

Theorising Religious Extremism

Abstract

This essay is a subset of a thesis with the overall aim to address a perennial and global gap in the literature of religious violence and interreligious dialogue by exploring the contours of experience of Buddhist nuns in times of acute violence. The main project suggests that the propensity to understand extremism from male informants may deliver incomplete stories, and by pragmatic extension, incomplete understanding of the global problem of violent extremism in the name of religion. This essay specifically discusses four such theories that are elementary to the thesis, and the aim is to critically analyse how these facilitate in examining the research questions and grounding my hypotheses. The theories shall lay the foundation of the study, and aid in comprehensive understanding of the research questions. The ultimate thesis shall produce data in an effort to understand the growth of what has been called “Buddhist extremism” in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, by focusing on two interrelated core questions. *How religious violence affects the Buddhist nuns, and how the Buddhist nuns affect the religious violence? How can “peripheral people” be brought into the fold of Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) as significant contributors of dialogue and reconciliation?*

Introduction

In a melodramatic and absurdist short story published in 1907, Joseph Conrad picked up on humanity's psychological intrigue to perform extreme violent acts. The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale is a novel that was inspired by the Greenwich Park bomb attack of 1894 in which a bomb exploded killing the French anarchist sympathizer who was carrying it, and is thought to be the first "terrorist attack" on Britain. The story sits on the edge of unflinching calculations of human predicaments, dilemma, and emotions that unleash the tumultuous tendencies of violence. Derrida (1973) in his understanding of violent human behaviour noted that we work to 'destroy our own protection to immunize ourselves against our own immunities'. This statement is vital because it explicitly projects humans as agents of their own destruction. In this regard, as the violent dismantling of our society is on the rise, it is binding to understand and challenge the ways in which people moralise the use of violence. One of the readily available, if not easily available, means of legitimising and moralising the use of violence is to associate it with the 'sacred'. Carter (2003) in fact argues that violence and the sacred are inseparable. Compared to most types of criminal violence, religious extremism poses the danger of complexity because they have "dissimilar motivations, organisations, resources, political interventions, and sensitive contexts" (Crenshaw 2000: 405).

Religion's role in the contemporary world is complex and differently constituted in varying contexts. While it is safe to affirm that the violent rhetoric is present in all religious traditions, and the banality of violence is intriguing, a religious tradition one barely associates violence with is Buddhism (Tambiah, 1992; Juergersmeyer, 2003; and Kitts, 2013). The doctrinal rejection of violence is indeed at the heart of Buddhism, but in reality, it is no different from other world religions. Brekke and Tikhonov (2012) in their case studies of Buddhism and Violence in Modern Asia, urge social scientists to "demolish this stereotype", and rethink the "Buddhist mainstream narratives of nonviolence". Buddhist monks embody Buddhism- in terms of both imagined and lived experiences. They are central to the Buddhist identity, and symbolically reign the religious and political corridors. While monks as "religious officials" receive utmost veneration and support, Buddhist nuns are perpetually "halfway" and "deficient" from the status of the monks (Kawanami, 2013). If the lack of studies on Buddhist extremism is disconcerting, the lack of literature on Buddhist nuns is

appalling, to say the least. Myanmar as a region too has received little scholarly attention, despite experiencing violent events, uniquely engineered nationalism, and ethnic and religious movements (Pettersson and Wallenstein, 2015). Studies around Buddhist nationalism and extremism has gained some momentum in Sri Lanka and Thailand, but Myanmar continues to be marginalised. It was only in 2011, when Michael Jerryson in his book *Buddhist Fury* acknowledged and emphasised that i) Myanmar remains underexplored, and ii) his identity as a white Christian male researcher from the West may hinder accessibility to the narratives of Buddhist nuns, without whom, he argues, the representation of the voices remain incomplete. Women in religious robes face “harsh deprivations” from both outside and inside the community. In the on-going Burmese war, the Buddhist nuns have impassively assumed the blind spot, while the monks are securing the titles of “the face of Buddhist terror” (The Times Magazine, July 2017) or the “pillar of peace” (Reuter, 19th May, 2018). Intra and Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) too have not been radically open to women religious leaders, and as Cornille (2013) argues, we are yet to explore the complex relationship of women and theological underpinnings in IRD because the discernment within this field is predominantly curated by male religious leaders and male scholars. This study, therefore, aims to assess and account for the ways in which Buddhist nuns deploy their agency to valorise the use of violence, and be resilient to victimisation in times of war.

Theoretical Frameworks

Violence is a highly convoluted and dynamic form of conflict. Both historical and contemporary forms of violence have been of sociological interest for its impact on human life, and its abilities to transform dominant cultural coefficients. Of the many characteristics and forms violence exhibits, this study focuses on “organised” and “symbolic” kinds. This essay is not centred on Buddhist doctrine and texts but rather on analysis of “local situational performances” (Jerryson, 2012) of being a Buddhist nun. The objective is to map the complex trajectory of how religious performativity and lived realities are politicised to incite as well as respond to violence. It draws on Mark Juergensmeyer’s idea of performance violence – that of acting out violence to create a ‘public event’ in the name of religion – and Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of religion as framework to create

and consecrate social distinctions and social domination. Endeavouring to walk on the middle path between positivist interpretations and expressions of social realities, the primary methodology would be ethnographic fieldwork, comprising semi-structured and focus group interviews and case studies. This PhD will contribute to the growing literature on religion and extremism by accounting for the stories of Buddhist nuns, and will help shed ethnographic and theoretical light onto areas that have received very little attention.

For Malešević (2010), these two forms of violence account for the most grave forms of public mutilations. In his investigations, he found that there is an undisputable connection between modernity and such forms of violence because “modernity allows deep proliferation of violence, and helps it to reach unprecedented levels” (Malešević 2010: 118). He argues that the relationship of modernity and violence is rather paradoxical owing to what he labels as “ontological dissonance”. In his writings it is seemingly plausible that social sciences continue to remain “intractable in its near absolute ignoring of studying violence” and provides only limited “common sense explanations of violence” (Malešević 2010: 50). His work suggests he is appalled by the constant evading of understanding violence from the paradigm of organised and symbolic modes of violence, and that it is important to ground lived realities within theoretical frameworks for a larger understanding of the sub-discipline of violence and the better understanding of its relation to human situations and actions. Asad (2009) compellingly argues that organised and symbolic forms of violence are inherently legitimised and acceptable by all parties in consideration- and this problematic cultural response is what he calls “the myth of religious violence”. The cultural interpretations of these violent acts are often indispensably collectively endorsed and implemented. Walby (2013) with his contemporary writings attests to the importance of theorising institutionalised violence as an imperative part of analysing social sciences. While the holistic and structural study of violence is often pushed to only the margins of anthropology and sociology (Malešević 2010; Malešević 2017; Walby, 2013) nonetheless, it continues to surface repeatedly in the exploration and examination of the lived-everyday life, and also in the sudden momentous junctures of social change. The variety of experiences an individual is subjected to in a modern and post-modern era, s/he ought to have interpersonal and relational experiences of violence, and while individual accounts are

necessary, there is a need to situate it within larger ongoing debates and reference of understanding.

Nowadays violence is made visible, challenging assumptions that those in authority use it as a tool only under the cover (Fry, 2006). While the association of religion and violence is increasing gaining light, women religious leaders and their accounts on violence are meagre and points at the non-linear narratives of 'women and violence'. Anne Edwards (1987) in her extensive work on women and violence noted that sociologists, even those specialising in studying violence, often discount the role of gender relations and gendered experience of violence. She wrote that it seems like it is "left for the feminists" (Edwards 1987: 2) to investigate this realm of sociology of violence. Bartholomeusz (1994) in her incredible book called, "Women under the Bo Tree: Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka" reminds and reinstates that women who renounce their life for the cause of Buddhist monastic life had a fundamental role in rise and spread of the religion. But both lay and ordained nuns have faced "violent treatments and great hardships unknown to men" (Bartholomeusz 1994: 3). Despite this being said decades ago, it seems to hit home even today. She mentions in her writings that, Pali Mahavamsa, a very popular poem in Buddhist literature of ancient times categorically and unapologetically documented that monks were worthy of more social support than nuns. Bartholomeusz summarises the deep-rooted structural differential treatment as "essentially, the order of nuns is an appendage to the order of monks" (Bartholomeusz 1994: 4). In the interviews she conducted with the nuns, she acknowledges the presence of organised and symbolic violence which happened to be so acutely ingrained within the social substructures of the system, that most nuns, even though they sensed the obvious relegation, accepted it as a form of an expected social behaviour. She wrote that, "without exception, every nun she interviewed said that Buddhist monks should not take part in any governing roles in politics" ((Bartholomeusz 1994: 152). This was due to them being aware that monks were supporting violence in active or passive states, and that it was a threat to their cultural values. But despite that, there were no confrontations. The author is convinced that the nuns lived certain aspects of violence in their everyday lives without knowing or challenging the status-quo, because they had internalised the *apparent* institutional religious and gendered roles (Bartholomeusz 1994: 154).

Fiedler (2010) informs us that, women as religious leaders have been historically marginalised. It was not until the 1970s that they assumed official roles in churches, synagogues and other places of worship. For her, the “tipping point” in interreligious dialogue can happen only when women religious leaders occupy a significant number and authority in discussing issues at hand. As the host for Interfaith Voices, a popular radio show in the United States, she interviewed scholars and practitioners of interfaith dialogue, mostly women, and their tales of subjugation, discrimination, and representation became overtly conspicuous. She asserts that women as faith leaders are gradually emerging but the issue is the same community defends patriarchy, and disapproves women in authority- this certainly echoes the concept of Bourdieu’s *symbolic violence*, and Malešević’s ontologically *organised violence*. Fletcher (2013) notes that the last decade witnessed greater participation of women religious leaders in dialogue, but the problematic aspect attached to such dialogues is that these are most “ad hoc and informal” forms of discussions, and suggests that women religious leaders should seek for official representation in dialogue. She analyses the newspaper article published after the historic World Religions Parliament in Chicago in 1893 to tellingly map the position of women religious leaders. The article published by the newspaper *Daily Inter Ocean* on the 12th September, 1893 addressed women religious representatives as “the fair sex”, and further described that while “the air was full of brotherhood” apparently, “sisterhood in such a gathering was superfluous”. Fletcher writes that the article not only underscores the position of the women faith leaders, but also points out to the unsettling fact that it was perceived and received as a “normal” paradigm. Fiorenza (1992) had commented on this androcentric disposition saying, “brotherhood has been the norm; including women is not to listen to their voices, but to welcome them to the generic masculinity” (Fiorenza 1992: 26).

Drawing on the cues provided by the authors in this segment of the chapter, it is safe to deduce the following- i) violence operates on several planes, and embodies more characteristics than one can conclusively elucidate; ii) The dearth in the studies around the conjecture of symbolic and organised forms of violence begs the question why; iii) women religious leaders are epistemologically and ontologically subjected to and conditioned by patterns of violence; iv) the territory of Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) has not squarely addressed the issue of representation of women faith leaders; and v) in both anthropology

and sociology, there is an undisputable need to theorise on violence embracing a people-centric and structure-based approach. This study attempts to adopt an experiential, relational, and reflective approach to engage with the pertinent subjective qualities of *performed* and *lived* violence, with the supposition of processual character of violence. Religious violence is contingent on subjectivities where its meanings unfold through how a community perceives and negotiates it. The approach shall lend itself to the post-modernist ethnography exemplified by the likes of Mark Juergesmeyer and Michael Jerryson, and endeavour to elucidate how the lives of Buddhist nuns are refracted within the boundedness of violent events; and how that informs and challenges our normative understanding of the interplay of prescriptive violence, its ritualised reality, and the religious quest for meanings. Broadly, there are four, not explicitly exclusive theoretical models that are the foundations of this study: i) Anthropological approach to study violence, ii) Lived approach to violence, iii) Theory of Performativity, and iv) Bourdieu's 'Symbolic violence'.

- Anthropological approach to study violence

Ortner (1984) said that, anthropology as a discipline has never actually been unified and universalised in terms of adopting a single shared frame of theoretical paradigm, and nor has it agreed upon theoretical affiliations that are binding to this subject. While this offers a vast scope, she argued that it is indeed difficult to lay out norms and draw sides, and identify sides we belong to when deciding the structures of theoretical archetype. Wolf (1980) was of the view that most theories in anthropology help in establishing and understanding *relationships* both within and across time and space, and that makes anthropological theories unique. As with many other social phenomena, conflict and violence provide a set of tools to define and understand relationships within any society, especially those that are formed historically and politically (Kurtz and Turpin, 1999). Though it can be rightfully argued that the cultural expressions of conflict and violence widely vary, we can perhaps agree that it usually occurs due to "perceived divergence of interests" (Fry, 1997), and it "rests on the polar end in the harmony-war social continuum" (P Heelas, 1989). This study leans onto anthropological theories to understand the bearings violence has on social institutions and actors. Strathern and Stewart (1999) verily determine the aspects in anthropology that help us to study violence from both conceptual and

operationalised forms. They argue that, anthropology aids us to interpret the meanings and expressions of “agency, imaginations, capacity for action, and intentionality”, and provides us a paradigm to decipher the “general understanding of roles and rituals of violent behaviours within the socio-cultural normalities” (Strathern and Stewart 1999:90).

Drawing on the “Anglo-Saxen” delineation of conflicts and violence, Riches (1986) made a case for conflict being less complex and problematic than violence, given that conflict is seen as a part of the social structure itself. It then is obligatory to understand the anthropological meaning of violence in the context of the situation under examination. Though the placement of violence in accordance to its typology is heavily disputed, the germane understanding of violence often has two inherent aspects- contested legitimacy and forced behaviour. As Strathern and Stewart (1999) put forth, violence stereotypically involves the use of forced action, and this realm of enquiry has received sustained attention. But what requires advanced investigation is the issue of legitimacy. Violence customarily involves party or parties who consider it legitimate to administer punitive treatment, and those parties appropriate their actions by deploying “the normal, desirable and divine laws” (Selengut 2017: 4). Boulding (1989) in her *Cultures of Religion* claims that religious confrontations comprise *peaceful gardens* and *holy wars*, and this is universal to all religions. In order to establish a just a moral society, holy wars are typified in the imaginations of the people to seek and safeguard the sanctity of “the Truth”. At a flash point of violence, religiosity of holy wars warrants the sacredness within the metanarratives of the globalised postmodern discourses. In the tapestries of history, religion and violence are woven together, and this is both a paradox and a dilemma. Appleby (1996) called this “the ambivalence of the sacred”.

In understanding religious violence and the connection of the sacred to authority and legitimacy within the location of postmodern anthropology, the accounts of Talal Asad become overtly important. While Asad (1993) unequivocally rejects the essentialist construct of religion, stating it is the product of the historical discursive processes, he provocatively suggests a shift in anthropological studies- from functionalist to post-structural frameworks that focuses on formations and practice. Implicitly tracing the propositions of Vygotsky, Foucault, and Bourdieu, Asad concurs that religion and power are inseparable identities. With the acceptance of this as a precondition, I want to examine how

the sacred breathes life into violence in the context of my studies. Asad (1983) argued that, “religion authorises specifiable religious practices and utterances that produces religiously defined knowledge” (Asad 1983: 237), and often it becomes the tool to not only justify, but also challenge and change a given social order. Religion negotiates violent behaviour and memory, and advances the meaning of the intent and consequence of the same. Lehmann and van der Veer (1999) explain that religion offers a set of powerful beliefs and rituals that can feed onto moralising violence and pacifying the suffering caused by it. In the face of postmodernity, Asad renews interest and uncovers the connections between religion and legitimacy. He often mirrors Weber’s understanding of the bearing of institutional authority that religion helps violence to bargain. In attesting so, Asad says that, “religious legitimations reify differences of power and violent motifs” (Asad 1999: 179).

Anthropological approach to study violence is binding to my study, and the reason is three-fold- i) It provides a tool-bag to conduct emic ethnography of people, structures, and social processes; ii) Following Nietzsche (1998) it has been attested that violence is a group act. The “...madness it requires is a rule that only groups can adhere to” (Nietzsche 1998: 70), and anthropology prepares us well to engage with a group; and iii) people-centric approach is fundamental to the discourse of anthropology. Anthropological grounding of violence is unique because it facilitates our comprehension of violence as “a practice mediating between historical boundedness of action in response to specific structural conditions and human creativity, and the cultural quest for meanings” (Schmidt and Schroder 2001: 18). Renowned psychologist Boumeister (2001) promulgated that violence is the antithesis of order and stability, and it is engineered from “outside” to ruin the collective homeostatic life. However, anthropologists almost indisputably argue that violence is a constitutive of the society and is fabricated in and by the society. Max Gluckman (1956) was one of the first anthropologists who said that internal division and conflict are fundamental to any society. His works complemented his contemporary George Simmel (1955) who cautioned us that violence is not chaotic; it is as much rule-governed and structured as order itself. Violence will always be non-linear and slippery, and as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) postulate, “violence is always in the eye of beholder”, meaning, the interpretation of violence is context and person specific. It is a process that is mediated by implicit irreconcilable difference of cultural expressions and moralised

repeated rituals. In most of the probing around violence, it is presumed that it is “evil” and an extreme antisocial behaviour. In this study, I wish to lean on the studies that anthropologically elucidate on how violence can be perceived as an “expected behaviour”. David Riches’ triangular model comprising the three fundamental actors namely- the victim, perpetrator, and the witness will be an important point of reference in locating the emic experiences of the Buddhist nuns. “Most violent acts consist of conducts that are socially permitted or encouraged, or enjoyed as a right or a duty” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 5). This study defies understanding of violence as a deviation; instead, it views it from the lens of perceiving violence as a derivation of service to the society. Riches (1986) wrote that the labels attached to any act of violence is multi-layered, and it is quite naïve and perilous to add value judgements onto it without getting a holistic and emic understanding of it. Anthropological understanding of violence suggests that it is determined socio-politically, and there can never be a specific category of people who perpetuate or fall prey to it- everything is culturally constituted and simulated.

- Lived experience of violence

Awareness of consciousness and reality in the pre-enlightenment era was comprehended through metaphysical perspicacity. After the WWII, there was an evident rise in positivistic approach, but there was a sudden shift in paradigm when Edmund Husserl proposed his theory on ‘Phenomenology’. Husserl’s school of phenomenology secured an important locus both as a philosophy and a methodology. In his works, *experience* was central because it transcended actuality, and emphasised on the meanings. One of the most important ideas this theory offered was that reality, truth, and their interpretations can be pluralistic in nature. In the development of humanities and social sciences, this was a ground-breaking method because it allowed for an individual’s perspective on and response to an act or event. Religion is often viewed as a social institution, and the binding concept is that it has set of norms and beliefs that are uniform to all its adherents. “Scientific intentionality would be mere abstraction without lived experiences of religion” (Segal, 2006). But, the experiential approach did not swiftly enter the realm of religion. Heidegger backed Husserlian thought by believing that “practical human comportment was essentially radically subjective and anthropocentric” (Heidegger 1962: 228, Moran 2000: 232),

however, positivistic approach continues to be popular in social sciences, mostly because it aids in using the label of objectivity. Although objectivity has several merits as an approach, experiential accounts can unfold incessant meanings to understanding the same phenomenon within the vast ambit of human experiences. This concept is at the heart of my studies because it i) subscribes to value pluralistic experiences and interpretations to the same occurrence, and ii) attest to the importance of praxis as a vehicle to inform us of our beliefs, and not the inverse.

The study of religion has been central to anthropology since its very inception, but the institutional approach has always been considered as “elusive and problematic” (Bowie 2006: 3). Ortner (1984) propelled that praxis is integral to anthropological undertakings because it lets scholars in on action and practice, and those are new forms of both methods and theories. She argued that seeing any part of a system from actors’ point of view should be the focal objective of anthropology. For Flood (1999), religious identity and expressions are less about truth claims and more about individual experiences. McGuire introduces the phrase “distinction-making” that implies how individuals routinely interpret religious orders, and either “dissent or assert” expressions by means of action (McGuire 2008: 6). This resonates with the classic philosopher and theologian Schleiermacher who stated that, experience is the only systematic agency that drives religion. Appadurai (1996) in his studies on religious and political extremism in Sri Lanka contended that, if we accept “culture as moving”, we ought to understand lived experiences. In his works, lived experiences are viewed as a part within the mosaic of “cultural processes” (Appadurai 1996: 48). McGuire (2008) in her detailed analysis of lived religion argues that the assumption that an individual is expected to undergo religious experiences in reference to or in alignment with religious norms and order is an elementary misconception most social scientists accede to. She suggests that we should focus less on establishing a social norm, and instead pursue and contemplate on individual narratives and interpretations that feed into the greater descriptions of religious violence. She advocates a shift from studying organisational religious behaviour to exploring people’s everyday lived religious encounters to help researchers formulate a fuller and more nuanced understanding of social realities. Like religion, violence too is lived in the everydayness of people’s lives. McGuire puts forward that some aspects of religion seem to ambivalently sanctify a repertoire of means of

expressing violence as both religion and violent comportments use similar cultural resources of domination (McGuire 2008: 117).

For J.F. Gilgun (2008) lived experiences of violence are important because it offers opportunities to understand violence from the standpoints of perpetrators, victims, and the witnesses too. From her field encounters, she reports that study of violence shall continue to be limited in its panorama if we truncate the roles and accounts of any entity involved or affected. In the context of an everyday life in a given cultural setting and time, lived realities provide an apparatus that help us to recognise that religious interpretations are neither “fixed, unitary, nor even coherent” (McGuire 2008: 12). This study values the lived experiences because it views actors as central players, and not the institutions they may be a part of. Lived experiences as theoretical backcloth serves as a vehicle to transcend the divide of institutional facticity necessitated by religious authorities and the participating individuals who not only live those institutional structures, but deliver meanings to it. Every person uniquely adds to the qualitative understanding of the social problem by means of – i) narratives, ii) meanings, and iii) expressions, and this is the three-tier model I propose for this study. This model shall be a frame of decipherment and elucidation, and is integral to the enquiry I conduct. Besides experience, another vital element in construing the everydayness of religiosity and violence is *praxis*. Marxian notion of praxis has an overshadowing effect on experiential studies even today. He proposed that ‘Man creates, and it simultaneously creates himself too’ (Schlanger 1998: 199). Therefore, in living an act, a person is not just creating something by being a part of it, the manner in which the event is imagined and experienced helps the person to negotiate and mediate her/his identity. The prospect of praxis facilitates the advancement or evolution of the person’s motifs, or *intentionality* as Ortner (2006) calls it, and the subjective meanings attached allude to significant attributes about the actor and the analyst.

- Religious Violence and Performativity

The aspect of praxis and performativity is not nonreticulated. I would rather argue that performance is a component of praxis. While *being* continues to be deeply embedded in the curriculum of western philosophy, the questions on *becoming* has gained sustained

attention in the postmodern sociological acumen. The beauty in performativity is that it allows us to break free from the classical duality of inherent identity and stratifications, and provides scope for evolving within the social complex, by reproducing rituals and expressions. Violence is formative- it is a continual and dynamic phenomenon that forges and influences identities (Feldman, 1991). Austin's 'Speech-Act theory' of 1962 brought to attention that people do not merely speak, they *do things* with the words. This illuminated the concept of *enactment* in a social context for the first time, and performativity has ever since been integral to linguistic philosophy. Later, Judith Butler expounded this powerful idea in the feminist theory paradigm that consolidated the understanding that "performance is a discursive practice to enact or produce meanings" (Butler 1993: 13). Performativity is integral to this study because it is inextricably associated with imaginations that are actualised (and ritualised) into *being* and *becoming*. For Bell (1999), the theory of performativity does not just assume the fluid nature of identities, but it highlights the premise of continual production of social meanings and socio-political consequences. A concept detailed by Bell that I wish to borrow for this study is as he called it, "the politics of visibility". He draws significant inspiration from Butlerian understanding of performativity; and the section on "isolating modality of performativity out of the textual context completely" (Bell 1999: 7) is what I am keen to explore. The complexities and schemas of performance of events are gravely entangled with what Deleuze (1992) called lines of power and subjectivations, and the analysis of the same can contribute significantly to the comprehension of violence.

In the paradigm of religious violence, it is epistemologically significant to understand performativity because it offers cues to understand cultural expressions and derive meanings that have inevitable consequences. This draws our attention to the production and ritualisation of the effects (and affects) of affiliated identities. Before we discuss performativity and its role in understanding violence, it is important to draw parallels with the concept of "mimetic theory" as proposed by Rene Girard. While it is perfectly possible for these two theories to dialogue and complement each other, I shall briefly summarise why performativity is more relevant to my studies. Girard's (1996) propositions are rooted in Christian theology, and he is of the view that violent extremism is the outcome of the mimetic tendencies of human beings where people try to imitate one another, giving rise to

conflicts. While this approach accounts for imitation affinities, it turns a blind eye to the aspect of subjectivity and experience. Also, it leans more towards psychology, metaphysics, and philosophy, than anthropology, and the role of cultural complex seems to occupy a place only at the fringes of this theory. Performativity on the contrary is anchored in the complexities of cultures and participants. It involves not just the actors, but also the audience or the witnesses. Juris (2005) having been discernibly inspired by Juergensmeyer, propels that violence is barely direct; it is performance because it embodies “symbolic ritual enactments of violent interaction with a predominant emphasis on communication and cultural expression” (Juris 2005: 415). For Juergensmeyer, *performative violence* is a combination of violence, performance, and ritual, and structurally and epistemologically it is more nuanced than what appears at the surface. He explained this by means of phases: the first he termed as “setting the stage”, second is the “dramatic time to kill”, and lastly “reaching the audience” Juergensmeyer (2017: 157-174). Analogous to a theatrical performance, the location and actors are committed for a certain kind of set-up, and prepare a spectacle for a specific audience group. This framework is well-tailored for my study, and it provides cues for me to examine how the Buddhist nuns perform their roles within the triangular model suggested by David Riches.

Juergensmeyer (2004) argues that “drama and loud enactments” offer overarching symbolic meanings to religious violence. This is mirrored in the undertakings of Appadurai (2006) and Spencer (2012) who have worked extensively in the Sri Lanka. They propel that the socio-political climate of a region relevantly adopts mechanisms that explicitly insinuates the sociology of “we versus them”. Realities, both good and vice are essentially lived through performances. They write that a specific landscape is constructed that adds dramatic effects on the violent outbreaks, and this landscape with its minute details serves as a backcloth for socio-political expressions. The spectatorship too is monitored with socio-political mechanisms. Juergensmeyer (2013) reminds us that any act of violence is a spectacle designed to create targeted impacts for the victims as well as for those who witness it, where the perpetrators want to “shaken awake the people, and siege their imaginations” (Juergensmeyer 2013: 281). In his investigations, he found that the driving force of religious violence is that it is ritualised and performed with the aid of religiously symbolic tools. For him, there are chiefly two aspects of performativity that are imperative

to understand the logic of religious violence- i) Violence as a “drama” where there is a conspicuous angle of “performative acts”, and secondly, ii) Violence as a “ritual” performed quite similarly to the religious rituals. Performing violence as a religious ritual echoes the idea of Girard (1972) where he argued that hostilities are best expressed through the agency of rituals. Violent acts *perform* social functions, and their impacts are transformative. The actors or perpetrators have the objectives to make a change (mostly symbolic), and they ensure the event is a *spectacle* where the witnesses have no problem memorising the imageries from the event. Juergensmeyer argues that the way in which the act is performed and perceived makes all the difference, because it means different things to different people, and at different times. He says that, “an act of terrorism usually implies an underlying power and legitimising ideology” (Juergensmeyer 2013: 156). He uses the metaphor of theatre to elucidate his propositions. Much like the theatre, there needs to be planning to *understand the actors and the audience, find the location(s), set the stage*, and finally the performance takes place to *capture the public’s attention*.

- Bourdieu’s Symbolic Violence

Religion shelters us from violence, just like violence seeks shelter in Religion (Carter 2003: 262). Surviving the calamitous consequences of violence and war cuts to the very core of what it means to be human, more often it is who Spivak calls the “subalterns” that are at the edge of these consequences. The association of socially institutionalised domination and religion is undertheorised (North et al, 2009). From Durkheim, Weber, Mauss, and Freud to Marx, Derrida and Foucault, all great philosophers and social scientists have addressed the affinity of religion and violence, but it may require contemporary researchers to unequivocally spell out how religious violence preys on social ascendancy. Of the pioneer sociologists, Bourdieu’s position on religious violence has received less attention and scholars find his works to be “limited and disappointing” (Rey 2007: 6). One of the fundamental reasons is that he openly professed non-allegiance to a particular religion, and argued that religion does not anchor humanity, instead, it is essentially oriented to sanction divides and wrongful domination. Bourdieu’s ground-breaking theory on *Habitus* and *Field* allows us to assess collective and individual dispositions on their value judgements on social hierarchies and marginalisation. As Costa and Murphy (2015) note, Bourdieu’s proposition

is, in particular, helpful in analysing symbolic violence. “Symbolic violence is violence that is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 167), where these agents comply with the dominating ideologies they are subjected to. This segment of the theoretical layout shall help me advance my understanding on the factors that cultivate and proliferate this “complicity”.

In Bourdieu’s magnum opus, the “Outline of a Theory of Practice”, he introduces three key concepts- *habitus*, *field* and the *symbolic capital*. In theorising these concepts, he not only challenged the debates on sociological and anthropological discourses, but transformed the terms of the debates (Bourdieu and Nice, 1997) by focusing on the sociology of human agency. His works were revolutionary and seminal because he rejected abstract categories of cultural behaviour and emphasised on “practice”. He was suggestive of a middle path between structuralism and phenomenology (Shusterman, 1999) because as social scientists, he believed, we should neither overly emphasise on structuralism due to its aspects of overestimating the powers of social structures, nor should we align with phenomenology because of its overt insistence on the liberty of humans as individual actors. Costa and Murphy (2015) term *habitus* as a “thinking tool” (Costa and Murphy 2015: 3) that helps us to understand and (re)construct the world we are inserted in. *Habitus* is also a research tool that helps us to access internalised human beliefs, behaviours, and social positions that are transformed into *practice*. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) contend that the notion of *habitus* helps us to understand the circumstances in which persons act in the way they do. The actor, according to Yang (2013), is influenced by the following- i) their position in the field, ii) the perception of the field, and iii) the aspiration of social change they bear in mind. Owing to this framework, Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is viewed as both theory and method.

Central to Bourdieu’s work is *symbolic violence* that stems from *symbolic power* and *symbolic domination* (Bourdieu 1977). Collective violence being seen as normal power-domination game has been prevalent since Weberian theories of State, authority and hegemony, but Bourdieu distinctly delineated that it is with the aid of the suppressed groups, is this subordination possible (Tilly, 1978). He put forth that, “to refuse what anyway is refused and to love the inevitable” (Bourdieu 1977: 77) is the virtue of the marginalised groups. Religion plays an imperative role in this symbolic violence, where perceptions and

factors of choosing sides are determined (McGuire, 2008). In saying so, McGuire implies that religion provides the overarching value judgements attached to acts of violence, and drawing from Bourdieu, she thinks that interestingly, when suspended in the *field* to *practice* violence, most actors are not aware of their roles as dominators or dominated. Bourdieu's reflections on religious violence are unique in a way that he views all phenomena and acts as "pre-structured" (the degree may vary), and all one can do as a social being is to embrace, modify, and negotiate it. In his writings, he often contested the understanding of "religious norms"- he argued that norms are continually changing according to the discernments of the authority in power. Further, he argued that, these norms are often not to direct behaviours, but to understand them (Bourdieu, 1977). Playing on his works on *field*, *habitus*, and *symbolic violence*, this study aims to explore how Buddhist nuns place themselves to usurp or normalise forms of dominating social dispositions in times of conflict, because "the sacred always dictates boundaries of power" (Bourdieu 1982: 13).

Rey (2014) notes that Bourdieu has a very challenging approach to the aspects of society we assume as given. Like honour, religion is used as a construct to dupe people into accepting the "injustices in their society" (Rey 2014: 2). Ernaux (2005) acknowledges that Bourdieu's sociology can "produce a real uprooting of the self" (Ernaux 2005: 163) because it leads to the collapse of the very core of social value systems we effectively normalise and orient ourselves to. Working on philosophical hermeneutics and religion, Ricoeur (2004), extends Bourdieu's plane of work by concurring that institutional religious discourses are bereft of *suspicion*, and that may allow trajectories of symbolic and structural violence to operate. Zimbardo (2000) propounds that the normality of violence is mostly subjected to the indoctrination of people into a system that valorises and legitimises violence, and blind obedience to authority is the chief constitutions of escalated violence. If violence is assumed to be the final stage of the process, authority certainly secures the position of a primer. Drawing on Foucault's examination of authority and violence, he said that authority and impositions transcends social institutions. Authority can be used not just to exercise violence, but also to curb all forms of resistance. Therefore, the relation between violence and authority is as much banal as unplumbed. Weberian school of thought productively provided a shift in the paradigm of understanding religion by suggesting a focus on religious authority, instead of the mainstream preoccupation of studying religion as a social

institution. BV Street (1993) rightly noted that irrespective of a system being democratic or not, authority is never a level-headed interaction, it is always a claim for greater representation. For Bourdieu (1977), authority, inherently is of the (symbolic) dominating nature, and this concept shall help me determine the underlying play of authority and agency in the provocation and reassertion of violent extremism.

Conclusions

Violence is problematic and subjectivised. Every person “intuitively or experientially knows what it means” (Dumont 1992: 133). Yet it is difficult to define because “it concerns phenomena that are sufficiently heterogeneous, to make them sociologically inoperational (Jamie 1984: 17). This essay shall lend itself to the more textured understanding of the questions the thesis aims to address, and analyse from close quarters the impact of religious violence on the Buddhist nuns. The aforementioned theories are the four pillars that shall consolidate my findings and further the comprehension of violent manifestations of Buddhist extremism and its bearings on the female religious leaders. The polysemic and proteiform characteristics of violence makes engaging with it interesting and challenging at the same time. This study aims to establish that violence, like power, is exercised and contested; and is used as a discriminatory cultural tool that broadens the divide between people and communities. Religion’s alignment with violence is problematic, and this nexus seems to favour some, and threaten many. The accounts of Buddhist nuns and religious violence have been considerably discounted not just by the communities they are a part of, but also by scholars. Drawing on Riches’ (1986) momentous model of three key actors in the discourse of violence- victim, performer, and witness, we are yet to understand the position of the nuns, and what conditions them into securing those positions. The politics of women in religious robes have protracted to the realm of interreligious dialogue, and their absence or underrepresentation from the dialogue tables calls for detailed assessment because there is certainly more to this than meets the eye.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1986). Theory in anthropology: Center and periphery. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28(2), 356-374.
- Appleby, Scott eds. *Fundamentalisms and the state: Remaking politics, economies, and militance*. Vol. 3. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Asad, Talal. "Anthropological conceptions of religion: reflections on Geertz." *Man* (1983): 237-259.
- Asad, Talal. "Genealogies of religion." (1993).
- Asad, Talal. "Religion, nation-state, secularism." *Nation and religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* 17896 (1999).
- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. JHU Press, 2009.
- Bartholomeusz, T. J. (1994). *Women under the bo tree: Buddhist nuns in sri lanka* Cambridge University Press.
- Boulding, Elise. "Cultural Perspectives on Development: The Relevance of Sociology and Anthropology." *Alternatives* 14, no. 1 (1989): 107-122.
- Carter, Jeffrey, ed. *Understanding religious sacrifice: a reader*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003.
- Cornille, C. (2008). *The im-possibility of interreligious dialogue* Crossroad Publishing Company New York.
- Cornille, C. (2013). *The Wiley-blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue* John Wiley & Sons.
- Crenshaw, Martha. "The psychology of terrorism: An agenda for the 21st century." *Political psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000): 405-420.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and phenomena, and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*. Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- Edwards, Anne. "Male violence in feminist theory: An analysis of the changing conceptions of sex/gender violence and male dominance." In *Women, violence and social control*, pp. 13-29. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1987.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *But she said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation*. Beacon Press, 1992.

Fletcher, Jonathan. *Violence and civilization: An introduction to the work of Norbert Elias*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Flood, Gavin. *Beyond phenomenology: Rethinking the study of religion*. A&C Black, 1999.

Fry, Douglas P. "The human potential for peace." *An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence* (2006).

Girard, R. (2004). Violence and religion: Cause or effect? *The Hedgehog Review*, 6(1), 8-21.

Hedges, P. (2010). *Controversies in interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions* Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd.

Heelas, Paul. "Identifying peaceful societies." In *Societies at peace: Anthropological perspectives*, pp. 225-243. 1989.

Jerryson, M. K. (2016). *The Oxford handbook of contemporary buddhism* Oxford University Press.

Jerryson, M. K. (2016). *The oxford handbook of contemporary buddhism* Oxford University Press.

Jerryson, M., & Juergensmeyer, M. (2010). *Buddhist warfare* OUP USA.

Juergensmeyer, M. (1996). The worldwide rise of religious nationalism. *Journal of International Affairs*, , 1-20.

Juergensmeyer, M. (1997). Terror mandated by god. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9(2), 16-23.

Juergensmeyer, M. (2003). *Global religions: An introduction* Oxford University Press.

Juergensmeyer, M. (2004). Is religion the problem?

Juergensmeyer, M. (2005). *Religion in global civil society* Oxford University Press.

Juergensmeyer, M. (2017). *Terror in the mind of god: The global rise of religious violence* Univ of California Press.

Juergensmeyer, M., Kitts, M., & Jerryson, M. (2013). *The Oxford handbook of religion and violence* Oxford University Press.

Kawanami, H. (2013). *Renunciation and empowerment of buddhist nuns in myanmar-burma: Building a community of female faithful* Brill.

Kawanami, H. (2013). *Renunciation and empowerment of buddhist nuns in myanmar-burma: Building a community of female faithful* Brill.

Kurtz, Lester R., and Jennifer E. Turpin, eds. *Encyclopedia of violence, peace, and conflict*. Vol. 1. Academic Press, 1999.

Malešević, Siniša. *The rise of organised brutality: A historical sociology of violence*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Malešević, Siniša. *The sociology of war and violence*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

McGuire, Meredith B. *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Genealogy of Morality, trans." *Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998)* 1 (1998).

Nordstrom, C., & Robben, A. C. (1995). *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and culture* Univ of California Press.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." *Comparative studies in society and history* 26, no. 1 (1984): 126-166.

Riches, D. (1986). *The anthropology of violence* Blackwell.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, history, forgetting*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Robben, A. C., & Sluka, J. A. (2012). *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader* John Wiley & Sons.

Scheper-Hughes, N., & Bourgois, P. (2004). Introduction: Making sense of violence. *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, 4

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy, and Philippe I. Bourgois, eds. *Violence in war and peace*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.

Schmidt, B., Schröder, I., & Schroder, I. (2001). *Anthropology of violence and conflict* Psychology Press.

Selengut, C. (2017). *Sacred fury: Understanding religious violence* Rowman & Littlefield.

Spencer, J. (1989). Anthropology as a kind of writing. *Man*, , 145-164.

Spencer, J. (2002). *Sri lanka: History and the roots of conflict* Routledge.

Strathern, Andrew, and Pamela J. Stewart. "Curing and healing: Medical anthropology in global perspective." (1999).

Tambiah, S. J. (1992). *Buddhism betrayed?: Religion, politics, and violence in sri lanka* University of Chicago Press.

Tikhonov, V., & Brekke, T. (2012). *Buddhism and violence: Militarism and buddhism in modern asia* Routledge.

Tilly, Charles. "Collective violence in European perspective." (1978).

Tracy, D. (1990). *Dialogue with the other: The inter-religious dialogue* Peeters Publishers.

Walby, Sylvia. "Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology." *Current Sociology* 61, no. 2 (2013): 95-111.

Wolf, Eric. "They divide and subdivide, and call it anthropology." *New York Times* 30 (1980): E9.

Zimbardo. Philip. *Violence workers: Police torturers and murderers reconstruct Brazilian atrocities*. Univ of California Press, 2002.