Islamic Ethics and Peacebuilding:

Reenvisioning Peace in a Globalized World

Qamar-ul Huda, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow

Center for Faith Identity & Globalization

June 2024

rumiforum.org/cfig

© 2024 The Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization (CFIG). Please direct inquiries to:

The Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization
1050 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036
T (202) 429-1690
E cfig@rumiforum.org

This publication can be downloaded for free at **https://www.rumiforum.org/cfig.** Limited print copies are also available. To request a copy, send an e-mail to cfig@rumiforum.org.

Disclaimer
The views and opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect or represent the official opinions or positions of the Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization (CFIG), its members, or its inspiration. Any content provided in this research was not sponsored by any religious or ethnic group, organization, nation-state government, company, or individual. The prescriptions made in this publication and the facts presented therein are not meant to detract from the political neutrality of the CFIG and are incorporated only insofar as the integrity of that political neutrality is not compromised. The reader is encouraged to arrive at his or her own conclusions and interact firsthand with sources and information presented in this research. The reader is also encouraged to understand that the views presented hereafter are those of the author and fellow collaborators and that the condition of facts presented is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. Thank you for your assistance in acknowledging and helping to preserve the political neutrality of the CFIG while allowing it to support the research of its fellows, associates, and contributors.

Islamic Ethics and Peacebuilding:

Reenvisioning Peace in a Globalized World

Qamar-ul Huda, Ph.D.

With greater interconnectivity in a globalized age where cultures, ideas, technology, information, and commerce are shared unprecedentedly, critiques point out the dangers of diluting traditions and practices. Unique ways of a particular society, culture, and religion are lost to whatever product or idea is fashionable or marketed for its distinct purposes.

One such casualty is the field of ethics, which has evolved into many sub-fields. Like other fields, the specialization of an area limits engagement and interaction with others. For example, it is common for specialists in business ethics to consider areas of technology ethics, particularly the role of artificial intelligence (AI).

However, we see that medical ethics will not cross paths with the ethics of global affairs, labor, or philosophical ethics. Students interested in the study of ethics usually begin with the introduction to the History of Ethics course, which consists of Western moral approaches, starting with Plato, Aristotle, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill to modern ethicists. For those interested in examining religious traditions, “religious ethics” courses examine major ethical and scriptural themes from the Abrahamic and dharmic traditions. These courses, generally speaking, attempt to answer questions like “Why be moral?” “What is good versus evil?” “How do we determine what is moral?” or “What is a meaningful life?” Ethics teachers are interested in instilling students to critically engage with the Ancient Greek and modern philosophers on ethical topics with a careful reading of selected texts; however, ethical courses do not pretend to be a substitute for moral education or moral formation of the person.

Instead, instructors state clearly in course syllabi that the reading materials are meant for reflection and criticism; that is, the course is interested in finding problems in the sources and examining their worthiness.[1]

This essay explores current ethical questions facing the broad field of religious peacebuilding, explicitly focusing on Islamic peacebuilding. It reflects upon sample questions such as “How are religious principles of dialogue transforming the individual and community of participants?” and “How are reinforcing Islamic principles of peace advancing inner and outer peace?” During a time of globalization or, as some argued, a ‘de-globalization,’ there is a global ethic of promoting harmonious societies by emphasizing shared values that foster harmony, inclusivity, tolerance, and the desire to know the “other.” The United Nations advocates this process and promotion of harmony to form social cohesion with greater inclusion, equality, and equity.[2] With the convergence of Western, Eastern, and Islamic approaches to peacebuilding, this essay studies a series of critical ethical questions facing Muslim peacebuilders and the broader Muslim-majority communities and ways to think about resolving these questions.[3]

Conflict resolution critiques of the Islamic peacebuilding field claim that it is insular and inward-facing. Muslim peacebuilders do not engage with the global struggles of postmodernity, environmental change, gender equality, poor governance, corruption, and issues relating to ‘fairness and justice.’

---

[1] See Fatih Şahin and İbrahim Yüksel, Meaning and Uniqueness of Ethics and Ethical Teacher Behaviors in the Teaching Profession*, i.e.: inquiry in education*, 13(2), 2021; Mahona Joseph Paschal, “Ethics in the Teaching Profession: A Practical Approach to Teachers’ Professionalism,” *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 10(3), 2023, 82-94; and, Kenneth A. Strike and Jonah F. Soltis, *The Ethics of Teaching* (Teachers College Press; 5th edition, 2009).

[2] See Timothy D. Sisk, *Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications* (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

[3] For a general review of peacebuilding ethics, see Karin Aggestam and Annika Björkdahl (eds.) *Rethinking Peacebuilding: The Quest for Just Peace in the Middle East and the Western Balkans* (Routledge, 2013); M.B. Anderson, “Can my good intentions make things worse? Lessons for Peacebuilding From the Field of International Humanitarian Aid” in John Paul Lederach and Janice Moomaw Jenner (eds.), *A Handbook of International Peacebuilding: Into the Eye of the Storm,* (Jossey-Bass, 2002), 225-233; David Chandler, “The Uncritical Critique of ‘Liberal Peace’” in Susanna Campbell, David Chandler and Meera Sabaratnam (eds.), *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding* (Zed Books, 2011), 174-190; and, Reina Neufeldt, “Ethics of Peacebuilding” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, November 20, 2017.

"*Conflict resolution* critiques of the Islamic peacebuilding field claim that it is *insular* and *inward-facing*. Muslim peacebuilders do not engage with the *global struggles* of postmodernity, environmental change, gender equality, poor governance, corruption, and issues relating to 'fairness and justice.' "

These claims, built on an anti-religious bias, assert that those who partake in religious peacebuilding are bound by doctrinal limitations and interpretations that prevent Muslim peacebuilders from being truly modern and progressive and taking part in genuine inclusion. In a world that emphasizes "disrupting discourse narratives"—a natural progression of political liberalism—it is equally important to analyze the varied but compelling issues of Islamic ethics of pluralism, ethics of responsibility to self and others, service ethics, the ethics of being an agent of positive change, ethics of active citizenship and applied ethics of contributing to the betterment of all communities. This essay examines complex issues tied to modern ethics and Islamic peacebuilding practices and theories that are critically important to conflict resolution.

Political Liberalism in Tariq Ramadan's *Liberation Ethics*

Renown scholar, public intellectual, and professor at Oxford University, Tariq Ramadan's *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* was an illuminative controversial scholarship but immensely thought-provoking because he raised issues of historical methods of legal interpretation, pointed out the limitations of relying upon theology at the expense of the social sciences and humanities, and particular attention to how ordinary Muslim citizens need to gain authority of religious interpretations. Within the Islamic global community, not to anyone's surprise, Ramadan was heavily criticized on each of these fronts for advocating a liberal reform agenda.[4]

[4] Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

However, trained in Western political philosophy, Ramadan was interested in situating his work with political liberalism[5], especially on the conception of justice and citizenship for free and equal persons, even with disagreements on all issues, including faith and the ultimate meaning of life. Like many modern intellectuals, Ramadan is an intellectual product of his environment that favors the historical values of political liberalism because it gives individuals the right to freedom from being coerced to live a certain way based on a particular conception of the good. This perspective fundamentally insists on the education of citizens so that they are aware of their freedoms and rights and of the need to recognize the equal rights of other citizens to these freedoms. However, they do not presume to educate citizens in a single worldview or epistemology. They assert that an educated population advances the diversity of thought in democracies, increasing citizens' participation.[6] According to Ramadan, a liberal society has the right to expect its citizens to endorse its most fundamental principles of justice and citizenship, and these ideals are aligned—not in contradiction—with Islamic values.[7]

Ramadan's work reminds us that there are still outstanding ethical issues relating to identity politics, the importance of belonging, the role of religious law, its compatibility with secularism, and operating in a growing non-religious world. At the same time, faith traditions are still paramount to living, assimilation, integration, pluralism, and how identity, actions, and public participation may all be relevant for the future of Europe.[8]

---

[5] On various political liberalism approaches, see Mary Doyle and Geoffrey S. Carlson, "Silence of the Laws? Conceptions of International Relations and International Law in Hobbes, Kant, and Locke" in *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* (2008) 46, 648–666; David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations: From Thucydides to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 1998) and Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Patriotism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[6] Also referred to as a social contract, see J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); and John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

[7] These ideas are presented in Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (The Islamic Foundation, 1999).

[8] A helpful lecture is "Dr. Tariq Ramadan: The Importance of Critical Thinking for Muslim Societies Both in the West and East," a YouTube video from a lecture at Sakarya University, Turkey, April 10, 2015, posted by *CILE Center: Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics*, May 24, 2015.

"According to Ramadan, a *liberal society* has the right to expect its citizens to endorse its most fundamental principles of *justice* and *citizenship*, and these ideals are aligned—not in contradiction—with *Islamic values*."

But, I think the limitation in his approach and framework is that Ramadan is locked in a corner on the particular ways and predicaments of European Muslims—despite their rich diversity and histories—can contribute to the future of Europe while staying true to their Islamic identity.

Challenges of Globalism and Ethical Inquiry

Within the globalized milieu, this new world has transformed human society in terms of consciousness, global power, interconnected communities, rapid communications, and engagement—all testing the past ideas of state sovereignty and autonomy. Ulrich Beck[9] argues that multiculturalism means living side by side with different people within one state; peaceful coexistence and non-interference in internal affairs as principles of international law have implied separate, autonomous, sovereign states; tolerance has meant grudging acceptance, allowance for difference as an unavoidable burden. Cosmopolitan tolerance is more than that: it is not defensive, not passive, but active, open toward others, embracing them, enjoying the difference as enriching, and seeing the other as fundamentally the same as us.

> **"Ulrich Beck argues that...*tolerance* has meant *grudging acceptance*, allowance for difference as an *unavoidable burden*.**

[9] For more on the changing nature of modernity, see Ulrich Beck's trilogy, *Power in the Global Age* (Polity Press, 2005), *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Polity Press, 2006), and *Cosmopolitan Europe* (Polity Press, 2007).

In this globalized world, it is significant not only how Islam is presented, used by the media and scholars, manufactured and analyzed by scholars and pundits alike, but also how it is studied and analyzed in interdisciplinary fields that present significant complexities and problems. It is expected to hear far-right politicians (journalists and academics) use ‘radical Islam’ or ‘jihadist Islam’—and other derogatory terms—carelessly with an uncritical eye, which led to an increasing fear of Muslims, the rise of Islamophobia, and the general othering of Muslims.[10]

They were loosely mixing terminologies with radical Islam, which was equated with terrorism, as were denominations of Islam like *Salafis* or *Deobandis*, which were to be blamed for nurturing narrow interpretations of religion. Scholars of religion, world affairs, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution practitioners knew that this reductionism of groups combined with an irresponsible indictment of an entire religion was problematic, much less intellectually irresponsible. The uncritical use of terminology has concrete social and political consequences. Scholars Jennifer Hoewe and Brian J. Bowe’s analysis states: “As the term ‘radical Islam’ becomes equivalently used and understood with terrorism, it may be a short step to making the term ‘Islam’ generally equivalent with its radical counterpart.”[11]

“As the term ‘radical Islam’ becomes equivalently used and understood with *terrorism*, it may be a short step to making the term ‘Islam’ generally equivalent with its radical counterpart.”

It strengthens the sense of understanding Islam as a monolithic threat to “us”; they stated this is not a neutral terminology. Hoewe and Bowe argue, “The uncritical adoption of this term in news content may make it difficult for counter-frames to emerge, which advances the othering of Muslims in public discourse.”[12]

---

[10] Jennifer Hoewe and Brian Bowe, “The Impact of Online Network Diversity on Familiarity and Engagement with Social Issues News on Facebook,” *The Journal of Social Media in Society* 12, no. 1 (2018): 309-347.

[11] Hoewe and Bowe, “The Impact of Online Network Diversity on Familiarity and Engagement with Social Issues News on Facebook,” 311.

[12] Ibid., 317.

Thus, when approaching the field or analyzing Islamic peacebuilding and the variety of complex ethical issues associated with the field, we must be attentive to navigating these vexing issues of the presentation of Islam.[13]

Key Areas of Islamic Peacebuilding

The Islamic peacebuilding and conflict resolution field consists of a vast literature with diverse thought and practices on the ground, from theology to law, from applied ethics to legal studies, and from feminist perspectives to post-colonial approaches. Some think Islamic peacebuilding and conflict resolution begin with the historical scholarly writings and *ulama* (religious scholars) arguments on the subject of just war theories and peacemaking engagements, elaborating the parameters of war and specific rules of engagement during and after the war.

However, beyond legal (*fiqh*) studies and juridical interpretations of just war theory, the tradition of Islam has intrinsic values, beliefs, doctrines, and practices of sustaining individuals to seek nonviolent and peacebuilding solutions. For example, there are abundant examples for resolving and preventing interpersonal conflicts, such as following nonviolent interventions and dialogue and seeking a mediator or a respected community member to resolve the dispute.[14]

The field of Islamic peacebuilding continues to advance the critical applied idealism of nonviolence to unambiguously affirm that killing any innocent being is not acceptable or legitimate. Acknowledging the enormous body of scholarly literature on the rules and limitations of killings within Islamic law, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, an influential Thai scholar and practitioner of nonviolent Islamic peacebuilding, asserts that violence is completely unacceptable in Islam and that Muslims must use nonviolent action to fight for justice and reconciliation.

---

[13] See Leif Stenberg and Philip Wood (eds.) *What is Islamic Studies? European and North American Approaches to a Contested Field* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023) and Abbas Aghdassi and Aaron W. Hughes (eds.) *New Methods in the Study of Islam* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[14] See Abdul Karim Bangura, *Islamic Peace Paradigms* (Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2005).

"...Chaiwat Satha-Anand...asserts that violence is completely unacceptable in Islam and that Muslims must use nonviolent action to fight for justice and reconciliation."

Satha-Anand states, "Islam itself is fertile soil for nonviolence because of its potential for disobedience, strong discipline, sharing and social responsibility, perseverance, self-sacrifice, and the belief in the unity of the Muslim community and the oneness of mankind."[15]

Satha-Anand disputes status quo perspectives on Islamic just war theories, particularly the use of defensive violence, by once again reviving the nonviolent aspects of the Islamic tradition. He is among many Muslim scholars and practitioners who are critical of historical and contemporary positions justifying violence and demand an alternative nonviolent framework.[16]

Within the Islamic communities, conflict is understood as it is connected to their ability to change society. Muslim religious leaders view conflict as an inevitable component of life, beginning with using the creation story as an example of conflict between the divine and the angels. Using the Islamic version of creation, religious leaders cite that God created Adam out of clay (earthly material) and asked the angels to bow down to the new creation. One angel, *Iblis*, refused to bow down, believing that man was a lesser form of creation.[17]

Religious leaders refer to this creation narrative to argue that conflict has always existed, particularly in the presence of the Divine with a fallen angel. Still, the Divine mandate and the primary aim are to create harmonious societies with minimum conflict.

---

[15] Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "The Non-Violent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Actions," in Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Sarah Gilliatt (eds.), *Islam and Nonviolence* (Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace, 1993), 55.

[16] For a bibliography of scholars and practitioners advocating nonviolence, see Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Non-Violence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Praxis*, (University of Florida Press, 2003) and Qamar-ul Huda, *Reenvisioning Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2024).

[17] For more on the story of *Iblis* (17:61) in Qur'an, see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, The Qur'an: A New Translation, Oxford University Press, 2004.

"Religious leaders...argue that conflict has always existed... Still, the Divine mandate and the primary aim are to create harmonious societies with minimum conflict."

In Islamic peacebuilding, the foundational question posed by Muslim peacebuilders is: Does this work bring justice to the victims?[18] Will the conflict situation be morally and ethically resolved by the principles of law? According to Muslim peacebuilders utilizing Islamic peacebuilding approaches, justice is the primary issue in resolving conflict, as it is an essential principle in the tradition. Unless conflicting parties take part in resolving the problem and simultaneously receive justice from the appropriate authoritative institutions, conflict can be expected to continue eternally. In Islamic thought, the concept and practice of justice are synonymous with peace.[19]

Praxis of Islamic Peacebuilding

Having supervised peacebuilding programs in Tunisia, Pakistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and other countries, these peacebuilding programs were built upon a change theory that emphasized civil society members—youth, journalists, academics, religious and business leaders, scholars, imams, women groups, and others—can learn and enhance peacemaking skills that are intrinsic to their Islamic faith.[20]

---

[18] For more on Muslim peacebuilders and how religious scholars engage in these endeavors, see Qamar-ul Huda, "Enhancing Skills and Capacity Building in Islamic Peacemaking" in Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010).

[19] See Lawrence Rosen, "Islamic concepts of justice and injustice", *The Justice of Islam: Comparative Perspectives on Islamic Law and Society*, Oxford Socio-Legal Studies (Oxford University Press, 2010); Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (John Hopkins University Press, 1984); Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam: The Concept of Religion and The Foundation of Ethics and Morality* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992); and Khalid Bin Ismail, "Islam and the Concept of Justice," *Jurnal Intelek* 5, no. 2 (2010).

[20] For more on peace education, see David Hicks, "Understanding the Field" in David Hicks (Ed.) *Education for Peace: Issues, Principles, and Practice in the Classroom* (Routledge, 1988), 3-19; Frank Hutchinson, "Young People's Hopes and Fears for the Future," in David Hicks and Richard Slaughter (eds.), *World Yearbook of Education: Futures Education* (Kogan Page, 1988), 133-147; James Turner Johnson, *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

Despite the political instability, these programs focused on local communities to have a dialogic process of self-examination, healthy self-criticism, and self-empowerment to transform themselves and their communities. Regardless of their dire circumstances, they can serve as community peacemakers or leaders in establishing local peace councils. One such topic was increasing the participants' ability to display more empathy (*ma'arifat al-khayri*) toward others who need emotional support. Extensive workshop peacebuilding topics involved dialogue skills, principles, and practices of forgiveness, compassion, love, dignity, reflection, patience, solidarity, service, acceptance, tolerance, and reconciliation.[21]

Islamic peacebuilding taps into individuals' spiritual and temporal dimensions to serve as an educational model to retrieve, re-embody, and re-enact these customs of peacebuilding; it is not merely an academic exercise. Since peace is not viewed as an absence of conflict, nor restricted to Western notions of structural violence, nor is the understanding limited to the legal definitions by Muslim jurists, Islamic peacebuilding texts make an explicit connection between peace and metaphysics, cosmology, politics, and culture. Within Islamic religious schools, teachers situated the theology of peace by applying inner and outer peace.[22]

Texts used in the curricula are based upon scripture, *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), eminent theologians, philosophers, and Sufi and Shi'a scholars like al-Ghazali, Ibn-Arabi, Jafar as-Sadiq, Abu Hafs' Umar al-Suhrawardi, or Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi were used as examples of their contributions to peacebuilding. Islamic peacebuilding curricula stress the Islamic values of nonviolence, compassion, collaboration, justice, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and service ethics were placed within a religious peacebuilding framework.[23] Not only were these Islamic values a focal point in the curricula, but teachers also found innovative teaching methods for students to practice in group exercises and identify projects in the local community.

---

[21] See Asna Husin, "Islamic Peace Education: Changing Hearts and Minds" in Q. Huda (ed.), Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam (USIP Press, 2010), 151-165.

[22] See chapter 9, "Islamic Peace Education" in Qamar-ul Huda, *Reenvisioning Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam* (2024).

[23] Islamic peace education curricula vary from responding to conflict war, promoting civic awareness, and creating an alternative to the rise of terrorism, see Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-terrorism* (Minhaj ul-Quran, 2015); Peace Education Program project 2005; Philippines Council of Islam and Democracy, *The Islamic Model for Peace Education* (Council of Islam and Democracy, 2009); IQRA' ASIA, *Encouraging Excellence in Islamic Education* (IQRA International Educational Foundation, 2015).

"Since *peace* is not viewed as an *absence of conflict*,..., Islamic peacebuilding texts make an explicit connection between *peace* and *metaphysics*, *cosmology*, *politics*, and *culture*."

Islamic peacebuilding could help break binary fixed positions already in place by broadening the thinking and appreciation of conflict parties. The field of peacebuilding advocates engagement with groups and parties using violence and terrorism as a tactic and presses upon states to adhere to international standards of military operations.[24] The challenge is to make the polarized parties understand, appreciate, and participate in meaningful dialogue and debate, articulate flexibility in their demands, and reshape their violent tactics into reachable reforms while opening a political process to broader participation to address the deeper problems of society that underlie their grievances.[25]

Ethical Issues in Islamic Peacebuilding: Forgiveness

The eminent peacebuilding scholar John Paul Lederach studied how individuals can be lost in the quagmire of pessimism in conflict or daily disputes, and within this quagmire, stakeholders framing peace tend to use ineffective conventional methods. Within this mentality, it is natural to see reality and solutions in dualistic terms; there is only a singular linear path for a political solution. A peace process must have the established guidelines and structure met before any meaningful agreement can be achieved.[26]

---

[24] See Nicole Ball and Tammy Halevy, "Making Peace Work: The Role of the International Developmental Community." Policy Essay 18, *Overseas Development Council* (1996).

[25] For more on this topic, see Greg Salomon, "The Nature of Peace Education: Not All Programs Are Created Equal," in Greg Salomon and Baruch Nevo (eds.), *Peace Education: The Concepts, Principles, and Practices Worldwide* (Taylor & Francis, 2002); Dennis Sandole, "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution Research: A Three Pillar Approach," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 1998, 5(2): 1-30; and Peter Coleman and Morton Deutsch, "Introducing Cooperation and Conflict Resolution in Schools: A Systems Approach," in Daniel J. Christie, Richard V. Wagner, Deborah Du Nann Winter (eds.), *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century* (Prentice-Hall, 2001), 223-239.

[26] See John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse University Press, 1993) and *Moral Imagination: The Art of Building Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

But, with constructive pessimism, according to Lederach, the most "significant weakness in sustaining genuine change is the lack of authentic engagement of the public sphere."[27]

The field of Islamic peacebuilding should consult more with scholars of philosophy, theology, ethics, and history on forgiveness and resilience.[28] Any single government or nongovernment organization cannot correctly orchestrate national, provincial, and local forgiveness. The field has plenty of works on reconciliation, restorative justice, truth commissions, transitional justice, and constructing peace memorials. The issue is that what scholars and experts write about is not as simple as it appears, nor are their ideas easily applicable to complex conflict zones. People wounded by war are weary of processes that claim to heal broken souls because there is no trust in anyone or any institution. Understanding the resistance to truth commissions should be recognized before writing on truth and forgiveness rituals or national dialogues and reconciliation commissions.

"People wounded by war are weary of processes that claim to heal broken souls because there is no trust in anyone or any institution."

In discussing forgiveness and retribution, scholars of Islamic peacebuilding Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan Funk, and Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana stated, "There is an articulated preference in Islam for nonviolence over violence, and for forgiveness (musamaha) over retribution."[29] In healing wounds and painful memories of conflict, reconciliation processes usually serve as a platform to address the past while thinking of the future. As with other religious traditions, reconciliation and healing are critical in Islamic peacebuilding. Using an arbitrator or mediator, parties will be engaged in reconciliation and forgiveness of pardoning another person (*afu*). Pardoning or *afu* is interconnected with pursuing goodness (*ihsan*) on earth.

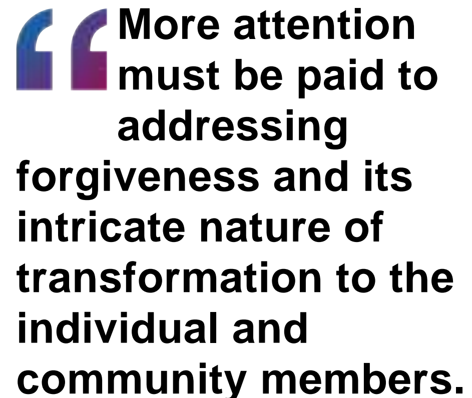
---

[27] Lederach, *Moral Imagination*, 58.

[28] See Raymond Helmick and Rodney Peterson, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Templeton Foundation, 2001) and Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 2001).

[29] Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan C. Funk, and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice* (University Press of America, 2001).

From scripture and the life of the Prophet, forgiveness is of a higher value than maintaining hatred or vengeance, engaging in forgiveness when they are angry,[30] or being reminded in the Qur'anic verses 2:36-38 that the very concept that human life on earth started with an act of forgiveness by God. More attention must be paid to addressing forgiveness and its intricate nature of transformation to the individual and community members.



Understanding the varieties of forgiveness to move past grievances and deep-seated resentment and toward reconciliation will begin navigating inner pain and negative emotions involves the right time and ripeness for people to reach this point; external circumstances to reach this stage of forgiveness may complicate the willingness and outcomes; depending on the severity of the pain, one never knows if it is possible to move forward; some do not care and while others want accountability, apologies, and public testimonies; and then, there are legal ramifications for the offender publicly agreeing to the crimes.

This brings us to the main issue: There is a need for ethics for forgiveness because of the lingering pain and trauma in Muslim-majority communities where there are no or few spaces to deal with wounds and enduring pain. While there are religious theological precedents on this topic, it does not mean existing political, social, and cultural infrastructures are prepared to confront a process for forgiveness.

Commitment as an Ethic

Commitment and affirmation are essential traits in peacebuilding ethics; with them, we see civil society members actively changing their communities. Many peacebuilding theorists point to the importance of involvement and social empowerment of civil society members to participate in taking action to transform and mitigate violence.

[30] For more on *forgiveness* (42:37) in Qur'an, see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, The Qur'an: A New Translation, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Peacebuilding scholar and practitioner Mohammed Abu-Nimer states, "Social empowerment and involvement through *ihsan* (virtues) and *khayr* (good) are also important paths to justice and peace in the Islamic tradition."[31] It is known that historically speaking, Muslim theologians thought of peace and violence as ways of doing good (*khair*) and preventing the presence of evil (*shar*).

Jurists conventionally proposed that war, conflict, violence, injustice, and discord are related to the problem of evil, and it is human beings' responsibility to do good and establish justice while preventing evil from occurring.[32] Of course, the Qur'an recognizes the capacity of human beings to do good in the face of adversity and evil and to change their conditions, as in Qur'an 13:11, "Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition." Scholars interpreted this as the imperative for people to empower themselves to change their condition by doing good and ensuring evil is not done.

Aside from these theological and social empowering theories in doing good and preventing evil on earth, the ethics of commitment and affirmation relate to the horizontal capacity, the ability to build and sustain relational spaces of constructive interaction across the lines of social divisions. Just as volunteering at hospitals or tutoring students, these acts generate creative processes, initiatives, and opportunities for resolving profound structural patterns of social inequalities. Expressing a committed value is an affirmation of the individual stating I am not an inactive passive observer of these inequalities. Instead, I am ethically committed, affirming the principle of helping those in need, and open to transforming myself and community members.

Since commitments and affirmations contribute to social change and deepen relationships, they alter relationships from those defined or inherited as distant and fearful toward proactive engagement based on mutual respect, affection, and friendship. In peacebuilding terms, this situation is called 'constructive change.' With constructive engagement comes the potential creative, critical change with new ideas, capacities, and visions to see new solutions.

---

[31] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context: Some Conceptual Questions," *Peace and Change*, 1996, 21(2), 22-40.

[32] Ibrahim Kalin, "Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition," in Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, 2010.

Where are The Truth Reconciliation Commissions?

To rebuild ethical societies in post-conflict societies with sustainable peace, the primary area of focus is establishing the rule of law and judicial and non-judicial mechanisms designed to address past injustices. I think the field of Islamic peacebuilding has been miserably behind the curve by not adequately addressing or designing truth and reconciliation commissions. Whether there are cultural, tribal, economic, or geopolitical reasons for not developing thorough systems of truth commissions or transitional justice,[33] there is ample Islamic literature and historical events on dealing with compensation to victims, seeking justice from oppressors, public testimonies, public events on listening and processing past wrongs.

Islamic peacebuilders will need to engineer institutions that support transitional justice that is tied to truth commissions, retributive and corrective justice, and prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations. This transparent and publicly engaged process is designed to heal the community by revealing the truth about past crimes through public truth-gathering forums, providing victims with reparations, scrutinizing governmental or community leaders' failures or complicity, and recommending effective reconciliation programs. Transitional justice and truth commissions rooted in local customs and culture will be a step forward in addressing structural violence—that is, the entrenched socio-economic conditions that cause poverty, exclusion, inequality, and deep divisions in society.

Truth commissions must comprehensively address civil and political rights violations as well as intrinsic economic, social, and political disparities. If properly designed, transitional justice mechanisms have the dual purpose of being backward-looking and forward-looking. They seek to illuminate, expose, and come to terms with a violent and repressive past and identify practical strategies to promote peace and public participation.

Truth commissions and transitional justice initiatives are not driven by civil society organizations from the bottom up; instead, dedicated resources and institutions are needed at the national government level. Unfortunately, in Muslim-majority countries, most governments do not have the moral courage or ethical fortitude to address their complicity in past atrocities. However, this, too, can change.

[33] I believe Morocco is the only Muslim-majority country to hold public truth and reconciliation proceedings.

Conclusion

When addressing ethics in Islamic peacebuilding, scholars believe that there is a moral objectivist position, that is to say, there are objective standards of truth and morality, independent of the trends in globalism, political liberalism, and or what we may wish or think that is popular in contemporary thinking. An objective morality stands above the transitory unsettled surface of everyday politics, which acts as a guide and standard of moral barometer and appraisal. These ethicists not only criticize the broader field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding but are very much aware of cultural relativism, ethical subjectivism, decolonial theories, applying post-structuralism, and inconsistent moral standards and or times where there are no moral standards.[34]

With the shrinking of civil society space in Muslim majority communities—due to the lack of freedoms and participatory civic institutions—it is even more critical to socially empower civil society members to participate in acting to transform, mitigate violence, and find innovative practices to emerge from conflict. However, this empowerment must include a process of forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation commissions to address the past and forge a more inclusive, pluralist future.

The problematic tension is when peacebuilding is closely aligned with state building, or in some cases legitimizing the state, deserves criticism. It is necessary to assess Islamic peacebuilding and its impact on local to national, personal to structural, and social to environmental, but it must be grounded within the tradition.

[34] See Vivienne Jabri, "War, Government, Politics: A Critical Response to the Hegemony of the Liberal Peace" in Oliver P. Richmond (ed.), in *Palgrave Advances in Peacebuilding: Critical Developments and Approaches*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41-57.

Bibliography

Abdel Haleem, M.A.S., *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, "Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context: Some Conceptual Questions," *Peace and Change*, 1996, 21(2), 22-40.

Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, *Non-Violence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Praxis*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003.

Aggestam, Karin and Annika Björkdahl (eds.), *Rethinking Peacebuilding: The Quest for Just Peace in the Middle East and the Western Balkans*, New York: Routledge, 2013.

Aghdassi, Abbas and Aaron W. Hughes (eds.), *New Methods in the Study of Islam,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, *Islam: The Concept of Religion and The Foundation of Ethics and Morality*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992.

Anderson, M. B., "Can my good intentions make things worse? Lessons for Peacebuilding From the Field of International Humanitarian Aid," in John Paul Lederach and Janice Moomaw Jenner (eds.), *A Handbook of International Peacebuilding: Into the Eye of the Storm,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002, 225-233.

Ball, Nicole and Tammy Halevy, "Making Peace Work: The Role of the International Developmental Community (Policy Essay 18)," Washington: *Overseas Development Council*, 1996.

Bangura, Abdul Karim (ed.), *Islamic Peace Paradigms*, Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2005.

Beck, Ulrich, *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy*, London: Polity Press, 2005.

Beck, Ulrich, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.

Beck, Ulrich, *Cosmopolitan Europe*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Boucher, David, *Political Theories of International Relations: From Thucydides to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Chandler, David, "The Uncritical Critique of 'Liberal Peace'," in Susanna Campbell, David Chandler and Meera Sabaratnam (eds.), *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, London: Zed Books, 2011, 174–190.

Coleman, Peter and Morton Deutsch, "Introducing Cooperation and Conflict Resolution in Schools: A Systems Approach," in Daniel J. Christie, Richard V. Wagner, Deborah Du Nann Winter (eds.), *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*, Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 2001, 223-239.

Doyle, Mary and Geoffrey S. Carlson, "Silence of the Laws? Conceptions of International Relations and International Law in Hobbes, Kant, and Locke," in *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law,* 2008, 46, 648-666.

"Dr. Tariq Ramadan: The Importance of Critical Thinking for Muslim Societies Both in the West and East," YouTube, uploaded by *CILE Center: Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics*, May 24, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pdP8UNmU1Q

Helmick, Raymond and Rodney Peterson, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 2001.

Hicks, David, "Understanding the Field," in David Hicks (ed.), *Education for Peace: Issues, Principles, and Practice in the Classroom*, New York: Routledge, 1988, 3-19.

Hoewe, Jennifer and Brian Bowe, "The Impact of Online Network Diversity on Familiarity and Engagement with Social Issues News on Facebook," *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 12(1), 2018, 309-347.

Huda, Qamar-ul, "Enhancing Skills and Capacity Building in Islamic Peacemaking" in Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010.

Huda, Qamar-ul, *Reenvisioning Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2024.

Husin, Asna, "Islamic Peace Education: Changing Hearts and Minds" in Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010, 151-165.

Hutchinson, Frank, "Young People's Hopes and Fears for the Future," in David Hicks and Richard Slaughter (eds.), *World Yearbook of Education: Futures Education*, London: Kogan Page, 1988, 133-147.

Ismail, Khalid Bin, "Islam and the Concept of Justice," *Jurnal Intelek,* 5(2), 2010.

Jabri, Vivienne, “War, Government, Politics: A Critical Response to the Hegemony of the Liberal Peace,” in Oliver P. Richmond (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Peacebuilding: Critical Developments and Approaches*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 41-57.

Johnson, James Turner, *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Kalin, Ibrahim, “Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition,” in Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010.

Khadduri, Majid, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Lederach, John Paul, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993.

Lederach, John Paul, *Moral Imagination: The Art of Building Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Neufeldt, Reina, “Ethics of Peacebuilding*,*” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, November 20, 2017.

Paschal, Mahona Joseph, “Ethics in the Teaching Profession: A Practical Approach to Teachers’ Professionalism,” *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 10(3), 2023, 82-94.

Qadri, Muhammad Tahir-ul, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism*, London: Minhaj ul-Quran Publications, 2015.

Ramadan, Tariq, *To Be a European Muslim*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999.

Ramadan, Tariq, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Rawls, John, *The Law of Peoples: With “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,”* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Rosen, Lawrence, “Islamic concepts of justice and injustice”, *The Justice of Islam: Comparative Perspectives on Islamic Law and Society* (Oxford Socio-Legal Studies), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Rousseau, J.J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Said, Abdul Aziz, Nathan C. Funk, and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2001.

Salomon, Greg, "The Nature of Peace Education: Not All Programs Are Created Equal," in Greg Salomon and Baruch Nevo (eds.), *Peace Education: The Concepts, Principles, and Practices Worldwide*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002.

Sandole, Dennis, "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution Research: A Three Pillar Approach," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 1998, 5(2): 1-30.

Satha-Anand, Chaiwat, "The Non-Violent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Actions," in Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Sarah Gilliatt (eds.), *Islam and Nonviolence,* Honolulu: Center for Global Nonviolence Planning Project, Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace, 1993, 55.

Sisk, Timothy D., *Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications*, New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2020.

Stenberg, Leif and Philip Wood (eds.), *What is Islamic Studies? European and North American Approaches to a Contested Field*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

Strike, Kenneth A. and Jonah F. Soltis, *The Ethics of Teaching,* New York: Teachers College Press (5th edition), 2009.

Şahin, Fatih and İbrahim Yüksel, "Meaning and Uniqueness of Ethics and Ethical Teacher Behaviors in the Teaching Profession*," i.e.: inquiry in education*, 13(2), 2021.

Tan, Kok-Chor, *Justice without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Patriotism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

About CFIG

The Center for Faith, Identity, and Globalization (CFIG) is the interdisciplinary research and publication unit of Rumi Forum. CFIG contributes to the knowledge and research at the intersection of faith, identity, and globalization by generating academically informed analyses and facilitating scholarly exchanges. CFIG's spectrum of themes will cover contemporary subjects that are relevant to our understanding of the connection between faith, identity, and globalization, such as interfaith engagement, religious nationalism, conflict resolution, globalization, religious freedom, and spirituality.

About the Author

Dr. Qamar-ul Huda is the Michael E. Paul Distinguished Visiting Professor of International Affairs at the United States Naval Academy (USNA) and has previously served as an associate adjunct professor at Georgetown University. He co-founded and was Vice President of the Center for Global Policy, a think-tank focused on U.S. security and foreign policies in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. Dr. Huda has held key diplomatic roles, including Senior Policy Advisor for the U.S. Department of State's Office for Religion and Global Affairs, where he worked on civil society and religious diplomacy, and served as the first Director of the Department of Dialogue and Collaboration at *Hedayah*, an international center for countering violent extremism in Abu Dhabi. His decade-long tenure at the U.S. Institute of Peace focused on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, including developing educational programs on mediation for civil society members in the Middle East and Asia. Dr. Huda teaches courses on Afghanistan, U.S. diplomacy, and conflict resolution at USNA and has taught at renowned institutions like UCLA, Boston College, and Brandeis University. He has authored three books, six training manuals on conflict and mediation, and over 50 peer-reviewed articles on topics ranging from religious peacebuilding to comparative ethics. His most recent book, *Reenvisioning Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam,* came out from Rowman & Littlefield in 2024. A recipient of multiple research grants, including those from the Social Science Research Council and The American Academy of Religion, Dr. Huda has twice been a Fulbright scholar. He holds a Ph.D. in political history from UCLA, a Master's in political economy and Middle Eastern history, and a Bachelor's in International Relations, Philosophy and Religion from Colgate University.

Ideas at their best when they interact.

Center for
Faith
Identity &
Globalization

rumiforum.org/cfig