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Muslim Ethics in an Era of Globalism: Reconciliation in an Age of Empire

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Introduction

When events occurring in a variety of Muslim societies around the globe are projected in the media on a daily basis, then it does momentarily appear that Islam has 'bloody borders', to use Samuel Huntington's now widely criticised description of Islam as a world civilisation. Given the diversity of Muslims around the world, the multiple conflicts, civil wars, revolutions, worldwide migration of people and continuing power struggles, surely these events must by necessity create multiple vortexes of conflict and instability. Often these media portraits cast Islam and Muslims as a people without ethics. Observers of the events of 9/11, reports of hostage taking by pirates in Somalia, the abduction of young girls by the insurgency group Boko Haram to the menace of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria could reach the conclusion that ethics is an oxymoron in Islam. Yet, the ethical is deeply entrenched in Islam from the personal level to the communal. How Muslims can both practise and project an ethics that is consistent with the temporality of globality is both a challenge internal to Muslim communities and a work-in-progress. This chapter will examine a few kernel ideas for consideration.

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1 Imperialism: post-modern style

Can we still speak of a global ethics when there is such a profound absence of a moral consensus on some of the most fundamental issues of life? Can one identify a *modus vivendi* for governance, a balanced international order and the accountability of the powerful? Rhetorical questions posed in this vein do not only identify the aspirations for global ethics, but also point to what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called an emerging 'chaosmos', a cosmos or world marked by chaos as a distinctive feature.

While nation-states partake in traditional forms of 'vertebral globalisation' there is a marked growth in what Arjun Appadurai described as 'cellular globalisation'. The

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latter is a rapidly growing form of globalisation where transnational networks can effectively replicate themselves without central messaging (Appadurai 2006, p. 131). This condition only adds to the 'chaosmos' since cellular globalisation flourishes in complex global networks as different as the World Social Forum as a positive exemplar, and grows in dangerous networks sustained by groups like al-Qaida/Islamic State activists, as deplorable examples. Global corporate capital too is operating in cellular globalising modes and altering the habits and practices of publics beyond the control of the state and with little accountability. And the intensification of social media and the growing power of cyberspace and its technologies have only enhanced cellular globalisation and diminished accountability.

2 Globalisation and emergent imperialism

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Given some very real asymmetries in power between existing global cultures, the question that arises is this: is there a need to hit the restart button and contemplate the need for reconciliation between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless? What options do ordinary people around the world have in choosing between fratricidal foot soldiers who deploy archaic means of warfare from suicide bombings to the use of missiles to down passenger airliners in different theatres of conflict versus the sophisticated armoury of imperial powers who utilise drone technologies and devastating air-power in order to vanquish their adversaries? For the dispossessed of the world, however, to seek reconciliation with both imperialist powers and nihilistic insurgencies borders on the burlesque.

The rise of the Islamic State across Syria and Iraq and the growth of the Taliban in Pakistan are both directly related to failed imperial ventures in the Middle East and South Asia prior to the 11 September 2001 attacks and developments after that fateful onslaught on innocents in the United States.

For millions of people around the world, the imperial ventures of the twentieth century still linger vividly in their living memories. Yet, imperial ambitions have yet to abate. It is as if we had failed to learn from history; Karl Marx's improvisation on Hegel's idea, that history often repeats itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce, is an apt reminder. Let me remove all ambiguity about the farce in point. The United States's imperial ventures have brought with them a bitter harvest and an unstoppable afterlife of violence in the regions it attempted to reshape with force. The farce stretches from the savage and illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that culminated in the occupation of both countries with devastating consequences. That is aside from the extra-judicial executions of terrorist suspects and the inhumane and indefinite imprisonment of hundreds of Muslim men in violation of international law at the US base in Guantanamo Bay, all events that US lawmakers and the public at large have sought to ignore. These events are one large tragedy that has already placed the fragile international political order and our tenuous inter-cultural ethical system in mortal danger.

American imperium has been long in the making, wrote the renowned but often conflicted political writer Michael Ignatieff. It is an imperium that has been acquired

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in a state of deep denial (Ignatieff 2003). It took a cataclysmic event for this illegitimate child of the republic to be acknowledged, publicly adopted and immodestly paraded in demonstrations of awesome power, first in Afghanistan and then followed in Iraq. Morally, the whip of imperial power is ambiguous: was it in self-defence or just pure revenge against anyone who silently cheered the 9/11 hijackers with their box-cutters into the netherworld?

The sanctimonious claim made by the former US president George W. Bush and former British prime minister Tony Blair that the 'war against terrorism' was not a battle against Islam does indeed ring hollow. The facts on the ground and the real-life reality only revealed one monotonous picture: it was a war waged against entities that identified as 'Muslim', and no amount of massaging could alter those facts. One could not miss the hidden subtext of Bush's speech from USS *Abraham Lincoln* on 1 May 2003: 'We have not forgotten the victims of September 11, the last phone calls, the cold murder of children, the searches in the rubble', he said. 'With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States. And war is what they got.' Replace the word 'terrorists' with 'Muslims' and you hear this: 'With those attacks, the Muslims and their supporters declared war on the United States. And war is what they got.' In fact, the Bush–Blair rhetoric, according to experts, was nothing but double-speak and part of the ruthlessness of the Bush administration's policies against all and sundry, especially the heavy-handed government treatment of Muslims living in the United States with regular harassment and witch-hunts that has now abated but has morphed into the practices of influential elements of civil society. Almost in unison all pro-Bush commentators were unanimous in their motive for going to war in Iraq, once the fig-leaf of weapons of mass destruction withered in Iraq's desert sun: this was a war to teach the 'Muslims' everywhere in the world a lesson for the terrorist attacks against the United States.[1] The courageous writer Norman Mailer indicted the American political leadership in the form of a rhetorical question: 'Can leaders who lie as a way of life protect any way of life?', he asked (Tiersky and Mailer 2003).

Islam is a religious tradition with a long and complex history that encompasses almost all the major cultures of the world, including Europe and North America. It has some semblance of uniformity from the outside but is immensely varied from within. The only Islam one can talk about is an embodied Islam: one that takes shape in flesh and blood; actions and consequences. What Karl Marx once said about small-holding peasants in so far as that 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented', rings truer when used to describe a complex discursive tradition like Islam.[2] Practically and theoretically speaking, Islam cannot represent itself; it is always represented by Muslims themselves or by actors claiming to represent it on a spectrum of diversity. In truth 'Islam' only manifests itself when it is embodied and represented by Muslims and when it is discursively articulated. Therefore, a great deal of demagoguery and downright ignorance is involved when actors and spokespersons speak for the whole religion, culture or civilisation. It makes no sense to talk about 'Islam', when it is in fact more accurate to speak about the specific acts of persons who are accountable for their deeds. If there is going to be any hope for reconciliation between communities, it begins with getting the vocabulary right when speaking about the 'other'.

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In what appears to be an indirect and belated *mea culpa* for his 'clash of civilisations' thesis that generated so much anti-Islam hysteria, the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington admitted US culpability in world affairs after 9/11. In his words, US foreign policy was to blame: 'To a considerable extent we ourselves have generated these attitudes by our efforts to impose our values and institutions on other countries. We suffer from what can be called the universalist illusion that people of other countries have the same values and culture that we do; or if they do not have them, then they desperately want to have them; or if they do not want to have them, that something's wrong with them, and we have the responsibility to persuade or coerce them into adopting our values and culture' (Huntington 2003, p. 18). This is an astonishing admission on the part of a man whose wrongheaded intellectual contribution was crafted at the time when brave colleagues in the US academy and beyond challenged the 'universalist illusion' he later chastised.

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If there are concrete issues which Muslim and Euro-American partners in any dialogue need to discuss, then they must include questions about equity in the international political and economic order. The equitable sharing of the world's resources in a peaceful and non-hegemonic manner is long overdue, and to ignore it is to invite peril on a global scale. And an effective end to direct and indirect Euro-American colonisation of Muslim lands would be the first step in the right direction. Euro-American support and tolerance for ruling elites and dictators lacking in legitimacy in the Muslim world, from Saddam Hussein previously in Iraq, Hosni Mubarak to Abdelfattah el-Sisi in Egypt, to name but a few, must come to an end. The post-Arab Spring political leaders present themselves as buffers against an exaggerated threat of political Islam, but actually serve as proxies for a range of imperial interests that are pitted against the democratic interests of the people. There is a reason why some parts of the Muslim world incubate so much political violence and totalitarianism, especially the metastasising menace of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. This is because the rule of law and human rights were never effectively enforced in governance and hence the severest of solutions are presented as alternatives. In fact, the violation of the most fundamental norms of governance was almost silently abetted by foreign powers – to their own advantage, of course. Should there be any surprise if extremist violence targets foreign forces who present themselves as liberators from despotism when they had actually colluded with local dictators until recently? The remedy the United States had adopted to rid tyranny by imperial conquest has monumentally backfired with unpredictable and unintended consequences.

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In order for a global ethics to succeed one would need the following elements in a cross-cultural dialogue: fostering an ethos of accountability and responsibility that begins with self-critique; transcending the nation-state structure in nurturing an ethos of cosmopolitan citizenship focused on people-to-people relations; and promoting an inclusive ethical content in the international legal and political order that goes beyond the limitations of liberal ethics.

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3 Inclusive and meaningful reconciliation

However, we need to ask a more fundamental question: why dialogue and reconciliation? Can people be reconciled with each other when fundamental suspicion is about the only tangible substance that sustains the conversation between antagonists? Far from the rhetoric of Samuel Huntington about an impending clash of civilisations or Francis Fukuyama's end of history thesis, we have now possibly reached a point of irreconcilable differences in our globalised and interdependent world. In other words: do we face the ominous prospect of globalised apartheid?

Let us face it, the gulf in perception between communities on political, economic, cultural, political and religious issues reflects deep fissures within our pluralistic global community. The burden of reconciliation is to lift the veil of suspicion on crucial issues that affect the real interests of people and their ultimate values and ideals. Thus, the idea of reconciliation itself requires re-definition.

Any act of reconciliation requires justice as a pre-requisite. Without justice, reconciliation is not only elusive, but can lead to a greater blindness of the soul. At least in the Islamic tradition, the conventional view is that the absence of justice can only pave the way for greater injustice and tyranny. While aggrieved parties can forgive their perpetrators for offences, the right to retributive justice cannot be abrogated in advance of the reconciliation process. The mere disclosure of the crime and knowledge of the offence may provide the victim with some relief but it cannot compensate for true reconciliation. In a true reconciliation the consent of the victim is explicit.

South Africa's historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission is often held out as a beacon of reconciliation. But despite all it virtues, this process denied victims to effectively be part of the process of reconciliation. It simulated reconciliation, without truly reconciling victim and persecutor. Victims knew in advance that they would not be able to exact justice from their persecutors. The South African experience tried to pass off the political truce reached between the apartheid government and the liberation movement to negotiate a future political dispensation as a process of personal and individual reconciliation. Personal reconciliation is not identical to social and political reconciliation. While individual victims told their stories of suffering and got relief through catharsis by hearing their persecutors confess their guilt, the individual was a cipher, if not an instrument, for greater social and political reconciliation (cf. Moosa 2000). And thus one has to then concede that the South African-style reconciliation process has its limitations. It is then not about retributive justice. Rather, it is reconciliation designed to kick-start a political truce.

Reconciliation at the beginning of the twenty-first century means something more than what we are accustomed to thinking of when evoking that term. We require reconciliation at a macro-scale: it goes beyond reconciliation within or between religious or ethnic communities, groups, families, or, in relation to God. Our moment in history requires nations, transnational, cultural, political and religious communities to reconcile with each other. In order to talk meaningfully about reconciliation we need to answer the critical questions: reconciliation for what breach? Reconciliation with whom? Reconciliation towards which ends?

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Can the religious imagination teach us how to maintain global community at a time when imperialism, insecurity, terrorism and the breakdown of global order are all rapidly on the ascendant? More importantly, can anything be retrieved from the complex diversity of Muslim traditions? What are the resources within Islam for reconciliation between 'self' and 'other'? Who is the 'self'? Who is the 'other'? Are we both 'self' and 'other' simultaneously within ourselves and in relation to others?

4 Hope and despair

On 16 June 2001, roughly three months before the tragic events of 11 September 2001, I warned a distinguished audience of Stanford University graduates and their parents of looming threats. I identified a few issues that required urgent attention such as the double standards in international affairs, especially the lack of equity in global economic and political governance; the absence of accountability on the part of the powerful; the inability of the powerless to own up to their responsibilities and to end playing the blame game; the reluctance of powerful nations to lead by example in the crucial task of disarmament of weapons of mass destruction; and of the threat of terrorism menaces all on a global scale.[3]

Early signs of the rising spectacle of terror in recent years were the US embassy bombings in Daressalam and Nairobi in 1998. Informed observers knew that a showdown between al-Qaida and its former handlers in the US security establishment was inevitable. However, it was the gravity, scale and spectacle of 9/11 that was unnerving as fortress America was being conquered from the air. America, a country that dropped Agent Orange and atomic bombs in Asia and ruthlessly gerrymandered the international political order for its own interests was suddenly vulnerable. The vulnerability of a giant, it is said, is always more terrifying and unpredictable than the pain caused by the thorn in the giant's paw.

Since that fateful day one is conflicted by two sets of emotions in a phrase made famous by the Sicilian theorist of Marxism, Antonio Gramsci, who talked about the optimism of the spirit versus the pessimism of the will. The optimism of the spirit proclaimed that a wounded America could serve at least two broad purposes. One had hoped that the communities to which the 19 hijackers belonged, namely a medley of Muslim countries in the Middle East with competing interpretations of Islam, starting with Saudi Arabia, could take a critical and comprehensive look at themselves.[4] With this they could begin the difficult but necessary process of self-critique. They would have to answer questions such as: why do our societies produce young people bent on such spectacular violence against innocents at home and abroad? What are the root cause of violence, political and otherwise in Muslim societies? What are the possible solutions? Is it due to the absence of democracy? Is democracy a mask for dictatorship in many post-independence Muslim states? What is the role of foreign powers, especially the United States and Europe, in perpetuating these dictatorships? Yet, these questions were never seriously asked and the short-lived Arab Spring was suffocated by reactionary powers and morphed into an Arab freeze.

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The other hope was that Americans would take the opportunity to do some introspection. How and why did a society that once offered itself as a model for democracy over time become such a despised entity among people of conscience the world over? What is it that the US government and state does to offend more than one nation, more than one culture or civilisation? Why is its influence and power actively opposed by Christian Latin Americans, secular Europeans, traditionalist Africans, Taoist Chinese and Muslims of almost all stripes? Is it really true that America aids and abets other people's miseries in order to secure its own interests? How does the desire for mahogany toilet seats and cheap fuel in the developed world dictate that all civilised values be abandoned in order to procure cheap goods from the developing world? Do First World nations acquire their comforts and increase their consumption in flagrant violation of international human rights? Does 'stability' in the Middle East translate into a US national interest that means the continued uncritical support of Israel?

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Since 11 September 2001, only an endangered species of writers, thinkers and activists in the United States and Western Europe, together with only a small number of rare politicians, have dared to ask the question as to why former US proxies from Osama bin Ladin to Saddam Hussein had turned so violently on their former handlers. Convulsed by a wounded nationalism both the populace and the elite in the United States embarked on revenge anywhere in the Muslim world. Striking at potential sources of threat before they even became real, to use John Quincy Adams's prescient 1821 phrase, America turned into the 'dictatress of the world'.

Bombing a war-ravaged and impoverished Afghanistan into the Stone Age was for all intents and purposes, as the late actor and satirist Robin Williams cynically put it, possibly welcomed by many Afghans as an upgrade![5] Unable to find satisfaction for their bloodlust, the hawks and neo-conservatives in the Bush administration unveiled their long prepared imperial plan for the Middle East. Beyond the vacuous promises of democracy for Iraqis lay the sinister plan: the Anglo–American plan to occupy Iraq was to teach Arabs and Muslims in the region to wear their chains with less reluctance as the prospect of freedom and liberty is removed before their very eyes from Baghdad to Bethlehem, and from Kabul to Karachi.

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Some institutions of American civil society are interested in ostensibly fostering dialogue with Muslims. However, these are largely self-serving and uni-directional efforts aimed at selling American foreign policy to Muslims. Since these are not genuine efforts in pursuit of effective dialogue and mutual learning, one can confidently predict the failure of such projects. Part of the problem is that the 'Islam industry' wishes to foster dialogue between the West and 'Islam' or the 'Muslim world'. This is a total misnomer, nevermind a faulty diagnosis, since it does not have reconciliation as an end. At worst it is an attempt to prescribe to Muslims; at best it is a subtle civilising mission. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has perfected this art from his newspaper pulpit. The war in Iraq, said Friedman, was to 'unleash a process of reform in the Arab-Muslim region' and help it embrace modernity (Friedman 2003). It takes some chutzpah to make such muscular claims, almost as preposterous as it would be for an Ayatollah to propose that the next Pope be a female from France!

Does reconciliation have more limited prospects for success? It depends largely whether the right issues are identified that lead to meaningful outcomes for both

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parties. No two cultures, religions or civilisations have to date in history ever fully reconciled. Had they done so, they would have both ceased to exist. Yet, people, as individuals and sometimes as part of representative groups, can reconcile with each other on concrete issues and substantive matters. And collectivities too can be held to standards of accountability.

5 Ethics of accountability

Most, if not almost all, ethical communities and systems of moral reasoning recognise some notion of responsibility and accountability. An ethics of responsibility is not only the burden to be shouldered by an individual. Beyond the law, larger collectivities, especially nations and countries, ought to be held accountable for their actions as part of an ethic of responsibility. Threatened by global warming and ecological threats there is now a greater awareness than ever before that we cannot shed our shared responsibility and collective accountability as stewards of the globe.

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Mystics often have an arresting way of explaining complex themes with their successful use of imagery to drive a point home. Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273), the famed mystic, reminded us to be aware of those who obfuscated reality and urged us not to be intimidated by our own fears. No matter how large and dreaded the challenge, human beings do have the ability to overcome and conquer. But if we do not confront the challenge then indeed the problem will metastasise. Rumi uses the parable of the snake known for its deadly venom. But something more happens if the snake is not confronted. 'It is said', says Rumi, 'that when a snake does not see a human being for forty years it turns into a dragon. That is, it sees no one who would cause its evil and vileness to melt. A big lock indicates that there is something valuable and costly inside. The greater the obfuscation, the better the essence – like a serpent guarding a treasure trove. Don't look at the ugliness of the serpent; look at the value of the treasure' (Rumi 1999, p. 245).

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One moral from Rumi's multivalent uses of parables can be the following reading of mine. If one does not confront a problem, then a venomous, but comparatively harmless snake can turn into a dragon to become a bigger problem. For Rumi the serpent is a metaphor for the animal soul or lower self: if this self that often covets everything is left unrestrained, then it will turn into a dragon. Hence, Rumi says, the inner workings of the human being are predisposed to go out of control and therefore require constant vigilance and regulation.[6] Since no human being confronted the snake, namely the lower self, to curb its vileness, it turned into something more grotesque – a dragon. Now the human being will need a rare talent in order to combat the menacing dragon: instead of needing the elementary skills of a snake-charmer, the human being now has the Herculean task of becoming a dragon-slayer. Yet, it is worth killing the snake or the dragons for the dividends are rich. Often in Rumi's stories, the serpent guards the precious treasure of emeralds found in ruins. Those emeralds are the gems that make a human being: they are the capacity to love, and this is the essence of the human being. Of course, the treasure in every instance could be different and thus it is situational. When Rumi is applied to our context then the dragon guards the

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treasure of love. With love comes responsibility and for twenty-first-century Muslims there is nothing greater than the question of responsibility and accountability. And if it means that in order to acquire responsibility one has to be exposed to some risk, then Rumi encourages us to make that leap of courage, and become the dragon-slayers in order to unleash the potential of love and its consequences. Instead of being intimidated by the ferocity of a snake turned dragon, he encourages us to value the treasure.

If people are derelict in their responsibilities, then the Muslim tradition treats such a disregard of duty to be the equivalent of the day of judgment. In a famous tradition, the Prophet Muhammad said: 'When responsibility/trust (*amāna*) is destroyed then surely expect the hour [of judgment]'. When he was asked, how responsibility was destroyed, he provided a devastating but insightful explanation. Responsibility, he implied, is not destroyed willy-nilly. Responsibility is established through elaborate processes of institutions and networks of trust, obligations and responsibilities. Human beings are responsible and accountable for what they do. Hence, in reply to the question of how responsibility is destroyed, Prophet Muhammad replied: 'When matters are entrusted to the incompetent then expect the hour!'[7] Responsibility begins with competence.

So could one begin with the global solidarity of responsible people and the alliance of competent people? Even if one is agnostic about Western governments in their conduct, especially towards the Muslim world, one must ensure that the alliances and solidarities in America's and Europe's civil societies will be rooted in an ethic of responsibility, preceded by trust and competence. It is at that level that individuals and communities will identify their interests in global solidarity and begin their reconciliation with communities and individuals of their choice on a global scale. Already thousands of courageous Americans and Europeans are engaged in self-questioning their countries' imperial and unethical global postures.

Similarly, citizens of Muslim majority countries and those living in minority contexts can earnestly engage in reconciliation processes with citizens elsewhere in the world. Surely, in a world of cellular globalisation, relationships of trust and responsibility at a people-to-people level would prove to be a giant step in the right direction. Muslims located in countries like India, Nigeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Africa, the United States and Israel could take the lead. Often these are deeply divided societies and are in dire need for reconciliation. Here Muslims of goodwill can become key role players in cellular globalisation for the good, rather than cellular globalisation in pursuit of the nefarious ends of terror that the foot soldiers of al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria pursue.

Reconciliation demands a radical posture of self-critique; and those of us living in the imperium may have to engage in even more rigorous self-scrutiny. Self-critique can begin with the longer memory of the past or a more immediate context. Take the attitude of the West, and with America insisting that the nations of the global south disarm and get rid of nuclear weapons, especially Iran and North Korea. In the streets of different parts of the global south this demand is met with much dismay and greater questioning. They range from: Is the United States not the owner of the largest stockpile of the most advanced weapons of mass destruction? Was the United States not the first country in human history to use a devastating atomic bomb in order to kill thousands of civilians, not combatants, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Furthermore,

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the United States frequently tries to undermine the most effective international instrument, namely the International Criminal Court of Justice formed to prosecute dictators and international terrorists for war crimes. In other words, if one returns to Rumi's parable, then surely even nations are like serpents who have morphed into dragons and are out of control.

Reconciliation does not only involve the need to identify the causes of moral and political harm, but it must simultaneously involve self-correction, self-improvement and social reform. Muslim countries, especially at the level of individual, community and society, will have to take the lead in changing their own condition. Such change begins with governance. The lack of good and responsible governance creates a growing pool of disgruntled and frustrated people in Muslim societies whose futures are bleak, if not non-existent. These pools of young people become the incubators for radicalism that morphs into frightening swamps of militancy and terror. In several Muslim countries attention will have to be given to the treatment of religious minorities. Platitudes will not be sufficient. Discriminatory laws and practices that make non-Muslim minorities into effective second-class citizens in countries like Pakistan, Egypt, Malaysia, Iran and Saudi Arabia to mention but a few, are intolerable. Ordinary citizens will have to be empowered in order to show zero tolerance for autocratic regimes. But such change can only take place if people in those very societies promote transformation according to their own values and standards. Many Muslim countries might have to consider establishing truth and reconciliation tribunals as in South Africa in order to come to grips with atrocities of the past, acts of genocide and massacres undertaken by governments and military rulers. The disclosure of past atrocities might be sufficient and more healing rather than Nuremberg-style justice for offenders in order not to create further divisions. These kinds of procedures will set the gold standard for accountable governance so that future rulers can be held responsible for their deeds.

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6 Reconciliation and re-covenanting

In the Muslim tradition reconciliation is a public act; one can actually say it is a political act, where politics means an act or demonstration of power or will. Reconciliation is the restoration of public morality, values and ethics, after these elements had been wilfully distorted and perverted. Therefore, it requires an equal act of will to restore the normative moral order. Thus the offender and aggrieved must publicly reconcile their differences and announce their commitment to restore what had been breached. The Qur'an suggests a three-pronged approach for reconciliation. It involves a personal act of repentance; a change in the self; followed by restitution and the full disclosure of the truth.[8]

Even though the German jurist and political thinker, Carl Schmitt, has an unsavoury record as a Nazi-sympathiser, he has paradoxically produced some of the most illuminating writings on politics and law. From him we learn that underlying reconciliation is a deeper sense of the political. Reconciliation has in focus a concrete situation, a specific conflict, identifiable causes, persons and events. Schmitt is known

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for his thesis that the 'friend–enemy' antithesis and antagonism is the grounds for the political (Schmitt 1996, pp. 25–37).

Political actions and motives, he argues, are shaped by the friend–enemy metaphor. Reconciliation, he points out, must also take into account the friend–enemy political antagonism. To use Carl von Clausewitz's famous phrase on war, we can then say that reconciliation is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse by other means, or would it be war by other means? So, how can reconciliation be possible if it is rooted in friend–enemy paradox?

It appears that political reconciliation at the level of public morality will always be challenging given the status of the 'outsider', which is different from that of the 'insider'. Nations do not reconcile into friendship or surrender to the other out of love for each other. 'Never in the thousand-year struggle between Christians and Moslems [Muslims] did it occur to a Christian', says Schmitt, 'to surrender rather than defend Europe, out of love towards the Saracens or Turks' (Schmitt 1996, p. 29).

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Retaining the figure of the enemy is indispensable for Schmitt. For in his view to lose the enemy would simply amount to the loss of the political itself. Commenting on Schmitt's need for the *figure* of the enemy, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida observes that the 'invention of the enemy is where the urgency and the anguish are; this invention is what would have to be brought off, in sum, to repoliticize, to put an end to depoliticization' (Derrida 1997, p. 84).

Where such an enemy is nowhere to be found then one has to conjure one up, and proceed to identify as potential enemies, who in their multiplicity are interchangeable from day to day, turning them into metonymic enemies in alliance with one another (Derrida 1997, p. 84).

What makes Schmitt's idea so compelling is his obsession with pure theory that drives him to find the metaphysics and theology underlying the 'political'. As a rejoinder, one may say in agreement with Derrida that we must depoliticise the 'political' and loosen the friend–enemy antagonism, contrary to Schmitt who deplored such a weakening of his vigorously defined 'friend–enemy' boundaries. We may have to explore other kinds of social bonds such as 'community' and 'friendship' in which to anchor the 'political' in an age of cellular globalisation without central messaging. Thus, by deconstructing Schmitt's sense of the political, we are in a position to re-imagine and re-conceptualise politics and imagine another kind of democracy that is different and not obsessed by his desire for homogeneity. In other words, one of the first steps towards reconciliation is not only to invent a new vocabulary, but also to re-covenant to a whole new idea of the political: a political premised on difference, diversity, cosmopolitanism and the ethical.

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For Schmitt homogeneity is necessary in a democracy in order to describe the kind of bond required for a democratic political community. It is homogeneity that defines the nature of the friendship, or the 'us', in a democracy. Schmitt is opposed to liberalism that does not recognise the need for such a commonality and is critical of liberal pluralism that is based on the negotiation of the common interests. In liberalism there is no need for a common and homogenous identity; for here citizenship is reduced to a legal citizenship. While political theorist Chantal Mouffe appreciates Schmitt's point on the need to identify what constitutes the people (demos) politically, she points out

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that he presents us with a false dilemma if he forces us to abandon pluralism (Mouffe 1999, p. 49).

For if we go along with Schmitt then there will either be a unity of the people, which in turn requires that every division and antagonism be purged; or, one accepts certain divisions, which leads to a political pluralism but negates the sought-after homogenous political unity and dissolves the very existence of the people (Mouffe 1999, p. 49).

Schmitt's challenge is helpful in that he forces us to re-imagine and re-conceptualise the political without being hostages to his demands. As Mouffe points out, Schmitt's notion of homogeneity can also be called 'commonality'. The challenge he poses is 'how to envisage a form of commonality strong enough to institute a "demos" but nevertheless compatible with certain forms of pluralism: religious, moral and cultural pluralism, as well as a pluralism of political parties' (Mouffe 1999, p. 50). Thus, if we take Schmitt's text seriously, then 'Islam would remain an enemy', Derrida observes paradoxically, 'even though we Europeans must love the Muslims as our neighbors.'[9] An excursus of Schmitt's ideas helps to demonstrate what kind of psychological drives animate our political thinking and what kinds of challenges would have to be met in order to move toward reconciliation. If the 'political' requires a homogeneity or commonality, then it would not be an ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, but rather a commonality of people who share cosmopolitan ethical values. For, surely, in today's world to think local exclusively, without thinking global, is to perpetuate a kind of 'apartheid' and an exclusion that will come to haunt us, as is the predicament of the current neo-liberal global order.

Historically speaking, Muslim ethics promoted political associations that are shaped by the hegemony of faith, with a preference for the homogeneity of the political, but one that could also accommodate pluralism and diversity. The transnational 'community of believers' (*umma*) has the dualistic feature of being both a political entity, and a community that transcends politics. In this latter role, it is a community that is committed to a moral responsibility and stewardship towards humanity.[10] What the Qur'an, and in turn Muslim ethical teachings in the past, strongly resisted was when believers undermined or abandoned their own political entities in order to make alliances with interests that were hostile to the interests of their communities. In other words, at a time when one's religion was also one's political badge, reaching out to other religious groups was seen as an act of sedition. But with the separation of religion and politics in modern nation-states, that concept by itself has disappeared. In the absence of hostilities, it is not only permitted for Muslims to collaborate and participate along with people, including non-Muslim political polities, but Muslim moral guidelines scrupulously encourage the advancement of virtue and justice in dealing with the religious 'other'. While the friend–enemy metaphor does come into play, it is not absolute as in the case of Schmitt's reading of the political. Rather, the political ought to be mediated by the ethical.

One can possibly make the case that in the past Muslim ethics, especially public morality, was treated differently from individual or private morality, in the same way that a public enemy was different from a private adversary. With a private adversary one quarrels and the possible psychological reaction is hate. In engaging a

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public enemy the result is conflict and the psychological expression of such hostility is demonstrated by going to war with such an entity.[11] Only the return of justice, conceived historically, mediates the public space. Thus when Muslims create alliances and friendships (*wali*, pl. *awliya*) and participate in a plural moral and ethical context, then the key ethical register in their public morality would be the application of justice. Conventional wisdom teaches that the demonstration of love belongs to the private sphere as the act of an individual. For individual and private morality has an altruistic dimension to it. An individual can engage in an act of self-sacrifice towards friend and enemy. Love could be the motivation to befriend the private adversary which in turn could turn hate into friendship. 'Love your enemies' (Mt. 5.44, Lk. 6.27). Or, as the Qur'an, 41:34–5, states: 'Good can never be the equal of evil. Thus, repel [evil] with that which is [aesthetically] beautiful or better (*ahsan*); then you will find that your enemy will turn into bosom friend (*wali hamim*).' Yet, we are challenged in the present to think of a notion of justice that is permeated with love; a justice that does not only correct or provide retribution, but also heals. In that sense reconciliation in South Africa provides many lessons.

Muslims should also have less difficulty in entering into relationships of integrity with the 'other'. Philosophically and theologically-speaking Muslim dogma does not create an impermeable wall between its own revelation and those revelations that preceded it. The closest association is of course with the other Abrahamic faiths of Judaism and Christianity, while also generically including other monotheistic and species of divine life forms. In fact, to exclusively claim the truth of the Islamic revelation and deny the truth in others would contradict both the letter and the spirit of the Qur'an. While Muslims may have differences on specifics of Christian and Jewish doctrine, it is a requirement of one's Muslim-ness to accept the theological and doctrinal 'other' as precursors that are integral to one's own faith. How is it possible that a culture and tradition like Islam that is so demonised in contemporary Euro-American culture can produce figures like the mystic thinker Muhi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) who could say to the world in his *Translator of Desires*:

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> My heart can take on any form:
> for gazelles a meadow,
> a cloister for monks,
>
> For the idols, sacred ground,
> Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim,
> the tables of the Torah,
> the scrolls of the Qur'an
>
> I profess the religion of love.
> wherever its caravan turns
> along the way, that is the belief,
> the faith I keep.[12]

In a tradition that views communion with the 'other' as part of the 'desire' of the self, there can be no shortage of ethical and moral resources to make a truly cosmopolitan existence possible. At least Muslims living in European and North American

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democracies should have fewer difficulties to make an ethical contribution to cosmopolitan thinking. In alliance with likeminded people from other traditions, Muslims ought to ensure that foreign policies of their respective countries are consistent with justice and global equity. In particular, they will have to be alert to the growing global gulf in economic antagonisms. Walter Rathenau pointed out some time ago that our destiny today is not politics, but economics. Economics has become *the* political and hence the destiny of humanity. One has to ponder the morality of efforts to sustain the prosperity of Euro-American democracies at the expense of the impoverishment and exploitation of the developing world. The developing south is a world that is held hostage by the overwhelming military might of the developed world.

Reconciliation can only take place in terms of specifics. One area in which efforts in reconciliation have to be focused is on the asymmetrical Euro-American economic consumption of the world's resources and the depletion of vital ones. It is the insatiable capitalist consumption that drives Western governments to seek raw materials and economic power at whatever cost to the human rights of others and regardless of the miserable living conditions of people in the South. Imperialist powers will go to war to procure these cheap goods for their citizenry. In this respect the citizenry in Europe and North America, including their growing numbers of Muslim citizens, are equally responsible and have a duty to restrain the deeds of their governments who represent them.

It is a gross fallacy perpetuated by self-serving political pundits that American or even European electoral politics largely focuses on domestic issues. For it ignores the fact that foreign policy dividends keep voters' wallets filled and their appetites sated thanks to cheap oil and to even cheaper imported consumer goods. Hence, it is just not sufficient to blame the multinational corporations like Bechtel and Haliburton for peddling their interests and perverting the international political and economic order; the consumers and citizens in the West equally share the burden of responsibility; for they are the key constituencies that sustain the web of political, economic and cultural interests. If one of the goals of reconciliation is to put an end to imperialism, then it must address this knot of economic issues. Anyone threatening the economic peace of Euro-American hegemony is a 'disturber of the peace'. The adversary, in the words of Schmitt, as a disturber of the peace is designated an 'outlaw of humanity'. With almost prophetic prescience for our times Schmitt added: 'a war waged to protect or expand economic power must, with the aid of propaganda, turn into a crusade and into the last war of humanity' (Schmitt 1996, p. 79).

The exploitation of the developing world of course takes place with the collusion of the elites from the global South. These elites manage failed states or advance their narrow economic interests at the expense of the majority of people in their countries. Not only is it immoral to sustain such people in power, but also their misrule produces the menace of terrorism that affects the West. Western global hegemony is not only sustained by economic imperialism; economic imperialism must be preceded by cultural and political imperialism. Therefore, all peoples and nations must have the free right to choose cultural and political systems that are consistent with their history and culture and free from external meddling.

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Reconciliation must be directed at the under-classes of the developing world and not the elites, who are often in cahoots, consciously or unconsciously, with international capital and imperialism. The underclass and non-cosmopolitan constituency, if given the opportunity, is most likely to bring about effective social change in the developing world. For they have the most to gain from social change. The middle classes in the short term may rightfully fear that they have everything to lose with social change, even though their long-term prospects would improve if their entire societies improve.

Just as religious communities adopted creeds, edicts and covenants in the past to create a sense of commitment to goals and values, similarly we too in our age may require a covenant for cosmopolitan co-existence, one that will commit us to the fundamental respect and integrity of the 'other' and co-existence without hegemony. As Walter Mignolo, Abdelkabir Khatibi and Richard Falk, among others, have pointed out, cosmopolitan citizenship can be built over language, cultural, ethnic and religious divides in ways unimagined before, thanks to increasingly innovative information technology, interdependency and cellular globalisation (Mignolo 2000). Globalisation without domination may have to be the ethical creed of such a new movement, where the contributions of local cultures and practices are treated with integrity and viewed as sustainable knowledge for life forms that are significant to the diverse groups of humanity.

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Conclusion

If terrorism is one of the most serious problems of the twenty-first century, then it is symptomatic of larger, deeper and invisible causes; causes that imperialist powers are reluctant to address since it will affect their interests. In order to assist failing societies we need much more comprehensive plans and remedies, plans that go beyond aid, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It requires the deepening of cosmopolitan citizenship and re-covenanting to values that go beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. Foreign policies can no longer be premised on self-interest, the absence of ethics and by viewing other nations as potential enemies. Neither is imperialism the remedy for failed states. Imperial ventures only cause greater failures as the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq and now Syria have played out before our very eyes in the span of just over a decade.

When the interests of imperialism and those at the helm of failed states coalesce, they create the fertile conditions for the growth of terrorism. Therefore, under these circumstances, it is alarming to note that not all people in the world see terrorists as criminals. In many instances Western powers, especially the United States, have dubbed legitimate freedom struggles against tyranny and dispossession as terrorism. For millions of people, liberation movements, and regrettably even those who espouse violence as an end, are viewed as the allies of the defenceless and offer hope for alternative life conditions.

In the light of these very desperate but largely invisible conditions that bring about globalised spectacles of violence, reconciliation is the only hope in times of despair.

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But the end of reconciliation must result in re-covenanting to values and practices that will turn the conciliation into meaningful life forms. These may be very small steps as intra-cultural covenants between micro-units of people, but it at least begins to restore hope and alternative lifestyles and values among those determined to change and make a beginning. This hope, as writer Anne Lamott points out, is a revolutionary patience (Lamott 1995, p. xxiii). Reconciliation could be the beginning of such a silent revolution.

Notes

1 Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist, in an interview with Terry Gross on her program *Fresh Air* on 21 April 2003, http://freshair.npr.org/ who in the American context is seen as a moderate, unequivocally and supportively confirms that the war on Iraq had an underlying message. The message was to go into the 'heart of the Muslim world and going door to door' in order to effectively teach Muslims a lesson in response to 9/11 as a way to puncture what he calls the 'terrorism bubble', even though there is no evidence of Saddam Hussein supporting terrorism or possessing weapons of mass destruction. The difference between Friedman's viewpoint and those of the neo-conservatives from William Kristol to Doug Freith and others, is that he presents the neo-conservative agenda in a velvet glove. See Robert Worth, 'The Deep Intellectual Roots of Islamic Terror', Arts and Ideas, *The New York Times*, 13 October 2001; Holland Cotter, 'Beauty in the Shadow of Violence', Arts and Leisure, *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001. In this sample of press articles and countless others, everything in Islamic history from the Prophet Muhammad to Muslim art is associated with violence and criminality in a sleight of hand that can only be described as sinister Islamophobia.

2 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans Saul K. Padover (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1937), Part VII.

3 Ebrahim Moosa, Baccalaureate Celebration address, titled *Globalizing the Humanum: The Continuous Struggle for Justice*. http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/june20/moosatext-620.html (accessed 4 February 2014).

4 See Amir Hussain, 'The Outer Edges of Islam,' in UC Observer, http://www.ucobserver.org/features/2014/12/islam/; Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books 2004).

5 Robin Williams on Broadway, HBO Video, 2002.

6 I want to thank Nargis Virani for her insights in deciphering Rumi's metaphors.

7 Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣrīya, 1428?2007), 13:7822.

8 Qur'an 2:160 '…Those who repent, make amends and disclose the truth: it is they whose repentance I accept …' Repentance is *tawba*; corrective action and making amends is *islah*; disclosure, making manifest and known is *tabyin*.

9 Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 89. Derrida adds: 'At a determining moment in the history of Europe, it was imperative not 'to deliver Europe over to Islam' in the name of a universal Christianity … Defending Europe against Islam, here considered as a non-European invader in Europe, is then more than a war among wars, more than

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a political war. Indeed, strictly speaking, this would not be a war but a combat with the political at stake, a struggle for politics'.

10 Qur'an 3:110: 'you are best of communities delivered unto humankind, for advancing the good and restraining wrong', *khayra ummatin ukhrijat li 'l-nas.*

11 These ideas are intuited from Schmitt's notion of the friend–enemy antagonism (Schmitt 1996, p. 29).

12 Muhi al-Din Bin 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1418/1998), 43–4. I have used the translation of Michael A. Sells, *Stations of Desire: Love Elegies from Ibn 'Arabi and New Poems* (Jerusalem: IBIS Editions, 2000), 74–5.

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