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Islam and terrorism: The blurred boundary between the cosmic and this world

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Abstract

Today the barbarity of crimes in the name of religion is all the more disturbing particularly when one considers the righteous religious language in which such heinous acts are cloaked. Violence perpetrated in the name of God continues to engage the world at alarming levels. It is in this regard that this study examines the general relationship between violence and religion in the specific context of Islam from the point of view of the cosmic war theory as advanced by Mark Juergensmeyer. The study observes that violent activities related to Islam are a result of the blurring of boundaries between the symbolic cosmic world of religion and this world, as a result of which the symbolic violence of religion translates into real violence. This translation is occasioned by violent groups in Islam legitimising their violence on the inherent symbolic violence of religions as they respond to 'unfavourable' local and global structural conditions.

Introduction

Violent terrorism carried out in the name of God, or associated with it, has tragically become a common feature today.¹ In these instances, terrorism is

¹ Martin CA, *Essentials of terrorism: Concepts and controversies*, 4ed, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, 2016, 130.

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either inspired by the defensive motives of religions, or is driven by the motive to ensure the predominance of a faith, or even, in some instances, driven by an aggressive combination of both.² However, religion is not always the only model of explaining terrorism.³ Nationalism and ideology have been identified equally as potent catalysts for explaining terrorism.⁴ Undoubtedly, there is enormous diversity of conditions to be considered when trying to understand and explain terrorism.

A number of situations have the capability of provoking terrorism.⁵ This presents a challenge of diversity that confronts any attempt at generalising terrorism. Analyses of these generalisations show that they are characterised by explanations that lay emphasis at different levels.⁶ These levels include explanations at the individual as well as group levels. These explanations aim primarily at psychological explanations/theories that try to identify why individuals join terrorists groups and how they are retained. The second level of explanations emphasises societal and national aspects.⁷ This category attempts primarily to identify causal relationships between certain historical, cultural and social political characteristics of the bigger society and the occurrence of terrorism.⁸ This generalised position is visible in terrorism theories that emphasise societal conditions such as modernisation. The final level of explanations emphasises the systemic or international aspects.⁹ This category isolates causal relationships between characteristics of the international state system and the relations between states, on the one hand, and the occurrence of international terrorism, on the other. One common theoretical argument on terrorism in this category conceives terrorism in terms of the fierce competition between superpowers during the Cold War and the existence of nuclear arms which made international terrorism a preferred weapon in the struggle against global hegemony.¹⁰ Religion as a phenomenon apparently relates with terrorism at all the three levels of general conception as we shall see shortly in the following section.

² See a discussion on the three levels of categories of generalisations of terrorism in chapter 7 'Religious terrorism' in Martin, *Essentials of terrorism*, 130-155.

³ Martin, *Essentials of terrorism*, 130.

⁴ Martin, *Essentials of terrorism*, 130.

⁵ Martin, *Essentials of terrorism*, 130.

⁶ Brynjar and Skjolberg, 'Why terrorism occurs: A survey of theories and hypotheses on causes of terrorism' *Norwegian Defense Research Establishment* (2000), 8.

⁷ Brynjar and Skjolberg, 'Why terrorism occurs', 14-26.

⁸ Brynjar and Skjolberg, 'Why terrorism occurs', 14-26.

⁹ Brynjar and Skjolberg, 'Why terrorism occurs', 26-28.

¹⁰ Brynjar and Skjolberg, 'Why terrorism occurs', 26-28.

Theoretical framework

It is argued in this paper that it is more common to conceive the association between religion and terrorism in the Islamic context at the societal level mentioned in the previous section than at the individual and systemic levels. This is the case when we seek to explain terrorism and Islam primarily in the context of the historical development and culture of the larger society as it relates to religion. The common claim of a clash of civilisations¹¹ between the West and Islam easily fits into this category. A close scrutiny, however, will still reveal that religious phenomena in general interact with terrorism at the individual and group, as well as at the international, levels mentioned above. In all these interactions, religion has the potential to be the direct cause of terrorism, as well as the agent of powerful motivations towards terrorism by conferring it with legitimacy. Religious interaction with terrorism therefore is potentially multi-dimensional and touches simultaneously at the individual/group, societal, and international levels mentioned earlier.

While acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of the interaction between religion and terrorism, this study is theoretically guided by the grand script of the cosmic war as advanced by Mark Juergensmeyer. This theory maintains that violence is intrinsically bound to all religions. The logic that supports this position argues that since religious language is about the tension between order and disorder, religion is frequently about violence that easily translates into terrorism.¹² Therefore, there exists an intrinsic appeal of war to the religious internal self-understanding similar to that generally found in the internal logic of warfare. It is this intrinsic appeal of war that is frequently exploited by terror groups. Perpetrators of terrorism often place religious images of divine struggle (cosmic war) in the service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious terror serve not only as tactics in political strategy but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation.¹³ This logic is among other things, confirmed by the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terror group Al-Baghdadi in his now famous phrase that 'Islam was never a religion of peace but a religion of fighting and that this war is the war of Muslims against infidels.'¹⁴

¹¹ McDaniel C, 'Islam and the global society: A religious approach to modernity' 2 *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 4 (2003), 507. See also, Huntington SP, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.

¹² Juergensmeyer M, 'The logic of religious violence' in Rapoport D (ed), *Inside terrorist organisations*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, 179.

¹³ See Juergensmeyer M, *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*, 3ed, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, 148-166.

¹⁴ 'Is Islam a religion of war or peace? Both - and Muslims must decide, priest says' *Catholic News*

Consequently, this group has developed a harsh and regressive interpretation of *Sharia* as drawn from the Qur'an particularly the sections that repeatedly instruct Muslims to support each other and to separate themselves from non-Muslims.¹⁵ The claim to have Islamic legitimacy and authority has seen the group take responsibility for and justify its terrorist activities.¹⁶ We first turn, however, to religious phenomena in general.

Of religion in general

To many students of culture, it is probable that religion is considered one of its most amorphous factors. This is so because not only is religion found in all known human societies,¹⁷ it also interacts significantly with other cultural institutions. Religion interacts with material culture, human behaviour, morals, ethics and the general value system. It has been expressed in this regard that there is no other cultural institution that presents so vast a range of expressions and implications as religion.¹⁸ The complexity of the religious phenomenon and its intimacy with the other aspects of life explain the attraction and attention it offers to scholars from across disciplines, all of whom have analysed religion with their own approach and method.¹⁹ This fate has been achieved due to the fact that religious concepts and ideas are not constrained by physical environment,²⁰ and any excursion into religion more often meets with no other limitations than those of the inspiring spirit of the human mind itself; a feature that has found expression in the different descriptions of religion as offered by different scholars.²¹

Agency, 21 May 2015 <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/is-islam-a-religion-of-war-or-peace-both-and-muslims-must-decide-priest-says-24503/> on 29 June 2016.

¹⁵ "Hannah Brockhaus: Muslims who interpret Quran peacefully 'find a strong ally' in the Church" *Catholic News Agency*, 12 August 2016.

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/muslims-who-interpret-quran-peacefully-find-a-strong-ally-in-the-church-98031/> on 15 August 2016.

¹⁶ See more in 'Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im: How Islamic law can take on ISIS' *Sunday Times*, 17 November 2015

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/opinion/2015/11/17/How-Islamic-law-can-take-on-ISIS> on 29 June 2016.

¹⁷ See Pals DL, *Eight theories of religion*, 2ed, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, 6-7.

¹⁸ See Smith H, *The religions of man*, Harper Colophon Books, New York 1965, 312.

¹⁹ See for example, Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytic approach to study of religion, and Emile Durkheim in the sociological approach to the study of religion, in Pals, *Eight theories of religion*, 53-118.

²⁰ Fuchs S, *Origin of religion: Introduction to history of religion*, Pontifical Institute Publications, Kerala, 1975, 12.

²¹ Fuchs, *Origin of religion*, 12.

Among the many descriptions of religion some can be categorised as ontological. Descriptions in this category concentrate on the objects towards which religious activity is directed such as ‘God’ or ‘gods’.²² Psychological descriptions of religion pertain to religious activity itself and concentrate on what can be termed as the religious behaviour.²³ Dialectical descriptions, as yet another category of religious descriptions, looks at religion in terms of the unique relationship between subject and object in religious activity.²⁴ All these categories underscore the position that religion interacts with human subjects variously, and with immense complexity of results in which the interplay of variables often proves difficult to establish with surgical accuracy.²⁵ One area of interaction that displays enormous difficulty to analyse is the relationship between religion and violence in general, and the often-touted relationship between Islam and terrorism in specific terms. To this end, we posit the following question, to which the paper responds: what is the nature of the relationship between religion and violence in general, and religion with Islam in specific terms?

Religion and violence

Numerous researches have been carried out on the theoretical relationship between religion and war. The more recent works in this area include: *Fields of blood: Religion and the history of violence*²⁶ by Karen Armstrong, and *Not in God's name: Confronting religious violence*²⁷ by Jonathan Sacks. In *Fields of blood*, Armstrong refutes the common western outlook that religion is inherently violent, which is often taken for granted and seems self-evident. This position explains why the main hope for peace is often state secularism, which aims to keep faith and statecraft separate. Arguing that this is an incorrect diagnosis leading to a flawed prescription, Armstrong maintains that throughout history, human beings have always chosen to intertwine religion with all their other activities, mainly because people wanted to endow everything they did with significance. This intertwining explains why religion is involved with politics, which also explains why religions have often been tied up with violence. Consequently, citizens often face the duty

²² Stark R and Bainbridge WS, *A theory of religion*, Peter Lang Publishing Group, New York, 1987, 11-25.

²³ Stark and Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, 11-25.

²⁴ Stark and Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, 11-25.

²⁵ See criticisms of the 19th century social thought and the traditions of grand theory associated with the founding fathers of social science in Stark and Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, 11-25.

²⁶ Armstrong K, *Fields of blood: Religion and the history of violence*, Alfred A Knopf Publishers, New York, 2014, 3-17.

²⁷ Sacks J, *Not in God's Name: Confronting religious violence*, Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, London, 2015, 3-87.

of confronting and trying to control violence without blaming religion for it or imagining that the solution lies in the sheer separation of religion and state. By exploring known examples of violence involving most of the religious faiths of the world, Armstrong argues finally that more often than not, violent impulses that originated elsewhere such as with nationalism, struggles for territory, resentment at loss of power, etc., present themselves as ‘religious’ disputes when really they have little to do with religion.²⁸ Connecting this position to Islam, Armstrong takes issue with the Taliban or ISIS marauders who often cite their religious sources as the justification for their killing. This, Armstrong notes, is not a sign that they have spent too much time with the Qur’an, but instead, too little, and have ignored the many passages exhorting mercy and tolerance.

In *Not in God’s name*, Jonathan Sacks, like Karen Armstrong reviewed above, maintains the same line of theoretical postulation that refutes religion as inherently violent even though the two often go hand in hand. Neither does Sacks maintain that some religions are more violent than others, as this, according to him, is what leads to hostility between religions. The explanation for religion’s affinity to violence, according to this author, lies in religion’s dual nature, as we can see in the three monotheisms of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. These religious traditions are spiritual belief systems that encourage prayer, charity and forgiveness, as well as tribal identities whose noble sentiments have often been confined to fellow believers. It is in this latter category where religion becomes an identity and builds a community, that conflict and violence ensue.

The dual nature of religion therefore explains the religious paradox when the prophets and saints preach worldly detachment, and yet the most successful religions are increasingly attached to earthly powers lusting after power, territory and glory, things that are secular, even profane. It is also often too easy to maintain that serving God means making or even forcing everyone else to worship as you worship. At its most extreme, this becomes what Sacks calls ‘altruistic evil: evil committed in a sacred cause, in the name of high ideals’. According to Sacks, ISIS is one such blatant example of altruistic evil. The barbarity of crimes in its name is all the more disturbing for the righteous religious language in which such crimes are cloaked.²⁹ Yet, as Sacks rightly points out, the Qur’an celebrates human diversity rather than wanting to stamp it out: ‘Had God Willed, He could have made you one community’.³⁰

²⁸ See Armstrong, *Fields of blood*, 3-17.

²⁹ Sacks, *Not in God’s name*, 3-87.

³⁰ Quran 5: 48.

Generally, the two works by Armstrong and Sacks are both partly theological in their approach and view the close relationship between religion and terrorist activities mainly from the perspective of the misinterpretation of religion and its sources. Armstrong maintains in this regard that often it is a result of spending too little time with the given religious sources, while Sacks in his 'theology of the Other', sees the link in terms of the lack of acknowledging other peoples' religion, as he says, 'keep your own faith and identity, but acknowledge the stranger as your brother'. This paper is generally in agreement with the two positions, but also points out the fact that general research has shown that religious expression itself even without misinterpretation is full of warfare symbolism, as can be seen in religious phenomenal aspects such as sacrifice, general worship and even songs. Religious statements such as, 'we will crush the devil,' 'Christian life is war,' and 'we are the soldiers of God,' all confirm the warfare symbolism as used in religion.

Rene Girard and Juergensmeyer are some of the scholars who have done extensive research in this general area of the intrinsic relationship between violence and religion. In *Violence and the sacred*, Girard envisages religion as a way of regulating social violence and creating social cohesion in society. In this respect he argues that the sacrifices offered in religion, in essence, cast out the violence that threatens the community, hence turning such violence of the community from inside to outside. Put another way, Girard sees the function of religion as keeping violence out of 'the community' by way of a scapegoat sacrificial ritual that substitutes for it.³¹ Community as a given religious entity should be understood in this case as an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves to be culturally distinctive from members of 'other groups with whom they have minimum regular interaction,³² and whom they frequently see as 'the other'.

In his part, Juergensmeyer has explored the intrinsic appeal of war to the religious internal self-understanding and the enduring role of religion in warfare. In a lecture 'God and War', Juergensmeyer demonstrated how the internal logic of war and religion are generally similar, and how both generally constitute an expression of fundamental efforts to understand the chaos that threaten the social (this world) and the metaphysical order.³³ In this way, religion can sometimes be viewed

³¹ Girard R, *Violence and the sacred*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1979, 1-7.

³² See Eriksen T, *Ethnicity and nationalism: Anthropological perspectives*, Pluto Press, London, 1993, 12.

³³ Juergensmeyer M, 'God and war: The odd appeal of war, are we at war, and what does God have to do with it' Princeton University Public Lectures, 21-23 February 2006.

as being no more than a form of language describing a struggle (read also as war) taking place in the cosmic plane ('the world beyond'), and that pits the positive versus the negative categories as usually determined by the religion itself. However, the demarcation or boundary between 'the cosmic' and 'this world' is often blurred and problematic in real terms. Terrorism, as a form of violence, and when viewed in the light of its connection with religion, in Juergensmeyer's view, constitutes the public performance of violence through acts that reach out to particular audiences and which adheres to this grand script of the cosmic war,³⁴ but with blurred boundaries or demarcations between the two worlds. The consequence of the blurred demarcation is that this time the religious violence that is the result, instead of being cosmic, becomes real violence, executed on the real rather than the cosmic plane, and people shed real rather than symbolic blood.

In *Global rebellion: Religious challenge to secular states*, Juergensmeyer further advances his theory to explain violence and the new socio-political forces of the contemporary globalised world.³⁵ At this point we note in this paper that globalisation has often been viewed as one of the principal ways of encroachment presented by modernity that is comprised of the processes in the interactions of human cultures that succeed in compressing and intensifying humankind's knowledge of the world.³⁶ As a consequence, the traditional boundaries and separations created by polities, and the physical properties of time and space are increasingly made inconsequential. Under modernity, we first saw religion relegated, and its place assumed by the modern nation states which usually were secular.³⁷ Globalisation, in its turn, has furthered the relegation of religion in the state, and therefore is fast dismantling nations while enhancing secularism at the same time.³⁸ In the above-mentioned book, Juergensmeyer captures the globalisation scenario and employs it to explain why religious activism erupted in the last decades of the 20th century. He focuses on what he calls loss of faith in secular nationalism partly due to the collapse of confidence in the western models of nationalism, and partly due to the rise of globalisation. In both situations, Juergensmeyer argues, religion fights back by providing both an ideology of order and an image of cosmic war that should deliver back that order.³⁹

³⁴ Juergensmeyer, 'God and war'.

³⁵ Juergensmeyer M, *Global rebellion: Religious challenge to secular states: From Christian militias to al-Qaeda*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008, 1-26.

³⁶ McDaniel, 'Islam and the global society', 509.

³⁷ Malan K, *Politocracy: An assessment of coercive logic of the territorial state and ideas around a response to it*, Scott J (trans), Pretoria University Law Press, Pretoria, 2012, 1.

³⁸ Juergensmeyer, *Global rebellion*, 1-26.

³⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Global rebellion*, 1-26.

It is clear that both Girard and Juergensmeyer exhibit a difference of view on the relationship between religion and violence. However, there is little doubt that in their theories, both writers agree that violence is intrinsically bound to religion, all religions. The logic that supports this position argues that since religious language is about the tension between order and disorder, religion is frequently about violence.⁴⁰ An examination of this position in the context of Islam may adduce the case of the ‘pelting of Satan’ which is one of the rituals of the Hajj.⁴¹ This ritual takes place at Mina, situated seven kilometers off Masjid al-Haram.⁴² Mina contains *jamarat*, the three stone pillars pelted as a compulsory ritual of Hajj symbolising the pelting of Satan with stones, in emulation of the prophet Ibrahim when he pelted Satan for trying to dissuade him from sacrificing his son Ishmael.⁴³ Furthermore *jihad* as a concept in Islam basically denotes struggle or tension between two positions.⁴⁴ Some Muslim writers maintain in respect to *jihad* that there is often no alternative but for a Muslim to exert self with uttermost power to establish Islam.⁴⁵ These two examples suffice to confirm the cosmic struggle as applicable in the case of Islam. This conformity to the cosmic struggle informs the ISIS leader al-Baghdadi’s assertions that Islam is a religion of fighting, as we saw earlier, and that the West is the foe.

In concluding this section, we note that history in general is full of evidence to support the link between religion and violence when it confirms that no other cultural institution has shed more human blood than religion in general.⁴⁶ This is because not only have religion’s characteristics led spiritual persons into violence, but violent situations have reached out for religious justifications as well. As Juergensmeyer ably stated ‘...extremism in religion [has] led to violence at the same time as violent conflicts have cried out for religious validation...’⁴⁷ Against this background, we can argue that as it is with all religions, the relationship between Islam and violence in general is intrinsic: a position that brings about the relationship between Islam and terrorism, as with all other religions.

⁴⁰ Juergensmeyer, ‘The logic of religious violence’, 179.

⁴¹ Ahmed N, *The fundamental teachings of Quran and Hadith*, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, 1980, 39-47.

⁴² Ahmed, *The fundamental teachings of Quran and Hadith*, 39-47.

⁴³ Ghani A, *The history of Makkah Mukarramah*, Dar-us-Salam Publications, Houston, 2004, 18.

⁴⁴ Al-Qardawi Y, *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam*, Al-Birr Foundation, London, 2003, 216-217.

⁴⁵ Maududi SA, *Fundamentals of Islam*, Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1980, 241-262.

⁴⁶ Tiwari NK, *Comparative religion*, Motilal Banaridass, Delhi, 1983, 4.

⁴⁷ See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God*, 1-26.

Islam and the acts of terrorism

Barack Obama captured the pulse of the world today with regard to terrorist violence when he observed that the world was at a crossroads between peace and war; between disorder and integration; and between fear and hope.⁴⁸ This presented a paradox considering the enormous gains made under the new world order which had seen the prospects of war between the major world powers radically reduced, and which witnessed more people living instead under democratic governments elected by them.⁴⁹ Yet, at the same time, the very global forces including technology that had brought the rest of the world together had made it more difficult for nations to insulate themselves from the new dangers created by the same global forces, as is evident in the case of terrorism.⁵⁰ Terrorism as a phenomenon has grown fast over the last two decades to affect countries almost everywhere in the world. Its monumental growth has become an issue of global concern as can be discerned from the many international conferences and summits that have been held to debate and offer solutions to its attendant impact.⁵¹

In terms of impact, terrorism as a phenomenon targets human society in all sectors; social, economic, political and religious, etc. It is likewise not limited to any particular geographical region, underscoring it as a universal and global phenomenon. We have already mentioned the many categorical levels of terrorism and how these explain the multiple perspectives and diverse theories associated with the terrorism phenomenon in the world today. We further saw the societal perspective that often traces the phenomenon to the socio-economic and political conditions in the world when terrorism is interpreted as a yearning for an alternative to the status quo. Yet, another common perspective in this category views terrorism in terms of individual or group dynamics. This view holds terrorist activities as forms of reaction to issues related to nationalism, ethnicity, poverty, radicalisation, failure of democracy, and religion.⁵² The main argument at this point is that a close analysis of the modern nation state with its secular and capitalistic tendencies in relation to terrorist activities, confirms a

⁴⁸ See 'Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly' *White House*, 24 September 2014
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly> on 30 June 2016.

⁴⁹ 'Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly'.

⁵⁰ See 'Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly'.

⁵¹ See for example, the International Counter Terrorism (ICT) 14th Annual International Conference, World Summit on Counter-terrorism: Terrorism Global Impact on 8-11 September 2014
<https://www.ict.org.il/articles.aspx?wordID=12> on 30 June 2016.

⁵² See Crenshaw M, 'The causes of terrorism' 13 *Comparative Politics*, 4(1981), 381.

combination of many of these perspectives in operation; a position supported in this article.

Ever since the last quarter of 18th century, the nation state has been religiously venerated.⁵³ Koos Malan corroborates this observation when he writes that the state has developed its own ideology that leaves an imprint on the modern man, and fosters dependence upon the state, inculcating a belief in, and loyalty towards, the state.⁵⁴ Bikuh Parekh asserts further in this regard of the modern nation state that:

All citizens are expected to privilege their territorial over their other identities; to consider that they share in common as citizens far more important than what they share with other members of their religious, cultural and other communities; to define themselves and relate to each other as individuals to abstract away their religious, cultural and other views when conducting themselves as citizens; to relate to the state in an identical manner; and to enjoy an identical basket of rights and obligations. In short the state expects of all its citizens to subscribe to an identical way of defining themselves and relating to each other and the state. This shared political self-understanding is its constitutive principle and necessary presupposition. It can tolerate differences on all matters but not on this one, and uses educational, cultural, coercive and other means to secure that all its citizens share it. In this important sense it is a deeply homogenizing institution.⁵⁵

Prior to the advent of the modern nation state, wars of religion had always included nationalistic as well as religious movements. However, since the late 18th century, religion has been surpassed by nationalism as the chief factor in human group relationships.⁵⁶ During the medieval periods, it has been observed, humankind notoriously fixed its gaze toward the heavens seeking divine revelation.⁵⁷ Then, in the succeeding extroverted period of the Renaissance, this gaze shifted horizontally toward humankind and the world.⁵⁸ In the resultant atmosphere of human confidence as a characteristic of this extroverted period, intellectual focus shifted to what humankind had to say, instead of remaining fixed on divine revelations as before.⁵⁹ At this juncture, the main gist is that no other phenomenon in human societies captures singularly the historical shift in the western national aspirations so totally today as the modern secular state phenomenon. This is to

⁵³ Malan, *Politocracy*, 1.

⁵⁴ Malan, *Politocracy*, 1.

⁵⁵ Parekh B, *Rethinking multiculturalism: Cultural diversity and political thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2000, 185.

⁵⁶ See Malan, *Politocracy*, 1-7.

⁵⁷ Cox H, *The secular city*, SCM Press, London, 1965, 1-12.

⁵⁸ Malan, *Politocracy*, 3.

⁵⁹ Malan, *Politocracy*, 3.

say also that the much hyped ‘clash of civilisations’ between Islam and the West,⁶⁰ in many scenarios, bears witness to the modern secular state effectively, representing the western rubric in the eyes of many extremist Muslim groups, and also explains the groups’ yearnings for Islamic states as is the demand made in some Muslim-majority nations. Global Muslim groupings such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab are all relevant examples of these groups generally united in their opposition to the West as well as in their intentions to establish polities governed purely by *Sharia* (Islamic law) in the form of positive law.

These groups propagate the notion that the West is generally at war with Islam and they convince their followers that there is a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West, and also that terror activities constitute a remedy to this clash besides constituting part of worship in Islam. Recent terror attacks in Kenya, also confirm to some extent the above logic with group actors at the regional level. This is to say that contemporary terrorist actors are usually groups organised by religious fanatics opposed to westernisation, and, to foreign ideologies which they feel are not in tandem with, and threaten, Islam.⁶¹ Incidences of terrorism have increased in the last two decades with group actors of global status who occasionally also have local presuppositions as the case of terrorism in Kenya carried out by the al-Shabaab group with its connection to al-Qaeda indicates. It is also noted that some of the terrorist players or agents operating in Kenya are internationally grounded as intelligence investigations have shown.⁶² On 14 June 2015, during a botched terrorist attack on a Kenyan military barracks, among the terrorist casualties was a Caucasian of British origin,⁶³ supporting, among other claims, the global nature of terrorism in Kenya. This adds therefore to the view that Al-Shabaab’s threat in Kenya was not a mere issue between Kenya and the failed state of Somalia.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ McDaniel, ‘Islam and the global society’, 507-510.

⁶¹ Moghadam A, Berger R, and Beliakova P, ‘Say terrorist, think insurgent; Labeling and analyzing contemporary terrorist actors’ 8 *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 5 (2014).

⁶² Otiso K, ‘Kenya in the crosshairs of global terrorism: Fighting terrorism at the periphery’1 *Kenya Studies Review*, 1 (2009),107-132.

⁶³ See ‘Al-Shabaab fighters killed in fire fight at Kenyan base’ *Aljazeera news*, 14 June 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/al-shabab-fighters-killed-firefight-kenyan-base-150614092239160.html> on 16 August 2016.

⁶⁴ A section of the Kenyan masses and politicians prefer to view the increased al-Shabaab terrorist activities in the country in terms of the presence of the Kenya Defence Forces in Somalia. See for example, ‘Faith Karimi: Kenyans debate: Time to get troops out of Somalia?’ *CNN*, 28 September 2013 <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/28/world/africa/kenya-mall-attack-reaction/> on 16 August 2016.

When all is said and done, there is little doubt that today's terrorism is overwhelmingly Muslim, and its roots pervade the Muslim world. Furthermore, the terror groups will always choose, prefer or intend that we associate them with Islam. In this respect, groups like Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and ISIS are always trying to portray themselves as religious leaders, holy warriors: all in defense of Islam. ISIS, in particular, presumes to declare itself the 'Islamic State.' Usually these groups propagate the notion that the United States of America and the West, generally, are at war with Islam, a position that also forms the basis of how these groups recruit their membership.⁶⁵ As a result, Muslim communities have found themselves increasingly plagued by many events that have struck the world as both offensive and shocking, and which in some way or another are related to their religion.⁶⁶ Islamic culture in some parts of the world has become associated with harshness and cruelty in the popular imagination.⁶⁷ In many parts of the world, the image of Islam is hardly that of a humane religion but the symbol of a draconian tradition that exhibits little compassion and mercy towards human beings, yet mercy is a central value upon which Islam is based. We note in support that, out of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an (the supreme authority of Islam), with the exception of the Ninth, all begin with the invocation '... in the name of God, the compassionate the merciful...'

In the next section, we turn our attention to the claim of the clash of civilisations between Islam and the West, and its connection to terrorism in the context of the modern nation state as a western concept opposed to Islam in the eyes of many Muslim terrorist group actors.

Clash of civilisations narrative in the modern secular state concept

In contrast to the rise of secular civilisation in the Western world, the origin of the phenomenon in the Muslim world occurred in completely different circumstances. Before Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1778, the entire Muslim empire, dominated by the Ottoman Turks, was relatively Islamic in norms, laws, values and traditions.⁶⁸ What was to follow Napoleon's invasion was phenomenal and the Muslim world is still recoiling from its impact and the attendant influenc-

⁶⁵ McDaniel, 'Islam and the global society,' 507-510.

⁶⁶ Fadl KMA, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality' 2 *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* (2003), 34.

⁶⁷ El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 34.

⁶⁸ Akhtar S, 'Islam and the challenge of modern world' in Kurzman C (ed), *Liberal Islam: A sourcebook*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, 319-327.

es. Shabir Akhtar confirms western secular influence on Muslims when he observes that since the end of 19th century, the entire house of Islam has survived on an intellectual overdraft, and that the West is no longer some abstract force in the distant land, but that ‘Muslims are living in the West’.⁶⁹ As a result of the western influence on Muslims and their general way of life, many observers contend that the main socio-cultural challenge facing Muslims in the contemporary world is how to deal with westernisation and its attendant values of secularism, nationalism, and capitalism, and still maintain an Islamic identity.⁷⁰

Secularism, it has been argued in some quarters, is incompatible with Islam for it ignores any form of theocracy.⁷¹ Proponents of this position often employ a civilisational theoretical approach focusing on Qur’an-based religious essentials to explain the impact of Islam on the socio-political order. Ahmet Kuru captures this approach by drawing attention to the absence of the ‘distinction between the church and state’ in Islam claiming that ‘Render unto Caesar’ is a Christian position that separates state and religion.⁷² Proponents of this view assert that secularism encourages a different set of policies based on science and human-made laws rather than divine criteria, relegating religion to the realm of private preference and judgment.⁷³ Mamadiou Dia, while maintaining the incompatibility of Islam and secularism, argues that the later sacrifices the unitary character of Islam to a dualist point of view that is foreign to it and in many ways equivalent to the Christianisation of Islam.⁷⁴ However, modernity, and by extension a secular phenomenon, is in a central sense inescapable. Akhtar points out in this regard that today even traditional Muslim believers are far more secularised than they themselves might imagine.⁷⁵

The main point of argument here is that the question whether ‘God and Caesar’ are one or separate in Islam in this era of secularisation is still a problematic theoretical principle, but a practical reality too as can be deduced from the significant levels of secularism among Muslims. A report in 2005 on state-

⁶⁹ Akhtar, ‘Islam and the challenge of modern world’, 321.

⁷⁰ Akhtar, ‘Islam and the challenge of modern world’, 319-23.

⁷¹ See generally Islam and secularism in Ahaya O, ‘The secular state premise and the Kadhi court debate during Kenya’s constitutional review moment’ Unpublished PhD Thesis, Moi University, 4 September 2015, 45-51.

⁷² Kuru A, ‘Passive and assertive secularism: Historical conditions, ideological struggles, and state policies toward religion’ 59 *World Politics* (2007), 527.

⁷³ Mutalib H, ‘Islamic resurgence and the twenty-first century: Redefining old agendas in a new age’ 13 *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 1, (1996), 97.

⁷⁴ Dia M, ‘Islam and humanism’ in Kurzman (ed), *Liberal Islam*, 295-303.

⁷⁵ Akhtar, ‘Islam and the challenge of modern world’, 321.

religion relations in forty-four Muslim countries concluded that the majority of the world's Muslim population lived in countries that either proclaimed the state to be secular, or that made no pronouncements concerning Islam as the official state religion.⁷⁶ The example of Kenya during the constitutional moment that largely delivered the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, further confirms this reality, when Muslims in Kenya were more concerned with the issue of *Kadhi* courts than the separation of religion and state as enshrined in the same Constitution.⁷⁷

It must be noted all the same that some Muslim scholars maintain to the contrary that Islam has no issue of compatibility with the secular state phenomenon. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, in *Islam and the secular state: Negotiating the future of Sharia*,⁷⁸ has argued that two debates pervade almost all discussions about Islam, Muslim societies, and the role of both in the 21st century. The first of these debates revolves around *Sharia* as a comprehensive guide to good conduct for Muslims, and its applicability within Muslim pluralist states. The other debate frames capitalism, socialism and secularism as antithesis to Islam and what it stands for. An-Na'im joins this debate submitting that secularism is not an unwelcome counter-force to 'true' Islam since Islam and the state have always been separate. Instead, secularism is the indispensable path to reclaiming Islam, advancing pluralism, human rights, women's rights, civil society and citizenship.⁷⁹

This article observes that the background of divided opinion with regard to Islam and secularism and by extension the modern secular state is a potential recipe for frustration among certain sections of the Muslim populations. Bernard Lewis has argued in support of this position, that Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and form to an otherwise aimless and formless resentment; an anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed their beliefs, aspirations, dignity and, to a considerable extent, their livelihoods.⁸⁰ This perspective on Islamic fundamentalism resonates closely with the position advanced by Armstrong in

⁷⁶ See United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *The religion-state relationship and the right to freedom of religion or belief: A comparative textual analysis of the constitutions of predominantly Muslim countries*, March 2005

http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/stories/pdf/Comparative_Constitutions/Study0305.pdf on 16 August 2016.

⁷⁷ Ahaya, 'The secular state premise and the Kadhi court debate during Kenya's constitutional review moment', 45-51.

⁷⁸ An-Na'im AA, *Islam and the secular state: Negotiating the future of Sharia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2008, 1-294.

⁷⁹ An-Na'im, *Islam and the secular state*, 267-294.

⁸⁰ Lewis B, 'The roots of Muslim rage,' 266 *The Atlantic*, 3 (1990), 47-60.

Fields of blood discussed earlier when she advanced the theory that the violence associated with religion often has its roots elsewhere in society and not in religion.

An-Na'im elaborates this position further when he notes that the key to understanding the role of Islam in politics and violence lies in the fact that there is no one authoritative entity that can establish or change *Sharia* doctrine for Muslims on any subject. In this respect Islam lacks the equivalent of the Vatican and papal infallibility. How *Sharia* is interpreted by the many different sectarian brands of Muslim communities is, therefore, at best based on the product of an intergenerational consensus of scholars, and on the leaders of each community in other circumstances. By nature, therefore, Islamic belief and practice is, arguably, fundamentally individual and voluntary. Consequently, Islamic fundamentalism (Islamism) is hardly uniform since multiple forms of it continue to spread and diversify from the numerous interpretational models. As a result, it is possible to encounter today Islamists who are radical or moderate, political or apolitical, violent or quietist, traditional or modernist, democratic or authoritarian.⁸¹ All the same, Islamists are usually subscribers to the violent strand of Islamic interpretation increasingly conceived by others as terrorism. Their own self-understanding, however, is that of people acting from inside religion, as it were, to defend their individual and collective identity against a perceived western onslaught and to effect a moral and material regeneration in their society.⁸² But, to what extent do their interpretation and reactions represent the ideals of Islam, and how is terrorism therefore Islamic? These are questions that we turn to next.

Islamism in the general scheme of Islam

Many terrorist acts such as the attack on students of Garissa University College in Kenya, on 2 April 2015,⁸³ the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015⁸⁴ and the more recent Brussels attack⁸⁵ constitute chapters in the long saga of the 'ugly'⁸⁶ that has forced many Muslims who are embarrassed and offended by

⁸¹ Fuller GE, 'The Future of Political Islam' *Foreign Affairs Magazine* March/April 2002, 49.

⁸² Fuller, 'The future of political Islam'.

⁸³ See "Garissa university attack plotter Mohamed Kuno 'dead'" *BBC News* 1 June 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36427289> on 16 August 2016.

⁸⁴ "Keith Perry: Paris attacks: ISIS gunmen shouted 'Allah Akbar' as victims were slaughtered in co-ordinated attacks" *Mirror* 14 November 2015 <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/paris-attacks-isis-gunmen-shouted-6830234> on 9 May 2016.

⁸⁵ See "Kim Wilsher: Brussels terror cell 'planned to attack euro 2016 tournament'" *The Guardian* 11 April 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/11/brussels-terror-cell-planned-to-attack-euro-2016-tournament> on 9 May 2016.

⁸⁶ El Fadl referring to the association of terrorism with Islam in, El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in

this legacy to take an apologetic stance. It has become common for a section of Muslims in this category to argue that Islam as an ideal must be separated from Muslim subjects, and that Islam, therefore, does not necessarily sanction the violent behaviour associated with terrorism.⁸⁷ Alternatively, these apologetic Muslims also argue that only a small percentage of the Muslim population is Arab.⁸⁸ Thus, because of the troubled image of Arabs in the world many Muslims would rather distance themselves from the Arab identity or culture.⁸⁹ This article agrees with Khaled Abou El Fadl when he argues that often these arguments are factually correct and even logical but unconvincing because they are evasive and may not take into consideration a variety of countervailing factors. For instance, these arguments ignore the role of intervening factors such as history in the understanding of the present, as the argument in this article in the case of the secular state phenomenon has attempted to do. The apologists assume equally erroneously that it is possible to separate with surgical accuracy a system of belief from the social practices that have grown around it.⁹⁰ These apologetic arguments, as the main thesis of this article sustains, fail to take into consideration the role of human subjectivities in determining and acting upon religious doctrines, wherein some peculiar ways of the actions mentioned; translate into radicalism and eventually violence.

To explore this argument further the article agrees that values and their meaning in culture are neither constant nor stable but instead are constantly shifting, evolving and mutating in response to a variety of influences and motivations.⁹¹ It is therefore good advice that when considering even religiously-revealed values it must be borne in mind that such values, like any other values, acquire meaning within developing and constantly changing societal contexts. It is sustainable in this case that it is always impossible to eliminate subjectivities of both historical and social dimension from participants as they endeavour to generate meaning. For example, the diverse notions about the relationship between religion and the state in Islam as occasioned by modernity and as demonstrated by the varying positions as examined earlier in this article, expresses the various interpretive ventures that existed at different times in the history of Islam, and

modern Islam and reengaging morality', 35.

⁸⁷ El Fadl referring to the association of terrorism with Islam in, El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 35.

⁸⁸ El Fadl referring to the association of terrorism with Islam in, El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 35.

⁸⁹ El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 35.

⁹⁰ El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 36.

⁹¹ El Fadl, 'The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality', 47.

that gave the notion of this relationship a variety of imports and connotations as circumstances dictated. In this sense, Islamic civilisation, as envisaged in the civilisational conflict between the West and Islam, is in reality a complex bundle of competing interpretations generated by a variety of communities of meaning at different times and places and under different stimuli. The same logic informs and supports the argument sustained in this article that acts of cruelty that constitute terrorism are not expressions of some profound Islamic authenticity or truth. To the contrary, these cruelties can be seen as part of a struggle between the interpretive communities over who gets to speak for Islam and how, as influenced by the subjectivities of the multiple dimensions of modernity as it apparently alienates the Islamic historical experience. El Fadl captures the spirit of this argument best when he maintains:

Despite the waving of the banner of Islamic authenticity and legitimacy Muslim terrorists are far more anti-western than they are pro-Islamic. Their primary aim is not to explore or investigate the parameters of Islamic values or the historical experience of Islamic civilization, but to oppose the West. Islam therefore is just a symbolic universe in which they function. Their protest is framed in Islamic terms because they are Muslims but it is not the case that they protest because they are Muslims or because they belong to a normative imperative that might be labeled as the Islamic civilization.⁹²

Islam and terrorism: The main argument and conclusion

This article argues that there is no express connection between Islam and terrorism just as is the case with other religions. However, in Islam, as in other world religions, there rages an intrinsic struggle that is both cosmic and symbolic, as we saw in the example of ‘pelting of Satan’, which is one of the rituals of Hajj. It is in this intrinsic struggle that the symbolic violence has great and real potential to translate into real physical violence, usually fired by catalysts in the form of interpretations of prevailing societal conditions resulting in a war fought on our real plane; a war that depends on who creates meaning, and at what time. This potential is certainly what Al-Baghdadi exploits in interpretational terms when he states:

O Muslims, Islam was never for a day been the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war....Mohammed was ordered to wage war until Allah is worshipped alone....He himself left to fight and took part in dozens of battles. He never for a day grew tired of war. ⁹³

⁹² El Fadl, ‘The culture of ugliness in modern Islam and reengaging morality’, 49.

⁹³ A statement by Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi in ‘Soeren Kern: UK: Politicians Urge Ban on the Term “Islamic State”’ *The Gatestone Institute* 4 July 2015 <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6095/uk-ban->

This unfolding on Islam and violence is closer conceptually to Johan Galtung's 'violence triangle'⁹⁴ in which cultural and structural violence cause direct violence while direct violence reinforces structural and cultural violence. Galtung argues that direct violence is often the more visible and takes many forms. In its classic form, it involves the use of physical force, as in killing or torture, rape and beatings. It can also involve any avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs even life itself which makes it impossible or difficult for people to meet their needs and achieve their full potential.⁹⁵ Cultural violence, on the other hand, refers to aspects of culture that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence, and may be exemplified by religion and ideology.⁹⁶ Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look or feel 'right', and so acceptable to society. One mechanism of cultural violence is to change the 'moral colour' of an act from 'red/wrong' to 'green/right', or at least to 'yellow/acceptable'.⁹⁷

Structural violence, on its part is said to exist when some groups are assumed to have, and, in fact, do have, more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, as the result of unequal inbuilt advantages in the very social, political and economic systems that govern societies, states and the world and often seen in the form of the deprivation of basic human needs. Thus, from this perspective, the terrorist violence of ISIS as 'direct violence' can be conceived as the result of unequal localised as well as global 'structural conditions', as is seen, for example, in the phenomenon of failed states. The 'cultural dimension', on its part, sets in and exploits the inherent close symbolic relationship between Islam and violence by explaining the failed states from the clash of civilisations' perspective and equating this with the symbolic cosmic war narrative that 'Islam is war.'

In conclusion, the inherent relationship between religion and violence as envisaged in the symbolic cosmic war or struggle translates into real violence and, therefore, terrorism, when the thin line or boundary between 'this' (the real world) and the cosmic plane becomes blurred through preaching and creation of meaning in society, by the likes of Al-Baghdadis of ISIS, Osamas of al-Qaeda, and the al-Shabaab movements, as a result of which the two worlds merge to become one: the radicalising process. At such moments of merger, the symbolic struggle in the cosmos becomes real from the point of view of the participants.

islamic-state on 30 June 2016.

⁹⁴ See Galtung J, 'Violence, peace, and peace research' 6 *Journal of Peace Research*, 3 (1969), 167-191.

⁹⁵ Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research', 168-169.

⁹⁶ Galtung J, 'Cultural violence' 27 *Journal of Peace Research*, 3 (1990), 291-305.

⁹⁷ Galtung, 'Cultural violence', 294-305.

In this way, Islam, like other world religions, has a potential inherent relationship with violence and eventual terrorism as long as the symbolic cosmic foe can be given a real face in this world. It is common to conceive radicalism as a process that witnesses individuals or groups who more and more adopt political and social ideals and aspirations that are more and more extreme, and which undermine the contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice. This article is in agreement, but adds that, in religion in general, and Islam specifically, radicalism from the cosmic war narrative perspective translates into the blurring of boundaries in the creation of meaning through interpretations and preaching in which the symbolic wars of religion become real war. ‘The blurring of the boundary in the creation of meaning’ therefore is the key to understanding religion and violence, in general, and Islam and terrorism specifically.