most participants that engage or are linked to violence in the name of religion do not, in reality, have anything piously to do with such religions, as can be seen in groups such as Boko haram, ISIS, Al' Qaeda to mention a few, who have been roundly disowned and distanced by Islamic leaders and followers. Though, there is a school of thought that believes that there is nothing like religious violence, this school of thought believes it is a myth and simply the mark of "clash of civilization", (Cavanaugh 2006). With the facts of this paper, this position becomes highly contentious and concludes that the obvious links between religion and violence cannot be overemphasized.

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