

DECOLONISED REPRESENTATION OF JIHAD NARRATIVE: CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS MISREPRESENTATIONS (PART II)

Syeda Sughra Naqvi*

Postdoctoral Fellow, The University of Sydney, Australia \ Assistant Professor, Higher Education Department Punjab, Pakistan | HEC Doctoral Fellow, La Rochelle Universite, La Rochelle, France

Muhammad Rizwan

Department of English, School of English, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author:** punjtani512@ymail.com

Article Info



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract

This paper, Part II of the research series initiated in "Construction of Religious Misrepresentations...", employs a decolonial lens to critically examine the dominant and weaponised narrative surrounding the Islamic concept of Jihad. It argues that a profound misrepresentation, fueled by neo-colonial geopolitical interests and radical Islamist ideologies, has systematically reduced Jihad's multifaceted meaning - fundamentally denoting "struggle" or "striving" - to a monolith of violent warfare. Through linguistic analysis and theological exegesis, the paper delineates the classical typologies of Jihad, emphasising the primacy of the internal, spiritual struggle (Jihad al-Akbar) over the strictly regulated, defensive armed struggle (Jihad al-Asghar). Supplementing theoretical analysis with empirical survey data from Muslim respondents, the research investigates contemporary perceptions of religious coercion, blasphemy, and the role of human reasoning (ijtihad) versus blind following (taqleed). The findings reveal a significant dissonance between mainstream Islamic teachings, which advocate for peace and tolerance, and the popular sentiments shaped by socio-political misrepresentations, particularly regarding blasphemy laws. The paper concludes that the prevailing intolerance within some Muslim societies is not an intrinsic feature of Islam but a historical and political consequence of power dynamics, colonial trauma, and the successful dissemination of distorted narratives by both external and internal actors. This study aims to recuperate the pluralistic and peace-oriented dimensions of Jihad, contributing to a decolonised understanding of Islamic epistemology.

Keywords: *Decolonial Islamic Studies, Jihad Misrepresentation, Religious Epistemology, Sociopolitical Narratives*

Introduction

Building upon the foundational critique established in Part I, "Construction of Religious Misrepresentations...", which analysed the mechanisms through which religious doctrines are selectively framed and weaponised within socio-political discourses, this second part focuses on a pivotal case study: the concept of Jihad in Islam. The term Jihad, arguably one of the most potent and contested signifiers in global political lexicon, has been effectively severed from its rich theological and spiritual roots within Islamic tradition. As noted in Part I, the process of 'familiarising the unfamiliar' - making a distorted narrative appear natural - has been particularly successful here (Moscovici, 2001). The global media, radical neoliberals, and extremist factions have colluded, albeit from opposing positions, to cement a monolithic association between Jihad and perpetual holy war, terrorism, and civilisational clash (Armstrong, 1993; Lewis, 2003).

This paper argues that such a reduction constitutes a form of epistemic violence, serving neo-colonial and religio-political agendas by legitimising violence and portraying Islam as an inherently militant religion (Spencer, 2007). To decolonise this narrative, it is imperative to return to the term's etymological, textual, and historical contexts. The Arabic root j-h-d fundamentally implies exertion, striving, and effort. Classical Islamic scholarship, from jurists like Ibn Rushd to contemporary theologians, has consistently categorised Jihad into hierarchical types, with the greatest Jihad (Jihad al-Akbar) being the struggle against one's own base desires (Kabbani & Mendricks, n.d.; Zaidi, 2009). The combative form (Jihad bil Saif) is strictly regulated as a defensive, last-resort measure permissible only under state authority and specific ethical constraints akin to the "just war" theory (Al Buti, 1995).

This study extends beyond textual analysis to ground its inquiry in contemporary Muslim subjectivity. It presents and analyses survey data exploring how educated Muslims perceive core issues intertwined with the Jihad narrative: the Islamic injunction of "no compulsion in religion" (La Ikraha fid Deen), the legitimacy of armed struggle for propagation, the role of clerical authority versus individual reasoning, and the volatile issue of blasphemy. The data reveals critical tensions, such as near-unanimous support for doctrinal non-coercion juxtaposed with a significant minority endorsing violent propagation, and a widespread zero-tolerance stance on blasphemy that contrasts sharply with the Prophet Muhammad's documented forbearance.

By integrating doctrinal exposition with empirical sociology, this paper seeks to dismantle the hegemonic misrepresentation of Jihad. It posits that the apparent prevalence of intolerance in some Muslim societies is not a theological inevitability but a historical product of political power struggles, colonial disruption, and the strategic hijacking of religious discourse by extremist elements. The path forward, as suggested in the conclusion, requires an intellectual and spiritual jihad to reclaim the tradition's humanistic and peace-oriented core, challenging the misrepresentations that fuel global discord.

Nowadays, the term Jihad, contrary to its genuine concept, is known as the armed fight or war against non-Muslims to impose Islam through enforced conversion. The critics of Islam insist that Islam and Muslims are openly discriminatory and inflexible towards non-Muslim communities.¹To support their

¹ Spencer, Robert (2007), *A Religion of Peace: Why Christianity Is and Why Islam Isn't*, Pegnery Publishing Inc. USA

stance they call attention to the verses in the Holy Quran that urge the believers to fight against non-believers in the name of God. They further refer to the Ghazwas (the battles) fought in the early period of Islam under the command of the Holy Prophet (SAWA) and eventually, the confrontation between the Crusaders and the Saracens or Moors, and now of course the contemporary stereotype of terrorists groups such as Al-Qaeda, Tehreek e Taliban, or ISIS/ISIL. It remains true that Islam is still conceptualized as a terrifying, extremist, bigoted, fanatical, violent and bizarre religion by considerable sections of the world's mainstream media, radicalised neoliberals and radicalised Islamists. The narrative of Jihad, with its misinterpreted definition of 'fight' or 'war' to spread Islam, has been familiarized to the world in such a manner that the original definition has become unfamiliar. Known has become unknown. The theory of social misrepresentation has succeeded in 'familiarising the unfamiliar'². The most 'unfamiliar,' yet fact-based truth is that the Arabic word for war is Al-harb and not Jihad. The notion of Jihad has been appropriated by many socio-economic-geopolitical neocolonialists and religio-political fundamentalists or Islamists over the past post-postcolonial decades in a bid to legitimize the varieties of violence and to implement extremist ideologies, and so a socio-political theory of revisionism, that will be discussed later, has been introduced to the world.

To decolonise this misrepresentation, it is crucial to focus on the genuine and infinitely more popular definition of Islam, i.e. peace, to avoid any misunderstanding about Jihad in Islam and its significance in Din (religion). Contexts and circumstances of the Quranic revelation and hadith are important to understand Jihad. Islam and Muslims are being judged through the lens of an ideological jihad narrative with a negative sense that has been popularized by neoliberals as well as radicalised fundamentalists. This misrepresented concept has lured people away from the genuine concept of Jihad in Islam, selectively repressing important figures and disregarding Islam's impeccable intellectual legacy, upholding the standards of law and justice in affairs of the state.

Jihad in Islam³

Jihad is derived from Arabic, from the root word 'jahad' (verb) that means 'to struggle, to strive, to put in effort, to endeavour'. Jihad is the noun of 'jahad,' thus its common meaning is an action or struggle. Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani and Shaykh Seraj Mendricks gave the same definition in these words: "Jihad in Arabic means "to strive for some objective"."⁴ They further explained the term with more clarity: "The Arabic word "jihad" is often translated as "holy war," but in a purely linguistic sense, the word "jihad" means struggling or striving. In a religious sense, as described by the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), "jihad" has many meanings. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer, as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam."⁵ S. Manzar Abbas Zaidi defines Jihad in the following words: "The word jihad derives from the Arabic root

² Moscovici, Serge (2001), *Social Representations: Explorations In Social Psychology*, New York, USA, New York University Press

³ See: Maududi, Abul A'la, English Translation by Syed Rafatullah Shah (2017), *Aljihad Fil Islam*, Independent Publication

⁴ Kabbani, Shaikh Muhammad Hisham (Chairman Islamic Supreme Council of America) and Mendricks, Shaykh Seraj (head mufti, Cape Town, SA), *Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not*, The Islamic Supreme Council of America, [Official website](#)

⁵ Kabbani, Shaikh Muhammad Hisham (Chairman ISCA) and Mendricks, Shaykh Seraj (head mufti, Cape Town, SA), *Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not*, The Islamic Supreme Council of America, [Official website](#)

jhd, signifying intense struggle or effort.”⁶ In Islam, this word indicates, specifically, the struggle in the way of Almighty Allah to be a true practising Momin (believer) by being on Sirat al Mustaqeem (the righteous path), by inviting other humans towards the righteous path i.e. Islam through teachings and preaching, and by giving mutual assistance when oppressed. It refers to the struggle or effort for the righteous objectives against oppression, against evil, for the prevailing good in society, for justice, for equality, for peace, for prosperity, for truth, for harmony, in short for humanity and humanism. Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions. It is significant to know how Jews and Christians are referred to in the Holy Quran. They are addressed as *Ahl Al Kitab* “the people of the book” who worship the same God as Muslims. Allah is the Arabic word for God, and is used by Christians, Jews and Muslims. They are expected to be “protected and respected”⁷. All three faiths worship the same God.

There are different types of Jihad for different perspectives:

1. Jihad Bil Nafs, also known as Jihad bil Qalb: the struggle against one’s own evil instinct and desires to pursue evil deeds
2. Jihad Bil Ilm: the struggle through knowledge and awareness, which includes a) Jihad Bil Lisan: the struggle with tongue through communication, speeches and preaching), and b) Jihad Bil Qalam: the struggle through pen and writings
3. Jihad Bil Saif: the struggle with sword, fighting and war

Ibn Rushd divides Jihad into four kinds: “Jihad by the heart; Jihad by the tongue; Jihad by the hand; and Jihad by the sword.”⁸

Jihad Bil Nafs (Struggle with Heart and Instinct)

Zaidi very accurately describes Jihad bil Nafs in the following words: “It has the connotation of a moral struggle within one’s own self, besides denoting an armed struggle. It thus carries the hermeneutical meaning of a moral endeavour directed toward one’s own improvement or self-elevation on a moral plane, which Muslim jurists of eminence have been quoted as calling jihad-e-akbar, or greater jihad.”⁹ Zaidi defines Jihad by the tongue as “to commend good conduct and forbid the wrong”¹⁰, like the type of Jihad Allah ordered us to fulfill against the hypocrites in His Words, “Ya Ayyuha alnNabiyyu Jahidi alkuffara wa almunafiqeena” Translation: “O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites.”¹¹ So to fulfill this command of Allah, the Holy Prophet (SAWA) struggled in two ways: firstly, by the tongue

⁶ Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas (2009), Eclipse of the Greater Jihad, Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace, Vol 3 Issue 1

⁷ Kabbani, Shaikh Muhammad Hisham (updated 2019), (Chairman ISCA) and Shaykh Seraj Mendricks (head mufti, Cape Town, SA), Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not, The Islamic Supreme Council of America, [Official website](#)

⁸ Ibn Rushd (known in the Western world as Averroes), Muqaddimaat, p. 259. Cited by Kabbani, Shaikh Muhammad Hisham (Chairman ISCA) and Mendricks, Shaykh Seraj (head mufti, Cape Town, SA), Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not, [The Islamic Supreme Council of America](#), Official website

⁹ Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas (2009), Eclipse of the Greater Jihad, Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace, Vol 3 Issue 1

¹⁰ Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas (2009), Eclipse of the Greater Jihad, Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace, Vol 3 Issue 1

¹¹ Holy Quran, Surah Al-Taubah, Verse No. 73

and persuasive speeches and preaching, inviting people to do good and abandon all mischievous and evil codes of conduct that may cause oppression and unrest within the societies.

Jihad Bil Ilm (The Struggle Through Awareness)

Ilm is an Arabic word that means knowledge, awareness, consciousness or cognisance. So, Jihad bil Ilm (JBI) is defined as putting in efforts to spread the knowledge and awareness of Islam. It is also known as Da'wah (invitation); to invite people towards the messages of Islam and to follow the righteous ways of life according to the guidance of Allah Almighty and His Prophet (SAWA). This type of Jihad can be practised in two ways: by tongue or by pen. The preaching by oral speeches is recognized with the name Jihad bil Lisan and the invitation or persuasion towards Islamic ways of life by writings is named Jihad bil Qalam.

Jihad Bil Lisan (The Struggle by Preaching)

Jihad bil Lisan indicates the effort or struggle through teaching, preaching or inviting people towards righteous path. Lisan means tongue and Jihad Bil Lisan is also translated as the struggle by tongue. Literally, it refers to the actions performed by the tongue, i.e. teaching or preaching. This form of Jihad is usually overlooked nowadays by the media, whether electronic or print. Presenting the message of Islam is called Da'wah in Arabic. To have an idea of its significance, it is enough to know that thirteen out of a total of twenty three years of Holy Prophet's Ba'sat (revelation as Prophet to Visaal) (passing away) are spent in this type of Jihad. God says in the Quran, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."¹²

Inviting people to Islam and making them aware of its message and all its aspects through conversation and kind persuasion is the type of Jihad that was first practised in Islam, without any fighting, as opposed to the more popular belief that Jihad takes only the combative form. In the Holy Quran where Allah says, "So do not obey the disbelievers, and struggle against them with the Quran, a great struggle."¹³ Here the word "strive" jaahidu, is used to mean struggle by the tongue; using the skills of speech while preaching and persuading the non-believers towards the beliefs of Islam. Imam Nawawi, in his book Al-Minhaj, when defining Jihad and its different categories, said, "one of the collective duties of the community as a whole (fard kifaya) is to lodge a valid protest, to solve problems of religion, to have knowledge of Divine Law, to command what is right and forbid wrong conduct"¹⁴.

Jihad Bil Qalam (The Struggle with Pen or Through Writings)

"The pen is mightier than the sword" is a famous idiom that very accurately describes Jihad Bil Qalam. People grasp the ideas by reading and pondering over the ideas themselves. Books are the best teachers ever. So if the societies need a positive change, the social workers, writers, journalists, scholars and

¹² Holy Quran, Surah An Nahl, Verse No. 125

¹³ Holy Quran, Surah Al Furqan, Verse No. 52

¹⁴ Al-Nawawi, See Al-Minhaaj, (the Method), p. 210. (Accessed September 2018)

teachers should participate in the struggle through their pen and writings. An anonymous scholar said, “Jihad bil Qalam should be done for struggling against the attempts of deformation and distortion of Islam.” He gave an example of Salman Rushdie, who wrote a book in which he presented some texts from the Quran with distortion and deformation of the original. For that the scholar recommended Jihad bil Qalam to confront the two versions.

Jihad Bil Saif (The Struggle Through Sword)

Jihad bil Saif is the “preparations and participation for defense against an armed conflict that is the consequence of foreign aggression”¹⁵. This type of Jihad “has been known as qitaal, or jihad-e-asghar, lesser jihad.”¹⁶ If fundamental rights are violated through oppression, laws and treaties are broken after conception or wars are imposed, only then is this kind of Jihad, bil Saif or struggle with sword, justified. S. Ramadan Buti, a contemporary orthodox scholar from Syria, in his well-known research work on the subject ‘Jihad in Islam,’ writes: “...even before he conducted Jihad by sword against the unbelievers, there is no doubt the Prophet (SAWA) invited these unbelievers peacefully, lodged protests against their beliefs and strove to remove their misgivings about Islam. When they refused any other solution, but rather declared war against him and his message and initiated the fight, there was no alternative except to fight back.”¹⁷ Some contemporary examples of approved, combatant Jihad, as given by anonymous interviewed scholars, are Palestine and Kashmir where the Muslims are being deprived of their fundamental human rights through oppression.

Thus, the most familiar perception of Jihad - battle, fighting, hostilities, warfare, combat - is erroneous. In fact Jihad, in its technical meaning, has several branches and the “combative form of Jihad is one and the weakest of them in rank or status”¹⁸. Jihad in its two concepts - violent and nonviolent - is contrasted in a familiar prophetic convention. John L. Esposito quoted Holy Prophet (SAWA)’s hadith, wherein He told his followers when returning from a battle, “We return from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.”¹⁹ From the minor Jihad to the major Jihad meant returning from armed battle to the peaceful struggle for

¹⁵ Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas (2009), ‘Eclipse of the Greater Jihad, Journal of Religion’, Conflict and Peace, Vol 3 Issue 1, accessed online with no page numbers mentioned, <http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/volume-3-issue-1-fall-2009/eclipse-greater-jihad>

¹⁶ Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas (2009), ‘Eclipse of the Greater Jihad, Journal of Religion’, Conflict and Peace, Vol 3 Issue 1, accessed online with no page numbers mentioned, <http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/volume-3-issue-1-fall-2009/eclipse-greater-jihad>

¹⁷ Al Buti, Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan (1995), Jihad in Islam: How to Understand and Practice It, Dar Al-Fikr Publishers.

¹⁸ Mehdi, Syed Intezar (2017), Interview undertaken by the researcher during her fieldwork in Iran in October 2017

¹⁹ Esposito, John L. (2003), Unholy War, Terror in the Name of Islam, Oxford University Press, Oxford, , pg. 28 and 38

self-control and betterment.²⁰ The greater Jihad is the more difficult and more important struggle against one's ego, selfishness, greed, and evil.²¹

However, there are critics of this concept of lesser or greater Jihad. For most of the fourteen centuries of recorded Muslim history, Jihad was most commonly interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power, which is but a "distortion of the truth"²² says Karen Armstrong, and Bernard Lewis²³ also endorses this in his book *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. Karen Armstrong further writes in her book, *Muhammad*, that Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) is often imagined as a warlord who had his sword in his hand all the time, scared people and succeeded in imposing Islam forcefully on the world. The reality was quite different. Holy Prophet (SAWA) and His companions were struggling for their lives and survival while, secondly, they had also undertaken a mission - the mission of Islam, the mission of human equity and equality - in which violence was inevitable to protect Islam against its enemies.²⁴ Protection of the faith can be carried out through legal, diplomatic, economic or political ways and armed struggle for this purpose comes when there is no other alternative. Moreover, harming women, children and old people is strictly forbidden, and it is recommended to immediately abandon fighting if there is some offer from the enemy to restore peace. Contrary to Jihadist ideology, only states or governments have the right to declare Jihad bil Saif with a proper cohesion to the Islamic concept of "just war," i.e. in defence or against oppression or to help the oppressed. No individual or group can legitimately declare Jihad by hijacking its Islamic concept in favour of their politically motivated goals. The so-called jihadists of Al Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS and some other terrorist groups misuse the concept of Jihad, thus contradicting Islam. They kill women, children and the old in society, against Islamic principles. They rape women and radicalise them by force, in the name of a newly-forged concept of jihad alNikah²⁵. They use women and children as a human shield if trapped. They rob banks, loot convoys, capture others' properties to finance their activities of terrorism. Their brutal acts of terrorism are in line with oppression, not against oppression. These actions exhibit their lust for power, lust for women, and lust for money. These non-state actors are doing exactly what is against the fundamentals of Islam, discussed in a previous chapter.

²⁰ Kabbani, Shaikh Muhammad Hisham (Chairman ISCA) and Mendricks, Shaykh Seraj (head mufti, Cape Town, SA) , *Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not*, published on the official website of [The Islamic Supreme Council of America](#)

²¹ See also: Khomeini, Imam (11 Nov 2015), *Jihad al-Akbar, The Greatest Jihad: Combat with the Self* Paperback, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

²² Armstrong, Karen (10 Sep 1993), *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, 1st Paperback edition, Harper Collins Publishes Inc., New York, pg. 164

²³ Lewis, Bernard (25 March 2003), *The Crisis of Islam, Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Publishers: London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pg. 24.

²⁴ Armstrong, Karen (10 Sep 1993), *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, 1st Paperback edition, Harper Collins Publishes Inc., New York, pg. 164-210

²⁵ Any terrorist (so-called mujahid) can come to any woman, declare her his wife and can engage in sexual intercourse, while soon after his departure another can come and repeat the same and so the practice continues. The woman cannot refuse.

How Common / Non-Political Muslims Perceive Coercion

The results displayed in the table below verify the Muslims' perceptions regarding the fundamentals of Islam. La Ikraha fid Deen (no coercion in religion) is the key concept of Islam, in line with its original sense as the religion of peace and protection. According to the results of collected data, common educated Muslims unanimously yet firmly stand in favour of this point of view as can be observed in the table given below which shows that 100% of participants have no doubt about this concept. 93.33% of participants rejected the extremists' ideology that advocates the use of sword with the purpose of spreading Islam.

Sr. #	Stated Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	'No coercion in religion' indicates that any coercive act to spread Islam or to practice Islam is forbidden in Islam.	150 = 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	Jihad Bil-Saif (struggle through sword) is a command of God to spread Islam.	01 = 0.67 %	09 = 6%	0%	62 = 41.33	78 = 52%

Accumulative Result:

Sr. #	Stated Questions	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
1	'No compulsion in religion' indicates that any coercive act to spread Islam or to practice Islam is forbidden in Islam.	150 = 100%	0%	0%
2	Jihad Bil-Saif (struggle through sword) is a command of God to spread Islam.	10 = 6.67%	0%	140 = 93.33

But again, as we have discussed earlier, 6.67% people who favour the use of physical power and weapons to spread Islam is alarming, as well as indicating that radicalisation is gradually seeping into the roots of common Muslim societies, and there is a high probability that this figure would be larger among uneducated people whose opinion depends upon the type of religious managers they are associated with. If these managers are scholars with a genuine knowledge of religion and without any political agenda, the followers would come away with a peaceful message, but if they are quacks or radicals with certain

political goals then the followers are also likely to become intolerant. Islam allows the use of the sword, weapons or force in certain contexts. The use of force, even if with divine purpose to maintain law and order or in defence or for helping the oppressed, brings violence with it this way. And this violence goes out of bounds when the same verses and hadiths permitting violence in limited contexts are used by the extremists out of context. For example, Quranic verse number 191 of chapter 2 Al Baqarah permits killing. It begins with “And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they have driven you out, and fitnah (disorder) is worse than killing. And do not fight with them at the place of worship until they attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the punishment of kafireen (disbelievers).”²⁶ Now, two words are focused on for the purpose of misrepresentation fitnah and kafireen, with an interpretation that only kafireen are the ones who cause fitnah, thus their killing is permitted. To validate this interpretation they simply quote the first part of the verse and when are asked who are ‘them,’ they indicate the last word of the verse i.e. kafireen. And while killing Muslims they present the excuse that these Muslims of other sects are causing fitnah. We find this verse in their literature as ‘Kill them (disbelievers), kick them out ... this (killing) is the reward of disbelievers,’ which is obviously a self-serving selection of the verse. In fact, this fighting in the way of Allah is discussed from verse number 190 to 194 explaining its full context. Verse 190 conveys the message, “Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not involve in hostilities. No doubt, Allah does not like aggressors.”²⁷ While in verse number 192 Allah urges one to restore peace immediately if the enemy abandons the fight. Another example is verse number 2 of Surah Al Ma'idah that conveys the message, “O Believers, do not profane in Allah’s monuments or [the sanctity of] the sacred month or [neglect the marking of] the sacrificial animals and garlanding [them] or [violate the safety of] those who come to the Sacred House seeking bounty and pleasure of their Lord. But when you come out of ihram, then [you may] hunt. And do not let the hatred of the people who obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram seduce you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in punishment.”

There are more than a hundred times when Allah permits the use of violence in certain contexts, just as above. However, extremists violate the contextual conditions and to avoid the questions raised by the common people, these politically motivated extremists declare human reasoning impermissible, announcing themselves as the ultimate authority regarding Islamic matters. They are told to follow the religious managers without any ambiguity or questioning. This way they escape logical reasoning against their coercive ideologies, backed by forged misrepresentations. Keeping that in mind, the aspect of human reasoning is also taken into consideration for analysis through fieldwork.

Human Reasoning and Concept of Taqleed (Following)

Taqleed means following. In Islam, it indicates following any of the religious scholars for guidance regarding Islamic questions. There are some extremists who go beyond this and declare that once one has decided to be in Taqleed of a scholar, one cannot consult any other. Human reasoning is a concept that has been repeated time and again in the Quran, with an encouragement to ponder over the matters of life

²⁶ Holy Quran, Surah Al Baqarah, Verse No. 191

²⁷ Holy Quran, Surah Al Baqarah, Verse No. 192

and the world to comprehend the logic of creation. Nothing is created by the Creator without some logical reason. There is an invitation to explore the causes of the existence of everything. It is because on the final Day of Judgment everyone will be held responsible for one's own actions and no one will be burdened for another's sins.²⁸

The results of the survey are very interesting. The first statement that highlights the concept of Taqleed has found strong endorsement among the people. 39.33% of the participants of the survey have the opinion that religious scholars or clerics should not be contradicted or even questioned for their fatwas (verdicts), while 60.67% disagree with this idea of blind following. Both sides have certain arguments in favour of their stance. The people in favour of blind following argue that the religious scholars devote their lives to acquiring the knowledge of Islam so they know Islam more than we, the common people, so cannot be questioned. But the majority of the common Muslims believe in reasoning, at least the majority of the educated class. But 39.33% is not a small figure, particularly among the educated people. They have decided to leave religious matters to scholars and they are following them without any objection. Some go further and claim that questioning or human reasoning is sinful.

Sr. #	Stated Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The common Muslims must not question or contradict the scholars/clerics' declarations.	13 = 8.67%	46 = 30.67%	0%	89 = 59.33%	2 = 1.33%
2	There is an answer to every question for those who ponder in search of truth	112 = 74.66%	29 = 19.3%	09 = 3%	0%	0%

²⁸ Holy Quran, Surah Faatir, Verse No. 18

Accumulative Result:

Sr. #	Stated Questions	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
1	The common Muslims must not question or contradict the scholars/clerics' declarations.	59 = 39.33%	0%	91 = 60.67%
2	There is an answer to every question for those who ponder in search of truth.	141 = 94%	09 = 6%	0%

An anonymous scholar responded to this human reasoning issue, explaining that asking questions is not at all forbidden but the answer given by the scholars should be accepted since they have spent the whole of their lives in acquiring the knowledge of Islam. 'If the scholars are infallible, who cannot make mistakes?' was a follow up question to his answer during an interview. He responded, they are not infallible but they certainly have better understanding than the people associated to other professions who do not have enough knowledge of Islam. The Islamic scholars are experts in their field thus their opinion should be considered valid. Just as, he added, we go to the medical doctor if we have health issues because they are medical specialists. Similarly, the religious scholars are specialists in the study of religion so their point of view is more authoritative than others. What if they be quacks? I asked, just as there are quacks in the field of medicine whose treatment could be fatal. Upon this, he recited a famous idiom, well known all over the subcontinent,

"Neem hakeem khatra e jaan, neem mulla, khatra e Imaan" My translation:

Quacks in medicine, fatal for life Quacks of religion, fatal for faith /soul

Half knowledge is the disease of the soul, he continued, the quacks who have lack of knowledge and understanding object to questioning and human reasoning with the fear of

being exposed. Such quack managers of religion are the real danger whom most of the interviewed scholars title as neem mulla (religious quacks) or ulma e soo (sinful scholars). The difference between

neem mulla and ulma e soo is that religious quacks claim themselves to be scholars who distort religion due to lack of expertise in religion, while ulma e soo are the scholars who intentionally forge, fabricate and misinterpret the religion in order to distort the facts for validating their politically motivated propaganda.

Blasphemy

Blasphemy, for me, is an act that hurts others' sensitivity regarding all senses; sense of hearing, sense of seeing, feeling and so on. The twenty first century, with an advocacy in favour of freedom of speech ignores the freedom of other senses, the very freedom of speech can cause damage to. There is an undefined thin line of ethical manners where our freedom articulates with other's. Everyone has to follow that boundary very strictly. One should know where my freedom is crossing that abstract yet concrete boundary to violate another's domain of freedom. The 'live and let live' policy of Islam and liberalism does not favour an unaccountable freedom of speech. No social moral values allow anyone to abuse or misbehave with a purpose to hurt. Thus, I strongly condemn and discourage any expression that targets others with a purpose to humiliate. Generally people, irrespective of which religion they belong to, are more touchy about their faith than any other thing. So is the case with Muslims. We are too touchy about our faith, Islam, our Prophet, Muhammad (SAWA) and Allah Almighty. So, we feel humiliation when someone, using the excuse of freedom of speech, attacks our faith just as anyone from any other religion will. Liberty of living peacefully is for all and not only for a few. That is why all the states of the world should legislate regarding freedom of speech with a certain definition where an individual's freedom ends and others begins – many states already do, of course. There should not be any room for blasphemy if we really want to live in peace. However, evil cannot be responded to with evil. Only good should be used against evil to curb it. Similarly, the evil of blasphemy cannot be tackled by coercive reactions by individuals. Considering the sensitivity of this issue and its current horrific consequence, blasphemy was one of the five topics selected to examine through my survey. And the most shocking results of the survey are regarding the issues of blasphemy. According to expectations, the statement explaining the Holy Prophet (SAWA)'s tolerance and patience towards blasphemers received an unopposed agreement by 100% of the participants. He was so humble to them that He used to pray for the ones who committed an act of profanity against Him. Having an understanding of the significance of tolerance, the result of the other, inverse statement regarding reaction towards the act of profanity should be 100% in disagreement. But it was not so. The opinion was not even divided by a close margin. It was very clear. There were only a few ticks in the column of disagreement, only 10%. And 9.33% preferred to avoid giving their opinion while a large number of participants, 80.67% of the total, favoured zero tolerance for blasphemers. The results help in determining the acute love of the Muslims for their Allah, their Prophet (SAWA), their Quran, and their religion Islam. Although it is their love that has taken them to this stance, they can go so far as to violate Sunnah commanding them to be tolerant but they cannot tolerate any act of blasphemy against Allah, the last Prophet (SAWA) and Quran. But the role of misrepresentation regarding a consensus in favour of zero tolerance for blasphemers cannot be ignored.

Sr. #	Stated Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Blasphemy law (with blasphemer's death penalty) is exactly according to Islam. Zero tolerance for blasphemers!	85 = 56.67%	36 = 24%	14 = 9.33%	15 = 10%	0%
2	Holy Prophet (peace be upon Him) used to forgive and pray for God's mercy upon His blasphemers. He never even allowed His companions to react harshly against them.	150 = 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Accumulative Result:

Sr.#	Stated Questions	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
1	Blasphemy law (with blasphemer's death penalty) is exactly according to Islam. Zero tolerance for blasphemers!	135 = 90%	15 = 10%	0%
2	Holy Prophet (peace be upon Him) used to forgive and pray for God's mercy upon His blasphemers. He never even allowed His companions to react harshly against them.	150 = 100%	0%	0%

The year 2011 witnessed Salman Taseer's, a governor of the Punjab province in Pakistan, assassination, shot dead by his own security guard named Mumtaz Qadri for supporting a Christian woman named Asia who was convicted by civil court first and then the high court sustained the conviction, on a charge of blasphemy. The murderer's statement in the court relates that he heard the announcement in the Mosque by a molvi that Taseer had committed blasphemy by supporting a blasphemer thus was deserving of death

and upon hearing this, he shot the governor in a fit of situational influence, without verification of the charge. The molvi mentioned by Qadri, however, denied any announcement of such a kind. Although Qadri was hanged for his extra judicial killing he was, and still is, “hailed as a hero”²⁹ by the extremists.

Qadri’s elevation to the status of hero on one side, led other extremists to be more violent towards charges of blasphemy and on the other side, it provided the opportunity to the people to kill their social or political rivals by simply alleging them as blasphemers. On 13 April 2017, a student at Mardan Campus, Mashal Khan’s savage lynching is an example of such a personal dispute and argument with some fellow students upon which they gathered a mob and lynched him, shouting *gustakh* (blasphemer) and *murtad* (deviant). And the extremist molvis refused to lead his funeral prayer. No evidence of blasphemy found against him during the investigation; indeed, it seems that his Facebook and Twitter accounts were hacked and someone else posted the allegedly blasphemous messages on social media.³⁰ ‘I love Allah, I love Prophet (SAWA)’ were his last uttered words. Extremism and misrepresentations won the day while peace, humanity and Islam were the losers. Such examples have produced an environment such that even the ordinary people and scholars with moderate mindsets are scared to express leniency towards blasphemers or blasphemy. In this regard, when I argued with a molvi “Isn’t it an act of blasphemy when someone usurps Allah’s authority of judgments before the Day of Judgment, punishing someone for which Allah is the sole authority?” A scholar narrated an event regarding blasphemy during the Prophet (SAWA)’s life. Paraphrasing his narration, there was a poet from Banu Quraish who used to write poetry based upon apostasy against Holy Prophet (SAWA) and Islam. Once upon a time, the Muslims saw him when he was passing by Madinah travelling to Syria. They captured him and presented him in front of the Holy Prophet (SAWA), demanding severe punishment for him. The Holy Prophet (SAWA) smiled and commanded Ali (as) to remove his blasphemous tongue. The companions who captured him requested to be permitted to do so but the Holy Prophet (SAWA) insisted for Ali (as) to carry out this punishment. Ali (as) took the poet out of the city, untied him, gifted him a camel to travel with 200 dirhams as travel expenses and told him to go. They thought it might be a trap for some surprise punishment. Anyway, he departed and watching all this, the companions who captured him rushed back to the Prophet (SAWA) narrating how Ali (as) disobeyed the Prophet (SAWA) by releasing the blasphemer with gifts instead of punishing him according to the Prophet (SAWA)’s verdict. Listening to their complaint, the Holy Prophet (SAWA) smiled and said that Ali understood accurately what I meant and did what I wanted him to do. The companions dispersed, confused at ‘how can cutting the blasphemous tongue be equal to releasing along with gifts’. Next morning, the same poet came back with a piece of poetry applauding Prophet (SAWA) and His humbleness. In addition, he embraced Islam. Then the Holy Prophet (SAWA) turned to the companions and asked if they saw how Ali (as) removed the blasphemous tongue of the Poet, by converting him to Islam and reorienting his poetry in praise of the Prophet (SAWA) instead of apostasy. This example leaves no question about how tolerant one should be for all matters of life, according to Islam. So, the notion of zero tolerance for blasphemers is simply exploited by the extremists and has been

²⁹ (29 Feb 2016), Salman Taseer murder: Pakistan hangs Mumtaz Qadri, Reported by [BBC New](#)

³⁰ Al Jazeera (21 March 2019), ‘Pakistan convicts two over Mashal Khan blasphemy lynching case’, Al Jazeera News, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/pakistan-convicts-mashal-khan-blasphemy-lynching-case-19032111035_5206.html

misrepresented to the common Muslims in such a way that no one dares to contradict this extremist stance, and anyone who does is punished like Salman Taseer.

Conclusion

Why is it that intolerance in Muslim societies seems to be more pronounced than in non-Muslim societies, particularly in the West? The scholar replied that the problem arises with power. The Holy Prophet Esa Ibn Maryam (AS), also known in the West as Jesus Christ the son of Mary (AS), was rejected by His nation. When He was crucified, only 10 or 12 disciples had accepted His preachings. After Him, these disciples went to Rome and started preaching the message of peace conveyed by Prophet Esa (AS) and succeeded in convincing the emperor of Rome to embrace Islam³¹ and he declared Christianity as the religion of the state. This way, the message of Christianity spread under the supervision of the Roman State. Later on it became influential enough that the Church, under the command of the Pope, became the most powerful authority of all the states following Christianity. And the maintenance of power always means a violation of boundaries and that violation introduces coercion. When coercion, brutality and inhumanity exceed limits, it invites revolutions against that power. The same happened in Europe when coercion exceeded the limits in the domains of the Church, the people started finding solutions to overcome this unbalanced and unjust exercise of power. The Renaissance movement with a liberal concept to establish a balance of power between the Church and the political institutions changed history with social reformations, scientific revolutions and industrial reforms. Consequently, the current western, comparatively tolerant societies are the success case of these reforms. In contrast to Christianity, Islam came into political power within the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) and power politics began soon after His demise, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, just as being in power has overwhelmed the western sense of balance of power with which liberalism was initiated, leading towards colonialism and now another step toward neocolonialism. Thus, before knowledgeable Muslim philosophers and thinkers would start working for the reforms against such misrepresentations favouring power politics, the fall of the Muslims' rule worldwide started transferring their status of the rulers to the ruled that caused mistrust towards the West; the colonisers. The colonised nations cannot bring reforms after falling. The physically colonised nations are naturally perturbed. And violence becomes more attractive than the moral values of the religions for traumatized mentalities hoping to regain the lost throne. The game of thrones begins yet again. Forgeries are introduced to win support. Misrepresentations blur the view. Humanity suffers, leaving violence behind, laughing at defeated peace.

Note: The research was conducted during doctoral studies at La Rochelle Université, France (2016-19)

³¹ The scholar used this word during interview and explained later that all prophets of God preached the same religion with a message of peace, and peace means Islam. Christians named their religion after Jesus Christ (AS) while Jews named their religion according to their tribe.