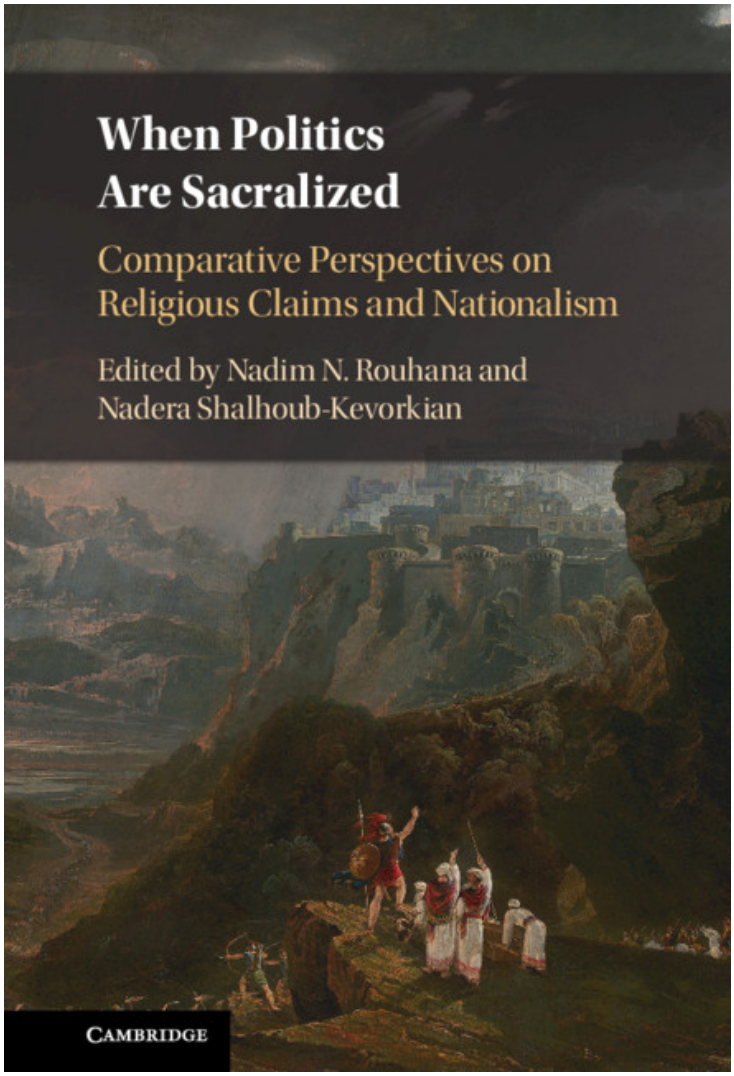
Article

When Politics Are Sacralized

November 14, 2023

When Politics Are Sacralized explores the consequences of using religious claims to fuel nationalist political projects

What happens when the competing political goals of nationalists are elevated to the plane of holy principles? How are boundaries made or remade? How is peace secured after violence erupts? How are identities shaped by political actors claimed by citizens or reclaimed by stateless people? What shape do human rights take amid existing and aspiring states state structures? What are the responsibilities or the perils of intervention? What does reconciliation look like? Does it come at all?



Cover of When Politics Are Sacralized, (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

This is the tangle of global dilemmas that Nadim R. Rouhana and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian attempted to unwind in their edited volume *When Politics Are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalisms*. Published in 2021 by Cambridge University Press, this volume examines how state actors frame their domestic and international objectives as religious necessities and the consequences for competing states and stateless peoples. The book's case studies include Israel, Palestine, India, Serbia, Saudi Arabia, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and Iran.

> ***"The title suggests a comparative angle, but the majority of the chapters in this volume is focused on Palestine-Israel with an understanding of the instructive dimensions of the case and its global and international resonances for the study of religion and public life—and political modernity more broadly."***
>
> ***—Atalia Oomer, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies***

As Atalia Oomer observes in her analysis of the volume, the editors position the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a central analytical lens through which other conflicts can be understood by the reader. In coeditor Nadim Rouhana's words, settler-colonial projects throughout the globe require more radical justifications by the state as the basic claims of the project are challenged by displaced people. "The more resistance there is," Rouhana explains, "the more they need to go to their religious legitimation." But, Rouhana warns, while states "borrow terms from religion," their projects clearly "are *not* religion."

Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism

To hear more discussion of the book's themes from Rouhana, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and other experts in peace and conflict studies, watch the following webinar hosted by Harvard Divinity School.