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Piety and Mayhem: How Extremist Groups Misuse Religious Doctrine to Condone Violence and Achieve Political Goals

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Piety and Mayhem: How Extremist Groups Misuse Religious
Doctrine to Condone Violence and Achieve Political Goals

Noah Garber

May 4, 2020

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Studies

Abstract

This thesis examines the way in which various groups have used religion as a justification for violent action towards political ends. From the Irgun, which carried out terrorist acts in Palestine, to the Palestinian Islamist organization Hamas, which has waged war on Israel, to the Buddhist leadership of Myanmar, which has waged a genocidal campaign against Rohingya Muslims living in the country, these groups have employed a narrow interpretation of their religious texts as a means to justify the actions they take. It is explained that it is not the compulsion of religious doctrine itself that is to blame, rather, the way the religion is interpreted and manipulated by groups and their leaders. This is then contrasted with how the religion they draw motivation from does not support their use of violence based on each tradition's view of ethical conduct in war.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Chapter 1. Scholarly Analyses of Terrorism Connecting Religion and Violence</u>	9
<u>Chapter 2. Irgun Zvai Leumi</u>	
Introduction	17
History of the Irgun Zvai Leumi	17
Examination of the IZL's Use of Terror	27
Religious Condemnations and Justifications of War	30
Conclusion	36
<u>Chapter 3. Hamas</u>	
Introduction	38
Hamas's Political Motivation	39
Jihad, its Different Perspectives, and Means of Attack	47
Quranic Interpretations of War and Peace	52
Conclusion	59
<u>Chapter 4. The Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (Ma Ba Tha)</u>	
Introduction: Buddhist Nationalism, the Ma Ba Tha and the Rohingya Genocide	60
Who Are the Rohingya? Historical Tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Burma	61
The Rise and Influence of the Ma Ba Tha	64
Buddhism's Claim to Peace	69
<u>Chapter 5. Conclusion</u>	77
Works Cited	80

Introduction

Over the past few decades, terrorism has become more and more prominent on the international stage. This issue became especially important, and perhaps most well-known in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Never before has such a disastrous and horrific event ever happened on American soil and unfortunately, this would not be the end to the international struggle against terrorism and extremist violence. As terrible as this event was, there are countless other attacks that have occurred and will continue to do so around the globe. Terrorism and extremist violence are not new phenomena either. For centuries, groups from different backgrounds and traditions have engaged in extremist violence. These attacks are seen as far back as Jewish antiquity, and many of the heinous acts committed by terrorist groups today display similar motivations. Whether motivated by political, religious, ideological, or socio-economic goals, extremist groups have taken matters into their own ends, typically in violent ways, to make their voices heard and attain their goals. Although these groups employ a variety of different rationales to justify their violent actions, religious justifications are often the most powerful, complex and even contradictory. Throughout this exposition, I will concentrate on how extremist organizations use religion as both motivation and justification for using violence to attain their political goals.

Over the past four years, I have studied both politics and religious studies, specifically concentrating on issues that deal with human rights, religious doctrine, and violence. This topic is a culmination of what I have been studying and gives me a chance to expound a topic that I am passionate about. Already knowing the general subject that I wanted to explore, I now needed to decide on the specific groups I would study for this project. For this I referred to my background and interest to decide which groups I would deeply analyze. Growing up in a Jewish household

and attending Hebrew school for over ten years, I have learned a plethora of information about Judaism, the Jewish people, and Israel. However, I only ever learned about these topics from the perspective of a Hebrew school teacher or rabbi who only taught me all the positive aspects of Judaism and Israel specifically. While having the knowledge from these educators is essential, I wanted to learn about these topics from a different perspective. This motivated me to investigate a Jewish terror group, which led me to discover the Irgun Zvai Leumi; the first case study of this exposition. The Irgun, as will be further explored in Chapter 2, was a faction of the Zionist Movement that sought to establish a Jewish homeland in the years leading up to Israel's establishment in 1948. Landing on this case study provides not only an example of a paramilitary group that employed terrorist violence, but also one that was deeply involved in the darker history leading up to the establishment of Israel. While the focus of the next case study is not a contemporary to the Irgun, it, too, has been a key actor in the struggle over Palestine, a conflict spanning back millennia. The second case study focuses on Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist organization whose military wing has been fighting for an independent Palestinian state since the 1980s. While Hamas' motives are diametrically opposed to those championed earlier by the Irgun, both groups have a strong claim to establish a land to call home, specifically the Palestinian state, and both condoned violence on behalf of this claim.

To gain a better understanding of the historical and ongoing conflict over Palestine, it is essential to understand the context for this strife. This conflict is based on the claimed land known as Palestine which is "an area claimed by two national movements as their homeland" (Bar-Tal and Salomon 3). As will be further examined in chapters 2 and 3, for more than 90 years, "Palestinian nationalism and Zionism, the Jewish national movement, have clashed recurrently over the right for self-determination, statehood and justice" (Bar-Tal and Salomon 3).

It is this issue that is of central importance to both sides of the conflict; they each fight for the establishment of a recognized homeland. While this conflict spans centuries, for the sake of this thesis, I will concentrate only on the 20th into the 21st centuries for this conflict. As discussed more fully in the chapter on the Irgun, the present-day conflict started with Jews and Palestinians “living in British ruled Palestine and [eventually] evolved into a full-blown interstate conflict between Israel and Arab states during the War of 1948-49” (Bar-Tal and Salomon 4). Relations between Israel and its neighbors remained aggressive, leading to regular attacks that escalated to war in 1956 and again in 1967. In 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egyptian and Syrian forces in the Six-Day War and its decisive military victory led to Israeli control over the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights and the Old City of Jerusalem. “Israel occupied these Palestinian areas and Israeli troops stayed there for years” (BBC 2015). Although some experts argue that the “Israelis hoped they might exchange the land they won for Arab countries recognizing Israel's right to exist and an end to the fighting,” the status of these occupied territories remains a major point of contention (BBC 2015). Again, it is evident that competing claims for territory and statehood are a large motivating factor in this long-lasting conflict leading to extreme violence.

After many years of occupation by the Israelis and many attempts of peace made in the 1970s-1990s, the Palestinians regained control over Gaza in 2005 with a government led by the subject of our second case study, Hamas. I chose to study Hamas, partly, for this very reason. As I was deciding which groups I would study, I soon realized that if I were to discuss one perspective of this deep-rooted conflict, it would be germane to understand the perspective of the other side. There is also a special connection that I have with this particular snapshot of the conflict; part of my family once lived in Gaza and then in 2005 was asked to leave their home

where they now are settled in a nearby city called Ashkelon. For this reason, I found it especially interesting to choose a group who has a strong connection to this aspect of the conflict, hence my decision to explore Hamas. In the perspective of most of the world, Hamas would be considered a terrorist organization. This group has refused to recognize “Israel as a country and wants Palestinians to be able to return to their old home - and will use violence to achieve its aims” (BBC 2015). This very dynamic will be examined later in the text but it shows the resolve Hamas has to attain its political goals. Perhaps a motivating cause for Gazans and Hamas more specifically is that since 2005, “Israel has held Gaza under a blockade, which means it controls its borders and limits who can get in and out” (BBC 2015). This blockade has led to difficult living situations for Gazans and plays a specific role in motivating terrorist actions. For these reasons, it is essential that I chose this case study because it allows for both perspectives to be accounted for in such a long-standing and complex conflict.

The third and final case study that I will delve into was chosen from my deep and recently found connection to a different religion, Buddhism. From a young age I have always had a fascination with eastern religion and my interest would always pique when I saw Buddhist icons or learned about its core principles. It was not until my freshman year in college during a class on world religions that I truly realized my deep connection to the religion’s principles and teachings. From there I became more involved with learning and practicing Buddhist traditions, and importantly, discovered I would not have to abandon my Judaism in the process. For a while the ideas expounded through Buddhist discourse seemed too good to be true, and for me, these teachings made a lot of sense when incorporating them in everyday life. But I wanted to see some of the negative products that Buddhism may have generated because learning about both the positives and the negatives about anything provides a more equitable outlook. I first learned

about atrocities committed by a Buddhist regime about a year later when studying the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. These atrocities, as will be further analyzed in Chapter 4, are being fomented by an extremist group of Buddhist monks who seek to drive a group of ethnic Muslims, the Rohingya, out of the country and condone murder and rape on a mass scale. The third case study focuses on an extremist group of Buddhist nationalists, the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, commonly referred to by its Burmese acronym Ma Ba Tha, which has also operated under different pseudonyms including the 969 Movement and most recently the Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation. Regardless of the name, these radical Buddhist nationalists use appeals to religion to establish anti-Muslim sentiment and incite communal violence. This is the common connection between all the groups examined in this thesis; they all use religion in one form or another to justify the use of violence on behalf of nationalist ends.

Before turning to these case studies, it is important to review scholarly works on the motivations behind terrorism and extreme violence, including theories that emphasize political, socioeconomic, cultural and psychological rationales. However, this is not the only way terrorists are motivated to commit attacks; there are other forms of motivation that are worth exploring. The other motivations that are seen through many groups stem from political motivations, socioeconomic variables, and psychological rationale of the terrorist. I also discuss scholarly arguments on the connection between religion and violence, concluding that it is not the compulsion of religion itself to promote such heinous acts, rather it is the way the messages are portrayed by leaders of an organization or group who describe a narrow interpretation of the text that fits the needs of the terrorist's ideologies. In the case studies that follow, I begin by laying out the history and context of each group and then take a closer look at each group's use of terror

or encouragement of violence, explaining how and why each group justified violence. Each study also includes an in-depth analysis of what religious texts in each faith tradition say about the use of violence and problematizes the extremist groups' use of religion to justify their actions. This thesis concludes with some final reflections on the reasons why extremist groups resort to violence under the guise of religion and how they use this motivation to reach their political ends.

Chapter 1: Scholarly Analyses of Terrorism Connecting Religion and Violence

In the chapters that follow, I will examine the way in which various extremist groups have used religion as justification to employ violence or political will. In order to get a clearer picture of the motives behind terrorism and other extreme violence, it is essential to distinguish between terrorism and state-sanctioned violence. When most people think about the use of violence for political ends, they think about acts carried out by specific terror groups. In fact, “the number of people killed by perverse secular authorities far outweighs the number of victims of religion-related terrorism” (Juergensmeyer 4). It may come as a surprise that the number of victims of state-sanctioned violence overwhelms the number of victims of terrorism, but state authorities typically have much more powerful means of coercion and are thus better able “to subjugate the populace” (Juergensmeyer 4) in order to have more control over the citizenry.

Before turning to the connection between religion and terrorism, I will first define terrorism. While it is hotly contested issue on the international stage, the definition that encompasses the term most simply is “the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion” (Webster 2020). Though this definition is sufficient in terms of describing what terrorism is, it does not take into account the different forms that terrorism can take on and by which actors it is typically employed. A more concise definition, provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, can be described as “[a]cts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them” (UNODC 2020). This definition does a better job of encompassing not only what terrorism means, but the various ways that terrorism is justified by groups. It also highlights the theatrical

nature of terrorism because groups are able to play on the fears and anxieties of not only the public in order to coerce them into supporting the group, but also the people in power; namely the state. In this thesis, I predominantly concentrate on the religious justifications for employing terror. However, in my research of this topic I have also considered a couple other approaches that will be delineated in this section that follows.

Terrorism also entails “the use of covert violence by a group for political ends” (Walter Laqueur, quoted in Juergensmeyer 103). Terrorists seek to further political ends such as national independence or regime change, and acts of terrorist violence can be seen as performances intended to promote a deeper message. Juergensmeyer describes terrorism as a theatrical form of violence which is employed as part of a larger political strategy. He describes terrorist acts as “symbolic, dramatic, theatrical” and suggests “that we look at them not as tactics but as performance violence” (Juergensmeyer 104). At the same time, even though terrorists may intend for their acts to convey a particular message, “public symbols mean different things to different people, and a symbolic performance may not achieve its intended effect. The way the act is perceived— by both the perpetrators and those who are affected by it— makes all the difference” (Juergensmeyer 105). The power we ascribe to a situation or event is derived from our own perceptions. All individuals are going to perceive the act in their own way and may understand the symbolism behind terrorist acts in different ways. Nonetheless, terrorists may still advance their political goals by drawing attention to their demands for national independence or their calls for justice. Their strategic and theatrical use of violence is the source of their influence and political power. An author in the field of the study of terrorism, Don DeLillo once said, “terrorism is “the language of being noticed.” Without being noticed, in fact, terrorism would not exist” (Juergensmeyer 122). He goes on to clarify this statement by noting that killings happen

every day around the world. The vast majority of them are unreported or unknown to the public. The key distinction lies with the idea that what qualifies a terrorist act is that “someone is terrified by it” (Juergensmeyer 122). Ultimately, this relates to a group’s political motives; through the use of symbols, they are effectively able to spread their message to the masses by playing on peoples’ natural fears. People truly are fearful of these groups, as they should be. There are too many cases of terrorist attacks in all parts of the world, so people understand that the threats made by these groups are anything but empty. One could say they use scare tactics as a means to their political ends.

While Juergensmeyer gives an apt description of the theatrical nature of terrorism, this does not address the motivations that drive groups to resort to terror Sebastian Wojciechowski, a Polish scholar of terrorism, explains that there are many other motives to consider. He establishes that there “are a sum total of a plethora of different elements, their mutual relations and the conditions that influence [groups that commit acts of terror]” (Wojciechowski 49). Drawing on the work of another terrorism expert, Paul Wilkinson, Wojciechowski lists a number of different justifications for terrorism, including “ethnic, religious or ideological conflicts, poverty, negative aftermath of modernization, injustice, revolutionary sentiments among society, weak governments or an internal power struggle” (Wojciechowski 50). These justifications can be categorized into 5 main determinants: “political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological” (Wojciechowski 50). While I will consider all of these factors in the main body of my text, I will first explain the key consideration that all three of my case studies; land.

In each of the groups examined, there is an inseparable connection to land in some capacity. In the case of the Irgun, they are motivated to obtain a place to call their home after centuries of persecution of the Jewish people. For Hamas, they want to regain the land that they

once called home. While these two groups have a similar connection to the land, the Ma Ba Tha is not motivated by the same rationale. They, rather, are more connected to the protection of their culture within their homeland; to drive out the force that, they feel, is threatening their way of life in their land. Despite the obvious difference in approach, all three of these groups have a specific connection to the political motive of establishing a homeland for their people and protecting themselves from foreign enemies. These motives will be examined more thoroughly in the text that follows, but first, I will delve more deeply into other factors to consider as motivations that terrorists have to employ violence.

Concentrating specifically on the socio-economic conditions related to terrorists' justifications, there is much debate as to the influence of these factors. Nonetheless, it is important to consider all possible motives for these actions. Some of the tangible evidence for this particular justification can be seen through "the issue of poverty (destitution) as a trigger of terrorism, or the relations between terrorism and profound financial disparities present in a given territory" (Wojciechowski 56). One of the indicators that the author mentions are the disparities between the approximately 14% of the global population who live in the "rich North" in contrast to 86% living in the "poor South" (Wojciechowski 64). This is evident in that global north and south possess "75% and 25% of global capital respectively" (Wojciechowski 64). This concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small number of countries can be considered motivation enough for acts of aggression and unequal distributions of wealth and power can also trigger violence within states.

It is also important to consider the "interdependence between the economic situation in a given territory and the emergence of terrorist attitudes" (Wojciechowski 64). In some instances, the combination of a group's ability to pose a terrorist threat and their poor economic conditions

make for a perfect recipe for the birth of terror groups. This fact is validated in the 2014 report from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism. For example, “two countries, Iraq and Nigeria, account for 53 per cent of all deaths from terrorism in 2014” and “in 2014, 57 per cent of all attacks occurred in five countries; Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Syria” (Wojciechowski 65). These nations are also recognized by the World Bank “to be significantly backward in terms of socio-economic development” (Wojciechowski 65). Though these cases seem to support a connection between poverty and violence, not all poor countries are violent and rich countries are not immune from violence. Think about such acts as 9/11 which happened on American soil, arguable the richest nation in the world. While socio-economic problems do not directly call for acts of terror, economic grievances do create a fertile ground for extremism, as we will see in the case of Hamas with the poor socio-economic conditions that they are subjected to living in the occupied territory of Palestine.

The last perspective to consider focuses on the psychological makeup of members and leaders of terrorist groups. Though many scholars have attempted to understand the deep-rooted psychological motivations that lead individuals to commit acts of terror, “there appears to be a general agreement among psychologists who have studied the subject that there is no one terrorist mindset” (Hudson 21). Jeanne Knutson, Executive Director of the International Society of Political Psychology, conducted a research project on the psychology of political terrorism where she found that terrorists’ “violent acts stem from feelings of rage and hopelessness engendered by the belief that society permits no other access to information dissemination and policy-formation processes” (Hudson 22). This would be the case in societies where radical ideologies are the norm. The only thing that people know is what is taught to them and what the actions their family, community, or state carries out that affect their daily lives. Growing up in

societies such as these leave no room for other ideological education. Many of these terrorists know that there is more out there and are angry that they are not allowed access to different way of thinking and acting. These violent acts are essentially the only way for these enraged people to express their angst. Another analysis conducted by Jerrold Post, who argues that people “become terrorists in order to join terrorist groups and commit acts of terrorism” (Hudson 32). This connects back to how violent options are sometimes the only way people feel they can express their anger. In joining these groups, it allows them to pursue these acts while giving the them a “sense of ‘revolutionary heroism’ and self-importance that they previously lacked as individuals” (Hudson 33). It essentially gives them a sense of worth and belonging to a group of people who are of kindred minds in attempts to achieve their idea of justice.

J.K. Zawodny looks at how decisions are made within terror organizations. The author finds that “that the primary determinant of underground group decision making is not the external reality but the psychological climate within the group” (Hudson 33). If an individual terrorist is action-oriented, which means taking definitive action is the only way to justify actions, then “inaction is extremely stressful” (Hudson 33). For these people, “if the group is not taking action then there is no justification for the group” (Hudson 33). They have this mentality instilled in them that action is the only way to achieve their ends is to commit acts of terror. Therefore, this type of action “relieves stress by reaffirming to these members that they have a purpose” (Hudson 33). The ultimate way that their purposes are reaffirmed is by taking credit for an act of terrorism on the global stage. In claiming responsibility, “the terrorist or terrorist group not only advertises the group’s cause but also communicates a rhetorical self-justification of the terrorist act and the cause for which it was perpetrated” (Hudson 33). Terrorists feel as though by taking responsibility they are absolved from any personal blame. Not only did they not have a

choice because they were following orders, but in taking responsibility it demonstrates their motives on a global scale which is the ultimate goal of any terror organization, to expand their sphere of influence and power. Despite these studies, psychologists are largely unable to make conclusive assumptions about terrorists' rationale because very few people have access to interview terrorists insofar as to conduct psychoanalysis. Even if they did have access to the mind of the terrorist, it is impossible to generalize the psychological make-up of terror organizations based on one person.

Yet another important consideration is the connection between religion and terrorism, since more often than not "it has been religion—often in combination with social, political, and other factors—that has been tied to terrorist acts" (Juergensmeyer 5). This is not to place blame on religion itself because it "does not ordinarily lead to violence...that happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances—political, social, and ideological" (Juergensmeyer 9). It is at this point "when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change" (Juergensmeyer 9). It is in conjunction with other motivators when religious ideologies can be exploited.

The final piece examined concentrates specifically on the relation between extreme violence and religion is Scott Appleby's *Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. In this work, Appleby makes the assertion that religion, in some cases has "legitimated certain acts of violence" but it has also sought to "limit the frequency and scope of those acts" (Appleby 10) as well. As it will be further examined, religious doctrine calls for the use of self-defense in certain circumstances but this call for violence is seen to have potential for "uncontrollable destructiveness" (Appleby 10-11). This is to say that it can be justified under the notion of religion that using violence can be condoned in some cases but prohibited in others.

With this interpretation comes the challenge that one needs “to interpret a changing, unfinished world of diverse and polyvalent experience and to declare its relationship with God” (Appleby 30). This means that there are a “plurality of plausible interpretations, leading to a diversity of religious responses” (Appleby 30) to acts of violence. It is not the religion itself that is ambivalent about the nature of violent actions, rather it is the individual who has a specific idea of the message holy texts portray. It is in this way that terror groups, like the ones studied here, are able to take religious doctrine and use a narrow interpretation of its meaning to reach their ultimate goals. Thus, individuals who seek peace or violence are considered to be legitimate interpreters of religious doctrine (Appleby 11). Groups who find a certain connection with the holy through their actions would still be considered religious actors even if they are seeking their ends through biblically unjustified means.

Chapter 2: The Irgun Zvai Leumi

Introduction

Of the three cases studied, religiously motivated violence was first used by the Jewish group that is the center of this chapter, the Irgun Zvai Leumi. As Charles Laffiteau observes, it is relatively difficult to decipher whether to classify the Irgun as ethnic or religious terrorism (Laffiteau 21). I would argue that, in the case of Judaism, ethnic and religious classifications would suffice to describe the nature of the Jewish experience. Jews are both united by religion and the common goal of people to achieve a home to call their own. They are a small enough community to be localized in a handful of places globally which means that they are rooted in historical, cultural, and geographical relations shared amongst the Jewish people. Regardless of the classification of ethnic or religious, the Irgun in most circles would be considered ethnically motivated given their ethnocentric goal of establishing Israel as a homeland for the Jews.

History of the Irgun Zvai Leumi

Halfway through the 19th century, a small Jewish community lived in historic Palestine, which was, at the time, ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman authorities allowed unrestricted immigration of Sephardic Jews, Jewish people originating from Spain and Portugal, to Palestine but placed severe restrictions on immigration of Russian and other European Jews (Ashkenazi), fearing that the latter would advocate for autonomy. Despite severe restrictions on immigration and land purchase, anti-Semitism and violent pogroms in Europe drove increasing numbers of Jews to emigrate to historic Palestine (Moyses 2016: 37-38). One of the main motivations for emigration was also motivated by Zionism, which - much like other European nationalist movements in the 19th century – expressed a desire for a self-determined life in an independent

state. As Joseph Salvador suggested in 1853 “a new state will be founded on the shores of Galilee and in ancient Canaan. The Jews will return through the combined forces of historical memory, persecution in various countries, and the Puritan sympathy of biblical England” (Bell 10-11). Though this was stated well before the Holocaust, the Jewish people have had a rough history of oppression and were, and still are, the target of hatred on an international scale. Most recently at this time of history, Jewish people in Eastern Europe were struggling against the pillage of their towns in what are called the pogroms.

The most salient motivation for Zionists was to establish a state that the Jews could call their own. Along with the Jewish state, a reestablishment of Hebrew as a spoken language and culture were other goals for Zionists in general. The culmination of these views came in August of 1897 when over 200 delegates met in Basel, Switzerland, and created the World Zionist Organization. From the beginning of this movement, there was inner conflict specifically between the Zionist left, Poalei Zion, and the religious right, Mizrachi, “which were on either side of the Zionist center” (Bell 12-13). Many of these separations were also between those who believed that Zionism was inherently anti-Russian which oftentimes put them in a tough position, especially those living in Russia. This relates to the idea that there are factions within the Zionist Movement that have a more leftist “radical interpretation of Zionist objectives” (Moyses 42). Because of differences of opinion such as these, it made it difficult to decide on a course of action to achieve a Jewish state.

Yet another problem stemmed from conflict between Jews and Palestinians over the Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in 1917 within the territory of the former Ottoman Empire. This document was seen to be a “curious British mix of self-interest... imperial consideration; biblical romanticism; and the complex interplay of

personal interests and ambitions of those in power” (Bell 16). The British cynically pursued agreements with both sides, making vague promises to support Arabs’ desire for an independent state in return for helping the British fight the Ottoman Turks while simultaneously supporting Jewish calls for an independent homeland in order to win the support of influential Jewish groups in Britain and the US to also help Britain win WWI.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, control over Ottoman territories was divided between France and Britain, with Palestine becoming a British mandate. Zionists, referring back to the Balfour Declaration, called for increased Jewish emigration to Palestine and support for local self-government. In the wake of these events, various Jewish self-defense groups were formed in anticipation of Arab resistance and out of skepticism of the British authorities’ ability to protect Jewish settlements. These fears were realized during violent confrontations in 1920, including a riot in Jerusalem that led to several deaths and hundreds of injuries, with mostly Jewish casualties. Nonetheless, British authorities blamed the violence on Jewish self-defense groups and arrested Jewish leaders “for violating Article 58 of the Ottoman code which ‘forbade arming the inhabitants of an empire with the intention of provoking rape, pillage, devastation, and assassination’” (Bell 17). In the wake of these events, a secret paramilitary group, the Hebrew Defense Organization in Palestine - Haganah – was created (Moyses 50-51). As this group came to be, tensions grew ever-higher between Jews and Muslims in the contested areas which culminated into more Arab nationalism creating grounds for more intergroup conflict.

One of the arrested Jewish leaders was Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who had long favored the creation of a real Jewish army, more Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River (Bell 18). Jabotinsky’s ideologies did not align

with the more moderate position of socialist Zionists. Rather, he favored radical ideologies that championed violent struggle and insisted that military means were necessary to create an independent Jewish state (Moyses 42-43). Jabotinsky was also influenced by his personal experience during World War I, when he “proposed the formation of a Jewish Legion within the British Army” (Bell 15) which would be “the first Jewish army since 135 AD” (Bell 15). This military experience inspired the creation of military training camps, the Betar, in the early 1920s and the eventual formation of the Irgun. Jabotinsky worked to build support for his revisionist doctrine and by the mid-1920s, there were over 50 groups across the world affiliated with his cause. Jabotinsky founded the Union of Revisionist Zionists in 1925 (Bell 18). Nonetheless, this “alternative Zionism,” as it was called, “was viewed with suspicion from the Zionist Left ‘for his new Revisionist movement appeared to be garbed in the clothes of European fascism and dedicated to the principles of the antirevolutionary right’” (Bell 19).

Following several years of relative peace between the Jews and Palestinians in the area, renewed tensions broke out in 1928 in a dispute over the Western Wall as violence between Arabs and Muslims escalated. This led to criticisms of the Haganah’s effectiveness and strengthened divisions between socialist and revisionist Zionists. In 1931, a radical wing of Haganah split off and formed Haganah-Bet, which adopted the name Irgun Zvai-Leumi (National Military Organization). Unlike the Haganah, the IZL objected to limiting its actions to self-defense and chose to initiate counter-attacks against Arab groups. “While Haganah followed a defensive strategy, which was deliberately oriented toward restraint, the newly founded revisionist movement was based on an offensive strategy, including terrorist fighting methods” (Moyses 53). Although Haganah-Bet started off small, with only 300

members and “a handful of old arms,” the group grew so quickly to 3,000 people, with training schools located in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv (Bell 23-24).

Ideological and tactical divisions within the Zionist movement intensified in the early 1930s, ultimately turning socialist and revisionist Zionists into enemies. Socialist (Labor) Zionist leader Chaim Arlosoroff advocated a conciliatory policy toward British Mandate authorities and engaged in dialogue with local Arab leaders of religious and revisionist Zionists, including Jabotinsky. Even more controversially, Arlosoroff negotiated directly with the new Nazi regime to lift a Jewish-led boycott of Germany in return for an agreement to allow German Jews to emigrate to Palestine. On his return from Germany in June 1933, Arlosoroff was assassinated and three men associated with Jabotinsky’s revisionist movement were tried for the murder. Although they were acquitted, this led to a split that would create a lasting impact on the Zionist Movement. Socialists, labor parties and organized labor increased their control within the World Zionist Organization, leading Jabotinsky to secede and form a rival New Zionist Organization. The Haganah was affiliated with the former, and the Irgun Zvai Leumi (IZL) “became in effect the military arm in Palestine of the NZO” (Bell 35).

Over the course of the 1930s, relations with Britain deteriorated and Arab nationalism grew. Growing anti-Semitism in Germany led to a large increase in the number of European Jews emigrating to Palestine, and this, in turn, raised fear and suspicion on the part of Palestinian Arabs. Riots erupted in April 1936 and quickly spread throughout Palestine, launching an Arab Revolt that was to last for three years. After the Arab Revolt began, the Jewish community came to realize that the Palestinians “did not want concessions, they just wanted to own the land and “the only way they would back off is if no further Jewish immigration or land purchase was allowed” (Bell 33). As a result, “both the Haganah and Haganah-Bet took serious steps to

improve Jewish defenses, to create elite striking groups, and to take positive though still defensive action against Arab harassment” (Bell 33). Jabotinsky unsuccessfully demanded that the British mandate authorities authorize the creation of a Jewish battalion; after this, he turned toward a stronger stance and authorized retaliatory action against Arabs. On November 14, 1937, the Irgun conducted its first officially sanctioned attacks on Arabs in an operation known as “Bloody Sunday.” Because British authorities made possession of weapons and acts of terror into capital crimes, the Irgun leadership suspended its support for retaliatory actions. David Raziel was then reappointed Irgun commander and authorized a series of terrorist bombings, in contrast to the Haganah that condemned such actions (Bell 45).

British policies angered both Jewish and Arab actors in Palestine, in part because British support alternated between the Jewish and Arab side of the conflict. In late 1938, the British took decisive steps to end the Arab revolt, imposing military rule over the Jerusalem district and tighter security control over all Mandate road traffic: “Arab unity collapsed in recrimination and quarrels; and the British kept up the military pressure, so that by 1939 the end of the revolt was in sight” (Bell 46). Although the security situation improved, “the British recognized that the basic Arab grievances remained” since “the Mandate was unworkable, and the obvious alternative, partition, would be imposed on the Arabs and opposed by the Jews” (Bell 46). Despite this political dilemma, the British sought a solution that would defend their imperial interests, for which “a tranquil Arab world was essential” (Bell 48). Ultimately, “British policy in Palestine was based on an analysis of British needs in the event of a European War, the relative strategic assets of Arabs and Zionists, and the impact of such a course elsewhere” (Bell 51). In May 1939, the British government laid out its plans for the creation of an independent Palestinian state in a formal White Paper, hoping to win Arab support by imposing further

restrictions that would severely limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. Out of this, neither side was happy because the Palestinians were denied statehood for an additional 10 years and Jewish immigration was restricted so as to guarantee the Arab character of a future Palestinian state. The British were not truly able to promise the land to both parties out of fears that it would compound violence from both sides. They found themselves in a position where their typical imperialist tactics would not work against both sides. Palestinians continued attacks against Jews in Palestine, while the IZL planned retaliatory actions, convinced that the only way to have a Jewish state was through military struggle (Bell 36).

The outbreak of World War II caused high tensions to form within the IZL. Two schools of thought emerged within the Irgun – a faction led by David Raziel, who accepted the authority of Jabotinsky’s revisionist party and supported a truce with British authorities once WWII began, and a faction led by Avraham Stern, who wanted to distance Irgun from the revisionists and saw Britain as the primary enemy. Following the two formal splits of the two groups in July 1940, a number of senior commanders and rank-and-file members left the IZL and joined Lehi – the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, also known as the Stern Gang. The IZL also suffered the loss of Jabotinsky, who died in August 1940, and Raziel, who died in May 1941. Another result of the war was the loss of the Polish Betarim, which in turn was a loss of “the strongest and most militant segment of diaspora” (Bell 52). There were many things during this time that played to the disadvantage of the IZL: “With the movement split with Poland under Russo-German occupation, with the strength of Betar in Eastern Europe lost forever, with Jabotinsky dead, with no mission in Palestine, the Irgun had no apparent purpose” (Bell 53).

However, there was one last glimmer of hope that came about during this time that would motivate the IZL to push forward: a new leader. The IZL began to regain strength toward the end

of 1942, training officers and increasing propaganda efforts. The relationship with the British was still tenuous, especially with its restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. In December 1943, the IZL resolved to launch an armed struggle against British mandatory authorities and detach itself from the revisionist party. Its first targets were the immigration offices that implemented the strict quota on Jewish immigration fixed by the 1939 White Paper and enforced by British mandatory officials but later expanded to include police and government targets.

This decision and the final culmination of the entire movement can be studied through the actions of one man, Menachem Begin, who was instrumental in the final push towards the creation of the state of Israel. Throughout his early life, Begin showed a proclivity towards state resistance by joining a Betar (military training camp) in Poland. Begin became a prominent figure when he became “an advocate of the view that mainstream Zionist groups were too accommodating with the British authorities in pre-1948 Palestine” (“Menachem Begin” 2020). Instead, he opted for the use of more violence to finally secure the establishment of a Jewish state. After his stint in the Polish army fighting in the Middle East, he assumed command of the IZL. One of his other motivating factors was that “the British had reneged on their original promise of the Balfour Declaration, and that the White Paper of 1939 restricting Jewish immigration was an escalation of their pro-Arab policy” (“Menachem Begin” 2020). Since the British were fighting the Nazis, Begin cooperated with them for a bit longer; however, it did not take long until a “formal 'Declaration of Revolt' was publicized in December 1943, and armed attacks against British forces were initiated” (“Menachem Begin” 2020). The leaders of the Zionist movement and other Jewish organizations in Palestine such as the Jewish Agency headed by David Ben-Gurion, were not amenable to the Irgun’s “defiance of the Agency's authority as

the representative body of the Jewish community in Palestine” (“Menachem Begin” 2020). Ben-Gurion even went so far as to say that the IZL was the “enemy of the Jewish People” (“Menachem Begin” 2020) and that it worked in contradiction to what the Jewish Agency was trying to achieve through peaceful means. As a result, Begin became one of the most wanted men in the territories.

The end of World War II raised hopes among the leaders of the Jewish Agency that the British government would lift restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Labour Party had promised to allow Holocaust survivors to emigrate to Palestine and to support the creation of an independent Jewish nation. Nonetheless, despite Labour’s victory in July 1945, the new British government continued to adhere to the restrictive policies outlined in the 1939 White Paper. In response, the Haganah joined forces with the Irgun and Lehi to form a united resistance movement against British rule. From 1945-1948, the three organizations launched over 100 successful attacks against British targets, including railroad tracks and railway stations, ports and coast guard stations, military airfields, police headquarters and British intelligence offices (Etzel 2020). The British responded by rounding up and detaining thousands of Jews, confiscating weapons, and ransacking documents from the Jewish Agency, which were taken to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which housed the government secretariat and the military command. In retaliation, the united resistance movement planned coordinated counter-attacks, entrusting the Irgun with blowing up the King David Hotel. On July 22, 1946, Irgun militants successfully exploded a bomb that caused part of the hotel to collapse, with 91 deaths and 45 injuries (Etzel 2020). Concerned about backlash over the large number of casualties, the Jewish Agency denounced the bombing and ended the united resistance. Haganah focused on bringing in illegal

immigrants and sabotaging British naval vessels that tried to stop them, while Irgun and Lehi continued their armed struggle against the British.

Amid growing anti-British sentiment, British mandatory authorities evacuated non-essential personnel and erected security zones in major cities to protect British soldiers and police. Nonetheless, attacks on British military targets continued, even following the imposition of martial law. In light of the failure of martial law, during which an average of four terrorist attacks were committed each day, opposition to British policy mounted within the United Kingdom and the British government moved forward a debate on Palestine at the United Nations. Though Begin was head of the organization responsible for violent attacks against British authorities, he still met, in secret, with delegates from the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine to advocate for his cause. Eventually, in 1947, the UN passed Resolution 181 which would separate Jewish and Arab states, with international control over Jerusalem (Etzel 2020). As a result of this resolution, there was an increase in Arab attacks on Jewish civilians. Arabs also controlled traffic between cities, blocked the road to Jerusalem, and cut off Jewish settlements. In response, the Irgun launched Operation Nachshon in April 1948, aimed at opening up the road to Jerusalem. The village of Deir Yassin was included on the list of Arab villages to be occupied as part of that operation. What followed came to be widely considered a massacre and the Irgun was criticized heavily (Etzel 2020).

Finally, after years of conflict and conquest, in 1948, the Irgun successfully “drove out the British Empire through a sustained campaign of spectacular attacks” (Chenoweth 12). The Irgun evolved from a terrorist group into a political party, with a number of its armed supporters joining the Israeli military which “suggests that those branded as criminals and outlaws during one season may be representing their countries in international forums during the next”

(Chenoweth 12). Since the Irgun fought to reclaim a biblical homeland, it is important to consider how salient religious motivations were for members of the organization and how the organization's justification for its use of violence compares to general understandings of the ethics of warfare in the Jewish tradition.

Examination of the IZL's Use of Terror

Charles Laffiteau discusses the reasoning behind the Irgun's use of terrorist acts designed to provoke the British into increasingly draconian policies. This seems counterintuitive at first, but the Irgun calculated that it could use disapproval of Britain's repressive policies to garner more sympathy which would thereby increase support of the group within the Yishuv (community). He notes that "other terrorist groups have also justified their use of violence by saying it is designed to provoke government crackdowns on the general population that will, in turn, create more sympathizers for the terrorist groups within the communities they operate in" (Laffiteau 8). This strategy not only made people sympathize with the IZL, but also cultivated disdain for the group in power, the British government. This type of tactic is seen across many different types of terrorist organizations because in this context, if a group feels as though its voices are not being heard by the governing power, it may provide the impetus for committing such heinous acts. It also holds that a provocation strategy seeks to "goad the target government into a military response that harms civilians within the terrorist organization's home territory" (Kydd and Walter 69). Once the governing body is putting their own citizens in harm's way it makes it easy to convince people that "the government is so evil that the radical goals of the terrorists are justified and support for their organization is warranted" (Kydd and Walter 69-70). In the Irgun's display of extreme force, it is an obvious message that British authorities were illegitimate and had to be opposed through any and all means.

Given the weakness of terrorist organizations like the Irgun relative to governing authorities, terrorists typically have a specific system of operations in terms of their group structure. They are laid out in such a way that they are “social networks as compared to the hierarchical structures typically seen in business and political organizations” (Laffiteau 21). Jewish terrorist organizations, like other groups, “were motivated by a combination of political, nationalistic and religious grievances, or formed as a reaction to what members believed were external challenges to their communal values” (Laffiteau 21-22). As it relates to the Irgun, this combination culminates in that they fought for the establishment of a Jewish state on the premise that, biblically, Jews have a claim to the land as sanctified by God. As described in some Talmudic texts, “the Jewish people had supposedly promised God himself that they would not rebel against His decree, to send them into exile, by “ascending [to the land] as a wall.” (Hertzberg 153). This example relates historically to when the Jews were exiled by the Babylonians and since that time, they knew that they would eventually return back to their promised land. It was not until many centuries later that the Jewish people would have the chance of returning, so this may be seen by ancient mystics that “God Himself can be moved by “stirrings below” to act in ways that he had not intended, or, at very least, to move quickly towards goals - such as the Redemption of the Jewish people - which He had promised for the unknowable future” (Hertzberg 153). It was in this promise that these radicals, or armed prophets as they were sometimes called, could fight to take back the land that they considered rightfully theirs. Even in biblical times, “exile and redemption, both had been ordained by God” (Hertzberg 153). Therefore, this is one indication that such actions can be justified under the guise of religious prophecy, specifically as a decree from God.

However, the establishment of Israel was not necessarily the most important aspect of Judaism, as some Zionists held “the view that the creation of Israel was a necessary, rational solution to the needs of Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries, but that this political effort was no substitute for the messianic, redemptive drama” (Hertzberg 154). This is to say that it is not enough of a motivating cause to resort to such violent measures. The ultimate realization of the redemptive drama, which still holds true to today, was professed by Rabbi Zvi Kook. Though he was not associated with the Irgun, his sentiment still holds true. He stated that “The Zionist return to the land of Israel was the first act of the redemptive drama which would soon, in our day, climax with all the glory that had been foretold about the coming of the Messiah” (Hertzberg 154). Over the past few months this theme has come up in Jewish and Israeli news sources time and time again, that the messiah may be coming. Various rabbis point to different signs of the long-awaited messiah. Rabbi Kook’s idea that “he had perceived the divine intention in contemporary political acts” (Hertzberg 155) usher in armed prophets to take extreme action. They took Kook’s teachings as “that the days of the Messiah were at hand and that those who stood in the way of his coming should be removed or pushed aside” (Hertzberg 156). These armed prophets, the Gush Emunim, were motivated through the use of political acts to ensure the messiah would in fact come. But does this description fit the Irgun? It seems as though the IZL would agree in part. They would agree in the sense that extreme political actions would achieve their goals. However, it does not seem that they would be doing so for the return of the messiah. They were far more politically and geographically motivated to bother with such preoccupations. This is one reason as to why they could be considered an ethnic terror group in addition to a religiously motivated organization.

Religious Condemnations and Justifications of War

As discussed in the previous chapter, Juergensmeyer surmises that “just because religion is in the background, [it does not mean] that [it] is what has propelled people into violence” (Juergensmeyer 3). This is a particularly important consideration in the case of the Irgun, which was not an explicitly religious organization. Whether religion is the cause of violence or an additional feature to it, examining the role of religion in terrorism is essential. To analyze possible religious foundations for the use of violence by the Irgun, it is important to examine how warfare is viewed within the Jewish tradition and what the proper conduct must be in accordance with the will of God. Within the Jewish tradition, the importance of life is considered above all else to be of the utmost holy. In rabbinic literature, the importance of saving lives is “sufficient to base the assumption that the killing involved in war is seen as despoiling the image of God incorporated in his creation” (Kiel 122). To contextualize this assertion, ancient Jewish religious and legal scholars, the Mishnah Sanhedrin, stated that “whosoever destroys a single soul is imputed of having destroyed a whole world; and whosoever preserves a single soul is merited with having preserved a whole world” (Kiel 122). This sense of interconnectedness, as we will see later in this thesis, relates not only to Judaic assertions of the moral dilemma of killing, but also the Buddhist assertions as well. However, within the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Akiva, an ancient Talmudic scholar who contributed to the Jewish legal code (Mishnah), argued that if one destroys one soul, one destroys the world since we are all created in the image of God and “anyone who sheds blood abrogates the image of God, as it is written he who sheds the blood of man, will have his own blood shed” (Kiel 122). In an ideal world, it would be the case that people refrain from killing others, but in a truer sense of reality, war is going to happen whether we, or the biblical sages, agree or not. These sages, then, “attempt to show that the

concept of limiting hostilities by means of the “Last Resort” principle is an integral part of the Sages’ moral landscape” (Kiel 123). Since they do not have the power to stop killing from happening, they seek to maintain standards of justice consistent with religious norms by not only delimiting which wars are justified but how they may be ethically fought.

According to Reuven Kimelman from Brandeis University, there are two classifications of wars that need to be considered when discussing a Just War theory in Judaism. The first type are wars mandated by God himself, including biblical wars against the Canaanites and against the Amalekites (Kimelman 2020). Within this category of obligatory wars are “reactive defensive wars” which are necessary for the protection of the Jewish people (Kimelman 2020). If they are under attack from an enemy, they must take it upon themselves to protect themselves because “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). It not only is protecting people themselves, but also God’s creation; therefore, God would sanctify this type of war as just. Even a preemptive strike is justified by most rabbis, however, not in the eyes of Rabbi Judah who “defines a counterattack as mandatory only in response to an already launched attack” (Kimelman 2020). Perhaps this is meant to ensure all other options were exhausted before engaging in war but given the historically poor treatment of the Jews who were constantly under threat of attack or invasion, waiting for the enemy to strike first could make it impossible to protect the people. Jewish tradition also calls for attempts to make peace before engaging in any military action; this is reflected in the following: “the Jewish nation is ready for agreement and friendship with all like-minded nations whose intentions are peaceful yet is not of the contemptible kind which surrenders through cowardice to wrongful aggression” (Kimelman 2020). Jewish tradition therefore regards violence and war as sometimes necessary, although it

also emphasizes that there must be a genuine attempt to make peace and avoid creating more enemies if possible.

The other category of approved war is “discretionary” war approved by the Sanhedrin, the supreme tribunal of ancient Jews (Kimelman 2020). This means that it is under the discretion of the tribunal to interpret the will of God and current state of affairs of the people to determine whether a war is justified. In the case of discretionary wars, they are “usually expansionary efforts undertaken to enhance the political prestige of the government or to secure economic gain” (Kimelman 2020). When committing to a discretionary type of war, “the estimation of one's own losses and one's own interest is insufficient for validating discretionary war” (Kimelman 2020); it must be considered for the benefit of the community as a whole. Not only can it not be decided on the basis of the individual, one must also estimate the “total destruction ratio” which involves an assessment of “‘double intention,’ that is, the ‘good’ must appear achievable and the ‘evil’ reducible” (Kimelman 2020). Wars cannot be fought just for the sake of fighting. If a present evil is able to be conquered and will ultimately lead to the triumph of good, then it is rational to commit to such a discretionary war. Other rules relating to sieges point to indefensible villages which “may not be subjected to siege” (Kimelman 2020) because “emissaries of peace must be sent to a hostile city for three days” to assess the impact of what such an attack would mean for the welfare of the city. It is also meant as a way to reason with the leader of the town to try and determine whether the war is necessary. If they decide that it is a worthy endeavor, then even after the fighting has commenced, “no direct cruelties against the inhabitants may be inflicted, and a side must be left open as an escape route” (Kimelman 2020). It allows for civilians and non-combatants to escape in a humane manner and not be trapped in the midst of the fighting.

In addition to defending the immunity of non-combatants, Hebrew scripture and Midrashic commentary condemned wanton destruction, as can be seen in Deuteronomy 20:19:

When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls.

This principle is evidenced in the example described above, to be judicious choosing one's enemies. Like people to a city, fruit to a tree provides sustenance to a defending army. I do not mean to say that the ancient Jews would eat their enemies, but it is necessary to "deal with the issues of wanton destruction and the immunity of the noncombatant" (Kimelman 2020). Another explanation of this type of behavior can be observed in the Sefer Ha-Hinukh, specifically in Mitzvah #529. This passage claims that the restraint from destroying inanimate objects, such as trees, during times of war teaches us to "love the good and the purposeful and to cleave to it so that the good will cleave to us and we will distance ourselves from anything evil and destructive" (Mitzvah 528). The rationale behind this is that respect for inanimate objects may teach people not to destroy whatever crosses their path, but rather be judicious in using their sword.

The second ethical dilemma that is heavily discussed relates to the aforementioned tactic of leaving one of the sides of the city open to allow non-combatants and the women and children to escape. Whether it be because of moral intuition or tactics of war, "the opportunity to escape saps the resolve of the besieged to continue fighting" (Kimelman 2020). It is this that calls to question who would be considered a non-combatant. In Midrash, it is explained that "the fear of Abraham noted in Genesis 15:1 was due to him saying, 'Perhaps it is the case that among those troops whom I killed there was a righteous man or a God-fearer'" (Kimelman 2020). As prescribed by the Jewish tradition, it is important to consider one's enemy's faith in God. If an

individual does not mean any harm, it would be unethical to bring harm to them. Referring back to the Sefer Ha-Hinukh, specifically in mitzvah #527, it is understood that “the requirement to leave open a fourth side of a besieged city [because], ‘the quality of compassion is a good attribute and it is appropriate for us, the holy seed, to behave accordingly in all our matters even with our idolatrous enemies’” (Kimelman 2020). These considerations highlight two major conditions, “safeguarding the moral character of the soldier and preserving the human image of the enemy” (Kimelman 2020). Regardless of who is at the other end of the sword, whether it be a believer in God or a non-believer, an ethical Jewish warrior must be judicious in considering who is an enemy and who is not. Using the criteria outlined above, members of the Irgun would unequivocally not be considered ethical actors in warfare. They go diametrically against being judicious about who to harm, as shown by attacks such as the “bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which killed 91 soldiers and civilians, including fellow” Jews. Though some believe that there was a warning put out, it was nonetheless largely ignored. Therefore, even though they tried to help, not much else was done to ensure civilians safety.

To glean into the primary sources to better explain these principles, we turn towards the Mishnah, the Tosefta and the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds which all have a different perspective on Halakhic thoughts to just war. Before we delve into these texts, to interpretations of the ethical use of force according to Halakhic law, refers to “the body of Jewish law supplementing the scriptural law and forming especially the legal part of the Talmud” (Webster 2020). To the more observant Jew, Halakhic law is the set of laws that dictates the way an individual should carry out their lives. From what to do when one wakes up, to the ethical practices of war, this set of laws describes them all. Rabbis, Kings and the Sanhedrin often played a decisive role in determining whether a war was justified. Preeminent political theorist

Michael Walzer attests that it is not the “case that all wars not required are permitted, for it is fairly clear that there were wars of which the rabbis disapproved” (Kiel 119). Like all issues of politics today, the same corrupting influences of political will and power tend to overrule moralistic approaches to any situation, let alone with fighting a war. For example, even if the President’s advisors do not want to go to war, the president still has the ultimate authority to declare war. However, even if a rabbi disapproves, it is “usually explained with reference to conditions of various sorts imposed on the permitted wars, not with reference to wars that are never permitted” (Kiel 119). As mentioned above, they do not even bother to ethically analyze a forbidden type of war because the law clearly states that these types of wars are never to be fought. This is not to say that forbidden wars are never fought, but they are just not even justified by the rabbis and figures of ethical authority. These figures do not have it within their power to absolutely condemn war, however, “the Talmudic sages did condemn the possibility of war and even limited the right of the king to declare war” (Kiel 119). To many scholars in the field, this compulsory consultation with the Sanhedrin and other figures on “the moral issues refers not only to the morality of waging war (*Jus ad bellum*) but even to the way the war is to be conducted (*Jus in bello*)” (Kiel 120). Now that it has been established that (1) there are a few types of wars delineated by religious texts, (2) that there are certain moral and ethical considerations that go into effect when deciding on engaging in war, and (3) that it is under the authority of the Sanhedrin and Rabbis to be the voice of ethical concern regarding war; it is now important to consider how the Irgun’s actions are condemned in the halakhic context.

Conclusion

Based on the principles explained within this chapter, it is clear that the actions taken by the Irgun would not constitute an ethical approach to committing to war. While they may have good intentions in terms of trying to secure a land for the Jewish people, the way in which these tactics have been carried out are diametrically opposed to what the halakhic law dictates. Especially when considering how one must take the time to settle the dilemma peacefully. While they ceased operations from time to time, the Irgun, may not have exhausted every option to come to a peaceful resolution. Rather, they planned attacks with very little regard to lives, even of their own people, to reach political ends. Since it is the case that they did not consult with the enemy before attack, they most certainly did not leave any escape option open for noncombatants; they simply committed attacks without any regard for these Jewish ethical principles.

It is important to note that while these principles are in place, during the time of Irgun's operations, there was not a Sanhedrin to more formally espouse these principles to such actors. There were rabbis at the time but there was little chance that their input would dissuade the Irgun from acting, they had larger political motives to worry about. It is not just the rabbinic community that was against the actions of IZL, it was a large portion of the Jewish community too. This dynamic is seen in all three of the case studies in this thesis. At the end of the day, these groups are acting outside the boundaries of both legal and ethical norms and are not indicative of what most members of the faith community – Jews in this case – believe that their religion requires. Therefore, there is very little evidence to point to the Irgun being ethical actors. They did this so much that have a completely different interpretation of the religious texts and took matters into their own hands to reach their ultimate goals. Therefore, it is not Judaism itself that

is at fault for the violent measures taken. Rather, the ambivalence lies in the compulsion of the Irgun to narrowly interpret the meaning of religious texts and employ them to justify their own actions.

Chapter 3: Hamas

Introduction:

A recurring theme in this exposition is how the groups in question use their terrorist activity to achieve a specific political end, whether establishment of an independent state or defense of culture. In the next case we examine, we see how a terrorist organization, Hamas, uses a particular interpretation of essential religious texts to appeal to its mass base and to justify taking violent action. This next group has controlled the local government in the Gaza Strip since 2007 and has struggled against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the governing authority in the autonomous regions of Gaza and the West Bank. Specifically, Hamas does not lead a de jure form of government, rather it leads a de facto government and has been able to garner support from the general population through social programs and community outreach. In this section, we will explore how Hamas uses religious language and symbolism to garner Palestinian support and justify extreme actions, namely suicide bombings. In doing so, Hamas leaders employ a narrow understanding of Islam's theory of Just War or Jihad. However, the way in which it is interpreted is not indicative of how the every-day practitioner acts and is therefore not representative of Islam as a whole.

In the sections that follow, I first lay out the beginnings of the group and how they employ violence to achieve their goals. Then I analyze how the leaders of Hamas interpret sacred texts such as the Quran and Hadith in order to understand why these choose to employ violence and how they justify this as a legitimate means of achieving their ultimate goals.

Hamas's Political Motivation

During the Second Intifada against Israeli occupation of historical Palestine in the late 1980s, a new group of Islamic activists arose in opposition to the secular approach of the PLO. This new group chose the name, Hamas, which is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya “Islamic Resistance (or opposition) Movement” and also translates into “zeal” in Arabic (Peretz 104). Hamas’s origins are rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Jihad, which became models for their motives and group structure. Much like how the Irgun arose out of a larger political movement, Zionism, Hamas finds its roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, which advocated for the adoption of Islamic Sharia and called for the liberation and unification of Islamic countries and states, especially in the Middle East. The general principles of the Muslim Brotherhood align with Hamas; however, Hamas takes these ideologies a step further by exacting violence to reach their ends. One of the founders of this group who grew to prominence was Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Palestinian religious leader (imam) who eventually “became the spokesman for the organization” (Peretz 104). When the group was formed towards the end of 1987, its leaders soon realized that establishing an ideological doctrine was essential in order to have a cohesive movement that would present a lasting impact on society at large, most importantly for the recognition of Palestine as a state. So, in August of 1988 Hamas published “a document of thirty-six articles apparently intended to serve as the fundamentalist answer to the PLO Charter” (Peretz 104). Hamas diverged from groups like the PLO, which was the governing body of Gaza at the time, for ideological differences and because “it was obvious from the document that there could be little long-term collaboration between the Islamic and secular wings of the Palestinian nationalist movement, the latter represented by the PLO” (Peretz 104).

Though they sought similar ends, the way in which they were to reach those goals were at odds with each other.

As seen in the covenant of this organization, the slogan of the movement is “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran is its constitution, Jihad is its path, and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes” (Peretz 105). Hamas portrayed its cause as a religious one and “defined Palestinian nationalism as an Islamic ‘struggle against the Jews’” (Peretz 104). Hamas’s covenant calls for Islamic literature and art to play an important role in the struggle: “The book, the article, the bulletin, the sermon, the thesis, the popular poem, the poetic ode, the song, the play, and others must be mobilized” (Peretz 105). This relates to Juergensmeyer’s assertion that symbols play a large motivating factor in terrorist motivations. Groups with religious motivations often interpret symbols described in religious contexts to have violent implications. They then use these symbols as a message from God to carry out his will by enacting such violence as deemed necessary. However, one of the most prominent motivating factors is that many Palestinians, and Arabs in the Middle East in general, see the Jewish people as invaders in their land and are responsible for the expropriation of their communities.

As I analyzed in Chapter 2, this conflict has been deeply rooted for centuries; today’s actors are not the original actors and they will not be the last. The Jewish people see Israel as their land by birthright, whereas the Palestinians and Arab communities also have a deep-rooted and strong connection to the land. This land has been their home for centuries and modern-day Palestinians feel as though the Jews are the outside invaders, even if their claim to the land is biblically justified. Unlike the PLO, which recognized Israel’s right to exist in 1993, Hamas maintained that all of Palestine was an Islamic homeland consecrated for Muslims that should never be surrendered to non-Muslims; as Peretz explains, “Hamas ‘strives to raise the banner of

Allah over every inch of Palestine.’ However, this does not necessarily mean that Jews are not allowed to live in the land. In fact, Jews and Muslims have been living in the same lands for all of recorded history. It is even dictated under Islamic code “all religions can coexist in security and safety” (Peretz 104-5). However, Hamas purports that non-Muslims “must recognize that Palestine is an integral part of the Islamic world” (Peretz 104-5). Hamas therefore not only espouses the creation of an independent Palestinian state but also insists that this should be an Islamic state. In turn, Hamas operates on the principle that “no part of Palestine may be given up... because all the land is an Islamic wakaf (religious endowment), “consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day,” like any other land that “Muslims have conquered by force” (Peretz 105). Their connection to the land is not just a battle for their home but also to win divine favor in the eyes of Allah. It is with this sense of nationalism and religious commitment that is observed, “the charter states, [that Palestine] is ‘part of the Islamic religious creed’” (Peretz 105). Rather than conferences and peaceful initiatives as seen in non-violent religious organizations, Hamas insists that Jihad is the only way to gain back control of Palestine from Israel and calls on all Muslims to participate in the struggle. In fact, the use of violence is so central to Hamas’s tactics that its covenant states that “initiatives and so-called peaceful solutions, and international conferences, contradict the principles of the Islamic resistance movement” (Peretz 105).

Given Hamas’ religious justification for its claims on Palestine, it is clear who their ultimate enemy is in this conflict, the Jewish people and Zionist activists. Hamas leaders believe that the Jews usurped their land and given this, “it is compulsory that the banner of Islam be raised” (Peretz 105). In addition to its military tactics, Hamas also focuses on providing social services and support to the community. This holistic approach leads to the inclusion of all people

in the cause. Hamas believes that “all must participate in the struggle: ‘scientists, educators and teachers, information and media people, as well as educated masses, especially the youth and sheikhs of the Islamic movements” (Peretz 105). While Hamas itself takes the more direct action to reach their goal, it is the job of all people to assist in the struggle. One of the most important ways civilians can help is through the education of the youth. They believe that education must be reorganized by “using a ‘healthy’ curriculum that will include ‘a comprehensive study of the enemy’ so that Muslims will understand his strengths and weaknesses” (Peretz 105). In Hamas's eyes, this is an all-hands-on-deck situation where all parts of society must be cognizant of who the enemy is and how to defeat them.

Specifically, Hamas expresses many of the same views that are held by anti-Semites and anti-Zionists around the world and uses these stereotypes as part of its justification for commit violence. Statements by Hamas claim that the Jews have “formed secret societies including Freemasons, Rotary, and Lions, which ‘took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting systems, and others.’” (Peretz 105-6). They that “the enemy was behind the French and Communist revolutions and, again with his money, controls the imperialistic countries” and even blame the Jews as “responsible for World Wars I and II, the League of Nations, and the United Nations” (Peretz 105-6). They believe the influence of Jews is so great that “his finger is in every war, and he tries to ‘rule the world,’ both the capitalist West and the Communist East, says the covenant” (Peretz 105-6). These claims show how part of the motivation to commit acts of violence is brought about not just from the creation of the state of Israel, but also from hatred toward the Jewish people.

To glean into more of the motivating factors and thought processes of the organization itself, it is useful to examine statements by senior Hamas officials, including senior officials from

the movement's political wing, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Abd Al-Aziz Rantisi, and Ismail Abu Shanab. The responses of these leaders are structured in a way that is very diplomatic, but they nonetheless still fall in line with the core principles that are delineated in the Hamas's Ideological Doctrine. For example, when asked if the goal of Hamas was to end the 1967 occupation or to replace Israel with a Palestinian State and whether Hamas sought the destruction of Israel, Rantisi answered cautiously, stating that:

We need to hear first about the goals of the Israelis. Do they intend to transfer Palestinians to Jordan? Are they looking to reoccupy Jordan, or seize the northern areas of Saudi Arabia? The Israelis up until now do not even recognize the Palestinians as a people. So we shouldn't answer this question until the Israelis make their intentions known (Gaess 2002).

At the same time, Rantisi indicated that Hamas would only freeze its armed struggle if and when the occupation ended because its primary objective was to end the suffering of the Palestinians and create an Islamic state. Many believe that Hamas are the true aggressors in this conflict, however, it is disputed by Rantisi that "we are not: we are the victim" (Richardson 44). In fact, Israel is responsible for the killing of Ahmed Yassin which later will further entrench Hamas in the position that Israel is primary reason as to why such violence is necessitated. As a response to this claim, a member of the political wing of Hamas, Rantisi justified the use of violent tactics including suicide bombings as follows:

In killing our civilians, our kids, Israel has used F-16s, Apache helicopters, missiles, tanks, they even demolished houses burying people alive in Jenin. So, if we had weapons like F-16s and Apaches, we would use them, but we haven't, and so we are left with two choices. Either we surrender and accept a quiet death, or we defend ourselves using our own means of struggle. And one of our most effective means, which can rival the impact of their F-16s, is martyr operations. We've told the Israelis again and again that if they stop killing our kids, our civilians, we will not use this weapon. It has been our response to the Israeli massacre of Palestinians (Gaess 2002).

Similarly, Abu Shanab presents the logic behind Hamas' use of armed struggle, explaining that Palestinians were defenseless against the violence inflicted by Israelis against Palestinians during the First Intifada and therefore turned to suicide attacks, which proved to be effective:

Palestinians don't have tanks to use against Israeli tanks. We don't have airplanes to defend ourselves against their airplanes. So as the Israelis kept their occupation in place and continued to kill our people, many means of resistance got developed. People carried out attacks on soldiers, on military jeeps, on settlements and military camps, and they kidnapped Israeli military figures. These, along with martyrdom operations, constitute our limited forms of resistance against Israel's huge military arsenal. Our resistance is a symbol of our rejection of the Israeli occupation, and it serves to remind the Israelis that they will not be able to continue that occupation without paying a price. And thirdly, the resistance is an affirmation of Palestinian determination not to surrender (Gaess 2002).

Speaking as a de facto government leader, Abu Shanab appeared to support dialogue with Israel, but he also insisted that Israel was not willing to negotiate, so that Abu Shanab puts the blame for this conflict solely on Israel. Hamas leaders believe that their "demands are legitimate" (Richardson 19) and highlights the imperialist nature that Israel is said to have in the region which could be a reason as to why Hamas feels the need to use asymmetrical attacks against a much larger and stronger entity in order to achieve its goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state. This answer also skirts the question the interviewer asked whether Hamas's intentions included the destruction of Israel. Spokesmen for Hamas avoided a direct answer in order to maintain as much legitimacy, and funding from other governments as possible, especially since it is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States.

One of the other co-founders of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, affirmed that the organization's goal was to end the occupation of all of Palestine and not just a reversion back to pre-1967 borders. Yassin clarified that "all of Palestine is occupied. And there is an entity for the Zionist movement on Palestinian land which embodies apartheid. We want a place that absorbs Palestinian Muslims, Jews and others without differentiation" (Gaess 2002). This statement is

seemingly contradictory to what is understood from Hamas's founding principles in the sense that Yassin expresses a willingness to absorb all peoples of the land into the Palestinian State even though the founding document would indicate otherwise. Once again, characterizations of Israeli occupation as a form of apartheid make Israel look like the bad actor in this conflict. This is a strategic move to make Hamas's cause seem more legitimate and justified, even though the tactics they are using to take back the land result in the death of many people, including non-combatants and civilians. The leader's account also negates the anti-Zionist language employed in the mission statements of Hamas by claiming that the land is also for the Jews.

Among the numerous propositions made by actors in this conflict is a solution that time and time again has risen to be the most viable solution to reach peace: a two-state solution. This suggests that the land of Israel would be apportioned to include not just the Jewish state, but also recognize the Palestinian Territories as the State of Palestine. As good as this may seem, especially for the interests of Hamas, there are a few factors that have seemed to impede this from happening. First, the borders have always been a hotly contested factor when considering such a solution. Many believe that the 1967 borders are reasonable; however, "Israel has constructed barriers along and within the West Bank that many analysts worry create a de facto border" (Fisher 2016). There have even been Israeli settlements established in the West Bank which would make it difficult to "establish that land as part of an independent Palestine" (Fisher 2016). Second, Jerusalem is one of the holiest cities in the world for Jews, Muslims, and Christians; therefore, this city has been at the center of attention for both Israelis and Palestinians. Both Israel and Palestine claim this city as their capital, although, as a strategic move, "Israel has declared Jerusalem its "undivided capital," effectively annexing its eastern half, and has built up construction that entrenches Israeli control of the city" (Fisher 2016).

President Trump has moved the United States Embassy to Jerusalem as an act of recognizing Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel. This, in turn, further delegitimizes Hamas as the leaders of Gaza by reaffirming that the international community does not recognize Palestine or Gaza as a state and governing power on the global stage and condemning the idea that Palestine's capital could be Jerusalem.

Third, if a Palestinian State were to be recognized, the five million descendants of the refugees will want to resettle their land. The issue of refugees arose out of the forced removal of Palestinians from their land when the state of Israel was created. This is perhaps a reason why Israel would not want to resort to a two-state solution. There would be “too many returnees [that] would end Jews' demographic majority and therefore Israel's status as both a Jewish and a democratic state” (Fisher 2016). Finally, an end to the occupation and withdrawal from the occupied territories raise fears that groups like Hamas would “threaten Israelis (as happened in Gaza after Israel's 2005 withdrawal)” with a total take-over of the West Bank (Fisher 2016). This region also allows Israelis to be “defensible against foreign armies, which often means requiring a continued Israeli military presence in parts of the West Bank” (Fisher 2016). Israel is under constant threat on all its borders by its neighbors; therefore, giving up this military stronghold (i.e the West Bank) would be counterproductive to their national security goals.

However, as Yassin states in his interview, “our [Hamas'] recognition of an Israeli state is conditioned on their recognition of our rights. Since we still don't have a state – I don't have a home to settle on – that means we're not in a position to recognize Israel” (Gaess 2002). Though this response does not include the rationale provided by Fisher, this raises an important point about the issues. It is not just the job of the international community to secure Palestine as a state; it is Israel itself that needs to recognize Palestinian statehood as well. Now that we have

come to understand the motivating factors behind Hamas' actions, it is imperative to examine the religious motivations and understand how they interpret the words of the Quran to justify their means to their political ends.

Jihad, its Different Perspectives, and Means of Attack

The use of war in Islam has always been addressed and codified through the various religious texts and doctrines. As a result of the narrow interpretation by terrorist groups, the Muslim community across the world has been overgeneralized and therefore the public perception the Muslim community has been damaged. Contrary to common misconceptions in the West, especially in the wake of the events of September 11th, 2001, there are many different ways to interpret Islamic scripture. When the events of this day were claimed by al-Qaeda, an Islamic extreme group, many became fearful of the Muslim community in general. Understandably, the country was shaken. How could something like this happen on American soil? What can we do to protect ourselves? Who is really to blame? In the midst of all the confusion, a common scapegoat came to the surface: Muslims. They were vilified, and still are to this day because of the events that transpired. Instead of blaming the extreme faction responsible, a number of people lumped together all Muslims, overgeneralizing that the beliefs and actions of a few were representative of the whole. The effects of this blame are still present today and will continue to do so if the issue is not addressed. There is a vast difference between the beliefs and practices of most Muslims and groups who use a narrow interpretation of religious doctrine to justify their heinous actions. If one looks closely at the Quran and other important holy texts and theories in Islam, it is evident that most Muslims would reject terrorism as a violation of the core precepts of the religion.

In order to create the distinction between normative and extremist views of Islam, we look towards the Prophet Muhammad's idea of a Just War Theory. Before this distinction is made, it is essential to explore what is commonly referred to as the Islamic form of war, Jihad. The term Jihad "can be literally translated as 'struggle', and has two meanings - only one of which is violent" (Levitt 8-9). The violent definition is what may come to mind when thinking about Islamic war, especially in today's context. There is actually a second definition, however, and it is more important to ethical conduct than the violent description. The nonviolent meaning of jihad "refers to the personal struggle for virtue and morality, striving to follow God's will" (Levitt 8-9). There are two terms that correlate to these distinct meanings; for the violent form, it is called lesser jihad, while the inner struggle to define one's relation with Islam can be referred to as greater jihad. From this distinction alone, it is already evident that there are misconceptions about jihad and how it is employed by the Muslim community as compared to extreme groups such as Hamas.

There are even intense debates within the community about the definition and uses of jihad. This controversy "emerges from the tension between its legal and ethical dimensions" (Hashmi 2000). This tension arises because of the difference in views between the juristic and the philosophical/ethical points of view. Overwhelmingly, it has been the juristic theories that have prevailed which indicate a political motivation for the initiation of jihad. As a result, "ethical inquiry became a narrow and secondary concern of Islamic scholarship" (Hashmi 2000). This imbalance of juristic over ethical interpretations has caused many "legal treatises propounding the rules of Jihad and discussing related issues, but few ethical works outlining a framework of principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunna upon which these rules could be

based” (Hashmi 2000). Jihad, therefore, lost much of its roots in the ethics of what the Prophet espoused about how to conduct war.

Not only is there much debate within the community, but there is “no single doctrine of jihad that has always and everywhere existed or been universally accepted” (Esposito 1069). The understanding of what is “required by the Quran and the practice of the Prophet regarding jihad” (Esposito 1069) has also been in a state of flux. There is no one group that has controlled the rhetoric either. Rather, it is “the product of diverse individuals and authorities interpreting and applying the principles of sacred texts in specific historical and political contexts” (Esposito 1069). Given the large population of Muslims around the world, it is tough to pinpoint one interpretation of Jihad. Although, for the purposes of this exposition we will refer to the definition provided below.

The ethical initiation and conduct of war has been addressed and codified through various Islamic texts and doctrines. These discuss “restrictions on the initiation of combat, and rules for the proper conduct of warfare” and thus describe an Islamic Just War theory (Legenhausen 2008). Specifically, there are three principles that would be considered a just cause for jihad. These justifications are as follows: 1. Defense, 2. revolution against tyranny, and 3. establishment of the shari’ah” (Legenhausen 2008). Although there is not full consensus within the Muslim community on this list, these are the most widely accepted reasons where starting a jihad is acceptable. Along with these three qualifications, there are three examples of when jihad is justified: “to repel invasion or its threat, to punish those who had violated treaties, and to guarantee freedom for the propagation of Islam” (Legenhausen 2008). In most contexts, these reasons would be acceptable for people or a group to pursue some sort of military action. Wars

have been waged countless times throughout history with these very same justifications. Therefore, this interpretation of jihad fits into the parameters of a just war theory.

However, as it has been observed in the actions of Islamic extreme groups, that they sometimes base their jihad solely on the basis of a difference in religion or other unjustifiable rationale. This is so widely controversial that “most scholars agree that difference in religion alone is never a sufficient justification for jihad” (Legenhausen 2008). In Islam and other Abrahamic faiths, “the fact that certain wars are divinely sanctioned by no means implies that they are to be fought without restraint” (Legenhausen 2008). This should only enforce the point that a “holy war” must also conform to religious dictates on the proper conduct of war.

The ultimate goal of jihad is to spread the word of Islam to all the world; therefore, a justified jihad would not be committed on the basis of “material gain or territorial conquest” (Hashmi 2000). This would seem to explicitly rule out using violence on behalf of establishing a Palestinian state and call into question Hamas’s use of violence “to eliminate the state of Israel and establish in its place an Islamist state in all of what once British mandatory Palestine--a territory was today that comprises Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip” (Levitt 8). The cornerstone of Hamas’s jihadist philosophy is to decimate the state of Israel so that the Palestinian people are able to reclaim the land as their own, which goes against dominant interpretations of what the Quran says about territorial conquest and just war.

Hamas has historically subscribed to a three-pronged strategy to achieve this land gain: “(1) social welfare activity that builds grassroots support for the organization, (2) political activity that competes with the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA), and guerrilla and terrorist attacks that target Israeli soldiers and civilians” (Levitt 8). This may seem surprising. How can a group that engages in terrorist

violence also have such a strong commitment to social welfare and pious acts? While Hamas members may dedicate themselves to helping fellow Palestinians out of a sense of religious duty, it is also important to understand how such social work serves to strengthen the organization. By emphasizing its members' piety and engaging in grassroots action, Hamas also hopes to win broader support from Palestinians than its secular rivals, the Palestinian Liberation organization (PLO) and Palestinian Authority (PA).

Through its grassroots outreach, Hamas creates gratitude among average Palestinians who rely on the organization for economic relief or other types of welfare activities. At the same time, Hamas's grassroots initiatives also "provide cover for raising, laundering, and transferring funds, facilitate the group's propaganda and recruitment efforts, provide employment to its operatives, and serve as a logistical support network for its terrorist operations" (Levitt 23-24). Organizations of the Muslim Brotherhood, another Islamic terror group "take advantage of the otherwise laudable Islamic tradition of charity and good works not only to teach their particular version of Islam but also to actively support terrorist operations" (Levitt 19). This is exactly what Hamas' grassroots organizations are doing. Through the use of their fundraising and money laundering to fund such acts, they create a legitimate front for violent actions. In this connection, scholars have found that using similar methods, "many al-Qaeda fronts and cells have also funded Hamas" (Levitt 19). It is undeniable that the grassroots organizations play a key role in the furthering of Hamas's cause. They use these seemingly charitable organization, which fulfil a Muslim's duty to annual charitable work, or zakat, to support the use of violence.

The final step is to take the decisive action. Some of the most popular methods that Hamas employs are car and suicide bombings. These are so popular, in fact, that from September 29th, 2000, through March 24th, 2004, "Hamas executed 52 suicide attacks, killing 288 people

and wounding 1,646 more. In total, Hamas conducted 425 terrorist attacks during this period, killing 377 people and wounding 2,076” (Levitt 12). These numbers are staggering. Just in this fact alone, it shows that these actions are based on “the centrality of violent jihad” (Levitt 8). Such tactics have been proven to instill fear in the people and create a stronger message that will have lasting impacts on the community. Oftentimes such attacks are also done as means to show Israel that they are unsatisfied with the current state of affairs and that something needs to be done to address the issue. However heinous these attacks are, Hamas believes that these actions are still “religiously sanctioned resistance against perceived enemies of Islam” (Levitt 8). As it will be further explored in the next section, it will be clear that Hamas’ jihad is in no way justified by the Just War Tradition of Islam or any Islamic scripture.

Quranic Interpretations of War and Peace

A different look into the interpretations of religious texts comes from the famed Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun who claims in the *Muqadimma*, “his celebrated introduction to a history of the world composed at the end of the fourteenth century, that ‘wars and different kinds of fighting have always occurred in the world since God created it.’” (Hashmi 64). No matter the context, wars have always been part of the human experience, so much so that this religious scholar claims that war itself is “endemic to human existence, he writes, ‘something natural among human beings. No nation and no race is free from it’.” Furthermore, Khaldun argues that various types of war are a “feature of human society sanctioned, if not willed, by God Himself” (Hashmi 64). However, the war that is waged by groups like Hamas, as suggested above, is not consistent with the general interpretations of Islamic Just-War theory.

To get a sense of how the concepts of jihad and Just War are generally interpreted, it is essential to consider how mainstream Islamic scholars interpret scriptures like the Quran, Hadith, and the Sura and contrast their interpretation with the one forwarded by Hamas leaders. According to the former, “Muhammad was averse to many aspects of the tribal culture in which he was born. In particular, there is no indication that he ever showed any interest in affairs of tribal honor” (Hashmi 2000). This is important to recognize because immediately it is implied that since Muhammad was not particularly inclined to tribal cultures, he would not support the actions and social dynamics that Hamas undertakes. So, how can practitioners of Islam claim they pledge undying allegiance to the figure who believes in the opposite of the group’s intentions? Not only was he opposed to tribal cultures, he showed no proclivity towards “the use of force in any form, even for self-defense” (Hashmi 2000). This is truly the embodiment of a policy of “nonviolent resistance” (Hashmi 2000). Though he did not solely subscribe to pacifistic non-violence, it is especially impressive given that this was in a time when he and his people were threatened by attacks against their lives.

Islam scholar Olivier Roy claims that “militant behavior in Islamist groups appears to be motivated more by a particularly aggressive style of religious preaching done by political training” (Levitt 18). Such training is the methods employed by Hamas in the education of Palestinian youth. This very dynamic is common throughout all forms of religious extremism, and in conjunction with the influence that religion has over people, this makes for an influential culmination of power. Hamas uses this influence through grassroots organizations to garner support from the masses. An example of the power that religion has over individuals is exemplified in what Islamic tradition refers to as *ibadah* and *dawa*. According to Islamic tradition, “all Muslims are obligated to submit themselves to God (*ibadah*) and [to] propagate

(*dawa*, literally ‘a call to God’) true Islam” (Levitt 16). The obligation to spread the message of Islam covers a wide spectrum of outreach activity, from outright proselytizing which benefits the soul to charitable giving and social welfare activities which benefit the body” (Levitt 16). At its core, this tradition dictates a peaceful proselytizing commitment with an emphasis of caring for the less fortunate. This is a proper application of jihad and similar types of conduct are seen in many other religious traditions.

However, acts of war are thought to be “a feature of human society sanctioned, if not willed, by God Himself” (Hashmi 2000). Thus, questions surrounding bellicosity and charity both “fall within the purview of divine legislation for humanity” (Hashmi 2000). How can both of these seemingly opposite issues be considered in the same frame of mind? They are considered in tandem because Islam itself is often thought to be a “complete code of life, given the centrality of war to human existence, the moral evaluation of war holds a significant place in Muslim ethical/legal discussion” (Hashmi 2000). There are a handful of reasons as to why people are inclined to war described in the Quran. While there is not a blatant reference to a Just War theory in this sacred text, similar codes can be inferred from its descriptions of mankind’s proclivity towards war.

One of the first mentions in the Quran of mans’ inclination toward war is describing the “fundamental nature (*fitra*)” (Hashmi 2000) of humans which “is one of moral innocence” (Hashmi 2000). According to the Quran, all people are “born with a knowledge of God’s commandments, that is, with the essential aspects of righteous behavior” (Hashmi 2000). As people grow, they are influenced by their surroundings, if they are raised by righteous and ethical people, they will grow to emulate these behaviors. The same goes for people who grow to know only hate and prejudice. These are the people who will be influenced by political ends using

unethical means; specifically, through groups of terror. In the words of the Quran, one must “act on Allah’s plan according to the way upon which He has made mankind” (Sura 30:30). If one follows the teachings prescribed within the Quran and understands mankind’s fundamental nature of moral innocence, they will thereby lead an ethical and righteous life free from illegitimate jihad.

The next explanation recognizes that “man's nature is to live on the earth in a state of harmony, and peace with other living things” (Hashmi 2000). This is specifically mentioned in the Quran when Allah says, “to the angels; ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth’” (Sura 2:30) in order to create peace. The true embodiment of peace (*salam*) “is therefore not merely an absence of war; it is the elimination of the grounds for strife or conflict, and the resulting waste and corruption (*fasad*) they create” (Hashmi 2000). Taken out of context, this could be interpreted to mean to eliminate the chance of war, even when it is unprovoked. This type of action is taken by Hamas and many other Islamic extremist groups. Even if there is no present threat from Israel, they will commit acts to take away any potential or future chance of attack. To a follower of Islam, Allah dictates that one must “enter into Islam whole-heartedly; and follow not the footsteps of Satan; for he is to you an avowed enemy” (Sura 2:208). Here it can be observed that this is one of the purest intentions in which one can act; to take no aggressive actions when they are unwarranted. This is just one of the many instances where the rhetoric of peace is preached within the Quran. It also speaks to the nature of human beings; we have it within us to choose to act peacefully.

While it is described within the Quran that people are born with moral innocence, we all have the “capacity for wrongdoing” (Hashmi 2000) because “there will always be some who choose to violate their nature and transgress against God's commandments” (Hashmi 2000). In

Islamic tradition, “Adam becomes fully human only when he chooses to heed Iblis's (Satan's) temptation and disobeys God” (Hashmi 2000). Once Adam eats the fruit, “Satan did make them slip from the Garden, and get them out of the state (of joy) which they had been” (Sura 2:36). As a result, Allah said “get down, you all (people), with hostility between yourselves, on earth” (Sura 2:36). Because of this moral choice made by Adam, humankind will be in conflict with others because of the differences in our understanding of morality. While this statement taken out of context could indicate justification to live in discord with others, if you look at the Quran’s messages in totality, it would still be observed that everyone must follow Allah’s message of living in peace with all. As it has been described in the case of Hamas, when an entire group rejects the message of God, “oppression and violence become the norm throughout the society and in relation with other societies” (Hashmi 2000). When moral codes, especially ones that are dictated by the sacred texts are disregarded, people are more inclined towards potential and actual violence.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) preached an ethic of peace and non-violence and one of the ways to commit jihad peacefully is through the propagation of Islam. As a result, it is proclaimed that “unless you (Muslims) also ally with one another, there will be turmoil on earth and great corruption throughout the land” (Sura 8:73). This is a call to action; all “Muslims must always be prepared to fight to preserve the Muslim faith and Muslim principles” (Hashmi 2000). This could be interpreted to mean to take matters into your own hands to destroy all evil, no matter what it may be. This is a common interpretation used as justification by terror groups. Although, if the text is examined closer, later on in the Quran, it states that “those who, when grave wrong is inflicted on them, (are not afraid but) help and defend themselves” (Sura 42:39). The idea of self-defense, especially towards one’s faith is something that even Mohammad

eventually realized is essential. While leaders of Hamas claim that their actions fall into the category of self-defense and that they are protecting themselves from the enemy, this interpretation goes against the more common understanding among Islamic scholars that terrorist actions violate the ethical conduct of war as prescribed in the Quran.

Ultimately, the use of force is “sanctioned by God as a necessary response to the existence of evil in the world” (Hashmi 2000). It is easy to see how this can be misinterpreted but, again, it is essential that the entire teaching is examined in totality before taking decisive action about jihad. If it were examined as a complete set of ethical conduct, it will also be realized that this meaning is derived from “the Qur'an's ... conception that the use of force should be avoided unless it is, in just war parlance, a ‘last resort’ (Hashmi 2000). This is also exemplified in the passage “and indeed whoever shows patience and forgiveness, that would truly be an act of bold will (and resolution in the conduct of affairs is) truly recommended by Allah” (Sura 42:43). The indication of this restraint shows how a just war theory is seen throughout all parts of the Quran and thus, Islam is not a religion that propagates the idea of unrestrained war against all people.

It is precisely this perspective that needs to be better understood. In fact, it is the opposite type of understanding that has created considerable Islamophobia. Oftentimes, such groups as Hamas and other terror organizations have a very narrow and inaccurate interpretation of the Quran’s messages whereas they are able to justify their actions on the grounds of their specific interpretation. They feel as though they are doing what Allah is asking of them; however, most would question their justification for waging such a war against the other as well as their lack of restraint. Looking at the Quran in its totality is essential to understanding the true message of Muhammad and Allah. Creating this distinction between just and unjust jihad is the first step that

is needed in order to separate every-day practitioners of Islam from those who disseminate an extreme interpretation and bend the text to best suit their political ends. As a result of their use of a narrow understanding of Islam to justify the resort to terrorism, Hamas has given an unfortunately erroneous representation of Muslims as a whole. Though it is more complex than this, Islam is a religion that preaches peace, compassion, and ethical conduct and the rest of the world must understand these intentions. That is why it is the jobs of all Muslims to show the world that their religion preaches peace, and not the amalgamated dictum of terror groups who only seek destruction and political gain which are all prohibited in the very scripture they use as justification for their actions.

Though the message of hate and unjust war is not dictated in the sacred texts, there are certain passages that prescribe how one should act in times of war or conflict. The Quran mentions that one should “fight in God’s cause against those who wage war against you, but do not transgress limits, for God loves not the transgressors (2:190)” (Hashmi 67). While this does sanction the use of defensive measures, it is explicitly clear that one must operate under the parameters of Muhammad’s Just War theory and practice restraint and caution when exercising violence. Ultimately, what groups like Hamas practice is not justified in the sacred texts of the Quran as evidenced by the passage; “Peace, not war is God’s true purpose for humanity (2:208)” (Hashmi 64). While it could be used as a means of defense and protection of faith, it must be done so according to God’s law. Although Khaldun observes that war is an innate feature of the human experience, the ultimate goal that God or Allah has for humanity is to live in peace with others.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, it has been the violent actors who have given a bad reputation to Islam, especially in the Western context. In showing that groups like Hamas advance very narrow interpretations of Islam to justify their use of terror, it helps separate every-day practitioners of faith from radical groups. Mainstream interpretations of Islam emphasize that it is within one's true nature to do good and to understand God's laws, not to take extreme action against someone you claim as an enemy. As it has been observed so far through the examination of Irgun and now Hamas, the narrow interpretation of religious doctrine is a common practice amongst terrorist cells who act in attempts to appease God while also finding a means to their political ends. Through this narrow interpretation, it shows that religious doctrine is not at fault for these violent actions, rather it is the incentive of the aggressor to take meanings within Islam and use them to justify their actions. Even within the founding documents of Hamas, the principles within are diametrically opposed to what most Muslims would consider to be ethical in the parameters of Islam. Through this analysis, it has been observed, that much like the Irgun, the motivation to secure land is an effective motivator for acts of terror. This same phenomenon will be explored in the next section, when the motivation of land and culture overwhelm even the most devout individuals, and religious doctrine is once again interpreted in a narrow manner in order to justify the use of violence to attain political ends.

Chapter 4: The Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (Ma Ba Tha)

Introduction: Buddhist Nationalism, the Ma Ba Tha and the Rohingya Genocide

Despite all of the progress that has been made in the efforts to avoid tragedies such as ethnic cleansings and genocides, these tragedies still persist. Most may not realize that such horrors are still happening because they are often in far off places and typically not strongly covered by the media. Regardless, groups of people are still subject to mass killing, rape and expulsion from their homes because of their ethnic or racial identity. One of the most recent and prominent examples of this is currently occurring in the Buddhist majority nation of Myanmar, previously referred to as Burma. As I will explore more deeply in this chapter, the military security forces of this country are ultimately responsible for the systematic persecution and indiscriminate killing of the Rohingya people. However, as Joshua Kurlantzick notes, Myanmar's nationalist Buddhist leaders are also responsible: "Since the early 2010s, hard-line Buddhist monks have played a central role in fomenting anti-Rohingya sentiment, which has spiraled into a nationwide campaign of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attacks" (Kurlantzick 2018). The Rohingya community is a Muslim community that lives in the northwestern part of Myanmar. However, there is something very puzzling about this dynamic since the individuals and perpetrating these violations are Buddhists. Buddhists are often thought to be a people of peace and as it will be explained, fundamentally they believe in the rights of all living or "sentient" beings. So why are adherents of such a peaceful religion committing such horrific crimes? A sentiment that many ethnic and national groups may share is the fear that their way of life is in danger because of external threat. In the case of Myanmar, many members of the Buddhist community fear that the Rohingya will disrupt their way of life and undermine their culture. This mindset, like all the cases examined in this thesis, is not indicative of the religion as

a whole, rather, it is a product of an extreme interpretation of Buddhist texts. In this chapter, I will show how that the mindset and actions are not indicative of Buddhism as a whole and in fact, violate many of the religion's commands against violence.

Who Are the Rohingya? Historical Tensions between Buddhist and Muslims in Burma

Before we get into any further discussion of the topics proposed above, it is essential to explain who the Rohingya people are and what their history has been leading up to the present day. The word Rohingya "is used to distinguish an ethnic, linguistic and religious group who lived in the former Arakan State of Myanmar" (Sohel 1,008). Although they live in Myanmar, they are "officially stateless and disowned by the Myanmar government, which argues that The Rohingya are not Myanmar citizens and that they came originally from Bangladesh" (Sohel 1,008). Their home today, Rakhine, is situated in a location that is "between the Islamic and Buddhist cultures of Asia as it is located in the tri-junction of Myanmar, India and Bangladesh." Within Myanmar, the population is 89% Buddhist which means that a vast majority of the Burmese people are Buddhist. As a result, the Burmese national identity has "always been closely intertwined with Buddhism" (Sohel 1,009). Prior to British colonial rule, "Buddhist kings ruled much of Burma" (Sohel 1,010), leading in part to a nation with an inclination towards Buddhism. The Sangha, or monastic community, historically has also acted when "the country's religious and cultural well-being is at risk and ... the current government is either unable or unwilling to address the sources of threat" (ICG 2017). This is precisely what is being done in Burma today; as a nationalist extremist sect of the sangha is encouraging the government to persecute Muslims in what it sees as a defense of religion.

Burmese nationalism has long included fears over the survival of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. This conviction that Buddhism was under threat “has persisted for over a century, though the perceived enemy has changed from British to Muslim” (Rosenthal 2018). Fear led to the persecution of other religious and ethnic minorities as well, as there was also a “rise of anti-Christian and anti-Hindu sentiments, the latter culminating in a series of anti-Indian riots” (Rosenthal 2018). Considering all of these cases, these reactions occurred as “part of anti-colonial movements and strengthened the idea that one must be Buddhist in order to be truly Burmese” (Rosenthal 2018). The conviction that Buddhism and Burmese culture are in danger is most often attributed to a presumed “Muslim problem.” From this perspective, the story goes like this:

Over the course of decades, Muslim Rohingya slipped over the border from Bangladesh at the point where it meets Rakhine State, and settled on Rakhine land. They grew in number and diluted the Buddhist population, forming the vanguard of a crusade to turn Myanmar into a Muslim country. Therefore, unlike other Muslims in Myanmar, such as the Kaman people, the Rohingya have never been Burmese citizens and do not deserve citizenship status (Rosenthal 2018).

Fast forward to today, Rohingya Muslims living in Rakhine state are actively being driven out of the country or face persecution and death. Getting more to the heart of what is happening in Myanmar, there has been an observed “pattern of widespread and systematic human rights violations in Rakhine State [which] may constitute crimes against humanity as defined under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court” (Sohel 1,007). Some of these actions are in the form of “[e]xtra-judicial killing, rape and other forms of sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment in detention, denial of due process and fair trial rights, and the forcible transfer and severe deprivation of liberty” (Sohel 1,007). Without much dispute, all of these actions go against any conception of human rights and stem from “ethno-demographic grievances ...between Buddhist and Rohingya-Muslim populations in the Rakhine

State of Myanmar” (Sohel 1,007). Though there are disputes on both sides, the Buddhist population has the sheer numbers to be able to crush any opposition without much trouble. It is curious that even though Buddhists vastly outnumber the Rohingya people, some Buddhists still feel threatened by their presence. As a highly controversial Nationalistic Buddhist leader named monk Ashin Wirathu maintains, “the Rohingya population’s rapid growth and high fertility rates threaten to overtake local Buddhist populations” (Sohel 1,008). This nationalistic sect of Buddhism claims that the country’s Buddhists are under siege from the Rohingya people and in order to protect their home and interests, they must “protect” themselves.

The rationale forwarded by this nationalistic Buddhist sect will be revisited in a later section, but first, it is necessary to give a more in-depth overview of the current state of Myanmar. Starting in 2002, “Human Rights Watch reported that the government issued military orders demanding that unauthorized mosques be destroyed” (Sohel 1,010). In addition, the government has taken these Islamic holy places and converted them into governmental offices. Earlier in 2001, “mobs attacked at least 28 mosques and religious schools. State security not only did nothing to stop the attacks, but also participated in the destructions” (Sohel 1,010). Instances of these efforts have been on the rise since 1990 and continue to grow every year. Since this time, special UN reporters have identified that these abuses are “widespread, systematic, and resulting from state policy” (Sohel 1,010). With extreme events most recently occurring in 2012 and 2017 with the crackdowns on the Rohingya population exacted by Buddhist mobs and the Burmese army, there has been strong evidence to suggest that the Rohingya are now the world’s most persecuted minority without citizenship” (Sohel 1,010). Like Palestinians in the occupied territories, The Rohingya are effectively stateless, as the government of Myanmar refuses to acknowledge their citizenship and denies them basic rights and protections. However, the

Rohingya are not in such a position to fight back against their oppressive regime. Although, there have been groups that have attempted to counter this state violence such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the attacks launched by Rohingya insurgent groups have led to a harsh, disproportionate backlash. Later on in 2012, “around 32,000 Rohingyas [were] registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangladesh” (Sohel 1,010). These staggering numbers only indicate the people within these refugee camps. Unofficially, around “300,000-500,000 unregistered refugees are living in conditions of abject poverty and malnutrition outside the formal camp areas” (Sohel 1,010). Since 2017, an estimated 712,700 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar and roughly 128,000 have been internally displaced (CFR 2020). This number has continued to rise and unless there is some sort of international intervention, the statistics will only continue to soar.

The Rise and Influence of the Ma Ba Tha

Before too much more is explained, it is essential to delve more into the creation and rise of the group that has largely assumed the role of defender of this genocide, the Ma Ba Tha. This group actually has changed its name frequently during the last decade after it came under scrutiny from both religious and state authorities. In fact, the Ma Ba Tha was started in 2012 emerging from the 969 movement (Moe 2018). This original movement dates back to the 1990s when U Kyaw Lwin, an official within the ministry of religious affairs, claimed that the name 969 is “rooted in a traditional belief in numerology. Across South Asia, Muslims represent the phrase *bismillah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim*, or "In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful," with the number 786” (Bookbinder 2013). Since this group sought to drive out the Muslim communities in Burma, the “number 969 is intended be 786's cosmological opposite and

represents the "three jewels:" the nine attributes of the Buddha, the six attributes of his teachings, and the nine attributes of the Sangha, or monastic order" (Bookbinder 2013). This group, the predecessor of the Ma Ba Tha, "claimed that the movement is a non-violent response to a Buddhist society under strain from 'foreign' influence" (Bookbinder 2013).

This "foreign influence," as characterized by one of the leaders of the 969, Ashin Wirathu, can be seen in efforts by "Muslims [to] control Burma's economy" (Bookbinder 2013). Muslims have made a name for themselves in Burmese society; however, claims that Muslims control all of the economy intentionally exaggerate Muslim influence and stir up mass fears. To this end, "Wirathu has called for a boycott of all Muslim-owned businesses" (Bookbinder 2013) and cautions that "money will eventually be used against you [citizens] to destroy your race and religion" (Bookbinder 2013). Wirathu and other monks in the 969 movement also incited fears that Muslims would wreak havoc on the whole of Burma's Buddhist culture by marrying and converting Buddhist women to Islam. As a lay supporter of the Ma Ba Tha explained, if "the Buddhist cultures vanish, Yangon will become like Saudi and Mecca ... It can be the fall of Yangon. It can be the fall of Buddhism. And our race will be eliminated." (Rosenthal 2018).

Wirathu was arrested in 2001, charged with inciting deadly violence by distributing inflammatory anti-Muslim pamphlets, then later freed in 2011 as part of a broad amnesty included in a broad program of political and economic reforms introduced by then-President Thein Sein. Political liberalization led to a rise in Buddhist Nationalism, more violence against the Muslim communities and other forms of "an upsurge in extreme Buddhist nationalism, anti-Muslim hate speech and deadly communal violence, not only in Rakhine state but across the country" (International Crisis Group 2017). At this point, the media became a platform for further advancing the views of this nationalistic group and with better access to specifically

social media “accelerated the spread of nationalist narratives” (International Crisis Group 2017). With this, in 2012, a new wave of anti-Muslim violence swept across the country” (International Crisis Group 2017) leading to worsening conditions for this targeted community.

Eventually, in 2013, the 969 members “rebranded the group as the Association for Protection of Race and Religion, which came to be better known as Ma Ba Tha” (Moe 2018). The Ma Ba Tha picked up where the 969 movement had left off, successfully pressuring “President U Thein Sein to approve a controversial set of four laws on race and religion that imposed restrictions on interfaith marriage, birth spacing, polygamy and conversion, believed to be targeted at Muslims” (Moe 2018). One of these controversial laws is seen in a report on Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar, where researchers with the International Crisis Group clarified how these laws seem to be targeted at Muslims. Specifically seen with the Population Control Law (May 2015) which “gives the government the power to implement (non-coercive) population control measures in areas designated by the president with high population density, growth, maternal and child mortality, poverty or food insecurity” (ICG 2020). Although there have not been any areas assigned, this measure allows for a more calculated and legal pathway to exact systematic violence against groups such as the Rohingya.

In the country’s first openly contested election since the imposition of military rule, many of the top leaders of the Ma Ba Tha campaigned in support of incumbent President U Thein Sein and against the leader of the opposition, internationally renowned dissident Aung San Suu Kyi, and her National League for Democracy (NLD) party. “The MaBaTha Chairman, Ashin Thiloka, advised followers to vote for candidates who would ‘protect’ the race and religion laws and to avoid those who would ‘destroy’ them – implying that they should not vote NLD. Others, notably Ashin Wirathu, were willing to be more direct in telling voters that the establishment

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was more supportive of the MaBaTha agenda and stronger in its protection of race and religion than the NLD” (International Crisis Group 2017). Despite the political activism of leading Ma Ba Tha monks, the NLD won the elections in a landslide. The NLD was not diametrically opposed to the Ma Ba Tha, as some member monks supported the NLD and NLD politicians had also made donations to MaBaTha-affiliated monasteries (International Crisis Group 2017). In office, NLD officials tried to engage the organization, encouraging it to tone down its anti-Muslim rhetoric and activities. However, after U Wirathu praised an attack on a prominent Muslim advisor to the NLD in January 2017, the Ma Ba Tha’s hand was forced and needed to change its name. In May, a “state-backed cleric organization Ma Ha Na announced that Ma Ba Tha was an unlawful organization” (Moe 2018) and in turn, “banned the group from operating under its current name” (Moe 2018). In response, the group changed its name to the Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation, but the group insisted that the Sangha Council had only rejected the use of the name Ma Ba Tha and had not abolished the organization; indeed, many regional branches refused to accept the name change (International Crisis Group 2017). For the purposes of this paper, I will continue to refer to this group as the Ma Ba Tha, despite any following name change. Regardless of whether name changes one hundred more times, one of the leaders of the group stated that “our association will never fade away. We will continue working for our race and religion like we are doing now” (Moe 2018). This is a group, like the Irgun and Hamas, supported by religiously and ideologically committed followers motivated by religious and ideological. Also, like the other groups, the Ma Ba Tha similarly enjoys considerable public support and has been able to continue its activities, despite condemnation by the government and Sangha Council.

The Ma Ba Tha, much like Hamas, has engaged in a wide range of social and cultural activities that have increased its grassroots support. In doing so, Ma Ba Tha members claim to be promoting and protecting Buddhism, which they consider a necessary part of Burmese cultural identity. Monks associated with the Ma Ba Tha have helped the poor, sick and elderly, providing food and health care. They have also provided disaster relief, raising funds and delivering aid to communities affected by floods and earthquakes. Ma Ba Tha-affiliated schools have expanded education for underprivileged and rural youth, offering both standard curricula as well as instruction in Buddhist cultural and civic education programs. Ma Ba Tha nuns and laywomen have worked on behalf of women's rights, specifically informing rural Buddhist women about their marriage rights and the right to practice their Buddhist faith. In addition, Ma Ba Tha members also provide pro bono legal advice, "including pastoral support and legal aid to women in abusive family or work situations who do not have the means to go through the courts." (International Crisis Group 2017). Throughout these social works, Ma Ba Tha monks, nuns and lay members claim to be following and promoting Buddhist moral precepts. Indeed, even though "Ma Ba Tha is widely seen by non-supporters as spreading hate speech, intolerance and conflict, the vast majority of its supporters believe the organisation's very existence promotes peace in plural communities" (International Crisis Group 2017).

So how can an organization that engages in activities explicitly grounded in good Buddhist practice also condone or even encourage violence against Rohingya Muslims? To be clear, many of the grassroots supporters of the Ma Ba Tha are focused on social activities that are in keeping with Buddhist teachings. Moreover, it is the Burmese military that is directly responsible for mass atrocities against the Rohingya in Rakhine state. Nonetheless, the extremist leaders of the Ma Ba Tha espouse extreme, hateful rhetoric and have been associated with

violent attacks on Muslims. To better understand this, we turn next to an examination of Buddhist ethics and then consider how Myanmar's military leaders and its allies in the Ma Ba Tha are "cynically using Buddhism to manipulate people to behave with violence and hatred, rather than compassion and generosity" (Rosenthal 2018).

Buddhism's Claim to Peace

Now that the persecution of the Rohingya people and the rise of the Ma Ba Tha have been explored, it is time to consider the contradiction between many central precepts within Buddhism and human rights violations, as well as the rationalizations forwarded by people claiming to act in the name of such a peaceful religion. It is essential to make this clear, that these crimes are not a necessary expression of Buddhism, but rather a form of "Buddhist nationalism [which is] the driving ideological force behind the Islamophobia fueling the violence against the Rohingya" (Rosenthal 2018). Buddhist nationalism focuses on a perceived threat to cultural identity, including a threat to the religion and its adherents, more than on the Buddha's teachings. Rosenthal clarifies this point by conveying that "in this crisis, the term "Buddhist" is used to designate cultural identity, not a religious belief or practice" (Rosenthal 2018). Similarly, the Buddhist nationalist leaders of Ma Ba Tha focus on protecting the ethnic Burman people, equating them with Buddhism; the "Ma Ba Tha often conflates race and religion, demonstrating that the group's deeper concern is one of ethnicity" (Rosenthal 2018). It is fueled by the need, felt by some, for the majority of people in Burma to maintain their way of life and not be bothered by a foreign people. Like the Irgun's ideologies, the argument can be made that the Ma Ba Tha is an ethnically motivated group because they are more concerned about the loss of their

culture and way of life as opposed to being sanctioned by a power or law to perpetrate their actions.

All of these crimes against humanity call into question the integrity of Buddhism's image of being a peaceful religion. In order to reject the idea that Buddhism is a religion of hate, throughout this next section, I will outline what Buddhism actually says about the rights of the individual through the use of religious texts and the accounts of religious scholars on the subject. In previous chapters, I have approached the theological examination from the perspective of Judaism's and Islam's theory of just war. However, it would be more prudent to discuss Buddhist theology from the perspective of human rights because the case of the Rohingya genocide calls this issue into question. As the Buddhist scholar Uttamkumars Bagde boldly states, "human rights as construed in the modern era are compatible with Buddhist ethics" (Uttamkumars 32). The Buddhist ethics that he is speaking about are specifically the four noble truths which encompass the eightfold path (steps to attain enlightenment). This is the center of Buddhist practice and describes the condition of human suffering and how one may be liberated from this suffering. The first of these truths is the realization of suffering (Dukkha). One must accept and realize that suffering is an inevitable part of the human condition. Second, Sidartha, or the historical Buddha, recognized that the origin of suffering was attachment (Samudāya). It is the things we are attached to that make us lose sight of the present moment and cause unnecessary pain and suffering. The third and fourth are especially important to consider because it is not enough to concentrate only on the reality of human nature. As Buddhist scholar Luis Sevilla suggests, the most reasonable rationale to accept is one which "locates human rights and dignity within a comprehensive account of human goodness, and which sees basic rights and freedoms as integrally related to human flourishing and self-realization" (Sevilla 219). This

account can be seen in the third and fourth noble truths are the truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha), and the path one takes to the cessation of suffering (Magga), both of which focus on basic rights and freedoms as integral to human flourishing and self-realization (Sevilla 2019). To put it very simply, if people are inherently prone to suffer, Buddhism holds that one should not contribute to the further suffering of others, but rather help liberate others from its grasp.

Buddhism posits that one should treat others with dignity and respect (i.e. respect their human rights) which is often attributed to the concept of interconnection with all beings. Popular Buddhist thought indicates that all human beings want the same things, happiness, freedom from suffering, and love. Therefore, we should all treat others with compassion. Since Ma Ba Tha leaders and members are blatantly disregarding the rights of the Rohingya people, they are not following this understanding of Buddhist doctrine. Arguably, the language of the third and fourth truths would require devout Buddhists to not only reduce the suffering of those who practice, but to those around them. This path is the knowledge of right understanding which means that one can see the world how it really is, not how one wishes it to be.

Another area of Buddhist practice where we see a glimpse into similar human rights language is seen in the five precepts of Buddhism. These five precepts give guidelines on what one must do to follow a life of peace and enable people to fully exercise their rights. The exact precepts are to abstain from taking any life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and gossip, and the consumption of alcohol and other intoxicants. Sevilla describes that with each of the five precepts, there is a right that goes along with it. As an example, he explains that because there is a precept “to abstain from killing” (Sevilla 221) there is a “duty which has a correlative right, the right to life” (Sevilla 221). The concern for human rights is therefore at the center of the

Buddhist community's conscience. At the core of these precepts, there is an inherent call for the proper treatment of all beings. Therefore, operating under these guidelines, it follows that the Ma Ba Tha is in direct contradiction with all the precepts described.

The goal of the Buddhist path is to free oneself and others from suffering. Suffering at its core is believed to derive from attachment to things outside of ourselves and to things or people that may not be constant in one's life. The Ma Ba Tha monks seem to blatantly disregard the idea that attachment leads to suffering because they are attached to the idea that their culture needs to stay intact without the improper influence of a foreign people. When a person becomes overly attached to something, such as the attachment to land, then oftentimes they are left with a feeling of sorrow and grief. Or in the case of the Ma Ba Tha Monks, anger and hate. In order to ameliorate this mindset, it is important to realize that not all things are permanent and by letting things go, we will not have the chance to be let down. This seems like a very pessimistic view, but it does not mean one cannot love something or enjoy everything in life. It simply means that in order to alleviate suffering, one must realize that everything is cyclical and good times happen, but they may not last forever; the same is true about the bad times as well.

Achieving this state of mind is not an easy feat and the Buddhist philosopher Goenka exhorts fellow Buddhists to avoid doing anything that would compromise the achievement of that goal. He states that "impure acts such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so on, are problematic not merely because they harm other people but because they express, reinforce, and propagate the very lust, hatred, and delusion that keep us within the cycle of suffering" (Sevilla 222). The rationale behind this is that if you are actively making others continue to suffer, then you are going against the noble truths and five precepts which inhibit one from achieving an

enlightened state. If the true goals of this “Buddhist” community were to work for the liberation of all, as dictated by Buddhist doctrine, then there would not be the systematic exile of thousands at the hand of people who took vows to abstain from the very things they are perpetrating.

To get a better sense of where these ideologies are coming from, it is important to consider some of Buddhism’s central texts. One of the most central Buddhist texts is the Dhammapada, which is often considered the most important text in all of Buddhism. It has deep meanings especially in the Theravada tradition, which is one of the largest schools of Buddhism most prevalent in South and Southeast Asia. Much like the Judeo-Christian Bible, where many of the teachings were in response to an event at the time, “each verse in the Dhammapada was originally spoken by the Buddha in response to a particular episode” (Buddharakkhita 2018) and the Buddha deemed each of these to be a worthwhile teaching experience. In another very similar sense to the Old and New Testaments, “the contents of the verses...transcend the limited and particular circumstances of their origin, reaching out through the ages to various types of people in all the diverse situations of life” (Buddharakkhita 2018). This shows that even in today’s vastly different culture, the teachings that the Buddha put forth are relevant and answer life’s questions. It also provides a reliable sacred textual source for the grounding of Buddhist views on human rights.

One of the first times that the mention of human rights appears in the Dhammapada is in the section entitled Violence. Gautama Buddha, or Buddha, states that “[a]ll tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill” (The Dhammapada 43). This message perfectly encapsulates the idea that all must realize that everyone suffers from the same things, so no one should cause another to suffer. All people

are afraid of death and will do anything in their power to avoid it, so why should people create this fear in others if they all share the sentiment? If they put themselves in the shoes of the other, then they will realize that they should not kill or harm any other being. The text also states they anyone who causes suffering to others will also suffer: “[o]ne who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter.” (The Dhammapada 43). Therefore, any Buddhist who wants to be free from all types of suffering, including “invasion” from Muslim populations, must not commit acts that perpetuate suffering.

Karma is another idea that Buddhism takes into consideration when discussing the afterlife or reincarnation. The acts that these Buddhists are committing, such as the law passed as stated above, extends their Samsara indefinitely. The term Samsara means the everlasting cycle of death and rebirth which is determined by how one lives in one’s current life. The never-ending cycle of suffering is perpetuated by creating more suffering than is necessary. This is one of the chief justifications for why guaranteeing human rights is so essential in Buddhism; a person causes unnecessary suffering to other beings will remain in the continuous cycle of death and rebirth. For those who believe in reincarnation, the idea of spending the rest of eternity in constant cycles of life is a good source of motivation to follow the four noble truths, and the five precepts in order to live the best life that they can in order to achieve nirvana.

If one looks at the doctrinal evidence, it is clear that the language and intent of the scripture promotes a culture of loving and kindness towards all beings, the importance of life, and the importance of relieving the suffering of oneself and others. It is seen within such doctrines as the Four Noble Truths which highlight the nature of suffering and how we can be

released from its grasp. Finally, the Five Precepts clarify how one should live one's life and treat others. With these core codes of life, human rights are implicit in all of the language because each of these documents stresses the importance of living a happy life as well as helping lead others out of suffering. The Buddha preached the concept that all life is valuable and in order to treat it as such, one must lead a lifestyle that promotes the wellbeing of all. This includes the idea of using the Noble Path as a justification to allow all people their deserved rights so as to release oneself and others from the eternal cycle of suffering. These religious tenets create the impression of Buddhism as a tolerant, pacifistic faith. However, Buddhist monks have historically engaged in political action and the leaders of the Ma Ba Tha are no exception. They have successfully through their campaign of advocating anti-Muslimism policies "forced major parties to adopt much of their hard-line rhetoric" (Kurlantzick 2018). The issue with these actions taken is not the religious texts themselves, the issue lies in the narrow interpretation that the Ma Ba Tha has of these religious texts. Despite the fact that they are using religious doctrine in unethical means, it is not the religion itself that necessitates violence. It is the compulsion of the group itself to analyze the connection they are employing between religious doctrine and the call for violent actions.

As provided by the key Buddhist documents and the arguments set forth by scholars of Buddhism and human rights are inseparable. What is separable, however, is the connection between the Ma Ba Tha and popularly held conceptions of Buddhist ideology. In contrast to the core precepts discussed in this chapter, the Ma Ba Tha insists upon a narrow interpretation of Buddhism which allows it to justify violence against the Rohingya. The fear of cultural invasion is no excuse for the systematic killing of hundreds of thousands of people and this sentiment

needs to be made clear to the international community so the horrors that are taking place in Myanmar and Burma come to an end.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the preceding text, an analysis has been conducted regarding the use of religion by terrorist and extremist groups to justify their violent acts. Each of the case studies portrayed a different set of religious beliefs, but all of the groups examined used a narrow, particularistic interpretation of religion in order to justify their exclusive right to control a particular territory or state. In the first section, we looked at the way Irgun rose to influence and exacted violence in the name of creating a homeland. Through a series of premeditated attacks on Palestinian communities, market places, and other locations, the Irgun fighters were able to not only drive the existing communities out of their home, but they did so with such vigor and success that they eventually were able to achieve their goal of creating the independent state of Israel. Looking into the central religious texts, it became evident that the actions they exacted directly contradict the ethical conduct of war as prescribed by the Talmud, Mishnah, and Torah. As it was stated, they made little efforts to peacefully reach an agreement with their enemy and when they attacked, they did not make stronger attempts to account for civilian lives or any way for them to escape. These accommodations are provided in religious texts to allow non-combatants and protected groups like women and children to escape during battle because it is said that doing so is ethically correct. The Irgun seemingly never made these options available during attacks and therefore, in the eyes of Halakhic law, they did not act in accordance to religious standards.

The same can be said about Hamas; their interpretation of Islamic religious texts does not coincide with the popular and ethical concept of proper conduct, especially in their terrorist actions. A term often heard when talking about Islamic terrorist groups is in the word jihad. To the untrained eye, this term is often associated with violent actions claimed to be done in the name of Allah. However, this is not the case. This term actually means struggle, whether within

oneself or against an external problem. The methods that groups like Hamas employ go diametrically against what is thought to be the appropriate use of Jihad and herein lies the problem with the way they justify their violence. Like all religious texts, there are ways that the meanings can be interpreted in different ways and in different contexts. In this way, religion is not at fault for these extreme actions employed by each group, it is the narrow interpretation of texts to justify their seemingly unholy acts. In the case of Hamas, I turned to the way in which Muhammad outlines a theory of just war to show how the actions taken by Hamas are in direct contradiction with many of the commands found in the Quran. Similar to other faith traditions, Islam calls on believers to resort to violence only as a last resort. The Prophet highlights it is within one's true nature to do good and to understand God's laws, not to take extreme action against someone you claim as an enemy.

Unfortunately, much of the world has the perception that Islam is a religion of hate and war, especially in the wake of 9/11, as ISIS and other extreme Islamist fundamentalist groups have grown in notoriety. It is with this idea that I initially began this research. From this very analysis, it is apparent that it is not just Islamic groups that are committing acts of violence on mass scales. There are groups in all major world religions that employ violence in the name of God. Through my analysis, I have sought to separate the narrow understanding of religion exhibited by extremist groups from the more general understanding of these religions based on common interpretation of religious texts.

Finally, in examining the Ma Ba Tha, it can be deduced that just like the other actors in this thesis, these Buddhist nationalist extremists do not act in accordance with popular interpretations from sacred Buddhist texts. One of the core principles in Buddhism is the escape from suffering and that we all interconnected in part through this experience. This is why it is so

shocking that a seemingly peace-driven religion such as Buddhism can harbor members who help promote and carry out actions that increase the suffering of others. Again, it is not indicative of the religion as a whole, rather a group of like-minded individuals who have been encouraged by Buddhist extremists to feel that their culture and way of life are being disrupted by the Rohingya people. Because of their fears, they have been willing to condone actions that are recognized in the international community as ethnic cleansing, if not genocide. Although the Ma Ba Tha has not committed direct attacks against Muslims, its followers have done so and its anti-Muslim rhetoric has convinced the military regime to do their dirt work for them. Since the government of Myanmar is directly involved in this genocide, perhaps this is the reason why the international community feels the need to criticize their actions. It is with this topic that I feel the analysis and research can be furthered in future endeavors. Taking a look at counter terror methods would provide context for how the international community handles terrorists. It will also allow for a closer examination of the ways in which individual states use counter terror methods to track down and neutralize the threat of terror.

In summation, the motivation of religion is seen to be one of the root causes of terrorist actions, especially in the cases of the groups examined. They then use this motivation to exact terror in order to reach their goals of the creation of a homeland, to regain lost territory, or to protect their current way of life. Regardless of the motive, these groups employ a narrow and manipulated interpretation of religious texts to best benefit their exclusionary vision. Therefore, it lies predominantly on the way these groups interpret their religion, not on the individual faith itself. Although some of these groups fared better than others in reaching their political goals, they achieved them through means that are questionable in light of the core principles and just-war requirements established by the very faith traditions they claim to uphold.

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