

ISLAMICJERUSALEM AS A MODEL FOR MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

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The core Muslim sources consider diversity and plurality to be the basis of everything apart from God. Indeed, diversity and plurality in nations, religions and religious laws is part of the design of the universe. In respect of their cultural, religious, or gender differences, the Qur'an addresses humans and reminds them that they belong to the same family, *yā a'yyuha al-nāsu innā khalaqnākum min dhakarīn wa unthā*: "O humankind! We created you all from a single pair of a male and a female" (Qur'an, 49:13). In addition, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, "You are all the children of Adam." In another verse, the Qur'an says *wa law shā'a Allāh laja'alakum ummatan wāhida*: "If God had so willed, He could surely have made you all human one single community (nation)" (Qur'an, 5: 48). From this point of reference, he "made you into nations and tribes"- *wa ja'alnakum shu'ūban wa qabā'ila*. The main purpose for this creation is **li ta'ārafu** "so that you should get to know one another" (Qur'an, 49:13), not that you may despise one another. On the bases of the Muslim core sources, the Qur'an in particular, the author argues that the first step in establishing a multicultural society is to identify and recognise diversity and plurality.

Islamicjerusalem is claimed as a sacred space by three of the world's major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The unique region of Islamicjerusalem can be argued as the model place where this one family can live together. Accordingly, instead of examining the views of Islam and Muslims on diversity

and plurality or their understanding of multiculturalism, the aim here is to present Islamic Jerusalem as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement.

Although Islamic Jerusalem is the most delicate issue of dispute between the current two conflicting parties, it is hoped that this model will provide a better understanding for the world leaders who are trying to return peace to the region. When the author thinks of Islamic Jerusalem, he thinks of several concepts including those of hope and justice. One could argue that "history has proved that there can never be peace nor stability without justice. The road to peace starts in Islamic Jerusalem and the solution to its current issue is the key to a just peace in the region." (El-Awaisi 1998: 47) As Karen Armstrong argued in her paper at the first International Academic Conference on Islamic Jerusalem Studies in 1997:

From the very earliest days, it seems the cult of Jerusalem was inextricably bound up with the quest for social justice. Thus in the Hebrew Bible, prophets and psalmists repeatedly reminded their people that Jerusalem could not be a holy city of *Shalom* (of peace) unless it was also a city of *Tseddeq* (of justice). (Armstrong 1997: 7)

Michael Prior adds that:

The lesson of history is that it cannot belong exclusively to one people or to only one religion. Jerusalem should be open to all, shared by all. Those who govern the city should make it "the capital of humankind". (Prior 1999: 17)

For this article, multiculturalism -as a process, a particular way of thinking, and about change - provides the important context for much of what we do, while cultural engagement has to be our response to it. Indeed, cultural engagement consists of intellectual, emotional, and behavioural components which cultivate a positive attitude towards others. In short, cultural engagement is clearly the way to address the challenges of multiculturalism and produce a positive response, which help society to challenge alternative perspectives on multiculturalism and difference. In addition, cultural engagement is essential to contest the notion of a "clash of

civilisations" and address the absence of understanding between cultures - which often amounts to mutual incomprehension - and the associated climate of suspicion.

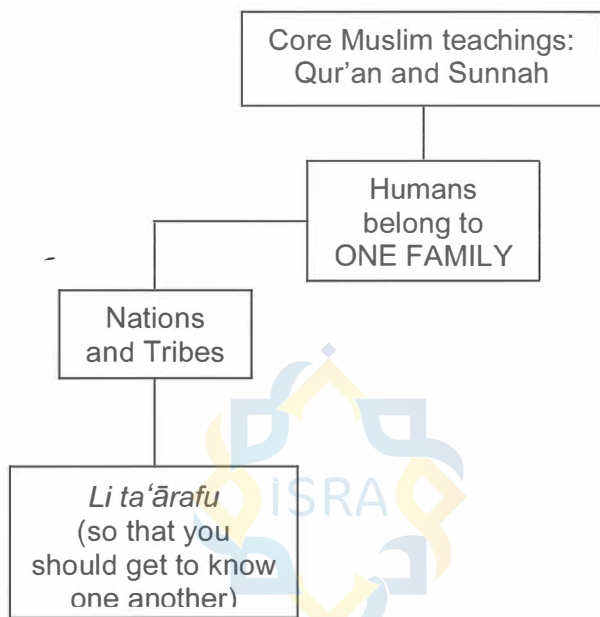


Diagram 1: Islamic Jerusalem models for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect

The Vision of the Seventh Century and Its Implementation

The first Muslim *Fath* of Islamic Jerusalem was a fundamental landmark which reshaped relations between the people of diverse faiths and cultures who inhabited the region. The arrival of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d 24 AH/645 CE) in the region - five years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (12 Rabī' al-Awal 11 AH/ 6 June 632 CE), in Jumāda I/II 16 AH/ June/July 637 CE - marked the beginning of a new and distinguished phase in the relations between the followers of the three great Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Instead of continuing to implement the Byzantines' exclusion policy, 'Umar, as head of the Muslim state, not only rejected the idea of excluding others who

would like to live in the region, he was categorically pro-active in establishing a new policy and system. Karen Armstrong argues that "The Muslims had established a system that enabled Jews, Christians, and Muslims to live in Jerusalem together for the first time." (Armstrong 1996: 233, 246)

The arrival of 'Umar in the region also marked the start of a golden age and the beginning of a new era in which IslamicJerusalem became a common and open space for everyone and a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement. This model was based not only on fostering the culture of diversity, plurality and mutual respect and implementing tolerance and recognition of others, but on determining their rights, duties, and treatment as a means to encourage and establish a peaceful co-existence between the different communities in IslamicJerusalem.

'Umar's model for a multicultural IslamicJerusalem was based on the core Muslim teachings, the Qur'an and Sunnah. Moreover, the methodology of *Tadāfu'*, the concept of *'Adl*, and the principle of non-exclusion, together not only emphasised the recognition of others but also took great care to preserve the dignity of humans and what belonged to them as prescribed in the Muslim core teaching sources. Preserving human dignity is a very central issue in Muslim thought and attitude. The explicit and sharp declaration of 'Umar to his governor of Egypt, 'Amr Ibn al-Āṣ, "How could you have enslaved people, when their mothers have born them free" (Ibn al-Jawzī 2001: 89) is a very clear example of this.

One may argue that this understanding and attitude to preserving human dignity and the recognition of others was what led 'Umar to implement the principles of tolerance and mutual respect. On his Assurance to the people of Aelia, 'Umar laid down the foundation of fostering diversity and plurality in IslamicJerusalem. Not only did he recognise and appreciate others' presence in IslamicJerusalem, he accepted them and offered a framework to show that it could be shared with them. Indeed, as well as respecting non-Muslim rights, he also took practical steps to grant them protection, safety and security for their rights, lives and

properties. He granted them freedom, and enabled them to become citizens and members of Islamicjerusalem society, without interference in their culture and religious life. In short, ‘Umar not only identified, he also accommodated, the presence and needs of his diverse citizens and established a system to protect their rich cultural diversity, identities and belongings. By establishing this model, one can argue that ‘Umar's aim was to preserve the human dignity of the people of Islamicjerusalem in status and rights regardless of their culture, religion, race and gender. This clearly manifested itself in the personal liberty, freedom and equality granted to the people of Islamicjerusalem in ‘Umar's Assurance of Safety.

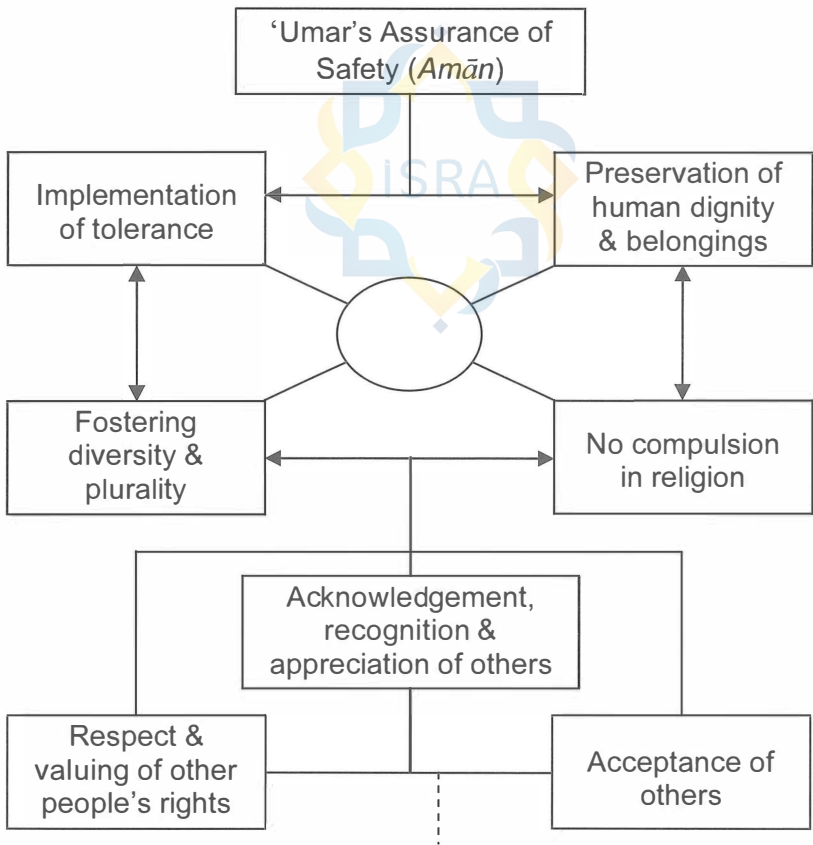


Diagram 2: Islamicjerusalem models for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect

Leading to:

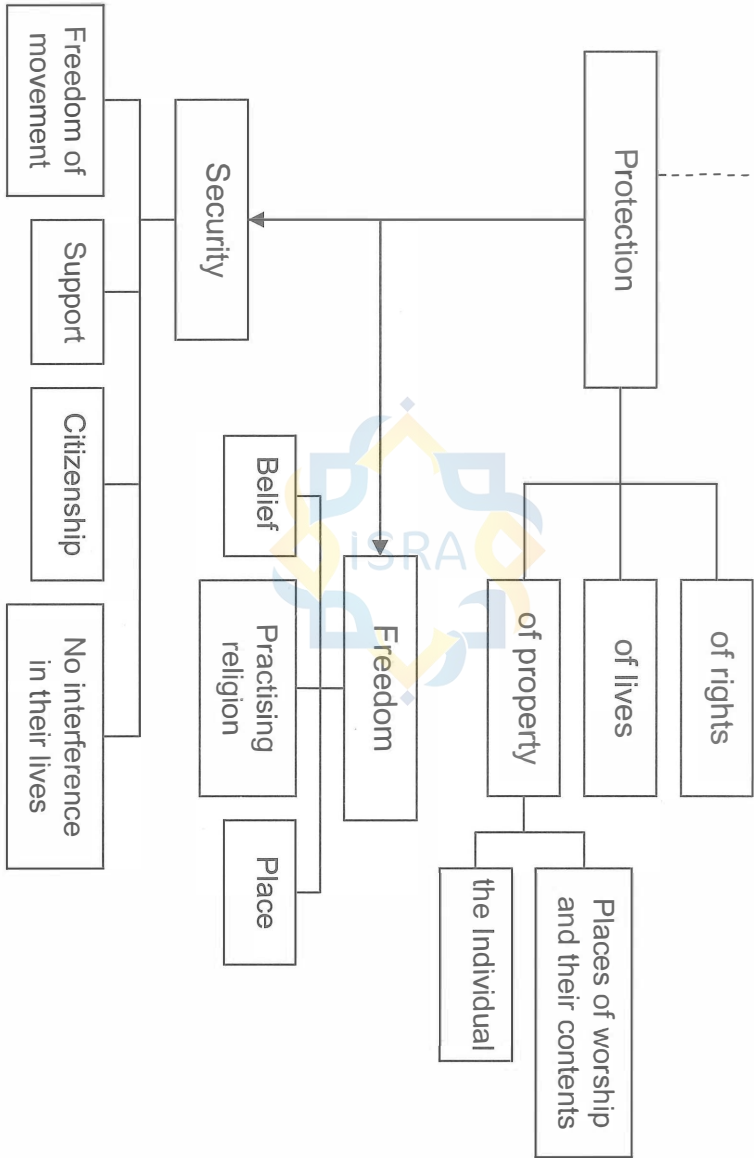


Diagram 3: Islamicjerusalem models for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect

One of the most important elements for this model's success was how the state and its established power and authority managed the diverse society of Islamic Jerusalem. The foundations for managing the future relations between the three faiths were laid down during that historical visit in the form of what is known in history as al-'Uhda al-'Umariyya or 'Umar's Assurance of Safety to the people of Aelia. Although this was a practical application of the core Muslim teachings, the Qur'an and Sunnah, it was the major outcome of the first Muslim *Fath* of Aelia. Indeed, it was the practical management initiative to implement the new vision. In addition, it formed the cornerstone to manage and implement the new vision where 'Umar granted the people of Aelia an Assurance of Safety for themselves, their property, their churches, and their religion. Indeed, 'Umar's Assurance of Safety is an important reference text and a theoretical framework which laid down the foundation principles and the essential criteria to establish and manage a multicultural society in Islamic Jerusalem for the first time. It introduced, defined, and legislated the status and rights of non-Muslims in Islamic Jerusalem and ensured a peaceful co-existence between the different communities there.

On this basis, 'Umar not only implemented this theoretical framework but demonstrated his protection practically during his first visit to Islamic Jerusalem. Among the early events during this visit, which emphasised his keenness to protect non-Muslim holy places, was 'Umar's refusal to pray either in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or its atrium when he was visiting the place and was invited to do so by Patriarch Sophronious. Abu-Munshar quoting Eutychius, Sa'īd Ibn al-Baṭrīq, reconstructed the recording of the conversation between 'Umar and Patriarch. 'Umar's justification for his refusal was:

If I prayed inside the Church, it would have been lost by you and would have slipped from your power; for after my death the Muslims would take it away from you, together saying that 'Umar prayed here. (Abu-Munshar 2007:110)

According to this account, it seems that 'Umar was not satisfied that his verbal explanation might be enough to convince the Muslims following his death not to change the church into a mosque. 'Umar wrote Sophronious a decree which read, "The Muslims shall not pray on the stairs, unless it be one person at a time. But, they shall not meet there for a congregational prayer announced by the prayer call." (Abu-Munshar 2007:110)

Moreover, 'Umar also succeeded during his visit in establishing mutual respect with the Islamicjerusalem people. Sophronious trusted 'Umar with the Christians' holiest shrine when he entrusted him with the keys of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In addition to establishing this mutual respect, Sophronious secured the protection of the Church from Intra-Christian dispute. According to this account, 'Umar passed the keys to one of his companions, 'Abd Allah Ibn Nusaibah. (Abu-Munshar 2007:111-112)¹

All the changes introduced by 'Umar were essential steps towards implementing this new vision, policy and system. However, certain aspects relating to Islamicjerusalem were not altered. For example, the name was unchanged, nor were its geographical boundaries. Also this area was not chosen as the capital. In addition, there was no thought of making Muslims the majority in Islamicjerusalem. Armstrong (1997: 14-15) argues that Muslims were the minority in Islamicjerusalem until the Crusader period. A young Malaysian postgraduate student, Fatimatulzahra Abd al-Rahman, examined Armstrong's argument and presented an interesting discussion which concluded that this was the case. (Abd Rahman 2004:55) One can argue that the main issue for Muslims at that time was not to change its demographical population by excluding non-Muslims and transferring Muslims from Arabia to settle in Islamicjerusalem so they would become the majority. Indeed, this matter highlights the unique nature of a multicultural Islamicjerusalem where the subject of majority and minority was not the issue. The main

¹ Although this account was not mentioned in any early sources, Abu-Munshar's satisfaction with its authenticity is based on the fact that the keys are still in the hands of the Al-Nusaibah family. See Maher Abu-Munshar (2007: 111-112).

concern was to establish a new vision for Islamic Jerusalem, which would lead to a peaceful co-existence and mutual respect between the different communities in the region.

The author argues that what prevented Muslims from doing all this was their vision of Islamic Jerusalem. If Makkah and Madinah were exclusive cities for Muslims, Islamic Jerusalem was made by Muslims into an inclusive, multi-religious, and multicultural region where all traditions and cultures could live in peace and harmony. According to one verse in the Qur'an, Islamic Jerusalem is "the land which We have given *Barakah* for everyone in the universe" (Qur'an 21:71). This is the main vision of Islamic Jerusalem – an inclusive not an exclusive one. Armstrong (1997: 14) argues that 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was "faithful to the Islamic inclusive vision. Unlike the Jews and Christians, Muslims did not attempt to exclude others from (Islamic) Jerusalem's holiness' and, instead of excluding these religions, "Muslims were being taught to venerate them". (Armstrong 1997: 18) In addition, Armstrong argues that:

From the first, Muslims showed that the veneration of sacred space did not have to mean conflict, enmity, killing ... and exclusion of others ... From the start, the Muslims developed an inclusive vision of [Islamic] Jerusalem which did not deny the presence and devotion of others, but respected their rights and celebrated plurality and co-existence. This inclusive vision of holiness is sorely needed by the people of [Islamic] Jerusalem today. (Armstrong 1997: 18-19)

Islamic Jerusalem represents for Muslims a region of hope, peace and stability. It was the region of hope for Prophet Abraham. When his people in his home country tried to kill him, he was ordered to migrate to the land of hope, Islamic Jerusalem. Once again, when Prophet Muhammad lost hope of any support in Makkah and the surrounding area, he was taken by night to the land of hope, Islamic Jerusalem. Since then, Islamic Jerusalem has always been a symbol of hope for Muslims. Even with all the turmoil and troubles in the region, it still represents for contemporary Muslims the land of hope for the future.

The first Muslim *Fath* of IslamicJerusalem put an end to centuries of instability, religious exclusion, persecution and colonial rule. When Muslims came to IslamicJerusalem, the first thing they did was to solve the existing religious and social problems by establishing peace between the inhabitants of that region. Before the first Muslim *Fath*, Aelia had been a closed and insular region, mainly for Byzantine Christians. Indeed, it was very much an exclusive region, i.e. just for the locals and the Byzantines. IslamicJerusalem, on the other hand, was not an exclusive region during Muslim rule but an inclusive one. For example, Jews returned to IslamicJerusalem only when the Muslims took over and opened it up to all nations. The Jews had been excluded by the Romans (Hadrian) in 135 CE, but the Muslims brought them back after 500 years to establish peace between the three Abrahamic faiths, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. For the first time in history, these three religions managed to live together under the new vision of IslamicJerusalem.

The author argues that the first Muslim *Fath* liberated the Christians from the persecution of Byzantine occupiers, rid the Jews of Byzantine oppression, restored their presence to that region after an absence of five hundred years (Armstrong 1996: 420; Cohen 1984: 14) enabled all the communities to live side by side peacefully for the first time after a long history of conflict, and provided the grounds for establishing IslamicJerusalem as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement.

The Christians of Aelia greatly welcomed the first Muslim *Fath*. (Abu-Munshar 2007:105-109) This could be argued as being related to the new vision of IslamicJerusalem which provided Christians with the respect which would lead to good treatment, peace, security and stability. Runciman argues that Orthodox Christians "finding themselves spared the persecution that they had feared and paying taxes that, in spite of the *Jizya* demanded from the Christians, were far lower than in the Byzantine times, showed small inclination to question their destiny".(Runciman 1987 (1): 20-21) In addition, Runciman (1987 (1): 20-21) quotes Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, Michael the Syrian, who stated that

God "raised from the south the children of Ishmael (Muslims) to deliver us from the hands of the Romans." Moreover, Butler quotes Ibn al-ʿIbrī who stated that Christians were optimistic towards the Muslims, "The God of vengeance delivered us out of the hand of the Romans by means of the Arabs. Then although our Churches were not restored to us, since under Arab rule each Christian community retained its actual possession, still it profited us not a little to be saved from the cruelty of the Romans and their bitter hatred against us." Armstrong (1996: 232). argues that it was not surprising that Nestorian and Monophysite Christians welcomed Muslims and found them preferable to the Byzantines.

The Muslim sources also record a letter sent to the Muslim army, when Abū ʿUbayda camped in Faḥl in the Jordan Valley: "O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines, although they are of our own faith, because you keep faith with us and are more merciful to us and refrain from doing us injustice and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes." (Al-Azdī 1970: 111)

Jewish sources show that the Jews of Syria were "patiently awaiting" the arrival of the Muslim armies because they were groaning under the rule of the tyrannical Byzantines and suffering cruel oppression in the fifth, sixth, and early seventh centuries CE (Ben Zeev 1976: 35) The Jewish response to the first Muslim *Fath* of IslamicJerusalem was "characterised as generally positive", (Al-Sharīf 2004: 526) because it terminated the Byzantine rule and liberated them from their oppressor.

After the second *Fath* of IslamicJerusalem by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 1187, two new quarters were created within the walls of the Old City: the Maghrabī quarter and the Jewish quarter with the Sharaf quarter in between. In short, the Muslim *Fath* of IslamicJerusalem made it possible for Jews to return to the region. Both ʿUmar and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn invited Jews to settle in IslamicJerusalem. When Islam ruled in that part of the world, both after the first Muslim *Fath* in the time of ʿUmar Ibn Khaṭṭāb and after the second liberation by Ṣalāḥ al-

Dīn, the different traditions managed to live in harmony and peace with one another.

Crusade historians (Abu-Munshar 2007:125-127)², such as William of Tyre and Michael Foss, argue that for 372 years, since the first Muslim *Fatḥ* in 637 until 1009 (Al-Ḥākim ruling), Christians practised their religion freely, (William of Tyre 1979 (1): 89-93) Moreover, Islamicjerusalem was for the Christians an open and safe region to travel to. (Foss 2002: 29) In addition, both Christians and Jews were employed by the Muslim authority in Islamicjerusalem in all positions. Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn, the local Turkish commander, who established an independent state in Egypt away from the Abbasid Caliphate from 868-904, appointed a Christian as a governor of Islamicjerusalem. He also allowed a new Jewish sect to establish itself in the region. (Armstrong 1996: 254-255) Al-Maqdisī described the situation of both Christians and Jews in Islamicjerusalem before the beginning of the Crusader period: "Everywhere the Christians and Jews have the upper hand". (Al-Maqdisī 1909: 167)

With this peace among the different religions and cultures, stability was the obvious result. The whole region witnessed this very clearly. The author argues that Islamicjerusalem had always held the key to war and peace in the region. Whenever it has been blessed with security and peace, the whole region has enjoyed peace, security and stability. There is no doubt that settling the issue of Islamicjerusalem in a way that ensures justice and restores the rights of its people holds the key to world peace and regional stability. One can argue that, to achieve global peace and stability, it is necessary to have peace and stability in Islamicjerusalem. Until this is achieved the entire world will not rest. Peace and stability in that region would bring about global peace and stability. Indeed, Islamicjerusalem acts as a centre for peace and for conflict in the world. Some might argue that this may be true for the Muslim Arab world but not for the rest of the world. The author argues

² Abu-Munshar presented an interesting discussion of several accounts on how non-Muslims were treated prior to the Crusade (Abu-Munshar 2007).

that the formula is a global one. In the past, why did the farmers leave their land in Europe to go and fight during the Crusader period? Today, for example, when there is a conflict in that region, everyone pays the price of that war in one way or another: more taxes, higher petrol prices, etc.

What was the basis of that original peace and stability? The author argues that it was the concept of *'Adl* (justice). Justice is a prerequisite for peace and stability. The formula which has been produced on the peace process negotiations for the current conflict in the Muslim Arab world in the last decade is based on the Arab and the Palestinian point of view of Peace for Land, and on the Israeli point of view, Peace for Security. The author argues that neither viewpoint is an appropriate formula. The exchange of land will not bring peace and security. In addition, imposing security will not bring peace. For the author, the formula, based on his understanding of the history of the region should be that neither peace nor security will be established without justice. So, the formula should be peace for justice which will lead to preserving human dignity and tolerance. In other words, justice is necessary before peace can be achieved.

The Muslim vision for Islamic Jerusalem was to establish peace and stability in the area. To achieve this goal, one could argue that sovereignty is necessary. However, it is the Muslim vision of inclusion that is important, and not having sovereignty over the region and its people - although that too is important. However, sovereignty (*Siyādah*) over territory and people does not mean ownership (*Milkiya*) as it does not give the right of the ruling power to confiscate individual ownership of property or to own individuals. As quoted by Aminurraasyid Yatiban, Wahbah al-Zuhaylī argues that:

Sovereignty gives the legal power to the state to take any suitable action regarding the land under its authority, such as introducing certain regulations. It does not have the right to abandon the individual ownership of private land, unless to be used for public

necessity but also with compatible value of compensation.(Al-Zuhayli 2002 (8): 6331; Yatiban 2003)

Indeed, sovereignty only gives power to administer the well-being of the people and safeguard its territory. In short, 'Umar used his power to reshape a good relationship between the different communities establishing IslamicJerusalem as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement.

One can argue that sovereignty alone does not lead to peace, security and stability. Without the vision coming first, there will never be peace or security and stability as both the Crusaders and the Israelis have shown. It is the inclusive nature of the vision that allows people to live in peace, even if this is a Muslim vision and those living under the vision are not all Muslims. Generally, during Muslim rule, people in IslamicJerusalem enjoyed safety, peace, security, stability and prosperity - with the exception of the period of the Crusades (1099-1198). Indeed, IslamicJerusalem enjoyed, in particular, the special care of the Caliphs and the Muslim rulers. In addition to being a spiritual and political centre, IslamicJerusalem was also a cultural, learning and teaching centre from which a large number of scholars graduated. Scholarly activities took place on a wider scale and at various levels, and schools, mosques and hospitals were founded.

'Umar therefore successfully created, developed and managed a new multicultural environment in IslamicJerusalem where differences among its people were not only acknowledged and recognised but accepted, respected, valued, and protected. IslamicJerusalem provides and promotes a climate of religious and cultural engagement and dialogue, tolerance and diversity, and social justice. It also encourages, supports, and contributes to fostering a multicultural ethos of mutual cultural understanding and respect, and a common understanding between different communities and individuals at all levels.

In conclusion, IslamicJerusalem was created by Muslims as an inclusive, multi-religious, and multicultural region where all

traditions and cultures could live in peace and stability. Indeed, its uniqueness is highlighted through its vision which presents a model for a peaceful co-existence where people from different religious and cultural backgrounds can live together in an environment of multiculturalism and religious and cultural engagement, diversity and tolerance. In short, it is not closed and limited, but a centre in which the richness of cultural diversity and pluralism thrive in a spirit of mutual respect and co-existence. This was the nature, identity, and vision of IslamicJerusalem in the past during Muslim rule. And in this age more than ever, where we are trying to promote multiculturalism and cultural engagement at a global level, IslamicJerusalem could serve as the model – giving us, as it does, the model of common space in which people from different backgrounds can live in peace together.

The Twenty-First Century's Contribution

In the seventh century, and in particular during the first Muslim *Fatḥ* of IslamicJerusalem, the land of hope provided the world with the famous document known as 'Umar's Assurance of Safety *Amān* to the people of Aelia (IslamicJerusalem). This fundamental landmark of hope laid the foundations for future relations and led to reshaping the relationships between people of diverse faiths who inhabited the region, namely, Jews, Christians and Muslims. This marked the beginning of a new and distinguished era of safety, peace, stability, security, progress, development and prosperity.

With a global feeling and a local touch, 'Umar was trying to resolve a local conflict with an international approach. In other words, he was "thinking globally" and "acting locally". Indeed, 'Umar's Assurance was the jewel of the first Muslim *Fatḥ* of Aelia, and the beacon for developing IslamicJerusalem's unique and creative vision and nature. In short, 'Umar's global vision and local focus presented IslamicJerusalem as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement.

The Muslims' devotion to IslamicJerusalem is not a result of colonialist aims or a desire to expand their rule, nor is it based on

false racist nationalist claims. On the contrary, the nature of Islamicjerusalem and its special qualities constitute the fundamental reason for their concern for it. 'Umar's Assurance of Safety not only rejected the notion of the supremacy of one people or race over others but presented Islamicjerusalem as a model both for multiculturalism and for conflict resolution. As one of the main characteristics of Islamicjerusalem is its competing political and religious claims, it could be argued that it should be presented as a model for conflict resolution through constructive argumentation methodology as a means for a "constructive dialogue" and positive negotiation with its conflicting parties. The adopting of this constructive dialogue methodology would open the way for conflict resolution.

One can argue that the differences between cultures, communities, and religions should give strength to society as a whole. Indeed, the different cultural lenses which people from diverse backgrounds bring to their society should enrich their experiences and add to their pursuit for a common ground. In examining 'Umar's Assurance as a whole, it was seen that Muslims were not afraid of recognising the needs of others and dealing with them. On the contrary, they discovered and established a model where they saw how practically fostering a culture of diversity, plurality and mutual respect of differences in a practical way was positive, and a strength rather than a threat.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in particular through serious scholarly findings, the land of hope is re-presenting itself in a modern fashion as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement. Indeed, our understanding of Islamicjerusalem as a model for multiculturalism and cultural engagement with all its intertwined elements, nature, characteristics, as presented here, could be seen as the twenty-first century's contribution to establishing a new agenda and new frame of reference for safety, peace, justice, stability, security, progress, development and prosperity in the region.

The Muslims demonstrated that this model could even work in conflict situations and areas where there had been long centuries of war and exclusion. Even at a later stage, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was very faithful and committed to this inclusive vision. During the negotiations in the third Crusade, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn replied to King Richard I "the Lionheart" of England in October 1191 CE by acknowledging Christian rights in Islamic Jerusalem, asserting Muslim rights and refuting Richard's claim that Muslims were invaders. In his reply, he stated "Islamic Jerusalem is ours as much as it is yours." (Ibn Shaddād 2000:152; Little 1989:179)

On the other hand, contemporary Muslim Jerusalem is shaped in part by dialogue with the concept of Islamic Jerusalem, the classical and modern history of Muslims, and in part by response to external interests and influences in the region. Accordingly, contemporary Muslims seek to relate their heritage in Muslim Jerusalem from the concept of Islamic Jerusalem and the Muslim past to the radical situation of today.

The unique aspect of Islamic Jerusalem is highlighted through its vision, which presents a model for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. It also offers a way for people from different religious and cultural backgrounds to live together in an environment of multiculturalism, and religious and cultural engagement, diversity and tolerance.

In short, **Islamic Jerusalem** is not exclusive but **inclusive** and should be opened up "to everyone in the universe", as stated in the Qur'an *Lil'ālamīn* (Qur'an, 21:71), "so that you should get **to know** one another" *Li ta'ārafu* (Qur'an, 49:13), not that you may despise one another. It gives the world a model of a common space in which people from different backgrounds can live together in peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. Indeed, it is not closed and insular, but a centre in which diversity and pluralism thrive through mutual respect and co-existence. This unique global common space of openness and *Barakah* has made Islamic Jerusalem an ideal *Amal* region where the one human family can make *Li ta'ārafu*, live together in *Amān* and enjoy this *Barakah*.

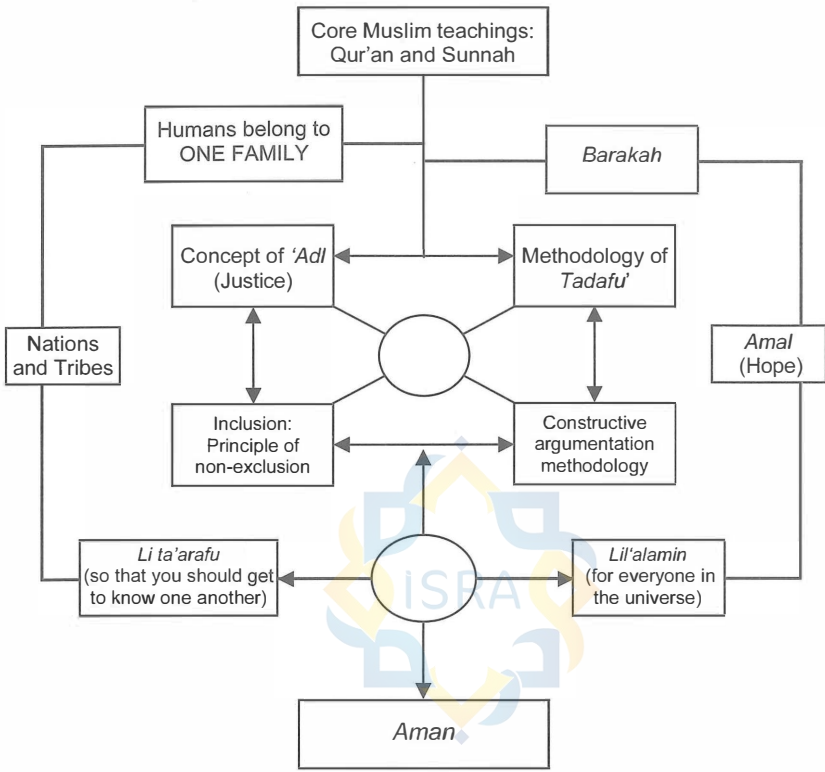


Diagram 4: IslamicJerusalem models for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect

Next Step

I have been studying, teaching and researching in the Study of Islam and Muslims at both Arab and British universities for 30 years (from 1977). In addition, I received training in Political Sciences, History, Middle Eastern Studies, and Islamic Studies; and taught for a number of years in History departments, Religious Studies departments, Arabic and Islamic Studies departments, and the Study of Islam and Muslims Departments.

Accordingly, the Study of Islam and Muslims has always been the focal point of my work and a field which I have enjoyed

immensely. I lived in both the Arab Muslim countries and the West, in particular the UK, and have a thorough knowledge of their history, politics, cultures, societies, and religions. I have not only studied Islam in depth, but have lived under conditions where different ideas and viewpoints were expressed and debated at length. I had the privilege of meeting leading figures from many Arab, Muslim and Western countries, representing the whole spectrum of Arabic, Muslim and Western thought and various schools. This experience enabled me to form a much broader approach to the field and compare the differing views of Arab, Muslim and Western schools. This is a very clear indication of an ability to build strong research links between the Study of Islam and Muslims in the widest sense.

For me, the Study of Islam and Muslims is a field which should include a number of disciplines and approaches, looking both at the religion of Islam and also Muslims in particular social and historical contexts within a number of different methodologies, e.g. political sciences, history, geography, anthropology, and Islamic Studies. The aim is to gain understanding of a broad range of issues relating to the study of Islam and Muslims, looking at the field in many different ways, and in many global contexts, spanning a variety of disciplines and methodologies; and distinct from traditional approaches where the focus has been to study Islam and Muslims from just one limited perspective. My philosophy is to offer interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary training in the Study of Islam and Muslims within a number of different methodologies, e.g., history, political sciences, and geography, as well as traditional areas in Islamic Studies.

In the last seven years (2000-2007), my main focus has been to set the new agenda for cultural engagements to generate an atmosphere in which a constructive dialogue can take place rather than a clash. I firmly believe that through education as the key means to defeat religious and secular fundamentalism and extremism, we will contribute to achieve a common ground and space, mutual understanding and respect, and peaceful co-existence between and within people, nations, religions, and

cultures. I recognise that not everyone will agree with this vision, and I do not pretend to have all the answers, but at least I am putting forward some ideas on how to improve understanding between people of different religions and cultures. For my part, I have been doing all I can to promote cultural engagements that will see people acknowledging and respecting their differences BUT willing to share a common ground and space, living and working together in a peaceful co-existence.

One of my central aims has been to promote a greater understanding of different religions, and cultures in a multicultural context, for the benefit of the wider community, and to build bridges between the Muslim and Western worlds of learning at this crucial time. In the last five years (2002-2007), the Al-Maktoum Institute witnessed a vast number of developments to promote such a vision. For example, to institutionalise the new agenda for cultural engagements and promotion of multiculturalism, I have taken several structural steps, including electing leaders of the local communities to the Institute Council and establishing Al-Maktoum Institute Students Society. The diversity of the Executive members' countries of origin is yet another reflection of the multicultural ethos we have developed at the Institute.

The issue of multiculturalism is also firmly at the heart of the Institute's academic work. This includes, for example, the creation of a professorial chair in multiculturalism. The Institute was the first higher educational institution in the UK to create such a post, currently held by Professor Malory Nye. The chair was created in response to the dire need to engage in a more serious and structured way in research and teaching in multiculturalism. I also established "The Centre for Research on Multiculturalism and Islam and Muslims in Scotland", which aims to contribute to the development of awareness of multicultural Scotland. Among other activities, it organised an international symposium in Spring 2006 on the Challenges of Multiculturalism. A special think-tank "Multiculturalism Research Unit" was formed. The theme of the Institute Summer School for female students from the UAE (including female students from Qatar University) in the last four

years (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) was multiculturalism and leadership. The Multicultural Awards for Scotland were started with the support of the Scottish Executive (Government) and are designed to recognise and encourage individual and institutional contributions to multicultural Scotland in which religious diversity, cultural equality, social justice, and civilisational dialogue flourish. The awards are made up of a principal award combined with seven smaller awards, including multicultural education, multicultural healthcare, multicultural in the media, multicultural in sport, civilisational dialogue, Arab-British understanding, and Scottish-Emirates relations. The Honorary Fellowship of the Institute is given to individuals who have demonstrated their commitment to the multicultural vision. Sponsorship and support is given to local clubs and societies who have demonstrated their commitment to multiculturalism and for projects to further this aim. Last but not least, the Al-Maktoum Multicultural Garden was established for the Fun Factory Out-of-School Club at Park Place Primary School in Dundee, Scotland.

I am also proud to be one of the key leading scholars behind the development, implementation, and dissemination of this new innovative agenda in the Study of Islam and Muslims, which defined the field as Post-Orientalist, Post-Traditionalist, Multicultural, and Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary in its methodology as well as its theoretical framework. The aim of this unique new agenda is to challenge and develop current teaching and scholarship, recognising that this is a time for change in Islamic Studies. There must be better education at university level on Islam and Muslims in today's world which reflects the needs of our contemporary multicultural society. The agenda has been developed to bring scholars together from all backgrounds, based on a principle of mutual respect, in order to develop a common intellectual goal in the field of the Study of Islam and Muslims.

Indeed, there is an urgent need for a new agenda to develop Islamic Studies into the Study of Islam and Muslims to challenge both the more traditional approaches that were often faith based and excluded non-Muslims and the orientalist approaches that

often alienated Muslims. Indeed, the call for a new agenda is truly timely and necessary, particularly to prevent the misguided and narrow interpretation of Islam which is the source of so many problems in many societies. It is only through multicultural education that we can work to eliminate extremism and fundamentalism. The Institute is promoting this agenda through the teaching of postgraduate programmes, which address local, national and international needs in the twenty-first century.

The success of the Institute comes from its new agenda. To reflect this, the Institute, during the past few years, has seen significant developments in terms of the existing growth of the Institute and the wider network of relationships. The Institute, for example, started the process of disseminating and implementing this new agenda by working internally at the Institute and externally with sixteen partner universities. I feel also very proud that the Institute has established and is in the process of disseminating this New Agenda in the Study of Islam and Muslims.

In the last seven years (2000-2007), I have successfully established a leading distinctive national and international centre of academic excellence for developing teaching and research in the Study of Islam and Muslims of the highest standard. This is based on critical and analytical debate in which better understanding of Islam and Muslims can be developed – both for Muslims and non-Muslims – in an environment focused on a common sense of purpose and belonging. I feel proud that the Institute is playing a unique and key role in setting the new agenda in cultural engagement and shaping and developing teaching and research in the Study of Islam and Muslim at university level in the UK and internationally. The Institute is now a unique seat of learning and research-led institution of higher education, which offers postgraduate programmes of study (validated by the University of Aberdeen).

Through the Institute, I have also been actively involved in educating the next generation of scholars both nationally and internationally to enable them to face the challenges and

opportunities of a diverse and multicultural world. Indeed, cultural engagement and multiculturalism are now at the centre of the Institute's vision and structure. This multicultural ethos is visibly translated and implemented in the day-to-day operation. The staff and students come from diverse national and cultural backgrounds including both Muslims and non-Muslims, and the research is taken forward by a team of internationally renowned scholars. For example, it is planned to balance the student profile by having 50% home students and 50% international students.

The Institute is very pleased with the continual growing success of the Master and PhD students. With the 14 graduates in 2006 (7 with PhDs), this brings the total of PhD and Masters Graduates to 54. Indeed, as the Founding Principal and Vice-Chancellor, I myself feel proud that the Institute has now a community of 54 graduates working across the globe at several levels. These students are to be highly commended for their hard work. They are truly one of the Institute's greatest assets. I am absolutely delighted that the Institute is playing its part in educating the new generation of scholars who will take that message of cultural engagement and multiculturalism out into the wider world, and will go out into the world of work ready to challenge the old ways of thinking, teaching and learning.

The Institute's success is not only impressive but also well deserved. I am enormously privileged and honoured to be its Founding Principal and Vice-Chancellor (2000 – 2007), since the Institute has been able to achieve its vision, mission, aims and objectives in the first five years of its existence and beyond. It has been a remarkable period, demonstrating the Institute's uniqueness at both academic and communities levels.

Through the Al-Maktoum Institute, I have been also actively setting the new agenda for cultural engagement and encouraging dialogue across cultures and peoples which has enhanced greater understanding and appreciation between the Arab and Muslim worlds and the west in general and between the UAE and Scotland in particular. Indeed, the Institute has played a fundamental role in

building progressive links between the UAE and Scotland. It has been continually striving to implement the vision to further facilitate the creation of mutually beneficial relationships between the two peoples. The strategic aim was to help promote a two way traffic for this developing relationship between the two nations.

At the personal and professional levels, the last five years of establishing and building the Institute have been challenging, demanding, hard and tiring work BUT an enjoyable experience. With each successful step, I have felt very strongly that the Institute was making a positive change and making history. I believe that it has made a groundbreaking development both at the academic and communities levels. Indeed, the last five years have been inspiring years where the Institute has set the new agenda for the Study of Islam and Muslims globally, and through the results of our major academic research we have begun a constructive dialogue and debate on how the future of the study of Islam and Muslims should be developed in the twenty first century.

Yet, I know there is still much to do to promote the vision for cultural engagement, and to get the message across that we are playing a major part in trying to bring peace to the world. To break down the barriers that separate and divide the contemporary world, there is an urgent need to establish and develop this new agenda for cultural engagement through education in both the west and the Arab and Muslim world. Although we were successful in setting the new agenda for cultural engagement in Scotland and the UK at both academic and communities levels through the establishment of Al-Maktoum Institute in Scotland, we urgently need to establish this new agenda in cultural engagement in the Muslim world. Through the Institute in Scotland, I have done everything possible to encourage a two way traffic in developing cultural engagement, in particular through serving the local, national, and international communities, and by forging international academic links, scholarship and collaborations with sixteen of the world's leading universities in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Gulf States, and South East Asia, (El-Awaisi 2007) BUT this is not enough.

At this stage of setting the new agenda in cultural engagement, it is time to establish a similar institute in the Muslim world which will hopefully complete the circle of laying the foundation for the new agenda for cultural engagement. Indeed, to ensure really successful cultural engagement, it should be well established and accepted by all the peoples in the world including China, Japan and Africa BUT at least at this stage by both the Western and Muslim worlds.

Setting this new agenda in the Muslim world will be at the top of my priorities in the coming years. I have devoted all my professional and personal life to education. As a scholar and leader who established several academic projects nearly from scratch, I enjoy innovative, creative, and challenging big ideas. As a person and a professional, I am very passionate about progressive education, research and community welfare. One of my central arguments is that, to improve the quality of life in a country and to turn that country into a knowledge-based society, the leaders there need to work with scholars to provide world-class educational opportunities for its citizens. In addition, I am a great supporter of higher education institutions in the Muslim countries who are trying to maintain their credibility as leading public institutions in their own country and to be responsive to the local and international market needs. To address the needs of our local and international societies, and to prepare our graduates to take their place in developing their society, there must be better education at university level in the fields of humanities and social sciences, in particular Islamic Studies and the Study of Islam and Muslim.

The first step in setting this new institute in the Muslim world was the organisation of the International Academic Symposium on Multiculturalism and Cultural Engagement: Mapping an Agenda for the Twenty-First Century on 8 April 2007 at Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi – United Arab Emirates. In the conclusion of my paper, I presented the argument and called for the establishment in the Muslim world of an institute for cultural engagement. This call was adopted in the Abu Dhabi Declaration for Cultural Engagement:

As a conclusion of the Symposium, the delegates have agreed to work together to achieve a practical step, which is the establishment of an academic and cultural institute in the Arab Muslim world, which seeks to enhance two-way traffic between and within peoples, cultures, and religions. This institute will lay the foundations for the new agenda for cultural engagement through higher education. The mission of this institute should be:

- to educate the next generation of scholars and practitioners, locally, regionally and internationally, to enable them to face the challenges and opportunities of a diverse and multicultural society and world in the twenty-first century;
- to be a research-led centre of excellence, to promote intelligent debate and understanding on cultural engagement and Islam and the role of Muslims in the contemporary world;
- to generate an atmosphere in which constructive dialogue and engagement will take place rather than a clash.

To implement and develop this idea, I decided to change my place from being in a higher education environment in the West and return back to the Arab countries. I moved temporarily in August 2007 to Sana'a in Yemen to establish, for the University of Science and Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Centre. I am still searching to find the right place and environment to establish a leading, innovative and creative academic and cultural institute to which I can transfer my expertise, passion, extensive experience, outstanding knowledge and skills, and personal qualities.

I am looking forward to continuing to work with colleagues in both western and Muslim worlds to face the challenges and opportunities of the twenty first-century.

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