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Religious Leaders Who Have Advocated and Engaged in Violence

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Throughout history, numerous individuals have become pivotal to incidents and/or campaigns that advocate violence in support of religious beliefs. Not only have these figures championed and/or participated in violence, but they also have risen to leadership roles. Although perhaps pacifists at the beginning, they later believed and embraced violence as a necessary strategy—if not solution—for religious groups or organizations motivated, in whole or in part by religious concerns, to achieve their objectives. Most are charismatic figures with excellent writing and oratory skills, not to mention an ability for organizing a loyal group of followers. This chapter examines some of the implications related to leaders who turn to violence in spite of most religious tenets requiring peace and compassion.

Research Basis for Chapter Claims

Defining Religion

In this chapter, we define *religion* (here synonymous with *worldview*) as the set of basic beliefs that people use to give meaning to their experiences (e.g., Geertz, 2000). This captures the intuition that religious beliefs do not operate in the same way as empirically verifiable claims. This definition of religion explains the meaning given to an experience through an interpretation as the religious dimension rather than dividing some experience as religious and others as not religious. This helps explain two things: how religious beliefs can be maintained in the face of what others consider to be overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary, and how the same empirical evidence can be interpreted in different ways by different religions. This definition also helps avoid arbitrary distinctions between belief systems, such as the claim that philosophical materialism (i.e., only the material world exists) or Marxism (e.g., dialectic materialism) are neutral and should be given a privileged and public status, while the theistic religions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, etc.) are not neutral and should be firmly kept in the private realm. This is an existential starting point for defining religion because it begins with the person's beliefs about what is of ultimate concern (e.g., Tillich, 1972).

One benefit of defining religion in this way is that it avoids the false dichotomy of *religious* or *nonreligious* by instead affirming that all humans have beliefs about what is of ultimate concern. Furthermore, all people use these beliefs to interpret their experiences and to give meaning to their lives. This is true of the "New Atheists" like Richard Dawkins (2006) and Christopher Hitchens (2009), as well as

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Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. It also explains why religious beliefs are not easily ignored by adherents; they are the beliefs about what is of ultimate concern for an individual, and so they are logically and existentially more basic than the rest of the beliefs held by that person—logically more basic because they are assumed in the rest of the person's belief system; existentially more basic because they are at the heart of what the person holds dearest, with the rest of the belief system radiating from that point.

One objection to this definition of religion has been that it is too broad and could be used to include anything, such as baseball. There is some truth to this claim because we can say in a meaningful way that a person is committed to baseball "religiously." In such a case, we are noting that this person's ultimate concern includes baseball. It seems that baseball could take on a ritualistic dimension as the expression of a specific view of the *enjoyable life* and as a metaphor about competition and work in the contemporary world. Indeed, popular sports and celebrity worship do seem to take the place of ritual games and polytheism in contemporary American society so it should come as no surprise that popular religion takes on this kind of form.

Our Time Frame

We delimit our time frame to modernity (i.e., understood to be the changes that took place in science, philosophy, and politics that began around 1648 and continued until after WWII) and areas influenced by modernity. The supposed end of the religious wars in 1648, the rise of secularism, and the division of church and state are the turning points from an Aristotelian/medieval outlook to modernity (Kuhn, 1962). It is also at this time that René Descartes replaces Aristotelianism with a philosophy that searches for individual certainty as the basis for belief. Not only does this make our job of selecting people much more manageable, but it also calls into bold relief the role of modernity in establishing the conditions for the kinds of religious violence we are studying.

What Is Violence?

For our purposes, *violence* consists of physical actions perpetrated by individuals and/or organizations against individuals, groups, nations, animals, and/or property. By delimiting violence to these external, physical actions, we are excluding psychological and/or structural violence (Galtung, 1964). Although understanding that psychological and structural violence can lead to physical violence, this would unnecessarily complicate the current study and make the number of possible cases to be analyzed unmanageable.

Research on Leadership

The research on leadership is voluminous. Not only are there numerous classics in this field (e.g., Burns, 1978; House & Aditya, 1997; Stogdill, 1974), but it also has its own scholarly journal, *Leadership Quarterly*. This subject of inquiry has largely been the purview of studies in business administration, public policy, public administration, and organizational behavior. It has covered such subjects as leader motivations, their unique skills (Fiedler, 1967; Katz, 1955), their effectiveness (e.g., Fiedler, 1967), and how leaders are perceived (e.g., Knight & Weiss, 1980).

One of the earliest subfields concerns "individual characteristics that universally differentiate leaders from nonleaders" (House & Aditya, 1997, p. 410). This work examines the psychological, sociological, and demographic backgrounds of leaders. The bulk of this type of research was conducted between 1930 and 1950. As a result of conceptual problems and criticisms, many leadership experts abandoned this line of questioning for greener pastures. During the 1970s, however, the leadership trait approach saw a bit of a revival. According to House and Aditya, this reexamination can be attributed to the fact that "substantial advancement occurred in theory due to clarification of several theoretical issues" (p. 411). Four dominant theories that fall under this category all have demonstrated some empirical support (House & Aditya, 1997, p. 413). It goes without saying that each of the explanations posit different variables that in combination lead to the effectiveness of leaders (on their behavior and subordinates) and in the situations and contexts in which they operate. One of the limiting aspects of this research agenda is that not all the variables that theorists and researchers posit are accessible to investigators.

Types of Religious Organizations

Another issue that should be clarified is the difference between a religious organization and a cult (e.g., Bromley & Melton, 2002). The term *cult* is typically used to identify a group that relies on a leader with special access to knowledge that no one else has. It has decidedly pejorative connotations and so seems to carry with it a negative judgment. For this reason, it is not commonly used in religious studies and is replaced with phrases like *new religious movements*. However, the cult label has some use in this study because of its Latin root (which is shared by the word *culture*), meaning *adoration*, and because of its use to denote groups that claim secret and special knowledge attained by their leader, like the Gnostic cults and their "gospels" made popular by Bart Ehrman's current research (2005). Thus, a cult is a group that has come to share adoration for a common ultimate concern, revealed to them by the leaders we are studying. Cults also have a strong sense of "insider/outsider" distinctions, sometimes based on racial identifiers. Our study includes persons that could fit into either the *religious* or *cult* designation. It also includes individuals who are part of social and political organizations with religious beliefs.

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Literature Review

To properly contextualize our research, this chapter reviews the historical context of religion and violence in modernity, overviews the literature on religion and violence, and briefly examines scholarly work on revolutionary leaders.

Historical Context of Religion and Violence in Modernity

There are unique historical circumstances that give religion and violence a distinctive character in modernity. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) and the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), was in many ways similar to the Peace of Augsburg (1555) in permitting the religion of a polity to be decided by the ruler, although it added civil protection for minority religions. It heralded the shift from medieval to modern in government because it represented the exhaustion with doctrinal wars and the desire for some level of civil protection (permission to worship at regulated times without harassment) regardless of religious adherence.

In Europe, because the civil government would now be ruling over both Protestant and Catholic citizens, the canon law of the Roman Church no longer applied to civil law (although it continues to be used in the church). Consequently, both Protestants and Catholics looked to ancient Roman law that had continued to be influential, mixed with the positive law of Holland, Germany, and Britain. Roman law came to be viewed as equivalent to *natural law*, with its emphasis on plural religious systems ruled by one central government. In the 16th through 18th centuries, there was a flurry of writing about natural law by thinkers like Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, Francisco Suarez, and Emmerich de Vattel.

Secularization

This background helps bring into focus a constellation of unique issues that interacted with and contributed to modernity and that modern solutions to religious violence have roots deep in European history. Christian Smith has argued that the process of secularization is not a natural and necessary byproduct of modernization (Smith, 2003). Secularization is one aspect of modernity's solution to the wars of religion; deriving from the Latin term for "of this age," *secularization* is the attempt to focus only on matters of this life in the natural world and leave questions about transcendence and immortality to the personal realm. Smith argues that conditions are created in which dialogue about the truth of religious claims is excluded from public discourse. Consequently, a situation is created where the public does not know how to discuss religious ideas, raising the possibility of violence in the perceived absence of other options.

We see this avoidance of discussion about religion continued in modernity as a response to the wars of religion (1618–1648). Coupled with an emphasis on the individual (Descartes), a shift in cosmology (Galileo/Copernicus), and the limitation of knowledge claims to sense claims (Bacon's *Novum Organon*), religious claims that seek to go beyond these boundaries are, from the beginning, presumed to be irrational. In a way, this forces the kinds of religious leaders we study to use fallacious reasoning to support their positions.

Overview of Religion and Violence Literature

Despite mass media attention and the rare scholarly treatment of religion and violence, including academic conferences devoted to the subject, few academics specifically examine the nexus of religion and violence. The majority of this research, however, lies in the numerous case studies of particular incidents, individual actors, groups, and campaigns. In other words, very few integrative analyses on the role of religion and violence have been produced. There are some exceptions, which are reviewed below.

Girard (1972/1977) is the author of one of the best known and most cited pieces of scholarship on religion and violence. In his book *Violence and the Sacred*, he claims that all religions begin with human sacrifice and that the process of ritual is to minimize this kind of group hurt. Girard highlights how states evolve when religion can no longer achieve the goals of the community. He suggests that mimetic desire (the need to have things that others have just for the sake of having them) breeds violence and that this pattern is placated by religion, which encompasses the dual processes of scapegoating and sacrifice. For Girard, mimetic desire is at the heart of all religious violence.

Building on and critiquing Girard's work, Rapoport (1991) competently outlines how, at different points in history, the major religions have exhibited both a side that advocates nonviolence and another side that encourages followers to engage in violence. Rapoport identifies six areas in which religion and violence are linked; these follow a progression from areas that are the most obvious and least controversial to linkages that are subtle and barely detectable but highly controversial. For Rapoport, religion has the ability to "inspire ultimate commitment"; it provides methods of communicating violence, it is intimately connected to "the origin and/or purpose of religion," and religious revivals often include violence as part of their practices. Although insightful, some of the evidence Rapoport presents (e.g., passages from the Bible and popular interpretations of religious events) is open to multiple interpretations. Meanwhile, other statements can be criticized because either the evidence he presents is not substantiated or he has failed to take into consideration multiple interpretations.

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Another treatment that sheds light on this subject is that of Wellman and Tokuno (2004). They state, "The symbolic and social building blocks of religion lend to groups . . . powerful mobilizing energies that are successful in part because they create tension, produce conflict, and sometimes engender violence against other religious groups, cultural powers, and global empires" (p. 291). They add, "Identity is galvanized by the degree to which one is against an outsider" (p. 291). Among their numerous insights, Wellman and Tokuno write, "We believe it is folly to assert that true religion seeks peace; or that religion is somehow hijacked when it becomes implicated in conflict or even violence. Indeed, religion does produce conflict, and, less frequently, violence" (p. 293). They conclude their thoughtful article by asking the question: Is violence in connection with religion inevitable? They answer this provocative question by stating, "Religious conflict is predictable and should be expected. Because religion is often an independent cultural force in society, it has the tendency to become a threat to other cultural and political powers. Religious violence, we would argue, may not be inevitable, but it should surprise no one" (p. 295).

One of the most classic and accessible books is Robert McAfee Brown's *Religion and Violence*, in its second edition (1973/1987). In the second printing, he identifies seven concerns that are more prominent since the printing of the first edition: (1) nuclear weapons, (2) terrorism, (3) the death penalty, (4) sexual violence, (5) drug culture, (6) disinformation, and (7) revolution. Brown's is a straightforward explanation of the multiple connections between religion and war. He goes about carefully defining his terms and writing about such subjects as war and religion, concluding his book with a discussion of alternatives to violence. The majority of his examples stem from American history. The biggest and most predictable difficulties with the book are its inability to deal with a greater number of examples of religious violence and the fact that the given examples are not current. Now that the social and historical relationships between religion and violence have been reviewed, it is wise to say something about the individual, biographical, and psychological focus of leaders.

Finally, Ross (2010) edited a three volume encyclopedia (*Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present*). The work includes 131 entries that cover individuals, organizations, and beliefs that are intimately connected to the link between religion and violence.

Overview of Religious Leaders

During the 1990s and early 2000s, a handful of social scientists examined the factors that influenced certain individuals to assume political leadership (e.g., Andeweg & Van Den Berg, 2003). Some of this work stressed birth order effects, while others looked at the unique personalities of the individuals. A subcomponent of this research reviewed the backgrounds of people who became the heads of political revolutionary movements (e.g., Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara, etc.). Much credence was made of the birth order of these people; in particular, it was argued that both the relationships between firstborns and their parents and between firstborns and their siblings shaped the personalities of these individuals, ultimately influencing them to seek higher political office.

Two important books relevant to revolutionary leaders in particular have been published. The first was by Mustafa Rejai and Kay Phillips (1979), who compared the biographies of the individuals they selected for intense case study analysis and argued that there are five types of revolutionary leaders: founders, professional revolutionaries, scholars, agitators, and generals. They warn that these are ideal types and that not all leaders share the same traits.

The second book, written by Frank Sulloway (1996), argued that firstborns tend to be leaders who support conventional ideas, where as those born last generally tend to adopt ideas that are more revolutionary. After Sulloway's book was severely critiqued in the academic community (e.g., Phillips and Rejai 2000), he (2000) offered a spirited defense that appeared in the journal *Politics and the Life Sciences*. Other critics claimed that the personality traits Sulloway chose "appear unrelated to rebellious behavior . . . [and that] Sulloway's claims for birth order effects should be rejected" (Townsend, 1997; 2000). It appears that this criticism has had a dampening effect on the study of revolutionary leaders since that time.

Our interest, however, is in a narrow subsection of these individuals—those who assumed leadership roles in organizations that advocated and/or engaged in violence in support of religious beliefs. Our subjects have been chosen using the method described below in an attempt to understand which factors seem to affect these people.

Causal Factors

After a review of the literature, the researchers identified eight possible causal factors that may explain the reasons why individuals gravitate to positions of leadership in religious organizations where they advocate and use violence. The first is the *age at which the individual achieved their leadership position*. With age, it is assumed comes experience and mastery to lead individuals in a group setting. Second, as previously mentioned, some research has attempted to link *birth order* to the proclivity to lead organizations. Third, there is a belief that with the higher the education a person achieves (i.e., *education level*), the better their writing and speaking skills. These attributes should translate into a better ability to convince others of the validity of their point of view. Fourth, the kind of *profession* a leader chooses can provide resources on which he or she can draw, including money for living expenses and the organization's day-to-day operations,

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contacts to use for recruiting, and so on. It can also serve as a bully pulpit for a leader's religious goals.

Fifth, the individuals' *stated goals* help illuminate a leader's understanding of what is of highest value and the means to this end. This also sheds light on their methods of persuading followers. Sixth, the formation of *self-* and *group identity* aids in understanding the use of violence directed against the self and others. To persuade their followers that violence is necessary to attain the desired goal, the religious leader must craft both an identity that has strong boundaries and a perception of an external threat.

Seventh, *means of persuasion* is related to *goals* and *self-* and *group identity* in seeking to specify how the leader persuaded others to join in his or her vision. The need to persuade requires a need to appeal to types of proof that is accepted by the audience. And finally, one element of developing a group identity that sought to achieve goals requiring violence is the leader's placement of the group in historic relation to other organizations. In this sense, the *religious background* of the organization may play an important role in the leader's ability to motivate followers.

Research Methods and Observations

We reviewed popular and scholarly literature and electronic sources to identify the best known leaders (interchangeably labeled *figures* throughout this chapter) who are connected to religions or religious campaigns that have advocated and/or participated in violence in the time and geographic framework listed above. This search was aimed at choosing people who achieved leadership roles only. It also developed out of the first author's research on religious violence and the resulting networking with scholars who have expertise in this field. This is admittedly not a very systematic procedure, but given the fact that there are no readily reliable lists of religious leaders in existence, the researchers concluded that this was the best available strategy. The search also uncovered individuals who have assumed leadership roles in organizations that have argued against the use of violence in a religious context or citing religious motives, such as the Reverend Martin Luther King (who as leader of Southern Christian Leadership Conference advocated civil disobedience and nonviolence), and individuals considered to be "lone wolves" who have killed or attempted to assassinate religious leaders like Mehmet Ali Ağca (who attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981). These people, because of the selection criteria of leaders who committed and advocated violence, are not included in our analysis.

We also examined autobiographical and biographical reference material on these leaders to collect data on the following eight variables: the age at which individual assumed leadership position, birth order, highest level of formal education, trade or profession before individual assumed leadership position, goals of organization, self/group identity, means of persuasion, and religious background. Each of the individuals biographies were coded on the eight variables by two coders (one of the researchers and a research assistant). Each factor was coded on the most likely factor.

Observations and Discussion

We identified a total of 20 individuals who cover different religions over the 75-year time period: from Gerry Adams, as the leader of the Sinn Fein and Ian Paisley (one of the most prominent Unionists in Northern Ireland), all associated with the Northern Irish "Troubles" (i.e., the conflict between the majority Catholic Republicans and minority Protestant Unionists/Loyalists and the British Empire/English rule); to Louis Beam and Bob Mathews (both members of America's shadowy extreme Right who drew inspiration from their racist and Christian Identity beliefs); to the Rev. Jim Jones, who founded the Peoples' Temple Church with ostensibly Communist intentions.

We have Muslim fundamentalists like Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden, both of whom preached against Western infidels. Many of these individuals gained reputations that are larger than life. For example, bin Laden, the head of Al Qaeda and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, is an icon in many Middle Eastern communities and other anti-American groups beyond the Middle East where bath towels and other trinkets bearing his image are sold openly and freely in the bazaars and in local stores. These 20 are selected because of (1) leading a group, (2) using violence, and (3) being the notable groups of the past 75 years where *notable* means they succeeded in bringing about high-profile attacks. Thus, while there are numerous others who have more obviously political ends, this group seems almost exhaustive of these qualifications.

Individuals who have achieved leadership positions in organizations using violence in support of religious ideals and objectives include the following:

Gerry Adams	Ian Paisley (Reverend)
Marshall Applewhite	Sayyid Qutb
Asahara Shoko	Abu Hamza al-Masri
Louis Beam Jr.	Shaykh Ahmad Yassin
Osama bin Laden	Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale
Richard G. Butler	Khalil al-Wazir
Jim Jones (Reverend)	Hasan al-Banna
Ruhollah Khomeini (Ayatollah)	al-Musawi Abbas
David Koresh	Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah
Robert (Bob) Mathews	Muhammad Omar (Mullah)

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Age at Which Individual Achieved Leadership Position

Our individuals range in age from 18 years (i.e., Robert Mathews) to 50 years (i.e., Shaykh Ahmad Yassin). Thirty percent of the leaders were 18 to 25 years of age, 40% were 26 to 35 years old, and 30% were between 36 and 55 years of age. Most gained leadership roles anywhere from the age of a young adult to premiddle age; this general stage in life probably afforded them the necessary energy and fortitude to organize and lead like-minded individuals. This is also an age range during which formative features of a person's life are being set in place, and the deeper they are into this process, the more unlikely it becomes that they will rethink it. Such rethinking would cause serious psychological damage as far as what they have made of themselves and could require a level of humility and repentance not often seen. This can be understood as an individual paradigm shift or transformation. Such a shift changes the view not only of the world, but also of the self viewing the world. Consequently, this raises interesting questions about how such a shift can occur in an individual.

Birth Order

As previously mentioned, some earlier research attempted to link birth order to the proclivity to lead organizations. Data was available about birth order for half of those individuals we studied. Although four persons are the firstborn children in their family, we have a relatively equal representation among those who are the second, third, fourth, seventh, and ninth in their family. From this collection of individuals, what is most noticeable is that information on birth order is not known, and/or it does not appear that birth order plays a significant or determining factor in a person's likelihood to become a religious leader who uses or advocates violence to achieve the leader's goals. There are enough differences regarding number and order of siblings that if this did have an effect it would be in relation to the development of self-identity.

Highest Education Level Achieved

Although four leaders (20%) only went as far as high school (i.e., Adams, Shoko, Koresh, and Mathews), six individuals (30%) had some college education, and three (15%) completed college or university; none of the leaders went beyond a bachelor's degree. Some (30%) had only a religious education. There was a leaning toward an engineering education. Furthermore, even those in our study who attended college tended to focus on professional study (e.g., engineering, traditional medicine, law) rather than on the humanities, which introduce the ideas of the examined life, epistemological problems with the kinds of claims these leaders make, and the reality that such orientations are not new and that such start-up groups have formed and fizzled many times in the past. This is not to suggest that a humanities education is a remedy for avoiding violence in religion—counter examples surely exist. Rather, it is to harken back to a suggestion made earlier that something is indicated about the ability of the leader and the followers to recognize and reject fallacious reasoning. This may explain their tendency to adopt fundamentalist beliefs and/or blocked career aspirations, leading to frustration in their lives. Reasonably, what one finds in considering these bios is that each person makes strong religious claims that spark interest and adherence among his followers, and yet the leader does not deal with, and probably is not aware of, the significant philosophical/historical problems attending his claims about reality (e.g., defending an Anglo-Israel reading of the Bible while not being aware of how those same passages have been understood by the Christian tradition; fighting for a Catholic Ireland while being told by the Pope to not resist in that manner). This indicates that these leaders share in common strong personal commitment to a belief system coupled with a low level of self-examination wherein they are willing to deal with (or even become aware of) contradictions in their truth claims.

Profession in Which Individual Worked

The kind of work a leader chooses can provide resources on which he or she can draw, including flexibility, money for living expenses and the religious organization's day-to-day operations, contacts to use for recruiting, and so on. It can also serve as a bully pulpit for a leader's religious goals. There is no noticeable trend with respect to the chosen professions: Some (15%) of these individuals were religious instructors by profession, while others were in the armed services, worked blue-collar jobs (25%), or were employed as teachers (6%), musicians, engineers, and doctors (15%). It is notable that the engineering backgrounds of two of the individuals (e.g., bin Laden) assisted them with their strategic violence, particularly the ability to understand the strengths and weaknesses of buildings and structures, knowledge useful in destroying them.

Goals of the Leader

The individuals' stated goals help illuminate their understanding of what is of highest value and the means to this end. This also sheds light on their methods of persuading followers. Sixty percent wanted to establish some type of self-government, 25% wanted a "worldly community," 10% wanted to establish messianic rule, and 5% wanted an otherworldly goal. For instance, some, like Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples' Temple Church, wanted to establish a kind of this-world utopia based on a specific view of equality and community. Among those holding to Islam or Sikhism, the pronounced desire was an application of traditional law to their community without interference from the outside. In some cases, this meant taking action against

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perceived outside threats, like secularization, which was linked with atheism. Others, like Applewhite, gave an otherworldly goal that attracted followers. Although phrased in terms of a UFO, Applewhite's stated objective was to leave the material dimension and ascend to a higher spiritual dimension. This kind of rhetoric is very similar to the Gnostic cults that have had cyclical popularity in European history, currently in ascendency again, evidenced from escapist fictional books and movies like *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2009).

Self- and Group Identity

The formation of identity aids understanding the use of violence directed against "the other." Seventy-five percent of the leaders made appeals to religion, whereas 25% evoked ethnic identity. Five percent made appeals based on politics. In some instances, violence was also directed against the self and the group, as in the cases of Jones and Applewhite. To persuade their followers that violence is necessary to attain the desired goal, the religious leader must craft both an identity that has strong boundaries and a perception of an external threat. This identity was sometimes formed around appeals to a specific ethnicity or religion, while at other times to specialized knowledge only attainable in the group. This was the case where a group could form around ethnic identity; for instance, the Palestinians lost the Six-Day War in one sense, but in another, this gave them a greater sense of unity and purpose. Although At Fatah and other nationalist-separatist Palestinian groups existed before the Six-Day War, this event galvanized self-identity. Similarly, after ordering attacks against militant Sikhs who were holed up in the Golden Temple in Amritsar (1984), Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. This formation of identity tends to place the "other" outside the bounds of rationality and therefore close rational dialogue as a means for unity.

Means of Persuasion and Types of Appeals

This evaluative component is related to *goals* and *self-* and *group identity* in seeking to specify how the leader persuaded others to join in his vision. The need to persuade requires a need to appeal to types of proof that is accepted by the audience. In the cases studied here, there was already a generally accepted framework of identity that the leader only need to tap into. The leaders fell into three classes: those appealing to common oppression (55%); those who made appeals based on religion (30%); and those making appeals based on ethnicity (15%). To justify some of their claims, leaders sometimes made appeals to special knowledge (e.g., there are higher spiritual levels on which the dead exist), intuition (e.g., the leader intuits that the world will end soon and the group should move to Guyana), or common sense (e.g., according to the leader, they often ascribe to the notion that it is common sense that one race is better than another) shared by the group. There is also an appeal to fear of the outsiders, as in the case of identifying the West with atheism, hedonism, Israel, and/or Zionism to solidify support for Palestinians and/or Islamic fundamentalist sentiments. As in case of the Palestinian situation, it may be worth noting a shift from secular nationalism to Islamism, because this points to the contingency of religion as a source of violence. The majority of appeals were toward a shared sense of common oppression. Others were overlaid with an ethnic component.

Religious Background

One element of developing a group identity that sought to achieve goals requiring violence is the leader's placement of the group in historic relation to other organizations. Many of the individuals studied here appeal to conflict between good and evil at an epic level. With some exceptions (the Catholic, Muslim, and Sikh), this seems to draw from Protestant pre-Millennial eschatology, where the good group is outnumbered by the forces of evil but is delivered by the appearance of a messianic figure. In this system, the world is getting worse and worse, and at some point in the near future there will be an actual, physical battle (e.g., Armageddon, a battle site in Rev. 16) in which the world is destroyed and only the good survive. We see this theme as being evident even among non-Protestants like Jones and those who wish to bring about a battle with their respective governments (e.g., Great Britain or the United States) to produce this kind of scenario. In the Catholic, Muslim, and Sikh examples, there is a long tradition on which appeals can be supported, particularly regarding self-rule and the application of religious law to the civil life. In general, 50% were related to Islam, 30% had Christian roots, 10% were connected to a new religious movement, and 5% equally were tied to Hinduism and Sikhism.

Gender

The fact that religious leaders who advocate and actually commit violence are disproportionately male is notable, because the connection among patriarchy, masculinity, and violence appears to be present in this context of violence. Although the 20th century has seen a rise of women in leadership positions, it has not seen a proportionate rise in violent women leaders. Perhaps there is a gender bias in selection on our part. More realistic, and perhaps bordering on a Freudian interpretation, however, is the male proclivity, fueled by too much testosterone or not enough sexual fulfillment, toward expressing oneself through violence on behalf of religious convictions (Brownmiller, 1975). It may be that the same thing that makes the male want to express himself sexually through acting toward a specific goal also makes him want to act to achieve other

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externalized goals—that the male thinks more in terms of *things* and *objects* than in terms of *persons* and *relations between persons*. Consequently, some males may reduce the difference altogether and be willing to use other persons as things in the progress toward a goal.

Conclusion

Among the previously identified eight factors, it appears that influences such as birth order and profession in which the individual worked are not truly explanatory of an individual's proclivity to lead religious organizations that engage in violence. What is more telling are the self- and group-identity components; this leads us to conclude that almost all other factors probably work in support of the self- and group-identity components.

Most of the identified persons involved in religious violence believe they are being persecuted and feel threatened by other groups. There are multiple interpretations for this perception, including the idea that the leader advocates violence because he knows it will coalesce his followers. Violence is also very visual, visceral, and action-oriented, and it is capable of giving the group more status and/or visibility (even if negative).

The use of violence is not without its opponents within the organization. These individuals may choose to leave, contest the leader, or simply accommodate to this strategy. It is also an organizing tool; it offers responsibilities to followers (e.g., planning, selecting, communicating). The advocacy and use of violence is perhaps a young man's game; that of a person who is reasonably well educated but not highly educated. This is an individual who has formulated an awareness of the world and self, with some educational input but not much, and who acts on that identity without a great deal of consciousness about assumptions or consistency within.

The tendency to base the identity on a small group of insiders who have special knowledge is explained by the *subcultural identity theory*, which proposes that humans are essentially moral creatures who form identities constructed through interaction with others in identifiable social groups (Smith & Prokopy, 1999). This interaction is facilitated through the process of identifying who is inside and who is outside of the group and through the matrix of challenges and responses that result. Although there are internal challenges that can strain a group and perhaps break it into new "insiders" and "outsiders," it is the external challenges that form the group identity. This explains why a free religious market leads to pluralism: People require the "other" to form their own identity within a group. The free-market and pluralism argument puts a very positive spin on this constitutive antagonism—us versus them, self versus other—which not only has some form of antagonism at its center, but also results not in pluralism on the ground (only on the level of national identity) but continued antagonism, segregation, contest over hegemony, and so on. It is also worth emphasizing the role of antagonism in self- and other-identity formation, and thus its link to real historical and political antagonisms—over territory, hegemony, and so on. An imposed monopoly religion stifles this, although unsuccessfully.[1] The implication of these theories is that conflict, sometimes escalating to the level of violence, is required for self- and group identity. Violence is one response to a challenge that is perceived to threaten the very preservation of one's identity within a group.

The research presented here is not an end in itself. Future iterations of this study might propose and test some sort of quantitative-based model that could be used to relate the level of consciousness and consistency with which strong religious claims are made, followed by acts of violence. This would involve a more detailed study of the arguments used to support the conclusion that violence is necessary, and the extent to which these arguments are sound and informed by an awareness of epistemological problems in such knowledge claims. Such research would indicate how a populace's ability to reason and think critically (i.e., identify assumptions and reject fallacies) plays a role in the reality of religion and violence.

Note

1. We thank Matthew Nolan for this insight. This is also similar to Stark's argument (2001).

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