Spring 5-21-2015

Unlocking a Narrative: Stories of Islam and Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

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Unlocking a Narrative: Stories of Islam and Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

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PIM-73

A Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Masters of Art

in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro,

Vermont, USA.

May 17, 2015

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Student name: <u>Jeremy Sinensky</u>

Date: <u>April 9, 2015</u>

DEDICATION

To the brave souls and minds that had the courage to share with me their understanding of a world in which peace is the status quo. Through their actions and lessons, they climb mountains each day and truly embody the spirit and pragmatism of peacebuilding ideals. Thank you for generously inviting me into your worlds. To the innumerable spirits and voices that you represent in your stories, teachings, and actions- this is in their honor.

To those from the pockets of this world I've had the great privilege of exploring, sharing with, and learning from that led me to the oasis of peace in Vermont.

To my grandmother Julia "Bubbie" Sinensky whose simultaneously spirit-breaking and courageous experiences and embodiment of survival and simplicity inspire my insatiable appetite for deeper meaning and understanding.

To Professor Joseph Church at Binghamton University who encouraged me to question all the symbols I perceive to be around me with a discerning eye. Professor Church always encouraged me to ceaselessly question "the answer."

To my family and friends who have helped me to find beauty and love, even in the darkest of hours: you continue to stretch my bounds to seek out truth, wisdom, and courage in places believed to be barren of such.

To ordinary folks.

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ABSTRACT

This paper, "Unlocking a Narrative: *Stories of Islam and Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation*," highlights largely repressed and ignored experiences and information related to peacebuilding and conflict transformation within Islam, conveyed through eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a diverse range of self-identified Muslims as well as relevant academic literature on the subject. I elected to focus on the research question of: "How can Islam be understood as a tool or lifestyle used for peacebuilding and conflict transformation endeavors?" so as to raise awareness of a largely invisible body of knowledge (within dominant social circles, popular media, and the breadth of global social and academic research and knowledge) through the experiences and knowledge of people identifying as Muslims. The diverse range of interviewees, females and males from Southeast Asia, West Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and the United States- as well as relevant literature consulted- transform dominant Islamophobic and reductionist views of Islam and people associated with the culture and faith, sharing concrete experiences as inspired by application of Islam's imperatives and teachings. Understanding Islam and its teachings as a source for peacebuilding and conflict transformation provides researchers, conflict resolution and development practitioners, and all those affected by dominant social views, with a deepened awareness of how Islam and self-identified Muslims, have, and continue to exemplify peacebuilding and conflict transformation images.

INTRODUCTION

I am an "outsider" to this topic- a guest that has intermittently been invited in to capture glimpses, stories, and brief moments of near-empathy with the information I have the privilege to digest and the corresponding growth I experience (Hesse-Biber, 2011, p. 116). I came to the main research question of: "*How can Islam be understood as a tool or lifestyle used for peacebuilding and conflict transformation endeavors?*" as part a personal journey in which I continue to learn a great deal about myself, my identity, and the way in which I exist as a global citizen. This paper intends to be a sharing of this educational exploration of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (CT) from diverse Islamic perspectives.

Through this process of self-discovery and development, I continue to try to stretch my bounds and reach out to the "others" that exist in my subconscious due to my upbringing and the ideas and views I have been exposed to in life. I was raised with strong Jewish and Zionist values in an insular environment that closely followed the state of Israeli and Palestinian political issues. I spent time living in Israel and still discerningly keep updated on social and political issues that affect the area. Especially due to the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine- often viewed through a lens of a faith-based, Jewish-Muslim conflict- my ideation of Islam and Muslims tended to remain oppositional, despite rarely knowingly encountering self-identified Muslims.

Though I maintain no expertise in the field of Islamic history, faith, and culture, as a means of challenging myself by immersing myself in an environment and academic area that is fairly new to me, I intended for this research study to be a learning experience in which I tried to increase my knowledge of Islam and relevant associations, and to share

such findings with others who may benefit from increased knowledge of Muslim experiences with peacebuilding and CT. After sharing experiences at the SIT Graduate Institute (SIT), working alongside peers that self-identify as belonging to Islamic cultural or faith tradition (in addition to people from other identity groups outside of my own), as well as a professional Reflective Practice Phase role as a Program Facilitator with World Learning's Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program (IYLEP), I felt compelled to continue to share experiences with Muslims and continue to transform my perception of the "other." I sought to learn of Islam as a framework that lends itself to peacebuilding endeavors and found self-identifying Muslims to be courageous and loving partners in peace and peacebuilding efforts as opposed to the reductionist and stigmatized view I had been naively raised with.

Following the completion of my SIT practicum opportunity working with IYLEP, I planned to travel to Paynesville, Liberia to begin an internship as a Community Outreach Coordinator with Youth Crime Watch of Liberia (YCWL), a youth development and social justice organization that aims to empower marginalized Liberian youth (many of them former child soldiers) through a variety of development-oriented intervention initiatives. Most unfortunately for Liberians, and secondarily quite unfortunately for me, my planned departure for Liberia coincided with Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's declaration of a State of Emergency due to the then rapidly growing and tangible threat of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) ("Liberia Declares States of Emergency over Ebola Virus", 2014). As one in a privileged position, I had the opportunity to decide whether or not I would elect to travel to Liberia to start my internship in Paynesville, despite the presence of EVD there. Due to personal choices and

a fear that any efforts to serve with YCWL and immerse myself in the experience of living and working in a new cultural context would be hampered due to restrictions based on the State of Emergency, I decided against traveling to West Africa during the throes of the EVD outbreak there.

After electing to forgo my Liberian internship opportunity, and interested in finding a practicum position with a youth-focused peacebuilding and CT program, several weeks later, I began a position as a Graduate Student Intern with Kids4Peace International (K4P) in Seattle, an organization that aims to increase understanding between Palestinian, Israeli, and American youths, through shared Abrahamic interfaith experiential learning programming. A common issue that persisted during my practicum with K4P was how the organization could most effectively engage the local Muslim community in the rich dialogue and community-building that K4P strives to offer to its target populations of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. This organizationally-identified challenge of lacking representation from the local Muslim community, seemed to often be an issue affecting the genuine equal representation that K4P seeks in its programming. This glaring lack of representation, as well as an increasing interest in Islamic cultural and faith tradition led me to begin attending several locally-based events organized by the Muslim community for the public. Through such experiences, I have been able to forge continuing relationships with several people that are active members of the local Muslim community. One of these Muslim peers in the community has recently joined the K4P Programming Team, serving as a bridge to his local community. Exposure to and collaboration with such inspiring individuals and groups of people that are actively

working toward peacebuilding and eradicating conflict led me to my desire to more deeply understand dominant perceptions of Muslims and Islamic tradition.

Between K4P's issue of lacking Muslim representation in its local chapter, my recent cross-cultural and immersive experiences, and my enduring questions of why Islam is often depicted in a damaging light, I became increasingly eager to develop my knowledge related to Islam and its teachings' intersection with global peacebuilding and CT efforts. Encounters and shared growth experiences with self-identified Muslims and those influenced by Islam, have led to me to personally break down barriers and stereotypes that have been deeply imbued in me for most of my life. Transforming these negative perceptions into seeds for emergent relationships, I wanted to more deeply understand where the dominant and negative views of Muslims and Islamic culture and faith emanate from. Due to prevalent and seemingly expanding poor perceptions of Islam both as a culture and religion, often manifesting in Islamophobic thoughts and actions, I see the topic of peacebuilding and CT elements within Islam and those who follow it, as holding particularly crucial and relevant weight. This is especially pertinent as the current reality of political volatility and social upheaval caused by specific interest-based groups in some Muslim-majority nations lends itself deeply to mass frustration of what conflict scholar John Burton explains are universal "Basic Human Needs" (Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 9). In many cases, the frustration of these "Basic Human Needs" manifest themselves in the mass suffering of global communities and the violent conflict that dominant views tend to focus on and mislabel as a singular reality. Such perspectives of Islam are ignorant of the multitudinous alternative narratives of Islam that promote peacebuilding and CT ideals. The writer and scholar of religious studies, Reza Aslan (2014), explains

the complexity and diversity that exists within the global Muslim world in the following

terms: "I have trouble saying the word Islam, the scholar in me wants to say 'Islams.'"

Such an assertion by Aslan also serves to explain that the application of Islam varies

vastly among the 1.6 billion people across the world that belong to Islamic communities.

Many of the highly publicized conflicts that persist today are in countries where

Islam is the prevailing influential culture and faith background. Focusing on ongoing

conflicts that persist in various Muslim-majority spaces, many dominant media,

academia, social, and political voices tend to regard Islam and people associated with it

through a misinformed filter of violence and injustice. Extremist groups such as the

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that adopt Islamic teachings and principles to meet

the needs of their own political struggles, in addition to repressive governments such as

the current Syrian government, tend to be the most emphasized images of Islamic society

and faith in dominant and widely disseminated Western views. That is to say, the most

visible perceptions of the widely diverse Islamic world is seen through a monolithic and

essentialized lens that tends to narrowly focus on the shocking, negative, and most

extreme views that drown out the voices of others, particularly those proactively working

towards peace, both through Islamic means and other. Such views understand the

extremely diverse and globally practiced tradition of Islam- and all people identifying as

being associated with it- through the same fearful lens. As Muslim peacebuilding scholar,

Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2003) notes:

> The academic literature on the subject is no less tendentious. A Search of the
>
> Library of Congress subject catalogue for resources on 'Islam and nonviolence'
>
> produces fewer than five items. 'Islam and Violence,' by contrast floods the

screen with thousands of entries. This orientation is evident in the research of

Western scholars and orientalists alike, both Muslim and non-Muslim (p. 2).

Contrary to this dearth of information that exists that is related to peacebuilding and CT

elements within Islam and its holy texts (such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sunnah) there is

an unending source of stories, experiences, and text that promotes peacebuilding and CT

ideals within Islam and the experiences of those who follow it. Through this research

endeavor, I sought to highlight some of those findings while elevating the unrepresented

voices of Muslim counterparts that have courageously devoted themselves to

peacebuilding- both internally and externally. Serving to expand this field of knowledge

and broaden the information available to those seeking to increase their awareness and

understanding of Islamic teachings and how they relate to peacebuilding, this study

focused on the experiences of four male and four female self-identified Muslims who

identify as members of West and North African, Middle Eastern, and United States

national groups and a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The interviewees were comprised of

students and professionals at varying stages in their academic tenures and careers,

proactively seeking to promote peacebuilding and CT in their personal, student, and

professional experiences (note: See Appendix A). Each of these participants expressed

their religious and cultural identity of Islam in a distinctive manner, also deeply

influenced by intersecting identity pieces that are influences.

Candid and rich conversations shared with each of these participants as well as

personal research on the topic of inquiry focused on the following key research question:

"How can Islam be understood as a tool or lifestyle used for peacebuilding and conflict

transformation endeavors?" Furthermore, research subquestions included: *"What are the*

Islamic faith traditions' views of conflict transformation and peacebuilding?"; "What are imperatives, themes, ideas, and concepts from this religion that focus on utilizing religious activity and beliefs for peacebuilding and conflict transformation (including extensions of notions of equality, social justice, and humanitarian) work?"; and *"In what ways is Islam unique in its perpetuation of peacebuilding and conflict transformation?"*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principles Related to Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation

Principles of Peacebuilding and CT theories share much commonality with the principles of Islamic culture and faith traditions. The Conflict Information Consortium at the University of Colorado (2013) offers a working definition of "Peacebuilding" as:

> a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of postconflict reconstruction and rehabilitation (Alliance for Peacebuilding, August 2013).

This explains that peacebuilding efforts should attempt to be sustainable and to break cycles of violence through varying forms of interventions. Additionally, Abu-Nimer, explains how, "Moral and spiritual forces of religion can encourage people to act and change" (2002, p. 17), and how religion can catalyze development and transformation among people. It is presumable that peacebuilding theory would have such development and transformation take place in positive terms, working towards constructive goals.

Applying this understanding of religion as a moral guide, for those subscribing to its principles, Islam can clearly be understood as a framework within which peacebuilding endeavors can advance, particularly as they relate to the broader concept of social change. Foundationally and most simply, the word "Islam" is formed from the same word as the Arabic word for "peace", "salaam" (Moore, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, the "Shari'ah", a moral and religious legal code of Islam, places strong emphasis on the

preservation and protection of what it calls the five necessities in human life, "darūriyāt", namely: "life, property and wealth, religion, intellect and, progeny." Peacebuilding theory, too, holds the protection of each of the aforementioned to be crucial to its effectiveness. Respecting each of those "Basic Human Needs," these Islamic values, as outlined by Shari'ah, serve as the source for much of Islamic law (Moore, 2014, p. 7). The safeguarding of the abovementioned aspects of Muslim law promotes many of the same elements inherent in the fields of peacebuilding and CT.

The Qur'an states: "... if any saves a life, it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind" (5:32), expressing the protection of all living creatures. A religion and lifestyle that encourages respect for "all living creatures," clearly helps to promote principles that are core to the potential transformation of any conflict and to engendering a prevailing culture of peace in any society. By mandating the guarantee of "Basic Human Needs" such as "security needs" and "welfare needs," through upholding the "darūriyāt," Islam contributes to a peaceful and more equitable culture in which people would less likely be moved to any sort of violence, as "Basic Human Needs" are accounted for, and conflict tends to mostly arise within contexts in which "Basic Human Needs" of numbers of people are frustrated and unmet (Galtung, 1980, p. 6). Moreover, respecting higher "Basic Human Needs" of "identity needs" nature further stimulates a conflict-free society as well as a sustainable culture of peace. Through commanding the assurance of property, wealth, and intellect, Islam seeks to perpetuate Galtung's notion of "welfare needs" (1980, p. 6). Simultaneously, in calling for respect of religion, "Shari'ah" mandate attempts to uphold rights to "identity needs," "intellect" and, "progeny," advancing efforts towards peacebuilding and CT from an Islamic perspective.

Diversity, Coexistence, and Inclusivity

The Qur'an, which Islam esteems as the word of Allah, God, passed down to the Prophet Muhammad, the preeminent peacebuilding figure in the story of Islam, advocates diversity and tolerance of differences based on gender (49:13, 53:45), skin color, language (30:23), belief, and social status (64:2, 6:165). Throughout the Qur'an, harmony between different social groups is praised and competition and control of one by another is widely condemned (2:213, 10:19, 7:38, 13:30, 16:63, 29:18, 35:42, 41:42, 64:18 as cited in Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 78). Abovementioned Qur'anic Chapter 49, Verse 13 states, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not that ye may despise each other…" (Quran.com, 2015). This clear call for coexistence and collaborative and exchange-oriented relationships within Islam is bolstered by Islamic Hadith, the corpus of the reports of the teachings, deeds, and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as it states: "All people are equal, as equal as the teeth of a comb. There is no claim of merit of an Arab over a Persian, or of a white over a black person, or of male over female" (Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 58). This remark explains the notions of equality within Islamic thought, especially with regards to ethnic, racial, and gender groups- key to a culture of peace.

In practice, historically, Islamic society's policies of religious tolerance secured the rights of religious minorities. Such an attitude was especially tolerant compared with the ways in which the same accepted religious groups, such as Jews, Sabeans, and Hindus were treated under other global political governances. These religious minorities had access to "considerably high state posts from the time of Mu'awiyah (r. 661-80) to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jewish

scientists, physicians, accountants, counselors, and statesmen were employed" (Kalin, 2010, p. 19). This example from Islamic history exemplifies not only the tolerance, but also the inclusion of these groups in Islamic society. They were active and contributing members of Muslim society. By allowing these religious minorities freedoms of labor, they were affording these groups potential access to the "Basic Human Needs" of financial prospects. Allowing religious practice promoted tolerance for the satisfaction of "higher needs" related to the "identity needs" nature (Galtung, 1980, p. 62).

Lastly, as Muslim peacebuilding scholars Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana & Meena Sharify-Funk explain the status of women in the Muslim historical experience:

Although the stereotype of the passive and repressed Muslim woman may be true in some cases, it fails to convey the diverse and complex experiences of Muslim women over fourteen centuries across many continents. Since the inception of Islam as a religious tradition, women have participated in social, political, economic, and intellectual life, as poets, Islamic scholars, spiritual teachers, warriors, heads of state, and business-women (2010, p. 180).

Kadayifci-Orellana and Sharify-Funk note the diversity of experiences that women from across the globe have had in their own cultural and personal contexts. This is expressed within a realist perspective, affirming that there is much room for working toward communities free of gender oppression, but also, from a more positive outlook, that many empowered Muslim women have influenced societies in innumerable fields and aspects of life. This is not meant to take away from the fact that there were, and continue to be, instances where women endure injustice and repression, but rather to highlight the powerful and uplifting models that already exist within the broad global and historical

Muslim world, supplementing the information that exists related to the diverse experiences of Muslim women.

Forgiveness

Employing the use of a Middle Eastern influenced, third-party facilitated conflict resolution (CR) process, the Qur'an emphasizes the principles of both patience, "Sabr" and forgiveness to be tools critical to the success of a CT process. The Qur'an says: "But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs" (42:43 as cited in Quran.com, 2015). This is one of three Qur'anic texts that are recited at the opening of such a Middle Eastern reconciliation ceremony, a "Sulhah." Additionally, taking place within a collectivist culture, it is common for the entire community to be invited to witness the event, as the whole community is seen to be affected by the status of conflict in their midst (Herbert, 2007, p. 17). Augmenting advocacy for peacebuilding prospects, the Qur'an (42:4) offers, "if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, he shall be rewarded by Allah."

According to peacebuilding and CT scholar and practitioner, John Paul Lederach (2003), "Conflict Transformation" theory aims to, "envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships" (*The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*). Based on Lederach's working vision of CT, the aforementioned Qur'anic texts encourage values critical to the success of an effective CT process as forgiveness and reconciliation ceremonies often help to transform relationships, replace conflict with justice, and respond to genuine issues that arise in human interactions and

relationships. Bringing a collective community to be a part of the traditional "Sulhah"

also publicizes and shares an effective model for addressing conflict, while allowing the

energy of the relationship transformation between the involved parties to positively

influence the entire community.

Nonviolence

Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Thai scholar of activism and Islam, succinctly summarizes

how Islam is laden with prospects for waging effective nonviolent struggle as a means of

achieving specific goals: "Islam itself is a fertile soil for nonviolence because of its

potential for disobedience, strong discipline, sharing and social responsibility,

perseverance and self-sacrifice, and the belief in the unity of the Muslim community and

the oneness of mankind" (as cited in Abu-Nimer, pp. 38-9, 2003). Through strongly

emphasized principles within Islamic faith tradition such as fasting and prayer, Islam

lends itself to disciplined, intentional, and purposeful behavior. As Abu-Nimer (2003)

notes, Islamic cultural and religious rituals and traditions can be harnessed for inspiration

for nonviolent (NV) actions in the following forms: "fasting rituals…excellent training

for hunger strikes; ritualistic prayers, for the habituated formation of worshipers into

parallel lines to prepare people for…disciplined actions; and religious chanting, which

can become an outlet for peaceful marches, meetings, and sit-ins" (p. 83). In a sense,

Satha-Anand delineates values related to how Islam can leverage its teachings as a means

of implementing NV practices, while Abu-Nimer takes such values and applies these to

practical means in which Muslims can assert such teachings and practices as a means of

furthering NV causes. The Prophet Muhammad, in addition to embodying these ideals of

NV, explains empowerment through NV in these terms: "Power resides not in being able

to strike another, but in being able to keep the self under control when anger arises"
(Hadith in Sahih al-Bukhari, 1998, vol. 8, bk. 73, no. 135 as cited in Abu-Nimer, 2003, p.
72). Muhammad's notion is similar to "active nonviolent" struggles and efforts, where
those waging NV are doing so proactively, courageously, and, all-too-often, in the face of
repression and violence. Based on this teaching, the practice of Islam can be a strategy in
and of itself to overcome any sort of injustice or inequity through NV means as
influenced by the NV elements and values found throughout Islamic teachings.

Concepts and Tools Related to Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation

"Shari'ah" refers to the moral code and religious law that governs many Islamic
religious and cultural communities. As mentioned above, "Shari'ah" has five main
objectives: "to protect life, property, lineage, religion, and intellect." Furthermore, the
overarching objective of "Shari'ah" is, "to establish social justice, fairness, mercy and
security in societies. (It) claims divine authority, but requires human interpretation"
(Islamic Network Groups, 2015). Within the understanding of "Shari'ah" as a divinely-
inspired body of laws presented to those practicing Islam and its cultural implications,
"Shari'ah" is subject to human interpretation and implementation. The divine assumption
and expectation is that such laws and concepts will be implemented to advance the
objectives of Islam, fitting into a vision of peacebuilding and CT. The lack of codified
law in the Shari'ah is seen as a strength of procedural justice, as this creates space for
flexibility and adaptation so that "Shari'ah" can most effectively meet the evolving needs
of those following its precepts.

Raquibuz Zaman (1996) outlines "Shari'ah" laws that promote peacebuilding and
CT including: "*al-musa'adah* (law of mutual aid)"; "*al-diyafah* (law of hospitality, based

on prophetic tradition outlining social obligation to treat guests graciously)"; "*al-musharakah* (law of sharing crops with those that cannot afford to buy them)"; "*al-maun* (law of acting in kindness- not only give charity, but lend tools to those that cannot afford to buy them as well)"; and "*al-irth* (the Islamic law of inheritance - distributing an estate equitably among all members of the family" (as cited in Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 54). Each of these examples is testament to the code of morality and ethics that "Shari'ah" aims to inspire amongst those who practice it. Clearly, a society in which these principles are espoused and practiced is less susceptible to conflict and will cling to empathetic and socially-just gestures as a means of promoting peacebuilding and equality ideals within Islamic tradition as they help to satisfy "welfare" oriented "Basic Human Needs" and build interdependent and cohesive communities.

Charity

Included among Islam's "Five Pillars," the foundation of Muslim life, is the expectation of giving "Zakat," or almsgiving. "Zakat" is the Islamic imperative to donate a portion of wealth every year to those lacking in basic needs. Conveying its centrality within the religion, this concept is mentioned more than 50 times throughout the Qur'anic text and is considered to be mandatory within Islamic faith belief (Rahman, 2014). The Qur'an also promotes "Saadakah," a voluntary form of charitable giving (Ahmad, 2014). Focusing on the Prophet Muhammad's embodiment of this ideal of "Saadakah," according to one Hadith, the Prophet stated, "Give the Saadakah without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity" (Alim, 2014). These notions of both the Islamic imperative of almsgiving and the promotion of charitable giving contribute strongly to ensuring a culture of equity, respect, and empathy, crucial to satisfying "Shari'ah" mandate as pillars

of peacebuilding and CT. Presumably, when people observe such religious practices, displaying acts and mentalities of social justice and compassion for others will serve to mitigate the likelihood of conflict by positively contributing to the satisfaction of "Basic Human Needs" for those accepting such social and religious norms.

Jihad

Contemporarily, "Jihad" tends to be a largely oversimplified and misunderstood concept and term within hegemonic and typecasting views of Islam. Inaccurately, in many global circles, "Jihad" has become a term synonymous with violence. To better understand Islamic perspectives on the term and how it can be used to perpetuate peacebuilding and CT efforts, well-known Indian Muslim reformist, Moulavi Cheragh Ali avers:

> The word rendered 'strenuous' is originally 'mujahid,' which in classical Arabic and throughout the Qur'an means to do one's utmost, to make efforts, to strive, to exert, to employ one's-self diligently, studiously, sedulously, earnestly, zealously, or with energy and does not mean fighting or warfare. It was subsequently applied to religious war, but was never used in the Qur'an in such a sense (Abu-Nimer, 2010, p. 29).

Debunking assumptions and what many perceive to be misapplications of the concept and term, he explains "Jihad" as an internal struggle. The Prophet Muhammad called this internal struggle with one's self '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" (Rehman, 2011, p. 63). In this view, not only is "Jihad" perceived to be a reflective tool meant to spur just and moral action and to continue to

contribute to Islamic peacebuilding and CT ideals that exist, but it also serves to undermine the prevailing negative assumptions of it being a tool and justification for violence as a means of achieving political goals.

Conflict Resolution within Islam

Islamic theory and culture are based on collectivist notions and ideals. Such cultural outlooks tend to be of a, "situational approach," which takes into consideration, "in addition to parties' interests, the history of social and political injustice, abusive practices, and outdated or sometimes distorted interpretations of Islamic sources. Islamic conflict intervention is guided by a social mission of liberating Islam and Muslims of these ills" (Abdalla, Anton, Haffa, & Mirza, 2002, p. 44). Islam looks at conflict issues using a holistic, wide-angled historical view of Islamic culture of CR. It aims to reconcile relations as they affect the entire collectivist community, not solely the individuals most directly involved in the conflict. Congruent with "Conflict Analysis," as part of the greater body of CT theory, these CR processes aim to address root causes of issues, and not solely the symptoms of conflicts. Islam seems to view CR through a "Relational approach" to social change, which explains that,

> All parties involved, including less visible actors, can contribute to both causing and resolving their conflict. This orientation of thinking is distinguished from assuming that the evil side has singlehandedly caused the conflict and the other side alone is responsible. Thus history matters (Arai, 2014a, p. 12).

Similarly, within Islamic cultural traditions of CR processes, history between all involved parties matters and the context is crucial to effectively resolving the conflict.

The peacebuilding foundation for CR based on Islamic faith is born out of Qur'anic texts that instruct parties to seek "amicable settlement" among themselves, as that is deemed to be "best." The verse continues: "if you do good and practice self-restraint, Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do" (Qur'an 4:128 as cited in Abdalla et al., 2002, p. 112). These notions of good-natured settlement to conflict and self-restraint are conducive to respectful and effective CR processes. Abu-Nimer (2003) outlines assumptions that guide various CR processes within a Western cultural framework. These include the conception that conflict: "is a natural process that can have either constructive or destructive outcomes or both," that it, "is an intrinsic part of all relationships," and that "it can be positive when it increases communication and trust; the problem is solvable; it results in development and growth; it releases pent-up feelings; it improves work and performance" (p. 17). Such views seem comparable to Islamic thought, which sees conflict as an inevitability in the human experience and that it can create new spaces and opportunities for renewed and collaborative relationships and positive effects for all involved.

There is a well-known example where Muhammad, acting as a third-party facilitator, personified the positive effects that a transformed conflict can produce:

> In the case of the Black Stone, the Prophet proposed a simple yet creative means of resolving the dispute: He had the quarreling clans join together to lift the stone to the desired height. The resolution of this problem implies a repudiation of violence and competition, and an appreciation of the creative possibilities of joint problem solving (Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 67).

In helping to transform the conflict, Muhammad displayed what Lederach identifies as a "moral imagination," proposing a creative resolution that allowed everyone to be satisfied with the result as well as an opportunity to forge healthy relationships that can start afresh with a collaborative opportunity (2005, p. 5).

Conflict Resolution Styles

Western and Islamic CR styles diverge in critical ways as they are respectively influenced by their disparate cultural norms and values. For instance, as Abu-Nimer (2010) explains in Crescent and Dove: *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*: Western values of individualism and negotiating for tangible, concrete outcomes, can be contrary to Muslim conceptions of CR, in which, "collectivist and intangible outcomes related to public image as well as psychological and social issues are often central" (pp. 74-5). Additionally, while the Western tradition of CR favors third-party neutrality, in a Muslim context, it is common to have third parties in a negotiation to be partial and take sides. Another key difference between these respective CR styles is that Islamic tradition applies legal, social, cultural, and religious values as the basis for mediation, whereas Western practice often favors "semilegal frameworks to legitimize their processes and agreements." Lastly, within a Muslim cultural context, "the legitimacy and credibility of conflict resolution processes of a third-party intervention stems from a negotiator's religious, social, and cultural rank," whereas under Western models, they are based on "formalized professional training, certification, education, (and) legal expertise" (2010, pp. 74-5).

Following this collectivist culture that is common to many Islamic communities, is the Islamic CR technique of "Shurah," which literally translates to "consultation."

"Shurah" is an inclusive process which engages community members who are asked to provide input on the decision-making process..." The "Shurah" system "holds freedom of expression at its core. If freedom of expression for all people is not guaranteed, then Shurah is not realized" (Abu-Nimer, 2010, pp. 75-6). This process is meant to be inclusive of the whole community so as to attempt to satisfy the community's collective needs. Abu-Nimer perceives it to uphold freedom of expression as it is meant to offer all those connected to offer input if they so desire. In a Gazan example of the "Shurah" process, the third parties will often shuttle between the parties, hearing their respective versions of the stories, during this sort of fact-finding and story-telling phase. Once the third-party person has sufficient information, this individual will caucus with each disputant until a decision is made. Decisions are made while invoking religious cause and influence. Third-party facilitator's are often selected based on older age and knowledge of the parties and their history and relatives. It is common for Imams and "Shari'ah" judges to serve in this capacity.

Criticisms of Contemporary Application Among Different Groups

Throughout the Literature Review there was a relative call for some level of reformation within the global Muslim world and seemed to be a general tone of willingness to adapt Islamic faith and cultural principles to serve the developing needs and realities of global Muslim communities. Such mentalities can be understood within the context of the current unfortunate reality that many Muslim-majority nations are currently enduring serious conflict. Abu-Nimer (2003) maintains:

The possibilities for addressing social and political problems through Islam have yet to be fully realized. Islam, as a religion and tradition, is replete with teachings

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and applications about peaceful resolutions of conflicts and thus provides rich

resources for nonviolent values, beliefs, and strategies (p. 19).

In this view, the full potential of the peacebuilding and CT knowledge and examples that

are contained within the body of knowledge of Islam is not fully actualized to date, in

terms of effecting positive social change toward transforming some social and political

issues that persist in various Muslim-majority nations, particularly in the Middle East

region. Reza Eslami-Somea (2010), a scholar of human rights, explains Abu-Nimer's

vision in practical terms saying that Muslim jurists should be able to undertake a similar

process of interpretation and application of the Qur'an to promote contemporary human

rights law. Eslami-Somea contends that, "Only then would Islamic law offer adequate

solutions to resolve the problems and hardships facing Muslim societies in the modern

era" (p. 128).

In additional criticism of the current status of peacebuilding and CT efforts as

applied to the contemporary situation of global Muslim communities, Kadayifci-Orellana

and Sharify-Funk (2010) relate the inequity that many women continue to endure in

certain global contexts. This view maintains: "Unfortunately, the many devoted Muslim

women who are working strenuously to address conflicts and build peace in their

communities are largely invisible in scholarship and journalism" (p. 186). They

recommend granting increased visibility to women peacebuilders, which will help to

correct the inaccurate impression that Muslim women are not addressing conflicts and

building peace in their communities. They continue to explain that many contemporary

Muslim women peacemakers are engaging in a process of rediscovery, uncovering new

meanings within Islamic tradition and new ways of perceiving such historical Muslim

female figures, including Khadijah, Fatimah, and Aisha, "all of whom have long embodied and personified certain nonviolent qualities that all Muslim women can aspire to" (pp. 198-9).

Scholar of religion, Qamar-Ul Huda, offers the Qur'anic precedent for transformative prospects, "Then We changed their evil into prosperity, until they grew and multiplied…" (7:95 as cited in Huda, 2010, p. 216). This example expresses a will for the capacity for transformation in Islamic faith and culture. Applying this example to current times, Ibrahim Kalin (2010) notes a positive view of Islamic prospects for peacebuilding and CT in saying that there is,

> an emerging consensus on upholding peace as a value in itself, regardless of the
>
> political state of Muslim countries and communities across the globe. There is
>
> also a growing awareness that the Islamic tradition contains the seeds of a culture
>
> of peace (p. 29).

This growing consciousness can help to stir political and economic developments and social transformation that are direly needed in specific areas within contemporary Muslim societies.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Relevant Academic Literature

The weaknesses that I found in my survey of the literature available that is relevant to the topic of peacebuilding and CT within Islam and among those who practice it, is the relative scarcity of resources related to the topic, especially when compared with the tremendous amount of research and information related that serves to analyze and understand Islam within a lens that only perceives violence and injustice. Contrastingly, however, it is noteworthy that, in recent years, with the development of the peacebuilding

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and CT field and the various conflicts that exist in various Muslim-majority nations, there seems to be an emergent field of peacebuilding and CT relevant to Islamic thought and practice. So, despite this general absence of information related to Islam and peacebuilding, there seems to be an increase in the amount of related information that is accessible. An additional limitation found in my Literature Review research was the lack of examples in which "Shari'ah" has been applied effectively as a means of instilling peacebuilding and CT principles and a system of justice that upholds such standards. I found a great deal of information on the topic of "Shari'ah" as a tool for social justice and promoting peacebuilding, yet felt there were no concrete examples provided.

A glaring hole that I found in my Literature Review was the lack of representation of female thinkers and researchers as well as female Islamic examples of peacebuilding and CT values and lifestyles. I feel as though there needs to be an expansion in the historical as well as contemporary contributions that women have and continue to make to the field of peacebuilding and CT within Islam. Conversely, on the same topic, I also felt that it was a strength that there were female scholars of Islam whose research and contributions were highlighted, altogether. This bright spot within this issue of an unequal representation, should be celebrated, and will hopefully serve as inspiration for global (not exclusive to Islam) patriarchal systems to allow women the space and freedom to contribute as they so desire, and also to attract increasing numbers of Muslim women to this relevant field of study and practice.

I found opportunity for growth in terms of the dissemination of information and literature and its reach. Though this reality may be dictated by hegemonic power structures, that, in many ways, control the flow of information and knowledge, I feel that

there is vast room for improvement with regards to transmitting more positive images of

Islam and its followers to both non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Despite the quality,

clarity, and mass amount of information that serves to advance peacebuilding and CT

within an Islamic framework, it is not reaching enough, and thereby not raising as much

awareness as its potential. A final key strength of the Literature Review is my

understanding that what I examined clearly conveyed how Islam has and does contribute

to peacebuilding and CT and how Islamic communities promote such ideals in diverse

and comprehensive ways. Through the application of religious text and the model set

through the teachings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, these scholars of Islam and

peacebuilding clearly outline how Islam is a framework for peacebuilding and CT efforts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The culture of inquiry that I chose can be characterized as following the "Interpretive Strand" approach within the field of qualitative and in-depth research. Through this inquiry I sought greater insight as to how the varied perspectives on and experiences with Islam can be understood, as these experiences are subject to an individual's application of the body of knowledge within Islam (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). As the conversations were of through nature, the process in itself served to be a meaning-making and partnership effort where "Active Listening," a sense of trust, and a search for understanding were at the core of the interview experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 94). The interviews were "semistructured" to remain flexible and offer the participants guiding questions, yet opportunities to share any information they wished to convey (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102).

I chose this particular group of interviewees, so as to be able to elevate the voices of this small, yet distinctive range of Muslims. As the topic focused on a religion and diverse group that is particularly marginalized and often the victim of oversimplified perceptions, this attempts to increase understanding and awareness of Muslim perspectives on and experiences with peacebuilding and CT, more positive elements within this religious framework from individuals that are often the subjects of Islamophobia and other misdirected realities. Though this research study had the potential to invoke somewhat challenging or sensitive issues among participants, I felt it especially pertinent to create a safe and understanding space within which the experiences of average, especially young-adult, Muslims can be amplified. Framing this research as a focus on the elements of peacebuilding and CT- especially from the perspective of

everyday Muslims- was an area of academic and social research that seemed to be lacking in expansive and comprehensive information. It was also an opportunity to give expression to Islam and its relation to peacebuilding and CT from Islamic perspectives, rather than from perspectives of those simply researching the topic from a more detached, ethnographic perspective. It offered me the opportunity to serve as an ally to this community and also allowed this community increased exposure to partners. This study incorporated contemporarily practiced experiences with and beliefs of Islam, sharing conversation with international and local adult folks who identify as Muslim (males and females in their 20s and 30s) that generously offered to speak with me or accepted my invitation to partake in an interview discussing the connection between peacebuilding and CT and their religious traditions, values, and life practice.

For the Data Collection Methods that I utilized, with the abovementioned culture of inquiry in mind, I conducted one-to-one interviews in the following formats: two face-to-face interviews in Seattle- with a female participant from the United States and a male participant from Guinea; six interviews via video conference- with one male participant from Jerusalem and one male participant from Iraq, as well as four participants in the Northeast United States, which included two females from Libya, one female from Malaysia, and one male from Senegal. Each of the eight interviewees self-identified as Muslim. The central issues and needs for these parties were to be understood from their own perspective and for their tool of Islamic faith to be leveraged as a means for peacebuilding and CT thoughts. Prior to starting each interview, the respective participants and I would share brief, casual conversation, engendering a friendly atmosphere. I reminded the participants that I was merely looking for any information

they wished to share and that I would do my best to ensure a sense of safety within the conversation throughout the interview. Also, to ensure that participants were comfortable with the research topic and questions prior to agreeing to partake in the research study, I sent participants the questions that I planned to ask during the interview process, offering as much transparency as I felt I could. Furthermore, I reviewed the Informed Consent Letter with participants, which outlined the participatory nature of the agreement, the purpose, relevant definitions, the interview questions, potential risks and benefits to participants, confidentiality, and contact information for the researcher. I audio recorded each interview and, after the completion of each interview, transcribed the results.

I employed the use of a "Qualitative Data Analysis" and "Interpretation" framework when trying to make meaning of the data collected (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). I felt that such an approach would help me to deeply explore the anecdotal evidence that the participants shared, so as to see how the Islamic body of knowledge is understood and applied to everyday Muslim personalities. In order to illuminate all-too-often invisible perspectives, I wanted to feel I had comfortable understanding of valuable stories and information that participants shared. The first step of this process was a "Data Preparation Phase," which included transcribing the data and deciding what results to focus on (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 302). During the transcription process, I took notes and wrote memos for important points shared by participants and common threads that evolved, analyzing and interacting with the data throughout the entire process. I chose to transcribe as I felt it would be a thorough and comprehensive way of re-experiencing, reimagining, and reviewing the data with a fresh perspective. My next two steps of the data analysis process were incorporating a "Data Exploration Phase" and a

"Data Reduction Phase" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 305). In the "Data Exploration Phase," I began to think about the data gathered and noted and categorized highlights that I deemed relevant to the research process. From these findings and notes, I began to summarize and code these findings. I employed the use of the "Grounded Theory Approach" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 308) in which I first collected the data, and organized it based on salient themes emerging from the results of my coding and notation processes. Essentially, my process entailed my attempt to most comprehensively understand and analyze the data through "immersion," organizing the data into groups, "chunking," and bringing meaning to such information, through "interpretation" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 262).

Some important potential Limitations to this Research Design included several key aspects. As a researcher, I elected to interview a diversity of Muslims, most of which were geographically distant from where I conducted my research. As a result, I relied on video call technology to conduct six of the interviews to account for these geographic constraints. The lack of ability to connect directly with the participants in a face-to-face setting likely decreased the quality of the interviews in some ways. For instance, sometimes the calls were dropped or the connection not very clear, disrupting the thought processes and flows of information that participants shared and that I was interpreting and perceiving. Additionally, geographical distances and time zone discrepancies between myself and the interviewees also led to some instances where I conducted interviews either late at night or early in the morning for me, likely affecting my mental alertness and level of attention and understanding.

As aforementioned, my "outsider status" in terms of religious identity, may have yielded some results in which perhaps participants may not have opened up and shared certain information, as I may not fully understand like one identifying as Muslim. The most I could be seen as was an ally, lacking the full ability to empathize, as I have not lived a Muslim experience. The fact that half of the participants, including three of the four female participants, are currently students and practitioners of peacebuilding and CT theory may skew my results, as responses likely were different from those not proactively involved in peacebuilding and CT efforts. The remaining participants have each participated in organized experiences related to peacebuilding and CT, as that is mostly the capacity within which I became acquainted with the interviewees. Similar to this potential for bias in the responses, the questions were framed from a peacebuilding and CT perspective, potentially influencing some of the responses provided by participants. Such factors serve to hamper the generalizability of the study.

Additional potential sources of Limitation to the study are that despite the fact that interviews were conducted in English, six of the eight participants- three male and three female, were not native speakers of the English language, clearly impacting the ability to fully express ideas and concepts related to this study. Due to the fact all interviewees were relatively young and mostly currently students, participants' responses were likely influenced by their respective ages, as fewer experiences to draw upon may guide their perspectives and their responses throughout the interview processes. Though the interviewees identified as having a wide range of religious affiliations with Muslim faith tradition, participants tended to maintain fairly politically and socially progressive notions. Several participants seemed to balance their faith practice with what they

explained (and I perceived) to be their relatively liberal social views. These political and social perspectives clearly influence the means in which their application of both Islamic cultural and faith tradition impacts their lives, as reflected in their responses throughout the respective interview processes. However, it is noteworthy that at least three of the participants identified as quite observant with Islamic faith as a central influence to them.

As students, they all received or continue to receive secular education, as opposed to attending strictly religious institutions such as "Madrassahs." Students of secular fields, they are likely influenced by secular subject matter that they encounter, which greatly predisposes them to ideas outside of Islamic thought. It is also important to point out that their secular studies and some of their professional experiences were conducted in English language, more commonly exposing them to ideas that may be more prevalent in Western culture, and possibly less endemic in Eastern cultural frameworks and institutions. The resources available in English likely lend themselves more comfortably to What the West would see as more moderate political and social perspectives and attitudes, with perhaps less exposure to more conservative or extremist ideas and attitudes. Being educated and having abilities to travel freely and pursue their interests also demonstrates a relative level of autonomy in their experiences, as they also have the educational tools and resources to define and apply (to some extent) Islamic and other influences in their lives. This also demonstrates a certain degree of privilege in which the participants are able to enjoy freedoms and experiences that perhaps people with fewer prospects for freedom of movement and educational and professional pursuits might enjoy. These privileges deeply guide the paths they each take.

Further potential sources of Limitations to this study includes predisposal to

armed conflict within their distinct life experiences. I am aware that at least half of the

interviewees have lived through armed conflict, including Participant #2 from Palestine,

Participant #3 from Iraq, and Participant #7 and Participant #8, each from different parts

of Libya. Such experiences clearly have a deep impact on their worldviews, though I will

not conjecture as to how, as that seems to be an extremely personal notion and likely

manifests itself quite differently for each participant that has been exposed to armed

conflict. The final possible Limitation to this study is the very small sample size. With

merely eight interviewees in total, the results are not generalizable, yet simply intend to

serve to highlight these distinctive experiences of a diverse group of Muslims.

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Participant #1: A twenty two-year-old male, born and raised in Guinea who emigrated to the United States. He is currently a university student in the Unites States.

Participant #2: A thirty-something male, Palestinian who currently works with a small international conflict transformation and peacebuilding interfaith organization in the Middle East.

Participant #3: A twenty seven-year-old male, Iraqi who has a degree in Engineering from an Iraqi university, but due to the current conflict is currently out of work. He has previous professional experience teaching.

Participant #4: A twenty seven-year-old female, Malaysian MA student in International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

Participant #5: A twenty six-year old male from Senegal, MA student in the International Development field in the United States. He has previous professional experience.

Participant #6: A twenty-year-old female American undergraduate student studying in the Unites States.

Participant #7: A thirty something year-old female, Libyan, MA student in the International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

Participant #8: A thirty-something female, Libyan MA student in the International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Diversity of Global Muslim Experiences and Identity's Influence

In this study, participants' relationship with Islam and the level in which it serves as an influence on their lives ranged from: "…the most important thing to me [is] to be Muslim" (Participant #1, personal communication, March 5, 2015), to:

> "I'm not really religious, but, kind of, because I grew up in like a Muslim household, it sticks to you a little bit...it's just like culturally. But…when someone says something bad about Muslims, you still have that little bit of sting to it…" (Participant #5, personal communication, March 11, 2015).

For Participant #1, a male Guinean student currently residing in the United States, religious Islam serves as the core foundation of his existence providing meaning to all he does and thinks. Contrastingly, for Participant #5, a Senegalese-American male student, Islam serves as a cultural influence, while he does not subscribe to its religious teachings. Furthermore, he feels part of worldwide community of Muslims, in the sense that, when something negative happens that is targeted at Muslim communities or individuals, he empathizes with such experiences. The clear disparity between these two responses aims to illustrate the diversity of views and practices among self-identifying Muslims, and debunk broad-sweeping generalizations that are made about all Muslim people. Moreover, it shows the kinship and community, as both are still actors within the diverse global Muslim experience. In emphasizing the intersectional nature of her experience in life, Participant #6, a female American student, stated: "I think because I'm an American Muslim, it gives me a broader viewpoint than some people, because I can kind of look at both sides of…certain issues" (personal communication, March 13, 2015). This

participant explained the multifaceted nature of her identity and how it allows her to shape her worldview based on a holistic, comprehensive, and unique perspective, in which she can relate to both American and Islamic norms.

Participant #7, a female Libyan student echoed a similar perspective, remarking that, due to major historical occurrences and the local cultural influences that resulted, Islam became a fusion of the religion combined with local cultures to meet the real demands of communities' social contexts. Islam manifests itself in vastly different ways when taking on various, localized practices and ideas. Participant #7 noted:

> when Islam spread out…every country had its own local culture. This is why we have different schools of thought. I'm Muslim. I'm Sunni. But, then we have 'Madha Maliki,' 'the school of Maliki thought.' There's some scholars…like one thousand years ago, they started to learn about Islam and how to integrate Islam into a new culture and community in North Africa…Maliki school is a very different one. When it emerged, like 60% of this Maliki School is traditions and local culture and is not Islam…it means that 60% of what I do in daily life, is based on traditions and actually culture, and not Islam (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

Though Participant #7 identified herself as a religious "Muslim," she acknowledged the deep complexity of her identity and how the dynamic pieces of it interact. Also serving to offer an alternative understanding to assumptions made of Islam, Participant #8, a different female student and professional from Libya, expressed the freedom she experienced within what she considers to be a "conservative" society:

in Libya, where I'm from…it's really conservative. We born as a Muslim, but, actually, we have this vision of modern Muslims where…we grow up in an environment where we have the freedom to express ourselves and express the values that we grow up with (personal communication, March 16, 2015).

In this assertion, she discredited assumptions that simply because she had a traditional upbringing that she was socially repressed. Participant #8 also refuted the notion of a singular Muslim experience. She explained that she was able to experience freedom of expression, both as an individual as well as in terms of her faith background. This experience, in addition to the experiences of each of the interviewees, helped to enrich my understanding of Islam and its followers. I learned of varied experiences that lent themselves to a diversity of understandings and applications of the religion, contrary to monolithic depictions that dominate popular understandings.

Diversity, Coexistence, and Inclusivity

Participants spoke at length about the various commands, teachings, and historical examples in which Islam has served to promote "coexistence," as peacebuilder and peacebuilding and CT scholar, Paula Green (2012), explains as, "allow(ing) equal rights" (p. 106). During the interview processes, nearly all participants alluded to the aforementioned Qur'anic passage 49:13 which participants explained as a reference to God's desire for people to live alongside and learn from one another, as a means of promoting peacebuilding principles and perpetuate a conflict-free society. Participant #2, a male peacebuilding professional from Palestine, referenced the Prophet Muhammad's embodiment of such ideals of inclusivity and respect for other social groups, as historically, Muslims never destroyed synagogues or churches. Participant #2 went on to

relay Muhammad's exhortation, which said that if one enters any country and rules that country, one cannot destroy any living creature there (personal communication, March 8, 2015). With the exception of instances in history where such temples have been targets of attacks, historically, these buildings were not only preserved, but even protected. Participant #2 remarked that Muhammad's precedent was set as a model for future Muslim followers to emulate. Such an example showed respect for other religions and cultures by affording freedom to ensure that people can express desired spiritually-motivated "higher needs," as part of universal "Basic Human Needs" (Galtung, 1980, p. 62). In ensuring the satisfaction of these needs, Islam and its example serve to uphold principles of peacebuilding theory.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness, a key component of reconciliation and of the CT process as a whole, is strongly emphasized throughout the body of knowledge of Islam. Participant #3, a male from Iraq said: "From a Muslim perspective, you always forgive each other…like when misunderstandings happen, we like to forgive each other and forget [anything] happened" (personal communication, March 8, 2015). Especially knowing that this participant is currently an internally displaced person due to the current level of physical insecurity in his hometown of Mosul, Iraq, I found this statement to be of even greater significance. Given the frustration of "Basic Human Needs" that he is currently experiencing, in addition to the previous comparable experiences he has previously endured, his assertion of a propensity to forgive and remain conflict-free seems all-the-more inspiring. He went on to give an example of a memorable experience in which he was involved in a car accident. Despite not being the cause of the accident, due to this

principle of forgiveness within Islamic teaching, he elected to simply forgive the driver and agreed that there was no conflict. Participant #1 corroborates such a perspective with a precept in the Qur'an which, as he describes: "If someone is aggressive toward you, you have right to defend yourself, 'then the one who forgive and opts for compromise, has his reward on the taking by God'" (42:40 as cited in personal communication, March 5, 2015). This passage expresses the notion that self-defense is justified by Islamic standards, yet seeking reconciliation is honorable and the ideal.

Participant #6 explained a fairly common belief within Islam that one cannot hold a grudge for more than three days (personal communication, March 13, 2015). Expounding upon such guidelines for a culture of forgiveness, several participants mentioned that prior to entering the month of Ramadan, which is listed in the "Five Pillars," one must first forgive and be forgiven by others. This example promotes peacebuilding through a practical tool, easily serving to uphold peacebuilding and CT prospects among individuals and communities that follow such models.

Nonviolence

Participants spoke a fair amount of the issue of NV and its applicability within Islam. This topic is especially important due to the contemporary prevalent view that associates Islam, its teachings, and its followers with violence that is religiously sanctioned not merely in situations of self-defense. Participant #7 invoked the Prophet Muhammad's standard for NV as typified by his actions while living in a hostile political and social environment in Mecca. Throughout this experience in Mecca, Muhammad embodied the Islamic value of "Sabr," patience, as a means of effectively living out a NV lifestyle. Participant #7 averred: "as a Muslim…you always look to the

past…Muhammad (PBUH), thirteen years he was in Mecca. He was practicing nonviolence and they attacked him…even for self-defense he did not use violence…" (personal communication, March 15, 2015). Another noteworthy claim within this statement is the idea that Islam continues to revere the past and its key historical figures as a means of contemporary inspiration and influence. Participant #8 elaborated on an additional source inspiring NV principles and action within Islam: "one of the famous sayings we have…where somebody slapped you, then you turn on your face and give them the other side. It just shows that you need to change the attitude of the others by being kind and a good example" (personal communication, March 16, 2015). This notion shows that even when faced with unprovoked aggression, the ideal response, from an Islamic perspective, is simply demonstrating kind behavior and not getting caught in a potential cycle of aggression or violence.

Human Rights and Social Justice

Islam and many of those that follow its example, pride themselves on human rights and social justice foci within the religion and culture. Participants offered extensive responses and ways in which Islam serves to perpetuate peacebuilding and CT ideals through social justice and human rights. Participant #4, a female Malaysian student, shared a story from the Hadith of Muhammad's experience in Medina, when it was, "made a Muslim country and Islamic governing community," which was simultaneous to when the Constitution of Medina was implemented in 622 CE and began to act as a guide for those practicing Islam. The Islamic community often refers back to the Constitution of Medina for human rights and peacebuilding influence. For example, the Constitution explicitly states that Jews and Christians are free to practice their religion. Participant #4

continued in saying that, "Muslims usually refer to not the Magna Carta, but to the Constitution of Medina," when looking for a guidance on issues of human rights (personal communication, March 11, 2015). The Constitution of Medina also delineates coexistence realities and seems to find peaceful means of incorporating other faiths into an Islamic system of governance. Within its own historical context, it applies teachings and beliefs from Islam as a means of producing a legal framework that directs its constituents on how to continue to sponsor vital human rights. This ideal of human rights is extended to great lengths within Islamic thought.

Participant #6 related a Hadith with a teaching from Muhammad, which instructs Muslims to always act with compassion and social justice: "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is oppressed." Muhammad explained that this could be accomplished, "By preventing him from oppressing others." Participant #6 contended that this notion, "stands out because it shows that we should not look at it like it's 'us against them'…it's that we're trying to help everybody" (Hadith Sahih Bukhari, Volume 3, Hadith 624 as cited in personal communication, March 13, 2015). Such an mentality expresses a need for empathy in situations where it typically may seem most difficult. Through this example that Muhammad stated in the Hadith, we find common Islamic faith and peacebuilding and CT tools in the form of mercy, patience, and open-mindedness, especially when faced with such tremendous tests such as helping even those who may be deemed to be "oppressors."

Additional examples of Islam's socially just stirrings that participants related to social justice and human rights action included calls to assist those most vulnerable in society such as refugees and orphans. In the Qur'an, Allah explains the abundant rewards

that those who assist such people in helping to secure their "Basic Human Needs" will receive for their moral behavior. Similarly, according to Islamic religious belief, the reward for freeing a slave or someone socially repressed is exoneration from all previous misdoings in life. Participant #2 explained how, in applying such a teaching, Muhammad, upon his arrival in Mecca, through Islamic society, helped to introduce a number of laws and regulations in order to reduce the number of slaves and to facilitate better conditions of life for women. These changes were introduced despite the historical context and the fact that slavery and the repression of women were socially-accepted norms at the time. Participant #2 expounded upon this in noting that women were actually granted greater social status and freedom within their historical context relative to other social groups (personal communication, March 8, 2015). Such examples are testament to Islam's role in advancing social justice and human rights on a global scale.

Conflict Resolution Processes

"Shurah," or "mutual consultation" is a Muslim CR process that has been adopted by communities across the globe. Participant #3 noted that a typical "Shurah" in Iraq: "generally means you…take the opinions of parties to a conflict…" These are generally comprised of five men from a first group and five men form a second group that convene to resolve the issue being addressed. A key point of the "Shurah" is to work together as a group to come to a resolution. The people that make decisions are "chosen" and are "the best men" that are "known for their honesty" and for being "clever." Decisions are made based on a majority vote, in a democratic manner (Participant #3, personal communication, March 8, 2015). "Shurah," as applied to a Malaysian context, from the experience of Participant #4, meets at a mosque and acts, "not only on issues concerning

the mosque, but, also issues concerning the community around the mosque." If any community members have a problem, then they can meet with the committee at the mosque at specified times. Upon hearing the issue, the "Shurah" unites to create a solution to help resolve the issue being heard (personal communication, March 11, 2015). Participant #5 reminisced of how the Imam at the mosque his family attended would act as a mediator during local and family disputes. Participant #5 observed that: "In the same way that a judge helps to settle matters, the Imam helped bring all involved parties to an understanding through the words of the holy texts" (personal communication, March 11, 2015). Applying the knowledge rooted in Islamic religious texts, the Imam would find rationale and explanation for dispute resolution decisions.

As part of a vision of an effective CR process, half of the participants alluded to a facilitator's need to be compliant with what peacebuilding scholar and practitioner Tatsushi Arai explains are "Conflict Sensitivity" norms (2014b, p. 38). These participants all emphasized a third-party facilitator's need to understand the community they are working with and the context they are working in. As Participant #4 forwardly expressed: "The third-party's role is to *facilitate* peace and understanding…then there's a small tight-rope where they could go wrong in so many ways" (personal communication, March 11, 2015). Participant #8 stressed the importance of third-party facilitators speaking the same language as the community members affected by the conflict (personal communication, March 16, 2015).

Participants Experiences Related to Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation

As students and professionals within and active supporters of the peacebuilding and CT field, participants eagerly shared many personal related inspiring experiences.

Participant #2, an interfaith peacebuilding professional, said: "I believe I have so many examples…we see in [name of organization removed] so many beautiful examples of Muslim families coming together and hosting Christian and Jewish families or…the solidarity that we see when something wrong happens…" (personal communication, March 8, 2015). Working in an interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding organization, Participant #2 dedicates his peacebuilding and CT service toward building bridges between Abrahamic faith communities and Palestinians and Israelis along conflict lines in the Middle East. Employing the use of the shared peacebuilding and Islamic ideal of empathy, he critically pointed out the support that these typically conflicting groups and individuals show for one another, especially when a tragedy occurs. For each respective group involved in the conflict, it becomes an opportunity to follow Muhammad's abovementioned urging to even make peace and eventually collaborate with one who might otherwise be characterized as your "oppressor" in a conflict context.

Participant #6, an undergraduate student, outlined the numerous social justice and human rights experiences she has had working with Muslim humanitarian and cultural organizations. On the global level, she worked with United Muslim Relief, a Muslim-driven humanitarian relief agency, which has raised money to assist Syrian refugees as well as those negatively affected by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. She explained that she is interested in looking at peacebuilding through an "interfaith lens," as she sees it to be a necessary component to peacebuilding prospects (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Participant #3 offered a personal act of peacebuilding in Mosul, Iraq in 2009, under unstable political and security circumstances. He recounted a story in which,

despite the fact that "groups of terrorists" would target Christians, he provided rides for

Christian classmates at his university. He said, "at that point it was considered dangerous

and a group of terrorists could appear and shoot you without question" for aiding people

who identified as Christian (personal communication, March 8, 2015). Essentially, he

risked his own security as means of assisting a marginalized and targeted group in his

home community. This courageous act seems to epitomize peacebuilding ideals as

understood through a lens of helping peers to satisfy their "Basic Human Need" of

receiving education and freedom to travel without unjust restrictions. Also inside of a

violent conflict setting, Participant #7, relying on her collectivist and community-oriented

upbringing, mentioned her experience of buying medical supplies so that she could help

assist those injured during the Libyan Revolution in 2011. Supplementary testament to

the profound peacebuilding efforts the participants have taken in their respective lives,

Participant #8 spoke of her experience working in public engagement and organizing in

Libya in 2011. She said that: "when people have the compassion and the motivation to be

part of change, they can do amazing stuff…it was really amazing what they have done

with no knowledge, resources, experience…just the power of people" (personal

communication, March 16, 2015). In this example, she relayed her experience working

alongside fellow Muslims and how inspired she was by their effectiveness despite the

adversity they faced and lack of external support.

Criticisms of Modern Applications of Islam by Specific Groups

Despite the large amount of pride expressed in their cultural and religious

heritage, most participants shared some criticism of contemporary applications of Islam

by specific groups and individuals. Given the current uncertain political and social

context within many Muslim-majority nations and communities worldwide, participants, such as Participant #8, saw certain groups that claim to act in the interest and under the influence of Islam to be misdirected in their political struggles, misusing the notion of "Jihad," an internal struggle over morality, to advance their own interests, not Islamic interests, as they so claim (personal communication, March 16, 2015). Such actions can be characterized by these fighting groups as influenced by what peacebuilding scholar and practitioner, Johan Galtung (2001), would explain as "Cultural Violence." These groups rely on what they perceive to be, "the sum total of all myths, of glory and trauma…that serve to justify direct violence" (p. 6). Despite harmful labels that quickly associate Islam and all Muslims with this sort of "Cultural Violence" and "Direct Violence," particularly when viewed through a Western lens, each of the participants expressed and seemed to embody elements that are vital to peacebuilding and CT ideals and values, transforming the propagandist and Islamophobic views that are imposed upon them. Consistent with CT theory, these participants see these issues as what Lederach (2003) sees as, "life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes" (The Little Book of Conflict Transformation).

Participant #5 said: "…so now, when there's a little bit of people trying to force their views. In my interpretation, the Qur'an says you really shouldn't be forcing your view, but you should be respecting" (personal communication, March 11, 2015). His criticism was that certain groups have taken elements of the Qur'an and used them for their own gains, yet, in his understanding, the Qur'an would denounce such actions as they undermine peacebuilding and CT prospects, lacking both the values of inclusivity and respect, as called for in the Qur'an. Underscoring some deep divisions that exist in

intrafaith conflict, Participant #6 remarked: "with the whole Sunni/Shia (conflict), people have wronged each other so much in the past and that's led to a current generation that just hates each other for no reason…but people need to look at all of this stuff about forgiveness…you're supposed to forgive them" (personal communication, March 13, 2015). Her understanding is that, if people apply Islam's expectation of forgiveness, an ongoing conflict that she sees as being drawn across the Sunni-Shia divide, would conclude, leading to a transformed conflict, greater Muslim unity, and societies and individual communities promoting peacebuilding. She sees inspiration through Islamic sources that could help to transform such deteriorating and cyclical violent conflicts. In a very direct statement, Participant #7 professed:

> people should really understand the concepts of Islam…Because, many Muslims, themselves, do not practice Islam. What you see now from ISIS or whatever, that is not Islam. This is totally different. All the[se] people don't have inner peace…they are not satisfied (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

From her perspective, the people who currently identify as ISIS are not really practicing Islam, when they say that Islam inspires their actions. She saw their version as an illegitimate iteration of Islam. She mentions members of ISIS' frustration of "Basic Human Needs" which serves to buttress their violent socio-political struggle.

Participant #5 echoed a notion endemic to the participants, explaining that certain social groups, particularly women, are marginalized and repressed in some Muslim communities: "even let's say people that are very strict Muslims in Saudi Arabia…and they have ideas that women should be subservient and should not be able to go to work and get education, when my interpretation of the Qur'an, that's not true" (personal

communication, March 11, 2015). He explains how such applications of Islam ultimately

misappropriate the core messages and teachings of the Qur'an. Participant #8 validates

this perspective in also relating concern over the mistreatment of women vis-à-vis

militant groups imposing their own contradictory interpretations of Islamic law. She

imparts: "ISIS and militia groups are pushing very hard to make sure all of the women to

be covered and then they killing themselves and others under the name of Islam"

(personal communication, March 16, 2015). She explains that these militant groups claim

to be stewards of moral observance, yet murder innocent Muslims and non-Muslims

alike. Participant #2 described a need for a reformation of sorts: "a huge part of my

religion talks about [social justice]…so social justice is extremely important. Nowadays,

I think there should be strong scholars that would address all the texts and concepts." He

recommends that robust religious leadership within Muslim communities could help

guide Muslims through the peacebuilding and CT texts in Islam as a means of utilizing

the religion for its intended purposes, serving to alleviate some of the issues that currently

affect certain Muslim-majority nations (personal communication, March 8, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Conclusions

The main research question for this study was: "*How can Islam be understood as a tool or lifestyle used for peacebuilding and conflict transformation endeavors?*" Participants in this study offered prolific and distinctive understandings of how Islam, both culturally and religiously, can be, and is utilized as a force for peacebuilding and CT efforts throughout the widely diverse global Muslim world. Furthermore, they offered anecdotal evidence as to their respective active roles in working towards a world absent of conflict where there are collaborative and empathetic efforts to ensure that the "Basic Human Needs" of all are satisfied through values shared by both Islamic teachings and tradition and the field of peacebuilding and CT, such as pluralism, understanding, respect, equity, and justice.

Deflating essentialist notions of global Muslim experiences, these participants, to some extent, served as a microcosmic sample set that displayed the deep diversity within the Muslim world, sharing various cultural and religious frameworks and beliefs that drive their peacebuilding exertions. Several participants noted their deep propensities for forgiveness as a source of strength for overcoming violent conflict that they have been subject to in their lives. There was also much discussion related to inner peace and the precepts for it within Islam. Participants saw this as a means of initially transforming any internal conflicts, and from there, allowing this internal peace to spread to all those connected, engendering a broader culture of peace. They explained the notion of "Jihad" as a means for working towards this sort of internalized and externalized peacebuilding behavior, and not as a means for taking up arms, as the term is merely reduced to in

dominant and contemporary Western views. They saw "Jihad" as a tool for self-betterment and fueling views and courageous examples of NV they lived out.

Participants expressed their strong beliefs that Islam is deeply rooted in tradition of human rights and social justice activism, to the extent that there was a belief related that one should go so far as to assist an oppressor, even if the person aiding is the subject of said repression. Through practical implementation of certain traditional CR processes, participants shared the ways in which "Shurah" and other related processes served to facilitate justice in their own lived experiences within disparate Islamic cultural settings. Other key tools and issues discussed by participants that help to position Islam and its teachings as a catalyst for peacebuilding and CT endeavors included how third-party facilitators and external third-party interveners within a conflict setting can most closely follow models of "Conflict Sensitivity." Through frank and open discussion of the violent conflicts that currently affect certain communities and nations within the global Islamic world, participants shared their dismay for certain applications of Islam, by also offering practical recommendations for how such political and social realities can be transformed and actuated for peacebuilding causes. On this topic, participants explained what they perceived to be the virtuous applications of both "Jihad" and "Shari'ah" and how each can be applied to create a just and moral social system. As I hoped- both as a researcher and individual- speaking with the participants helped me to debunk some of my own ill-informed preconceptions of Islamic teaching and culture, which I hope can serve as a resource to all those who seek to learn more from these perspectives on and experiences with Islam as a stimulus for peacebuilding prospects.

I found interesting discrepancies between the resources surveyed for my Literature Review and the responses shared by the interviewees. Most notably, as interview questions were framed within the context of peacebuilding and CT theoretical framework, participants did not discuss much about the justification of violence and war, while academic resources consulted focused a fair amount on the issues of "just war" and violence. Additionally, participants discussed forgiveness, withholding judgment, and a sense of flexibility a considerable amount, while the research largely neglected such topics. Lastly, the interviewees in this study focused on issues relevant to the peacebuilding tool of "Dialogue for Understanding" and "Conflict Sensitivity" with quite a bit of frequency, while these concepts barely appeared within the research reviewed over the course of the Literature Review process.

Practical Applicability

The findings of this research may help to change negative and monolithic perceptions of those self-identifying as Muslim. For instance, readers who do not have a clear understanding of Islam may read this as an alternate source for information as to what Islam is and how its followers apply it to further causes of peacebuilding and CT efforts. This paper offers both theoretical and concrete examples of the application of Islam and its cultural and religious influence in terms of opposing destructive attitudes. It serves to construct a more positive image of Islam and its followers, helping to offer different understandings from what are prevalent Western attitudes. Furthermore, the principles, tools, and stories addressed in this study can serve as practical models that can be emulated within Islamic contexts. These principles and models of CR can especially aim to satisfy "Conflict Sensitivity" standards that will perpetuate positive CT results.

This paper aspires to educate communities and individuals- both Muslim and not- as to the teachings within the religious and cultural conception of Islam. It offers additional resources and information for those seeking a greater understanding of Islam, its precepts, and ways in which it can be and is practically applied. The takeaways from this study can be implemented through offering both outsiders the possibility to more intimately understand Islam and those who are influenced by it, in that it acts as an opportunity for exposure to a group that is often seen as "the other," and whose elements of peacebuilding and CT have yet to be fully explored.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of the research project and the findings it yielded, there are several questions for future undertakings related to this subject matter. The questions follow as such: How can the experiences and views of average Muslims- especially ones intent on peacebuilding endeavors in any capacity- be highlighted and become more commonly known and made visible within the various media that influence global perspectives? Essentially, how can the information such as the information I have gathered through this study reach the greatest number of people in both the global East and West communities? A very salient theme within the Literature Review effort was the lack of female perspectives as well as examples of females that embody Islamic peacebuilding and CT principles- despite the fact there are surely innumerable examples throughout history. Based on such findings, how can the female Muslim experience be better incorporated into a more complete understanding of the global Muslim experience? Furthermore, what is the role of women with regards to development and social change as the socio-political systems and circumstances in many Muslim-majority areas throughout the world

continue to develop? From an Islamic justice stance, an additional question that arose

was: How has "Shari'ah" been applied, in more recent examples, to advance

peacebuilding and CT? How can such a system of law and justice serve to satisfy the

"Basic Human Needs" of various global Islamic communities?

Most of the participants interviewed either directly or indirectly alluded to a need

for a safe and open space in which people can discuss issues, without perhaps and

concrete goals other than elevated levels of awareness and humanization of those seen as

"others." Based on such findings, how can "Dialogue for Understanding" effectively be

applied to Islamic conflict scenarios in a way that complies with "Conflict Sensitivity"

expectations and norms? Perhaps there can be a space for dialogue, even when conflict

does not necessarily express itself in violent manners? If so, what would such

arrangements look like? What pre-existing Islamic cultural and religious influences might

be applied to such dialogic prospects? Furthermore, with an increase of international

attention to conflicts that effect many Muslim-majority areas, how can international

interventions and support best ensure that they follows "Conflict Sensitivity" norms, and

attempt to genuinely satisfy the CT needs in such conflict areas?

I feel there is a need for further research into diverse Islamic perspectives on the

roots of the conflicts that exist in various Muslim-majority communities and

corresponding best practices for addressing such root causes, while working towards

peacebuilding and CT goals. What initiatives exist and where is there potential for growth

in terms of addressing issues related to violent conflict? What should the respective roles

of both civil society and government be in tackling such issues while attempting to

transform conflicts and their causes at their most fundamental and root levels?

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Appendix A: **List of Interviewees**

Participant #1: A twenty two-year-old male, born and raised in Guinea who emigrated to the United States. He is currently a university student in the Unites States.

Participant #2: A thirty-something male, Palestinian who currently works with a small international conflict transformation and peacebuilding interfaith organization in the Middle East.

Participant #3: A twenty seven-year-old male, Iraqi who has a degree in Engineering from an Iraqi university, but due to the current conflict is currently out of work. He has previous professional experience teaching.

Participant #4: A twenty seven-year-old female, Malaysian MA student in International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

Participant #5: A twenty six-year old male from Senegal, MA student in the International Development field in the United States. He has previous professional experience.

Participant #6: A twenty-year-old female American undergraduate student studying in the Unites States.

Participant #7: A thirty something year-old female, Libyan, MA student in the International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

Participant #8: A thirty-something female, Libyan MA student in the International Development field in the United States. She has previous professional experience.

Appendix B: **Letter of Informed Consent**

Unlocking a Narrative: Stories of Islam and Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation
SIT Graduate Institute
03/03/15

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, "Unlocking a Narrative: Stories of Islam and Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation," conducted by Jeremy Sinensky a graduate student at the SIT Graduate Institute. Jeremy is conducting this study for his Capstone project. Professor Paula Green is his faculty sponsor for the project.

Working Definition of "Conflict Transformation": "A sustained process of examining conflict sources and contexts systematically and developing relevant means to redirect its momentum into constructive relationship-building and societal change."[1]
Working Definition of "Peacebuilding": "Peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of postconflict reconstruction and rehabilitation."[2]

Your Participation is Voluntary!
Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation at any time before or during the interview process. Should you elect to participate, you may decline answering any of the questions during the interview process. After the interview has taken place, you may receive an audio copy and typewritten transcript of the interview, but will have waived the rights to its use in this research. The interview will be transcribed verbatim, checked for accuracy, and participants will be allowed to make any desired changes to the data collected from the audio. You will either volunteer to participate as an interviewee or be asked by the researcher, if you are interested and available to partake as a participant in this effort. Please carefully read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Purpose of Study
This research seeks to increase awareness of perceptions of self-identified Muslims of peacebuilding and conflict transformation from diverse Muslim perspectives. The project will entail an exploration into the role of peacebuilding and conflict transformation within various elements of Islam, from a variety of perspectives.

Procedures

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[1] Arai, Tatsushi, 2014. Post-War Development and Peacebuilding: Study Guide. P. 6.

[2] Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2013. Selected Definitions of Peacebuilding. Retrieved from http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/2013/08/selected-definitions-of-peacebuilding/

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked questions regarding your personal perceptions and conceptions of peacebuilding and conflict transformation from an Islamic perspective. If you volunteer to participate, I will ask you the following:

- How do you identify? How do you think such social identification influences your worldview? How does your particular level of practice of your identity influence your perspective and actions?
- What does peace look like to you? What does peace look like from your understanding of an Islamic perspective?
- What key principles of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (including social justice, promotion of human rights, stewardship, among other extensions of peacebuilding and conflict transformation) are you aware of within Islam? Can you please elaborate on some of these concepts? *(feel free to reference specific texts and sources related to concepts and practices being discussed)*
- I am somewhat familiar with certain concepts that clearly uphold peacebuilding within Islam such as *Zakat* and *Saadakah*, can you please explain such concepts and other specific principles within Islam that come to mind?
- What concepts in Islam relate more specifically to attaining inner peace, ultimately connected to a society in which a culture of peace can thrive?
- Are there modern examples of peacebuilding and conflict transformation within an Islamic context that you would like to share? *(can be local, national, global contexts)*
- Do you have any experiences related to peacebuilding and Islam that you would be interested in sharing? If so, please feel free to do so.
- In what ways is Islam unique in its perpetuation of peacebuilding and conflict transformation?
- What are Islamic society *cultural* approaches to conflict transformation?
- What does peace look like to you? Through belief in Islam, in any capacity whatsoever, how can you achieve such a vision of peace?

Through interviews and researched secondhand resources that address this topic, I plan to collect varying perspectives and understandings of peacebuilding and conflict transformation from Islamic perspectives. The interview will likely last between 40 to 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and only be used by the researcher for the purposes of this specific study. You can ask for a copy of the transcript of the interview upon completion of said transcription.

Potential Risks and Benefits to Interviewee
There is a risk that the interviewee may find the content to be of personal nature as the topic being explored addresses issues related to the interviewee's personal social identity as well as potentially personal notions of religion, culture, and spirituality. It also asks participants to reflect on their lived experiences with peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Some of the content to be reviewed may be somewhat complex and/or unfamiliar to the interviewee. Furthermore, some of the questions asked may be perceived by the interviewee as challenging and/or negatively framed. Should the participant have any questions, please do not hesitate to inquire with the researcher. If for any reason, at any time during the interview process, the interviewee prefers not to

respond to a question, the interview will discontinue the discussion of such a question and proceed on with the next question. Please note that this intends to be a safe, open, and understanding space for the participant to share information relevant to this research topic, and the researcher should retain sensitivity to the topic and participant's needs throughout the course of the interview process.

The benefits of your participation include adding to a body of knowledge on a topic relevant to contemporary issues in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Your knowledge, concerns and opinions about the topic of research could help others better understand this issue, while offering participants the opportunity to elevate voices during interviews, in the finalized published version of the research analysis, as well as in academia as a whole.

Confidentiality
Your views on the subject matter will remain confidential and anonymous. I will not share the interview transcripts with anyone and will ensure they are kept in a safe location that only I can access. Your responses will be used for a qualitative research project and will only be incorporated into the final product with your consent. To ensure confidentiality of the participant, if you are quoted in the research, a number will be given to your interview and any names used will be changed. Additionally, when the study is finished, I will destroy the list that shows which interviewee number corresponds with your name. The only descriptive information that will be used in my research is your age, self-identification, geographic location and gender.

The audio recording and typewritten transcript of the interview will only be listened to by the researcher. The recordings will be destroyed upon successful completion and presentation of the research, which is expected to take place sometime between May 17-22, 2015.

Contact Information
If you have concerns or questions about this study please contact the researcher: Jeremy Sinensky at Jeremy.Sinensky@mail.sit.edu or (551) 574-6000. Additionally, you may also contact my research advisor, Professor Paula Green of the SIT Graduate Institute at Paula.Green@sit.edu or (802) 257-7751.

Participant's Signature of Consent
(Electronic or Print Signature)   Witness to Consent (*Print and Sign*)

_____   _____