MUSLIM MORALITY AS FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL HARMONY

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Abstract

The argument inherent in this study is that the Islamic framework on social coexistence and harmony stipulates moral capital as a bridge for community's inter-connectivity, interaction, and development, and that, for Muslims, morals act as an effective catalyst for constructing social coexistence and harmony. This study discusses the concept of Islamic social ethics and moral development in the context of society, followed by an inquiry into the ways and means according to which Muslim ethics may contribute and sustain social rapprochement, mutual support and social justice. The study aims to identify the prevalent framework for Muslim social morality, which can be of benefit to effective social policy, increasing civic engagement, developing an inclusive universal moral education, or furthering multicultural tolerance. Using textual approach, this study shows how Islam capitalizes on individual and collective morality towards the effective engineering of sustainable communities' relations and development. Further empirical studies on the contribution of Muslim morals in lieu of fortifying community development and social harmony would contribute to the way of elucidating the Muslim projection of theoretical moral ideals in real life conditions as well as tracing the convergences and divergences between Muslim theory and practices with regards to the application of morals to personal and communal settings, and more importantly in our context the shaping of communities' rapprochement, co-existence and harmony.

Keywords: Muslim social ethics, Islamic morality, Islamic moral education, Muslim social harmony

Introduction

The understanding of Islamic perspective on social ethics is vital to comprehending much of the Muslims' effects on the development of communities and societies today, the denouement of Muslim moral compass in shaping their interactive personal and group behavioral dynamics in their way of building community relations, in addition to appreciation of the foundations of Muslims' contributions to global cultural, historical and civilizational studies. This study explores the concept of Islamic social ethics and the need for social order, followed by ways according to which those social moral values conjuncts towards promoting, strengthening and idealizing web of community and social relations. This is achieved by bringing it to the fold of religious and spiritual scopes, and transforming social performance into a genuine yardstick for one's ascension to the divine and personal moral uprightness.

The understanding of the position and role of Islamic morals and moral education in the constructing of social and cultural harmony is crucial, especially with growing stereotypes around Muslims communities and the negative portrayal of their religious culture as undermining to the very concept of cross-community and inter-religious understanding. Understandably, the escalating waves of terrorist attacks in addition to stereotypical media narratives on Islam and Muslims have largely contributed to the widespread and unfavorable depiction of Muslims social attitudes, to the extent of questioning the citizenship of Muslim minority members and the conceivability of their compatibility with values of coexistence if not their inherent incapability to embody them. The question of "conflicts of identity" within communities, Tarek Ramadan noted, is a pervading one and calls for a common ethical framework nurtured by the religious and cultural diversity. Ramadan believes that contemporary crises within societies remind of the need for a greater extent of ethics in the public life, and to overcome the view of diversity as a hindrance. For him, ethics based on common citizenship must be forged from a serious and profound engagement with the meaning of common humanity.[1]

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[1] Ramadan, T. (2010, February 23). Islam's role in an ethical society. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/feb/23/ethics-citizenship-islam.

Elucidating and unpacking the basis of Muslims' social ethics and morality is an essential step in identifying points of interoperability and convergence, towards developing a universal framework of social moral harmony and tolerance. The discussion of the means to achieving, maintaining and realizing Muslim social harmony may also serve as a basis that could benefit from future replication or synthesis within multicultural societies. This would be particularly the case in developing cross-religious universal moral education, as reinforcement for civic engagement policies and development agendas or in providing possible commonalities that could promote tolerance and religious diversity in multireligious societies.

Concept of Islamic Social Ethics

Prior to the discussion of Islamic social ethics, we first address the broader concept of Islamic ethics, not excluding the vitality of the community and a form of social order to human existence and progression. In employing the Qur'an and hadith as fundamental references, one notices that the Qur'an expresses ethics and morals in a range of terms which together configure a web of moral concepts and impart upon the reader a sense of Qur'anic morality and the nature of community and society in Islam which seeks to flourish. These descriptions include terms of *khuluq* (character), *ma'ruf* (established good, known and approved), *khayr* (goodness), *haqq* (truth), *birr* (righteousness),[2] *qist* (equity), *haqq* (truth), *'adl* (justice), , *nahy 'an al-munkar* (avoid of wrong and harm), *taqwa* (piety), *sidq* (honesty), *amanah* (trust), *'ahd* (loyalty to promise), *salihat* (good deeds) and *sayyi'at* (bad deeds). Al-Jurjani (d. 1078 AD), a notable Muslim scholar, defines ethics as a deeply rooted state of the soul by virtue of which acts emanate easily and conveniently without the need for thinking. When the resulting acts are good, this state is then described as good ethics (*khuluq hasan*) and bad when the deeds are bad.[3]

The tradition of the Prophet Mohammad (Sunnah) also represents fundamental source for moral theory and practice. Interestingly, the Prophet of Islam defined the culmination of his mission as one of perfecting moral excellence,[4] fulfilling the best of manners, describing those with best manners as having completed faith, equating good manners with righteousness, and judging good manners as 'weights to be placed on the scales of the Day of Resurrection'. These various descriptions of morality carry significant implications for Muslim individuals and social practices, added to the approach of Muslim religious theory and practice, and the Islamization of social and public domains of life. This for instance brings to attention the crucial importance of virtues of mutual understanding, respect, cooperation, trust, brotherhood, social justice, privacy protection, prohibition of theft, robbery, fraud, slandering, mockery or gossip.

Prior to further discussion of the nature and function of Muslim morality in the context of social cohesion, one needs first to define ethics as moral system which help identify actions as right or wrong. Ethics pertains to the norms, rules and standards to accept and endorse or reject any of the actions, character, conduct, reaction, or decision-making. Some of those ethical values include trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, reliability, and loyalty, respect, responsibility and accountability, fairness and impartiality, and caring.

Izutsu noted that the concepts of social system may be conveniently classified into seven sub-fields: marital relations comprising concepts that relate to marriage, divorce, adultery and fornication; parents-children relations, comprising the duties of parents towards children, and the duties of children towards their parents, and regulations concerning adoption; laws of inheritance; criminal laws concerning particularly murder, theft, and retaliation; commercial relations comprising concepts of contract, debt, usury, bribery, and justice in commercial dealings; laws concerning charity, *i.e.,* alms, legal and voluntary; and laws concerning slaves.[5] On the other hand, Beekun argued that Muslim ethics revolves

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[2] The Quran introduced a rather broader definition of ethics and good deeds: "It is not Al-Birr (piety, righteousness, and each and every act of obedience to God) that you turn your faces towards east and (or) west (in prayers); but *al-Birr* is (the quality of)the one who believes in Allah ,the last Day, the Angels, the Book, the prophets and gives his wealth, in spite of love for it, to the kinsfolk, to the orphans, and to the poor, and to the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and to set slaves free, perform prayer and gives the Zakat, and who fulfill their covenant when they make it, and who are patient in extreme poverty and ailment (disease) and at the time of fighting (during the battles). Such are the people of the truth and they are the pious" (Qur'an 2:177).

[3] Al-Saqqaf, 'Alawi bin 'AbdulQadir (n.d.), *Mawsu'at al-Akhlaq*, al-Durar al-Sunniyyah, Vol. 1, pp. 11-12.

[4] Al-Aidaros, A. H., Shamsudin, F. M., & Idris, K. M. (2013), "Ethics and ethical theories from an Islamic perspective," *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 10.

[5] Toshihiko Izutsu (2008), *God and Man in the Qur'an*, Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, p. 83.

around five fundamental axioms, namely, unity or "*Tawhid*" which means the totality of integrated existence in and outside of the universe; equilibrium or "*adl*" meaning a sense of balance among the various facets of human life; free will which is the ability of humans to act without external coercion but within the limits set by Allah and as his vicegerent on earth; responsibility and accountability of human beings for their actions; and benevolence or "*ihsan*" which means that actions are done without expectation of return or reward benefiting others.[6] Izutsu argues that Islam proclaimed a new morality entirely based on the absolute will of God, whilst the guiding principle of the pre-Islamic moral life had been tribal tradition or the custom of our forefathers."[7] Muslims are exhorted to cultivate within themselves many divine attributes such as goodness, justice, kindness, compassion, altruism, righteousness, truth, peace, generosity, grace, love of neighbors and of humankind; not to walk on earth with arrogance, abolishing injustice and preventing harm against the innocents.[8]

In his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revival of religious sciences), Ghazali defines ethics with reference to the development of character traits (*akhlaq*). For him, performing praiseworthy deeds is an effect of praiseworthy character traits that warrant salvation in the next life. A key element of Islamic ethics is the innate behavioral drive towards purity of intent. It is in this light that one often observes many early Muslim scholars beginning their works with discussions of motives and motivations, customarily commencing with the hadith of intentions, which states that all human acts depend on their respective intentions. In moral practice, Islam places sincerity of intention, purity of focus to God at the crux of all of the human affairs. Muslim social ethics also pertain to the moral relations amongst social groups, and are concerned with rules of inner and outer behavior which organize higher forms of association (*'umran*) amongst people. Social ethics are the ethics of the society as against the ethics of the individual.[9] Social Islamic ethics regulate and coordinate various social relations and deal with discords in interpersonal relationships and relationships amongst individuals and society.[10] God has made it obligatory for all Muslims to acquire knowledge, education, and skills in life that will be personally and socially beneficial.[11] The roots of social ethics can be traced back to three fundamental references: revelation, man's innate nature, and human experience. For instance, the Qur'an makes clear reference to these sources whilst emphasizing their unifying core principle, namely, belief in the One God (*tawhid*). Human emotions and acts also fall within the purview of ethics (references). Humans are created with a free will of choice and thus act with full consciousness and responsibility for their actions and decisions (Beekun, 1997).

The discussion of Muslim social ethics also draws attention to the central concept of the community known in the Islamic literature as '*al-jama'a*' and the need for social order (*nizam ijtima'i*). This idea is central to the doctrine of beliefs, laws, spirituality, morality and culture (*'urf*) in view of the fact that the community is mandated to cooperate and support one another in order to fulfill the responsibilities of stewardship and vicengership (*istikhlaf wa-'imran*). Islam strongly advocates mingling with others, dedicating oneself to others' service and beneficence, and engaging in communal religious congregations and development whilst demonstrating patience and forbearance in social interactions. In Islam, personal ethics are instrumental to social interactions and easing of societal or environmental transitions; both in fact share common destination, namely, drawing humans near to the Divine through perfecting one's thoughts, actions, and overall performance. Some differences however exist. The personal ethics relates to the personal life as illustrated in the Qur'anic perspective of humans as a community. Having said that, 'personal' remains reciprocal to the course of the collective social and public life.

In their discussion of the Muslim's need for socializing, Muslim scholars, mystics and ethicists in particular required addressing the questions or merits of living in solitude (*'uzlah*). For example, Ibn Miskawayh (d.1030 AD), a notable Muslim ethicist of the Buwayhid dynasty, argued that the term 'man' (*insan*) is derived from the root word '*uns*' (fellowship). Each man is, then, born with the quality

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[6] Beekun, R. Essa (1997), *Islamic Business Ethics*, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.
[7] Toshihiko Izutsu (2002), *Ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'an*, Quebec: McGill Queen's University Press, p. 45.
[8] Ali, Ausaf (1996), "Islam, Science, and Islamic Social Ethics," *Islamic Studies,* Vol. 35, No. 4, p.377.
[9] Ausaf, "Islam, Science, and Islamic Social Ethics," p. 400.
[10] Haque, M. S., & Ahmad, J. H. (2016), Islamic Ethics in Public Relations, *Proceeding-Kuala Lumpur International Islamic Studies and Civilisations*, p. 8.
[11] Ausaf, "Islam, Science, and Islamic Social Ethics," p. 405.

of fellowship,[12] which implies association and friendliness. Ibn Miskawah believed that virtues are realized primarily through active participation and social life and that there is a genuine need for a great number of people to form such a community, which entails living together, exchanging and sharing needs and specialties, so that each may attain their specific happiness through cooperation with others. For him, happiness is possible within the capacity of the community of people as a whole, which implies the need for association.[13] Ibn Miskawayh also believed that avoiding mingling or living with others in cities leads to failure to exhibit temperance, intrepidity, liberality or justice.[14]

For Miskawayh, happiness is the end of virtues, and the attainment of which is the supreme goal of ethics and virtue, which are realized only by deeds and actions. This is an indication of happiness being sourced in human action and life activity, for which humans must strive to manifest the virtues of happiness through justice, courage, and temperance. Yet since virtues are actions and deeds, and since the virtuous man cannot perform his virtues towards himself, but towards others, virtues are thus realized only when one actively participates and lives with other people and has dealings and various kinds of association with them. Similarly, happiness is within the capacity of the community as a whole. Therefore, man can only achieve a portion of it in isolation, and must acquire the rest from contact and association with others. It is here that the indispensable need for association lies, and the rejection of some sections of ascetic life (*zuhd*) arises.[15] He argues that man is, by nature, in need of other men.[16] Society and state are the essential authorities for cultivating virtues, political reform and social cooperation.[17]

> Man cannot attain his perfection by himself alone. He must have recourse to the help of a great number of people in order to achieve a good life and follow the right path. This is why philosophers have said that Man is a civic being by nature. This means that he needs to live in a city with a large population in order to achieve human happiness. Every man needs other people by nature as well as by necessity. He must, therefore, be friendly towards others, associate well with them, and hold them in sincere affection, for they complement him and complete his humanity; and he himself plays the same role in their life.[18]

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 AD) argued that living in a community and developing associations is an essential condition of human life. He noted that social organizations are necessary because of the fact that God created man and fashioned him in a form that subsists on food, and guided him to a natural desire for food and instilled in him the power that enables him to obtain it.[19] However, the ability of individual man alone is not sufficient to help him obtain his various needs, and hence, man needs cooperation, for it is through it that the individuals and community alike achieve their needs, which are greater than if they had to rely on their own abilities alone.[20] Ibn Khaldun sees that humans are prone to aggressiveness, and this in his view helps explain why human associations needs something more than the mere will in cooperation. There is a need for preventive order established by "royal authority" that curves human evilish inclinations and tendencies.[21] For Ibn Khaldun, the developmental process of human societies cannot survive if not monitored or controlled by religious ethics; these can help maintain the social order of a civilization and keep it in balance.[22] Islamic Ethics seek to strike the middle range of things and never be dominated by extremes.

Islam is deeply concerned with social order and organized public life. The community's intent of Islamic ethical values is to promote, protect and sustain the public welfare while preventing inconvenience and hardship. Ghazali defines the very objective of the Shari'ah as one which seeks to

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[12] Omar, M. N. (2016), "Islamic Social Ethics: An Analysis of Miskawayh's Thought," *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p 83.
[13] Ibid., pp. 82-83.
[14] Ibid., p.83.
[15] Miskawayh (1966), *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, C.K. Zurayk (ed.), Beirut: American University of Beirut.
[16] Ibid., p.83.
[17] Ibid., p.84.
[18] Ibid., p.83.
[19] 'AbdulRahman, Ibn Khaldun (1967), *The Muqaddimah*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.), New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

promote the wellbeing of people, which lies in safeguarding their faith (*deen*), their self (*nafs*), their intellect (*'aql*), their posterity (*nasl*), and their wealth (*mal*). Whatever ensures the safeguard of those five fundamentals would serve, save, promote, and vice versa. Ibn al-Qayyim (d.1350 AD) describes the Shari'ah as based on wisdom and achieving people's welfare in this world and the afterlife. For him, Shari'ah is all about justice, mercy, wisdom, and good. Hence any ruling that replaces justice with injustice, mercy with its cruelty, common good with mischief, or wisdom with absurdity, is a ruling that does not belong to the Shari'ah even if claimed to be so in some interpretations.[23]

Public welfare (*maslaha*) should not be equated with ethical utilitarianism, since the outcome of the act alone does not justify the means while the means alone do not justify the outcome, for both the outcomes and means are parallel with moral norms and rules of the Shari'ah.[24] Islam sets the preservation and promotion of social relations as fundamental intent of the Shari'ah. The latter represents the moral framework for social engineering and community development, and more particularly, an essential vision and yardstick for the conceptualization and operation of social ethics. In addition to these Islamic universals, there exist also the Muslim legal maxims (*al-qawa'id al-fiqhiyyah*) which intend to enhance benefits and eliminate harms for both individuals and the public.[25] It is in this context of public welfare and interest that Ausaf discuss his views of social ethics according to principles like: What is not specifically forbidden in the Qur'an and the Sunnah is permitted; Islam permits only what is wholesome and beneficent to humankind; Islam forbids what is harmful and corrupting to humankind; God enjoins the doing and enjoining of what is good and beneficent and the avoiding of what is harmful; Wherever the common welfare of society is, there goes the statute of God; The larger interest of society takes precedence over the individual interest and conversely, a smaller harm can be inflicted to avoid a larger harm or a smaller benefit can be sacrificed for a larger benefit; and, all men and women are equal before God and shall be held accountable before God on the last Day.[26]

Social Ethical Values as Catalyst for Social Harmony

Islam has vested a peculiar philosophy of moral education and practice focusing on re-structuring the web of social relations though capitalizing on the moral investment among Muslims and others, instead of short-end goals of socio-economic and cultural changing exigencies through several avenues. First, one should point out to the principle of Tawhid, which provides Muslims with a sense of vision and direction as it regulates the relationship between man and the Creator through universal system of worship, laws and ethics. Muslims view it theologically as discharge of trust and responsibility (*taklif*)[27] of which social ethics are essential domains of attention and practice. Already, the Qur'an describes the Muslim community with fundamental qualities which are essentially acquired rather than hereditary, including for instance balance and moderation (Qur'an, 2: 143), goodness (Qur'an, 3: 101), brotherhood (Qur'an 23: 52), mutual consultation (Qur'an 42: 38), religious tolerance (2: 56), just equality (4: 124), and unity (Qur'an, 21: 92; 23: 52). Goodness of the community depends on their performance in the domain of human association (*'umran*) which may be further evaluated according to indexes of *tawhid* (3: 102), commanding good deeds and forbidding the evil ones (3: 110).

Interestingly, the Islamic social moral perspective is profoundly interested in developing sustainable social relations characterized by humanity, rationality, empathy, simplicity, dignity and social justice, with a focus on shaping positive social and cultural harmony, fostering sustainable social relations and securing an inter-community development platform. We have organized the following discussion according to three central yet interrelated areas; knowledge, practice, and cooperation. Those intertwined elements of social development may be used as yardsticks for moral investment in the harmony of social relations and employed as indexes for effectual social relations, and above, validators of communities' spiritual and moral health and collective responsibility.

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[23] Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah (1973), *I'lam al Muwaqqi'in an Rabbi al-Alamin*, Taha 'AbdulRawuf Saad (ed.), Beirut: Dar al-Jil, Vol. 1, p 333.
[24] Hashi, A. A. (2011), "Islamic ethics: An outline of its principles and scope," *Revelation and Science*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 127-128.
[25] Rules like 'harm must be eliminated', 'harm is not to be inflicted nor reciprocated in Islam', 'harm is eliminated to the extent that is possible' and 'harm is not eliminated by another harm'.
[26] Ausaf, "Islam, Science, and Islamic Social Ethics," pp. 405-407.
[27] The Qur'an describes this trust as follows: "We offered the Trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it, and were afraid of it (fearful of being unable to fulfill its responsibility), but man has undertaken it; he is indeed prone to doing great wrong and misjudging, and acting out of sheer ignorance" (Qur'an, 33: 72).

Community of Moral Education

The message of *'iqra'* (read) is inherent to the Islamic tradition. Islam determines a fundamental difference amongst those who know and those who do not.[28] The Qur'anic exhortation of 'knowing one another' is often expressed in terms of the obligation of pursuing knowledge and learning of languages, cultures and traditions; this certainly involves a considerable extent of openness and respect of human experiences, interactions, communications and dialogues. However, the Qur'anic concept of knowing of one another deals with a much broader and fundamental task pertaining to what is described as understanding and comprehension (*tafaqquh*). In other words, the very components of faithfulness in Islam require learning, expanding horizons of self-understanding as well as the endeavor to obliterate the veils of ignorance, misjudgments and superstitions. One may speak here of a strong interdependence of the conceptions of piety, faith and morality upon the exercise of learning, open inquiry and ability to process the complexity of human experiences.

It is not strange with this moral spirit that Muslims may be well placed to develop and enhance knowledge and familiarity of other communities' circumstances and struggles while further enriching their inter-communities' consciousness, exchange of experiences and development. Intellectual and social openness condemns all forms of rejection, denial, exclusion of the other because of a lack of inter-communal familiarity, interaction or understanding. This is implied in the moral dictates of the Qur'an, which reprimand mockery of others, insulting of other religious faiths, aberration, as well, and all other forms and sources of malicious acts or harmful speech or description.

Islam also prohibits circulation of rumors, scandals or insult, accusations or defamation of others as a way to maintain the moral health of the community and to secure the soundness of its interaction. One may for instance take the Muslim business ethics as an example of how Islam envisages the field of business, not only as an area of exchange of goods and profit making, but also as critical domain of social enhancement and community rapprochement. It sets out the customs for trade, commerce and investments in a way they do not allow for exclusivity or abuse, but rather encourages partnership, tolerates risk taking, honors business contracts and stipulations, all while disallowing certain detrimental business transactions and categories like interest based, *charar*,[29] *najash*,[30] exploitative commercial arbitrage, swearing, and strictly prohibits cheating and deception or manipulation.

Islam further prohibits delusive sales, unlawful commodities, warns strictly against the canceling of closed deals for choice of increased gains, recommends leniency in business,[31] and considers the zakat payments of debts as a method of releasing indebtors incapable of making payments. Islam also warns against inflation and manipulation of prices, encourages fair pricing, necessitates written contracts, and warns of ambiguity or uncertainty in business transactions and misinformation on products and processes in avoiding fraud or the trade of harmful products and mitigating waste or pollution. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the worst of false tales: and do not look for other's faults, and do not spy on one another, and do not practice *najash* and do not be jealous of one another and do not hate one another, and do not."[32]

Importantly however, given that Islamic social ethics are based on the very principle of human creation's unity; there is no effectual value given misconstrued categories of social classes. Islam acknowledges qualities of knowledge, character and righteousness, and rejects humiliation, exclusion, abuse, exploitation, control, manipulation, or exaltation. According to Bensaid and Tekke, the Qur'anic view on human relations is imbued with the theological foundation of the unity of creation and the principle that humans are children of Adam, and that none are entitled to privileged treatment over others. As such, there is no effectual value assigned to human characteristics such as race, color, gender, age, language, social status, physical appearances and the like.[33]

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[28] The Qur'an states: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?" (39: 9).
[29] *Gharar* involves doubtfulness, unknown, uncertainty or ignorance in business or uncertainty over the existence of the subject matter of sale.
[30] *Najash* is a fictitious tender of a high price as in the auction.
[31] The Qur'an states: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then delay things until matter become easier for him; still, if you were to write it off as an act of charity, that would be better if only you knew" (2: 280).
[32] Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari (1980), *Al-Jami' al-Sahih min Hadith Rasuli Allah wa-sunanih wa-ayyamih*, Cairo: al-maktabah al-Salafiyyah, p. 5143.
[33] Benaouda Bensaid and Mustafa Tekke (2018), "Islam and Prejudice: Special Reference to Gordon W. Allport's Contact Hypothesis," *Kemanusiaan*, Vol. 25, Supp. 1, p. 105.

In the light of the above, Muslims are expected to conduct themselves with respect towards each other, treat neighbors kindly, exhibit integrity in business, and treat interest holders justly. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Allah does not look at your outward appearance and your goods. He looks only at your hearts and your deeds."[34] The implications of such delineations around God's view of humankind methodically configure the frameworks of social relations to exclude all premises and forms of othering or appointing oneself as authoritative checker or qualifier of people's inner motives whilst cultivating a greater attention to self-purification and cerebration.

The Qur'an uses the word '*ta'aruf*', meaning knowing and understanding of one another, but also implying reconciling community and group disparities while placing a central attention on the fundamental principle of the origins of human creation and their formations into nations and tribes. The Qur'an states the following: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely, the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware" (Qur'an 49: 13). The above criterion essentially pertains to piety, good character and righteousness. The term '*ta'aruf*' is a derivative of *ma'rifah*; this highlights Islam's fundamental attention to the need for greater introspection into the essence of one's being and one's own inner qualities, away from superficial outwardly appearances, and by extension, character building and self-discipline. *Ta'aruf* however, requires sincerity and an open spirit of mutual learning, exchange, and above all, recognition, consideration and respect of others. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "There is no preference for an Arab over non-Arab or for a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is their preference for white people over black people, nor for black people over white people except through piety. You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from clay."[35]

The Qur'an also launches a reform into man's fallacious conceptions of racial and ethnic differences based in human judgments, inner beliefs, assumptions, prejudices, and shifts attention from historical and cultural perceptions towards the cognition of unity of human creation and divine satisfaction as an effective means of molding human attitudes to their original creational nature.[36] It also puts forth the concept of 'Common Ground' (*kalimah sawa'*)[37] which holds the potential of nurturing effective interactions, familiarity, and understanding, and consequently prompts a change of attitudes, increased mutual recognition, and inclusive participation and engagement. Common ground engagement affects the community's harmony by disbanding differences, housing diversity, upholding universal human values, and furthering a collective defense and security pact. This translates into a serious interest in moral education, consolidation of power against immorality and harm, and promotion of piety and goodness. It also simultaneously invokes learning in search for the truth, which is not to be diverted by influence of culture or race, since wisdom ought to be pursued and employed regardless of its source. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer; he seeks it wherever he may find it."[38] This means that Islam recognizes the inherent need of unearthing inter-community knowledge, pays heed to the transfer of intergenerational autochthonous knowledge and fends off distortive experiences which impede mutual benefit and the deteriorate communal unity.

However, Islam pushes *ta'aruf* far beyond the cognitive and intellectual frontiers to introduce protective layers of moral responsibility and social care in order to reinforce and sustain inter-community exploration and active bridging. The Qur'an calls on Muslims to use wisdom, good admonition, and dispute in the better way (Qur'an, 16: 125). Islam also establishes a series of spiritual, ethical and legal measures to ensure fortifying of core values like mercy, dignity, honor, kindness, respect, appreciation, ease, support, solidarity and service, in addition to the establishment of justice over rights and needs while guaranteeing an equitable distribution of responsibility in a manner that transcends religious, ethnic and cultural demarcations and discernment.[39]

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[34] Al-Qaysarani M, al-Maqdisi (1995), *Dhakhirat al-Huffaz*, 'AbduRahman al-Firywai (ed.), Dar al-Salaf. Vol. 1, p. 599.
[35] Ibn Abi, al-'Izz (1984), *Sharh al-'Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*, Albani et al. (ed.), Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, p. 361.
[36] Prophet Muhammad states: "All of you descend from Adam, and Adam was made of earth. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab nor for a non-Arab over an Arab, neither for a white man over a black man nor a black man over a white man". Sulayman binal-Ash'ath Abu Dawud (1979), *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, p. 5116.
[37] The Qur'an states: "Say: 'People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from God.' And if they turn their backs, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims'" (3: 64).
[38] Muhammad bin 'Issa al-Tirmidhi (n.d), *al-Jami' al-Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Ahmad Shakir (ed.), Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 2687.
[39] Benaouda Bensaid and Fadila Grine (2014), "Old Age and Elderly Care: An Islamic Perspective," *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, Vol. XI, No. 1.

The religious measures provided in emphasizing public service, the pursuit of wisdom, transcendence of race and bias, and embodiment of social virtue benefit from multi-layered reinforcement to ensure sustainability and pervasiveness. First, the emphasis on spiritual standing and virtue as the highest merit, as opposed to race or class. This removes secondary criteria, providing a solitary channel for spiritual transcendence where spirituality, virtue and social harmony become effectively synonymous. Second, the elimination of the visible appraisal of spiritual merit to prevent negative comparison, or a spiritual-social hierarchy, through emphasis that only God is aware of one's spiritual standing. This sets the ground for positive competition in pursuit of virtue, devoid of pride or negative contrast. Third, the sustainability of the mechanism itself, by embedding the precepts of social virtue and morality in autochthonous communal knowledge, where achieving virtue requires the pursuit of said knowledge, maintaining a continuous generational synchronization that prevents moral drift.

Community of Moral Practice

In the following section, we shall discuss the community's moral character, the serious nature of moral practice, both on individual and community levels, the avenues used to secure sustainable yet sound moral practice and the eventual revitalization of social relations and further boosting of inter-community interactions. Morality is a major source of community health and strength while immorality leads to its eventual deterioration, chaos and eventual decline. However, the community moral pledge should not be regarded as a superficial practice celebrated on occasions of congregational rituals, nor one that changes according to fluctuating socio-economic and political conditions, rather it is firmly rooted in the spiritual and religious commitment and duty of every individual member in the society. Having said that, one may understand the community vantage in upholding individuals' moral choices, celebrating moral transformations while ensuring normative adherence to higher moral ends and supporting positive developments within it. The community sense here is what further endorses the moral character of moral individuals and upholds their moral aspirations.

The Muslim moral business is inherently imbued in the cognitive and behavioral mindset of Muslims, given that moral uprightness is interwoven with the spiritual discipline and is considered a serious index for personal and community wellness. First, one understands the individual character of morality given that Islam places human accountability and responsibility in the purview of the individual's conscience and free will but also the community's responsibility. However, in view of its emphasis on the individual accountability of man, Islam stipulates that having arrived at an age of maturity; Muslims take up responsibility for their own moral development and integrity. Taken as effective normative domain for vigilance, heightened awareness, constructive support and improvement, community space further assist in the flourishing of morals and enriching moral excellence.

Islam also introduces its own hierarchy of ethical and moral values. It however, places importance on several core ethical values in order that Muslims embody their own individual and private life as validation of faith and commitment and as proof for profound convictions. Those values remain subject to vigilance and observance - with repentance in cases of failures - in what appears to be a cyclical process of personal development and refinement of moral character. Some of those values include sincerity, humility, trust, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, self-contentedness, gratitude, sharing, selflessness, sacrifice, forgiveness, patience, and endurance. Islam also calls for amiable interpersonal relations, sharing with the needy and less fortunate, giving in charity, caring for neighbors,[40] guiding others, showing leniency, trust and forgiveness, visiting the sick, attending funerals, and abstaining from the abuse and exploitation of others.[41] Islam rewards exemplification of such values in one's personal and social life with spiritual merits, thus shifting the Muslim consciousness to higher ends of

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[40] It is reported that Prophet Muhammad defined a neighbor as follows: "Your neighbors are forty houses ahead of you and forty houses to your back, and forty houses to your right and forty houses to your left." Al-Sakhawi Muhammad (1993). *Al-Maqasid al-hasanah fi-bayan kathir min al-ahadith al-mushtahirah 'ala alsinah*. Ed. Muhammad U. al-Khisht. Ed. 2. Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, p. 204. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "He who closes his door from his neighbor in fear for his family and wealth is not a believer, and neither is he whose neighbor is unsafe from him a believer. Do you know the right of the neighbor? When in need of help, you support; When in need of a loan, you assist; When impoverished, you provide; When taken sick, you visit; When blessed with goodness, you wish well; When struck with calamity, you condole. When they pass on, you accompany their funeral. If you have purchased fruit, then make a gift of it to your neighbor. If you have not done so, then take care to conceal it upon your return. Do not allow your child out with it, for it may embitter the neighbor's child or make them covetous. Do you know the right of the neighbor? By the One in Whose hand is my soul, they who fulfill the rights of their neighbors do not exceed the few graced by Allah's mercy. He continued to advise them over neighbors, until they thought they would come to include them in their wills". Al-Bayhaqi, Ahmad (2003), *Shu'ab al-Iman*, Hamdi D. Muhammad (ed.), Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, p. 3136.
[41] The Qur'an states: "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just" (Qur'an, 60; 8).

being drawn nearer the divine and pursuit of happiness in both worlds while simultaneously associating violations of core moral values with consequences of sinning, leading one ahead of both religious and spiritual guilt and pathways of self-reform and moral uprightness.

A key moral value in this context of discussion pertains to the ensuring peace, safety and security in view of that fact that Islam exhorts its disciples to safeguard the rights and safety of those around them and their surrounding environment. It also associates piety with securing the safety of others' honor, dignity, and property, while obstructing the means before the immoral justifications of ends. To this end, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand, the people are safe, and the believer is the one who is trusted with the lives and wealth of the people."[42] Ensuring safety and security relates to the inception of trust towards others' rights, dues, properties and families and is set to validate Muslim spirituality and religiosity together. Known in the Islamic tradition as *amanah*, trust infiltrates nearly all facets of individual and social life, dictates that Muslim acts with utmost honesty and trust in all of their dealings, added to the requirement of honoring one's words, contracts, pacts, commitments and promises.[43]

Alongside this, Islam also holds high regard for justice as a fundamental objective, and hence shapes its moral education and discipline accordingly.[44] It is worth noting that Islam does not hold in high regard any earned material merits, but instead cherishes the virtues of thankfulness, equity and justice. For instance, it holds a high regard for work, ownership, and earning, yet not without the just basis of economy, ownership, living standards, and merit in addition to the resistance against exploitation, degradation, and recognition and merit according to gender, physicates, or other impressionistic traits. It also censures dissensions of social classes and social conflicts, and instead endeavors to forge harmony through equality and social justice as shown for example in its marked resistance against the monopoly of wealth and economic resources. The policy of the second Muslim Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 regarding justice towards the elderly of other faith groups is still used as religious and legal precedent.[45]

The early emphasis on social justice, doing no harm, and according all rights, whether social, financial, or legal began as a reflection of spiritual and religious divine injunctions. Policies such as the one adopted by 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab in the formative Medinese society, not only served as legal precedents, but also as formative sociocultural anchors linking values of social justice to jurisprudence and practical state policy; creating legal safeguards and defining social norms, moral education and jurisprudence in a manner that would define the very social contract of Muslim society.

Community of Moral Support

Given the critical position of meaningful dialogues and cooperation, Islam capitalizes on community spiritual and moral capital in establishing solid grounds for dignified and respectful treatment. Again, this appears to be engineered around the fundamental idea of human creation and centrality of community care in exercising moral practices. The Islamic sources are replete with materials establishing the need for respectful conduct with one another; this for example is seen in the case of compassion for the elderly, mercy for the young, and safeguarding of the destitute, needy and those enduring struggles. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will

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[42] Ahmad bin 'AbdulHalim, Ibn Taymiyyah (1969), *Majmu' Fatawa Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah*, 'AbdulRahman bin Muhammad bin Qassim (ed.), n.p., p. 266. He also said: "He will not enter Paradise whose neighbor is not secure from his evil. If you would be pleased to be safe and for your religion to be safe for you, then restrain your hands from harming the lives of people, restrain your tongues from harming their honor, and restrain your stomachs from consuming their wealth". "Shall I not tell you what distinguishes the best of you from the worst of you? The best of you are those from whom goodness is expected and people are safe from their evil. The worst of you are those from whom goodness is not expected and people are not safe from their evil. Whoever harms others, and then Allah will harm him. Whoever is harsh with others, then Allah will be harsh with him". See Sarah bint Farraj al-Aqla' (1430), *Takfir al-Mu'in 'inda Aimmat al-da'wah al-Najdiyyah*, University of Umm al-Qura, Mahad al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wa-Ihya al-Turath al-Islami, p. 24.

[43] The Qur'an states: "Those who are faithfully true to their *amanah* and to their covenants...these indeed are the inheritors" (23:8).

[44] The Qur'an states: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witness to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents or your kin, be rich or poor, Allah is better protector to both (than you). So follow not the lust (of your hearts), lest you avoid justice; and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do" (Qur'an, 4: 135).

[45] It is related that an old Jewish poor person who had resorted to begging for the fulfillment of his needs and the payment of government taxes dues (*jizyah*). Upon knowing of his plight, 'Umar provided him with adequate financial support, exempted him from the payment of taxes and issued a new public policy to not overburden the weak or poor non-Muslims citizens.

have mercy upon you."[46] One interesting tradition that highlights the central position of human identity is showcased in the following hadith. A companion named Qays ibn Sa'd reported: A funeral passed by the Messenger of God, and he stood up. It was said to him, "It is a Jew." The Prophet said, "Was he not a soul?"[47] Islam commands cooperation for the sake of good and piety as is stated in the Qur'an "help one another in virtue and goodness, and righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sinful, iniquitous acts and hostility; (in all your actions) keep from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety" (Qur'an, 5: 2).[48] Cooperation is a mode of thought and action that requires excellence (*ihsan*) in all facets of life and best performance in all of human endeavors and undertakings.[49] On a societal level, this involves generous giving, constant sharing according in the best forms, manners and styles. Undertaking the assistance of all times of need, calamities and joyous occasions is to be carried out with no ill or self-interests besides that of a genuine and respectful discharge of human obligation towards others. Bensaid and Tekke argued that congruent with the Islamic logic of human contact, Islam there surges a profound yet compelling exhortation to assist others indiscriminately and unconditionally, while continuing to validate one's religiosity and spirituality by way of service, assistance and sympathy.[50] For them, this social accountability helps maintain relationships with others as shown in Islam's interest to promote cooperation and intergroup relations through exhibiting resourcefulness to other groups.[51]

Specifically, the Qur'an (5:2) commands believers to cooperate with a spirit of piety, righteousness and good. Those represent core tenets of community building which bond members to common living principles as they seek to promote common interests of morality and life while safeguarding bonds of neighbors, business and trade, and social and cultural relations. Muslims are further encouraged to demonstrate integrity, nobility, trust, justice, confidentiality, decency, and fairness, even in cases of enmity[iv], to avoid disrespectful argumentation, enhance the standard of community aesthetics, atmosphere, and comfort through rulings adhering to the specific details of hygiene, green spaces, halal diets, personal care and grooming, nurturing positive social attitudes, adopting virtuous names, condemning of witchcraft, magic, superstition, pessimism, and holding public etiquette, gentle speech, decent and humble bearing of oneself, and compassionate animal care.[52] Other rulings give significant attention to compassion in social spheres of the household, neighbors, wayfarers, orphans, poor and needy. From this arises the concept of *ihsan* which dictates the sharing of available resources with others, while constantly ensuring the pleasure of God and His satisfaction as fundamental inner intent.[53]

The Prophet's practice of Medinese community cooperation provides good model for Muslims' learning, envisaging and undertaking of ethics, especially with regards to social relations building. Following thirteen difficult years in Makkah, Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, nearly four hundred kilometers away, to embark on a new chapter of official moral practice however in a multi-religious context. An in-depth familiarity of the Prophet's legislations and practices in the Medinese society is of significant importance to the understanding of the relationship between moral values and character development and socio-cultural harmony. Izutsu describes the Islamic encounter with the Arab tribal social structures in which tribal and blood kinship bonds were the ultimate standards by which personal values were measured. He further elaborates:

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[46] Ahmad bin 'Ali, Ibn Hajar (1998), *Hidayat al-Ruwat Ila Takhrij al-Masabih wal-Mishkat*, 'Ali bin Hasana bin 'AbdulHamid (ed.), Dammam: Dar Ibn al-Qayyim, Vol. 4, p. 425.

[47] Muslim bin al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi (1955), *Sahih Muslim*, Muhamad Fu'ad 'AbdelBaqi (ed.), Dar Ihya' al-Kutb al-'Arabiyyah 'Issa al-Babi wa-Shurakauh.

[48] Ali Unal. *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English.*

[49] Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: (Verily Allah has prescribed *ihsan* (perfection) in all things) (Muslim). Muslim bin al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi (1955), *Sahih Muslim*, Muhamad Fu'ad 'AbdelBaqi (ed.), Dar Ihya' al-Kutb al-'Arabiyyah 'Issa al-Babi, p. 1955.

[50] Bensaid and Tekke (2018), "Islam and Prejudice: Special Reference to Gordon W. Allport's Contact Hypothesis," p. 108.

[51] Ibid., p.113.

[52] Al-Bukhari, bin Ismail Muhamad (1980), *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (ed.), Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, p. 5889. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Keeping your eyes down, clearing the streets of obstacles, responding to Salam greetings, enjoining virtuous deeds and forbidding evil." Al-Bukhari, bin Ismail Muhamad (1980), *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (ed.), Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, p. 2465. In another narration, he added: "Helping the aggrieved and guiding the aberrant". Ahmad bin 'Amr, al-Bazzar, *Al-Bahr al-Zakhkhar*, Mahfuz al-Rahman ZinuAllah (ed.), Medina: Maktabat al-'Ulum wal-Hikam, p. 472. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Allah is Pleasant and loves pleasant things, Clean and loves cleanliness, Generous and loves generosity…" Al-'Asqalani bin Hajar Ahmad, *Hidayat al-Ruwat*, p. 254.

[53] This is described in the Chapter of Insan (Man) saying: "We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude" (Qur'an, 76: 9).

It is of supreme importance to the right estimation of Muhammad's religious movement to realize it was just in such a circumstance that he declared the definite superiority of religious faith over the ties of blood. His was indeed a daring attempt to establish a new community on the basis of a common faith… the most effective factor… apart from religious truths contained in the message of Mohammed, its ability to serve as a point of crystallization for a novel socio-political unity.[54]

Medina was characterized by the presence of Jewish tribes like Banu 'Awf, Banu al-Najjar, Banu al-Harith, Bani Sai'dah, Bani Jashm, Bani al-Aws, Bani Tha'alabah, Banu Qaynuqa', Banu al-Nadhir, and Banu Quraydha. With the exception of some individuals, the last three tribes are reported to have the only ones that remain true to their Jewish beliefs. It was within this context that Prophet Muhammad established a model of social ethics characterized primarily with reform, care and justice. One of its key initiatives relating to the reform of social relations included the bond of brotherhood among the migrants from Makkah (*muhajirun*) and the residents of Medina (*ansar*), as shown for instance in the case of the companion Sa'd Ibn al-Rabi' with 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Awf.[55] Prophet Muhammad also introduced the constitution of the Medina (*sahifatul al-Madinah*) to effectively organize those interpersonal, social and inter-community relations among the various communities of Medina, including the Jewish inhabitants of Medina. The Constitution granted a series of basic rights yet also imposed other social duties and responsibilities. It introduced a project of cohabitation, social equality, security assurances, criminalization of harboring criminals, preventative justice which tackled transgressions on the dignity of individuals or their properties, the collective shared expenses of city protection, freeing of captives through ransom payments, comprehensive debt alleviation, encouragement of healthy customs, religious freedoms, rights of neighbors and the declaration of the sanctity of the city.

Islam calls for supportive cooperation on matters of morality, development and social justice. This falls within the broader framework pertaining to cooperating on common goals and needs as illustrated earlier in the Medinese constitution. The Qur'an established this cooperation on themes of piety and public order. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have participated in the alliance and oath of "*fudul*" (people with virtue), later exclaiming that he would surely take part in it if he were to participate in such a pact again. On yet another level, the inter-community cooperation calls for caring, sympathy, mutual support and just distribution of resources. This is perhaps the reason why Islam continually calls on its followers to extend assistance to others, to be resourceful, and to bring happiness to others.[56]

Conclusion

This paper discussed the role and contribution of social ethics to sustaining social relations and ensuring robust, productive inter-community interactions, and by extension, effectively securing social harmony. This however, brings to light the crucial need of the capacity of today's Muslim moral education to act as effective catalyst in the engineering of a model of social co-existence and practical harmony. Given the growing stereotypes and misrepresentations surrounding Muslim relations alongside the very questioning of the true Muslim identity and its aptitude to live and cope in contexts of religious and cultural diversity, it is incumbent to revisit the current curriculums, practices and general cultures of moral education, especially with reference to their advantageous position on social relations and dynamics.

An awareness of Muslim social ethics and morality has much to offer in the way of identifying commonalities for diverse multicultural societies, offering means for greater engagement, higher civic engagement and more effective policy design by way of focus on embedded mechanisms and concepts. This has significant implications for the success of development agendas, integration policies, and the promotion of multicultural tolerance on the one hand, and countering negative stereotypes towards Muslim social ethics on the other by reflecting commonalities. The discussions provided on the premises, goals, and driving forces behind Muslims' social ethics are further essential to guiding effective policy, impactful curricula or designing effective social programs that resonate with Muslim

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[54] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 58.

[55] Salahi, M. A. and Cadir, N. (2013), *Muhammad: His character and conduct*, Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation, p.167.

[56] Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The one who looks after and works for a widow and a poor person is like a warrior fighting for Allah's cause or like a person who fasts during the day and night". See Muhamad bin Hibban al-Bisti (1994), *Sahih Ibn Hibban bi-tartib ibn balban*, Shu'yab al-Arnawut (ed.), Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, p. 4225.

target audiences. More critically, they represent access to an established framework for engagement of Muslim demographics, and an established archetype that can be replicated or synthesized elsewhere with or without religious programming.

Effective moral instruction should focus on the reflective experience of social fields work as a genuine channel of moral development and maturity, or else it may turn to a mere exercise of intellectualism, meditation or individual spiritual luxury, lacking the profound experience necessary to accommodate and adapt to the changing context. And while upholding one's fundamental principles, beliefs and values, one must also give attention to the vitality of *ijtihad* in the process of moral practice, and the need for moral adaptability with regards to aspects of projection of values in context of communities, as this would greatly enrich conceptions of social ethics and even enhance the far reaching results of its practice. Finally, there is a need to question many cultural and historical interpretations surrounding the understanding and application of moral values. Muslim social ethics have the capacity to be developed and integrated into a global moral education, adding great value to the understanding of coexistence in today's multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious present.

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