REFERENCES

Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking in Islam: Toward Reconciliation and Complementarity between Western and Muslim Approaches

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Abstract

The current debate at the popular as well as academic levels about religions' role in the present conflicts requires further research. The question whether or not religion is the main factor behind the current conflicts is being dealt with by a number of academics and researchers. This paper goes a step further into the study of religions' role in conflict resolution. The potential role of religions in conflict resolution and peacemaking has become a necessary phenomenon since religious ideologies have been hijacked by their very adherents in order to legitimize actions driven either by political ends and power interests or due to a general sense of frustration and desperation produced by injustice towards and marginalization of certain groups who happen to be adherents of a certain religious tradition. The arguments for the importance of the role of religion in conflict resolution point to the enormous mobilizing power of religions, code of ethics, high human principles, cultural norms and values highlighted by religious traditions and their specific teachings and concepts about conflict and reconciliation; war and peace, etc. This paper focuses on conflict resolution and peacemaking in Islam, a religion which, in current circumstances as well as historically, has mostly been associated with conflict and war. This study of conflict resolution which does not entirely respond to specific situations in a non-Western Muslim cultural context. The paper briefly mentions the indigenous Arab/Islamic tradition of conflict resolution while discussing Islamic conflict resolution models which draw on the original Islamic sources and teachings as well as creating a common ground where the Western principles of conflict resolution can be accommodated. A study of Islamic concepts of peace and conflict/war could contribute to the discussion related to conflict resolution and peacemaking in Islam.

Introduction

The importance of studying religions' role in the lives of human beings has never been as crucial as in the present-day world affairs. The reason for

conducting research on religions' role in the world is related to the ever more prominent changes in relations among human beings, communities, nations, and between human beings and nature at large. Some consider these changes as characterized more by conflicts and clashes[1] rather than peaceful coexistence. Religion in this regard is considered by many to have caused division and discord among human beings[2] while for others it contains the messages of unity and harmony found in its moral and spiritual values. To this effect, scholars have perceived religion to be Janus-faced.[3]

The current research on religions' role in conflicts as well as in conflict resolution has its foundation in previous academic works on religion and violence. The above two approaches seem to be combined in recent literature. The links between religion (or sacred) and violence have also attracted attention previously[4] and are also being investigated at present. The recent line of argument about religion's influence on the interpersonal, intercommunal and international conflicts follows the course of research on its contribution to both conflict and peacemaking, and the need for strengthening the latter.[5] Whereas the models of conflict resolution and theories of reconciliation have existed both in academic and cultural spheres in a variety of cultural and social settings, no effort so far been made for developing new theories to combine different existing approaches.

Thus, the Western and non-Western models of conflict resolution and reconciliation have been functioning largely in their respective contexts and since the focus has long been on the Western academic and theoretical approaches to conflict resolution, these models have often been imposed on other cultural contexts, resulting into an imbalance. In this paper, I briefly review the Western theoretical models of conflict resolution the Islamic cultural and historical approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation in order to find ways to develop new models of conflict resolution and

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[1] Examples found in Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion and Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Marc Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," *Peace & Change*, 22: 1 (1997), 1–31; Scott R. Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Scott Thomas, "Religion and International Conflict," K. R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2000).
[2] Jerald D. Gort and Hendrik M. Vroom, "Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation," in Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen and Hendrik M. Vroom (eds.), *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation: Multifaith Ideals and Realities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 3.
[3] Ibid., 3.
[4] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977).
[5] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peace building," *Journal of Peace Research*, 38: 6 (2001), 685–704.

reconciliation which different cultural contexts into account and combine characteristics of the existing models.

Religion and Conflict Resolution

Religions' role in the lives of adherents cannot be denied. People's identities are multi-dimensional. Among these dimensions religion has a significant standing. The ways, however, in which religion influences the lives of people, are determined by social, economic, historical and, to some extent, geographical factors.[6] Religion, as many believe, has caused much conflict between people belonging to one tradition or the other. David Little and Scott Appleby note in their introduction to the edited work (2004) that religion has both caused intolerance and hatred as well as has generated hope and 'tolerance of the strongest type', and the wish to understand and accept the difference.[7] Religion is not the sole motivator of the ebbs and flows in human interactions. There are more earthly, day-to-day challenges in social, political and economic spheres faced by people, which create either conflictual or peaceful conditions for them. Thus, while in order to develop more sustainable models of conflict resolution, one would need to take into account social, historical, cultural and religious factors as otherwise the focus on religion alone would, as Marc Gopin notes, involve dangers in terms of either overemphasis on religion's positive role or overlooking other important factors.[8]

There are various levels of religion's contribution to human lives. Among those, individual as well as social factors are prominent. Religion contributes to the identity formation of the individual and the society at large. Such identities contributed by the religious traditions fulfil an "individual's need for a sense of locatedness — socially, geographically, cosmologically, temporally, and metapysically."[9] Likewise, religion's powerful mobilizing capacity cannot be ignored. Historically, religion has played a leading role in mobilizing people for either conflict or peace.[10] As opposed to previous works focused on religion and conflict, the current research on conflict resolution emphasises

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[6] Jeffrey R. Seul, "'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, 36: 5 (1999), 553–569.

[7] David Little and Scott Appleby, "A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict," Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 2.

[8] Marc Gopin, "Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution," 19.

[9] Jeffrey R. Seul, "'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict."

[10] Mehmet S. Aydin, "The Religious Contribution to Developing Shared Values and Peace," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 39: 1/2, (2002), 32–38.

the great potential of religion for driving people to non-violence and peace.[11] In this respect, there is a need for creating organizational frameworks that do not discriminate between religions by 'labelling one culture as normal and another as exceptional.'[12] Such an ideal can be easily hampered by the assumption that valid models of knowledge for peace already exist.[13] The models for religion-based conflict resolution refer to high norms and values that are constituted by religions and their social, cultural and spiritual references which are continuously practised by societies. In order to achieve positive results out of religious beliefs, scholars argue, the peacebuilding capacity of religious traditions must be explored.[14] Religions' role of peacebuilding is based on conflict transformation, "the replacement of violent with non-violent means of settling disputes" and structural reform.[15] Besides, religion can be used as an important instrument in achievement of reconciliation[16] since it contains a potential for uniting people providing them relief and solutions to their problems, and offering them healing and consolation.[17] Among the steps with regard to promoting the positive role of religion, an improved understanding of conflict must be initiated according to which conflicts are not merely known as a rupture of peace rather must be viewed as a stimulus for enhancement of human development. Similarly, a more realistic understanding about reconciliation must be developed that does not consider it an absolute opposite of conflict.[18]

Whereas religions' role in creating conflicts among people has been frequently referred to, their importance in creation of peace and harmony is even greater and must be further explored. The high human and spiritual values contained in religious philosophies and traditions, historical legacies, and deep and rich symbolism in religious rituals offers natural grounds and possibilities to adherents for a greater understanding, acceptance and respect of diversity among human beings, communities and nations. It is this potential in religions that needs to be explored and focused on.[19] In addition to the general

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[11] Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion."
[12] Abdul Aziz Said, and Nathan C. Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution," paper presented at the *European Parliament for the European Centre for Common Ground*, September, 2001.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Little and Scott, "A Moment of Opportunity?," 5.
[15] Ibid., 6.
[16] Jerald and Vroom, "Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation," 8.
[17] Ibid., 9.
[18] André Droogers, "Religious Reconciliation: A View from the Social Sciences," in Jerald D. Gort, et al (eds.), *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation: Multifaith Ideals and Realities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 11.
[19] K. R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2000).

messages, religious injunctions, values and their local and cultural interpretations add to the diversity of tendencies. While religious components can be interpreted in various positive ways, some adherents attach more restrictive, exclusive and sometimes, violent meanings to them.[20] Thus, since the ways in which religions are practised are so complex, it is clearly wrong to judge certain religious traditions or their adherents from the actions of just a few.

The religion-based conflict resolution must take both Western and non-Western models of conflict resolution into account. In this respect, a conflict resolution process taking place in a non-Western context must rely on the indigenous and local techniques which may or may not include the propositions from the Western models. A discussion on various models of conflict resolution within diverse religious contexts can potentially expose already existing indigenous techniques which over the time have acquired local names but perform the functions of dispute resolution at interpersonal and intergroup levels. Such techniques are found in the Arab-Islamic context as well that have been functioning for centuries, much before the Western perspectives on conflict resolution were developed. In this regard, as scholars suggest,[21] culture can play an analytical tool to understand conflict resolution.

Existing Models of Conflict Resolution

Most people think that conflict resolution itself is a Western concept.[22] This maybe because there are certain culturally specific characteristics of dispute resolution that do not form part of the existing models. Difference also exists in the general approach towards conflicts. The Western model of conflict resolution tends to view conflicts negatively and thus focuses all its attention on resolving them "totally," rather than giving preference to their reduction or control.[23] According to the Islamic sources, however, conflict is viewed as "...natural and potentially positive, and not merely as a source of instability and threat...."[24] The rituals of reconciliation and conflict control in an Arab-

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[20] Amr Abdalla, "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention: A Search Within Islam and Western Literature," *Journal of Law & Religion*, 15: 151–184, (2000–01); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Peace Building and Nonviolence in Islamic Religion and Culture: A Theoretical Framework," *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 8.

[21] Abu-Nimer, "Peace Building and Nonviolence in Islamic Religion and Culture."

[22] George E. Irani, "Islamic Mediation Techniques for Middle East Conflicts," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 3: 2 (1999).

[23] Ibid., 2.

[24] Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan C. Funk and Ayse S. Kadayifci. "Islamic Approaches to Peace and Conflict Resolution," Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan C. Funk and Ayse S. Kadayifci (eds.), *Peace and*

Islamic environment can thus make rich contributions to the existing models of conflict resolution. Clearly, attempts in applying the existing models of conflict resolution to non-Western or Islamic settings can pose certain problems. For example, the knowledge of conflict resolution for those who get involved in this process is often based on Western literature, which does not include information about the local contexts.[25] Some peace studies point to the basis of differences between Western and Islamic models of conflict resolution in their respective approaches to peace. While the former emphasizes the importance of 'political pluralism and individual rights' as the substance of peace, the latter focuses on 'cultural pluralism, communal solidarity, social justice and faith'.[26]

Paul Salem in his article (1997) explores non-Western perceptions of the Western conflict resolution models and illustrates the diverse cultural and social formations that exist in the Western and non-Western cultures and identifies problems with the conflict resolution techniques in both contexts. Based on the existing approaches to conflict resolution and their place in the world scenario, Salem suggests that before the Western models of conflict resolution are transplanted in Arab contexts, they need to be adapted to the Arab cultural context.[27]

There may be pitfalls in both Western and Islamic conflict resolution models. Scholars suggest that in order to avoid these pitfalls a new model should be generated which includes principles and success-stories of both. Upon assessing, one realises that although 'justice, morality and accountability together with Islamic law' are the guiding principles of the dispute resolution practices in the Arab-Islamic context,[28] the ways in which these objectives are achieved are not always coherent with the spirit of conflict resolution. The Western concept of conflict resolution focuses on 'suffering generated by conflict rather than on the justice or morality of the cause' which may be questioned in other cultural and philosophical systems.[29] Thus, finding a way through which tendencies like cultural insensitivity and an irresponsible approach to abidance by the rules can be avoided, would help initiate a more balanced conflict resolution model.

Conflict Resolution in Islam (Lanhan: University Press of America, 2001), 9.

[25] Abdul Aziz Abdalla. "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention."

[26] Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution."

[27] Paul E. Salem, "A Critique of Western Conflict Resolution From a Non-Western Perspective," Paul Salem (ed.) *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: Selected Essays* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1997).

[28] Abdalla, "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention."

[29] Salem, "A Critique of Western Conflict Resolution From a Non-Western Perspective."

Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking in Islam

Research on conflict resolution and peacemaking in Islam can be seen as a part of broader research projects on religion and conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, it may not be wrong to assume that the current research on the religious models of conflict resolution has Islam and its potential contribution to peacebuilding and reconciliation at its heart. Scholars who in the late 20th century devoted their research to exploring general philosophy, history and important features of Islam have also changed the course of their research to exploring the peaceful features of the religion. Bruce Lawrence and Carl Ernst are prominent scholars of that ranking. Another tendency among scholars of Islam is their focus on different cultural contexts where Islam has grown as a social religion. Bruce Lawrence in that respect has contributed to a great extent by trying to prove that it is wrong to view Islam as one monolithic phenomenon[30] although he had initiated work on exploring peaceful elements of Islam earlier.[31]

Muslim and Western scholars also seem to be engaged in research work about the existing models of conflict resolution and reconciliation in Islamic or Arab contexts. Those who focus on the theory of political arbitration and conflict resolution in Islam, often explore historical Islamic contexts as well as methods of pre-Islamic arbitration which play an important part in determining the Arab-Islamic cultural parameters for conflict resolution.[32] Such works often depend on the Islamic historical contexts and sources such as the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. Scholars of Islam have especially relied on interpreting the verses of the Qur'ān that dealt with practical measures with regard to arbitration. A repeated reference in the Qur'ān which is quoted by scholars of Islamic models of conflict resolution is related to the arbitration by prophets and messengers who have been trying to fulfil the Divine command of guiding the humankind and making peace between them where they differed,[33] appointing an arbiter from among the people who are in conflict,[34] etc. References, in this regard, are also often made to the Prophet Muḥammad's Ḥadīth and his practices as well as the practices and deliberations

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[30] Bruce B. Lawrence. *Shattering the Myth: Introduction to Islam Beyond Violence* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–29. Also see Ralph H. Salmi, Cesar Adib Majul, and George K. Tanham, *Introduction to Islam and Conflict Resolution: Theories and Practices* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 4.

[31] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Rethinking Islam as an Ideology of Violence," Paul Salem (ed.), *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: Selected Essays.*

[32] Ahmad S. Moussalli, "An Islamic Model for Political Conflict Resolution: Tahkim (Arbitration)," Paul Salem (ed.) *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: Selected Essays.*

[33] Qur'ān, 2: 213. Quoted in Moussalli, Ibid., 52.

[34] Qur'ān, 4: 35.

of the four Righteous Caliphs. The Qur'ānic references to conflict resolution
or arbitration are often accompanied by emphasis on justice and equity in the
process. In this regard, those who wrong their fellows are ideally brought into
concordance so peace could be made between the wrongdoer and the
wronged.[35]

Scholars and researchers argue that the Islamic approaches on conflict
resolution are 'multifaceted' and go deep into the root causes of conflicts based
in history of relations and their contexts which can become effective not only
in resolving or mitigating conflicts but also preventing them.[36] Mohammed
Abu-Nimer in this regard argues that the Islamic culture provides guidelines
for organising relationships between human beings at individual as well as
social levels.[37] Besides, peacebuilding, according to the scholar, creates bridge
between peace and conflict resolution.[38] Whereas scholars such as Mohammed
Abu-Nimer suggest that techniques of conflict resolution in the Islamic
context must be explored, they also highlight the need for addressing the issues
that contribute to creating distrust between Muslims and the Western world.
Scholars also point out feelings of distrust and explore ways to balance the
Western and the Islamic models of conflict resolution and peacemaking. The
scholar also points out the importance of peacemaking and negotiation in the
Islamic sources[39] and makes a reference to the studies of non-violence in Islam
that suggest that even though the use of force is permitted in Islam, Muslims
can find guidance in the Islamic sources for a non-violent approach towards
conflict which is based on the core of Islamic values, beliefs and cultural
practices.[40]

Some scholars point to loopholes in the models of conflict resolution and
peacemaking in the Islamic contexts and their limited approach. In this regard,
Frederick Denny points out that although peacebuilding is considered to be an
important duty in Islam, its scope is rather limited to intra-faith matters rather
than relations with non-Muslims.[41] Besides, in order to rely on the Islamic
models of peacebuilding one would need to address the feelings of distrust

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[35] Qur'ān, 49: 9.

[36] Judy Carter and Gordon S. Smith, "Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action," in
Coward and Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding*, 285.

[37] Ibid., 9.

[38] Ibid., 16.

[39] In order to support his point of view, he quotes the Qur'ānic verse: 'But if the enemy incline
towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is the One that
heareth and knoweth (all things)' (ibid., 45).

[40] Ibid., 47.

[41] Frederick M. Denny, "Islam and Peacebuilding: Continuities and Transitions," in Coward and
Smith (eds), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004),
136.

present both within the Muslim societies against the West as well as the portrayals of Muslims as 'intolerant, utterly warlike, anti-feminist, barbaric'[42] by the Western public, academics and scholars.

The spiritual dimension of Islam — Sufism — also called Islamic mysticism — offers compassionate solutions to human problems since relations among human beings are directed by spiritual understanding of God's creation. Sufism teaches self-purification, upholds principles of non-violence and spiritual development and gives spiritual interpretation to jihād. The Sufi interpretation of jihad is related to the inner fighting against evil thoughts and desires. Prophet Muḥammad called the inner fighting 'Greater Jihad' while fighting with arms against the enemy of Islam as 'Lesser Jihad'. This definition of jihad is linked with the struggle for justice and inner purity. Furthermore, Sufi principles of human development related to self-realization and self-discipline; unity of all religions and freedom; and cultural and social progressiveness[43] contribute to peaceful conditions for the coexistence of diverse communities. Sufism's contribution to conflict resolution and peacemaking is important due to the fact that it is the spiritual as opposed to institutionalized Islam.

Furthermore, the Sufi philosophy based on the concept of unity, the unity of God and the unity of being — a concept also called *Waḥdatul Wujūd* proposed by the 12th Century Spanish mystic Ibn 'Arabī — combines features of sustaining the diversity, as it highlights the principle of the Whole being reflected in the parts.[44] Besides the inclusiveness and universalism also highlighted in the Qur'ān[45] is especially linked to the Sufi philosophy. Besides, the Sufi concept of peace is highlighted as "not only outward human effort, but also a spiritual attitude of receptivity and continual inward cleansing."[46] Scholars who link Sufism with the philosophy of peace in Islam highlight its concepts of existential harmony between the parts and the Whole as well as between the parts themselves through inner reformation and spiritual development.[47] The Sufi principles of spiritual unity between the Creator and

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[42] Ralph H. Salmi, et al, *Introduction to Islam and Conflict Resolution: Theories and Practices*, Introduction, 2.

[43] William C. Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

[44] Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "Peace in the Sufi Tradition: An Ecology of the Spirit," 247.

[45] The concepts of universalism and inclusiveness are found in several Qur'ānic verses such as (49: 13) as follows: 'Oh mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you peoples (or 'nations') and tribes that you may know one another' also quoted in Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "Peace in the Sufi Tradition," 248.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 252.

the creation are also found in mystic philosophies within other religious traditions that are often considered the meeting point between religions since they are shared by people of diverse background.

Developing Complementary Conflict Resolution Models

Apart from the dispute resolution techniques already existing in the Arab-Islamic context, the need in present-day world affairs is to develop a model that responds to broad-based questions such as peaceful interaction between nations and cultures. A model which includes principles of the Western conflict resolution techniques and the knowledge of local traditions in the Muslim context would also strike a balance in the mutual interaction of different traditions. With regard to the Islamic model, knowledge must be derived from the deep-rooted Islamic principles and values in the legal and theological sources.[48] Among the core Islamic values are found 'social justice, rational theology and mysticism'[49] which can significantly contribute to the conflict resolution and peacemaking.

Closely linked with the conflict resolution and peacemaking models within the Islamic tradition are the concepts of conflict and peace in Islam. Peace, according to Islamic sources, is the natural state of affairs where the truth prospers and prevails while conflict is an aberration and disturbance of this. Peace and conflict are thus representations of acceptance and rejections; truth and lie.[50] Peace is the rule and war is the exception.[51] War according to Islam is permitted on specific grounds, mainly defensive but also against oppressors, despots and those who violate principles of religious freedom and injustice.[52] Wars that are posed on the grounds of 'race, exploitation or pomp and show' are condemned by Islam.[53] In order to understand the nature of conflict and thus the techniques of conflict resolution within the Islamic context, it is pertinent to analyse the concept of the 'other' in Islam. The 'other' in Islam can be defined in terms of 'forces of deception and disbelief'

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[48] Abdalla, "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention: A Search Within Islam and Western Literature."

[49] Abdulkader I. Tayob, "Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity in Studies," *Contemporary Islam* 1:2 (1999), 1–15.

[50] Richard C. Martin, "The Religious Foundations of War, Peace, and Statecraft in Islam," Kelsay and James Turner Johnson, *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, 28 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 91–115.

[51] Sayyid Qutb,. *Islam and Universal Peace*, Chapter on "The Islamic Concept of Peace," *ATP.* 1993, 5–15.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

originally described as pagans; unbelievers who defied the truth of the Qur'ānic revelation; those who set equals to God (*Mushrikīn*) and the people of the book i.e. Jews and Christians.[54]

While Islam has a particular definition of the 'other' it has also been subjected to 'otherness'. Islam, in the non-Muslim public circles is often viewed as a monolithic phenomenon where its diversified existence and practices in Muslim majority and minority contexts are often ignored. For example, the Western view of Islam is limited to its public image while its historical, theological and spiritual aspects are often far from explored.[55] Likewise, the different phases related to its 'revivalist, reformist and fundamentalist' tendencies as a response to specific historical challenges are misconstrued and misinterpreted. Moreover, some of these Islamic tendencies are taken out of context and debated, which often gives them undue misplaced importance. Nevertheless, this is and only one part of the problem. The other part is manifest in the damages caused by manipulation and misrepresentation at the hands of the Muslims themselves who hold or aspire for power and authority. Their attention seems to have shifted from the deeply embedded Islamic values and this has divested Islam of its very basis. For example, "historical misuses, abuses and misinterpretations of Islamic sources have diluted the strong emphasis on justice, equality and freedom in Islam as a value system. These centuries-long practices have been so enmeshed with the original messages of Islam that unjust and abusive institutions and structures now appear to be part of the Islamic heritage."[56]

Considering that Islamic concept of peace is closely related with justice, one can also find injunctions in the Qur'ān and Sunnah about conditional war and violence as the existence of peace without justice is outruled. In terms of developing a conflict resolution model which includes a just notion of peace, one can only derive certain mechanisms from the Western model of conflict resolution. What seems more plausible in this regard is a rather different approach towards conflict. Conflict is not entirely a negative term.[57] It can be positively interpreted as a condition for change, a crisis that improves human relations and existing conditions. It poses challenges to the lethargy towards taking action against injustice and oppression. There have been debates on Islam's stance about violence — that it does not outrightly reject violence.

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[54] Richard C. Martin, *The Religious Foundation of War*.

[55] Rabia Terri Harris. "Nonviolence in Islam: The Alternative Community Tradition," Salmi et al, *Introduction to Islam and Conflict Resolution: Theories and Practices*.

[56] Abdalla, "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention: A Search Within Islam and Western Literature."

[57] Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Practice*, 17.

Those engaged in discussions and research on Islam and non-violence, are critical of the use of 'absolute religious pacifism', as opposed to well-prepared non-violent strategies, since it is somewhat detached from the 'mundane or political reality'.[58] Abu Nimer and other researchers studying peace are of the opinion that Islam cannot be described as an "'absolute non-violent' religion since it justifies acts of war and the use of force under certain strict conditions."[59] The conflict resolution and peacemaking techniques in an Islamic context are deeply embedded in and guided by the Islamic sources and their full implication depends largely on liberal interpretations of the same.

In order to assess Islam's principles related to conflict resolution and peacemaking, one must examine the cause of generalization about links between Islam and violence. If one looks closely, the causes of stereotypical perceptions about Islam among the Western public, media and to some extent academic spheres are often related to overlooking the historical incidents as well as current world order based on sharp divisions in terms of military, economic and technological power. Instead, that the reactionary nature of the violent actions of Muslims must be taken into consideration. While it goes without saying that violence, in all its forms, must be condemned, a greater need exists for eliminating its very causes. That of course needs an overhauling of the global system which is mainly run by those in power. While discussing the conflict resolution processes, one must consider the principles it is based on. Among these principles, justice and equality are most important since without them the needs of the parties in conflict would not be fulfilled.

Looking at the conflict resolution and reconciliation techniques within the Arab-Muslim contexts, one notices a due incorporation of the long-practised local traditions. These models of dispute resolution are closely linked to the community empowerment and leadership. The process of dispute resolution in Arab/Islamic contexts includes several phases such as *Wasta* (patronage mediation); *Ṣulḥ* (settlement); and *Muṣālaḥa* (reconciliation).[60] They also emphasise the original Islamic principles and practices with regard to religious and political contexts of life. Scholars argue that the 'original non-dogmatic' perspectives of Islam on political matters had a more inclusive character as opposed to a fundamentalist stand of an ideological state which is based on pure Islamic principles.[61] Scholars consider the Islamic concept of *taḥkīm* or political arbitration/conflict resolution as a flexible practice which can be developed into a strategy that can be adapted for resolving conflicts on

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[58] Ibid., 12.
[59] Ibid., 27.
[60] Irani, Islamic Mediation Techniques for Middle East Conflicts.
[61] Moussalli, 65–6.

national and international levels.[62] The Islamic models of conflict resolution are closely related to reconciliation since the ultimate goal of resolving problems, according to the Islamic sources, is to create a deep and sustainable understanding between the parties which reconciles them in their future relations.

While developing a complementary model of conflict resolution and peacemaking which has characteristics of existing models and indigenous traditions in the Arab-Islamic context, Islamic theological sources must be explored. Injunctions related to war must be seen in correct historical contexts and must be interpreted in the light of the changing times. Among the Islamic values the following can have important implications in conflict resolution and peacemaking the pursuit of justice, social empowerment by doing good the universality and dignity of humanity, equality, the sacredness of human life; knowledge and reason, creativity and innovation, forgiveness; individual responsibility and choice, patience (sabr), collaborative action and solidarity, inclusiveness and participation; pluralism and diversity, etc.[63]

Among the means of creating appropriate conditions for developing a complementary model for conflict resolution, approaches such as dialogue,[64] peacebuilding workshops,[65] and intercultural interaction at the communal and national levels can contribute to better communication and mutual understanding. In this regard, the role of religious leaders and institutions[66] and political leaders and civil society organizations is particularly important. On a more philosophical note, the Sufi principles of inclusivism and universalism highlighted in the Islamic sources must be explored and points of convergence between these principles and those present in other religious and spiritual traditions must be taken into account.

Conclusion

While discussions are held among the peace researchers in both Western and non-Western contexts about religion-based reformed models of conflict resolution, which include success stories from both sides, steps must be taken towards complementary rather than divisive approaches. A sensitive approach towards the existing cultural traditions and indigenous techniques, therefore,

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Practice.*

[64] Said and Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution."

[65] Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion."

[66] André Droogers, "Why Do Religious Groups Become Involved in Conflicts?" Gort and Vroom, *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation: Multifaith Ideals and Realities.*

must not be limited to one party, rather the approach should be mutually agreed.

Among the factors which can positively contribute to mutually respected models of conflict resolution are efforts to gain unbiased, accurate information about not only political and mechanical techniques but also cultural behaviours, responses and ways of dealing with issues. An open-minded approach to accessing knowledge about cultural aspects on both sides would imply a closer study of concepts which have long been interpreted in negative ways. For example, the Muslim understanding of the Western cultures as breeding grounds for modernity, secularism, individualism, and materialism[67] must be transformed into a more sensitive and realistic approach combined with the recognition of diversity in the Western cultures. Similarly, the Western view of the Islamic world should be based on adequately informed, unbiased sources of knowledge where Islam's historical and theological contexts are taken into account. Furthermore, a more contextual approach to terms previously associated with Islam in negative ways, such as fundamentalism and revivalism must be developed. In this regard, a non-stereotypical understanding and recognition of diversity not only in Muslim cultures but also in interpretations of Islam and its sources — Qur'ān and Sunnah — is likely to contribute to acceptance of differences between the two traditions as not necessarily a negative phenomenon rather a factor that points to the richness of group behaviours.[68]

As some researchers in the field have pointed out,[69] the difference between the Western and Muslim approaches to conflict and peace may also be described as the difference between reason and passion. A need therefore exists of combining the two rather than attaching singular importance to one of them. While gaining knowledge of Muslim perceptions of peace and conflict, attention must be paid to their grudges and unfulfilled needs generated by the turn of historical events against their past glory. This, in any case, is related to the leading principles of the existing models of conflict resolution. The notions of political and economic power and their representation in the current world order must be discussed and seen from the perspectives of those who are left on the margins. A keen emphasis on the use of power from the perspectives of those who possess it and those who don't would create a more sensitive, as opposed to an indifferent, approach to understanding the feelings of the marginalised, poor and weak.

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[67] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Living Islam: From Samarkand to Sornoway, Excerpts* (London: BBC Books Limited, 1993).
[68] Abdulkader I. Tayob, "Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity in Studies."
[69] Said and Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution.

Finally, attempts at combining the Western and Islamic approaches to conflict resolution must include a genuine search for shared spiritual values which exist in all religious traditions and are followed by all cultures. Religious approaches to life may differ in their institutional and juristic systems but commonness can be found at the spiritual level which remains the core of all religious traditions.

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