Discussing Islamic Peace Ethics: Conceptual Considerations of the Normative

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Abstract: This chapter is conceptual and raises significant issues framing and underlying the discussion of Islamic peace ethics. The workshop title, 'Islamic Peace Ethics: Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Contemporary Islamic Thought' implies the question whether or not Islam and/or Islamic thought embodies inherently violent forms. While any religion can be used for violence, parts of current political and public discourse portray Islam – and thereby also Muslims – as somehow violent, which is a highly problematic view. Biases are a natural part of any society. A bias is also illustrated, for example, when academics ask certain questions rather than others. In political terms, the inquiry into Islamic peace ethics can also be seen as an application of power. Thus, Islam and Muslims may be delimited while the West and Western self are safeguarded. This perspective leads us to two conceptual themes, which also have empirical implications. The first theme directly relates to the normative, in particular normative plurality versus universality. Should we take the world's cultural and socio-political diversity as a principle to guide us? Can we accept the plurality and hybridity of norms, and refrain from imposing our Western-democratic norms on others? Or, following those who are against relativizing culture and norms, should we maintain the dominant position by imposing our norms? The second and linked theme is the one of self-other constructions and processes of othering. As the self's identity is formed in differences to an 'other', self-other constructions are a normal part of human existence. Yet, hierarchical and dichotomous self-other constructions that lead to processes of othering, and even dehumanization of the 'other', enable violence and are highly destructive. Western thinking about Islam often illustrates a universal, Western approach and the hierarchical, dichotomous self-other constructions

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and othering processes linked to it. When we inquire into Islamic peace ethics, we need to remain self-reflective, and consider unknowns and alternatives in order to enable an understanding that does not reproduce Western biases. Insights generated in such a manner can aid a renewed dialogue with the 'other', and help to deal with self-other difference non-violently.

1. Introduction

The chapter raises significant conceptual issues that frame and underlie the inquiry into Islamic peace ethics. It is clear that any religion can be used for violence, and many have been in the past. But regarding Islam, we find an implicit and at times explicit link to violence in parts of contemporary political and public discourse. This is in itself problematic, and it is furthermore Muslims who are then implicitly or explicitly portrayed as violent. Such a link has significant political dimensions and constitutive effects. The West, or non-Muslims, can utilize such a discourse to exert power and dominance over Muslim populations or states, while safeguarding and strengthening Western identity and the Western self.

The aim here is to shed light on two core and interwoven themes. Both are conceptual in nature but have empirical implications. The first theme relates to the normative and the question of plurality versus the universality of norms. This then leads us to ask if we should accept the world's cultural and socio-political diversity as principle to guide us. Should and can we actually accept normative plurality and hybridity, where norms conflict with one another too? Answering yes to this question has significant consequences, for it would lead us to the need to refrain from asserting our Western-democratic norms onto other cultures and societies. Answering no to this question, in line with those who warn against relativizing culture, would lead us to further imposing our norms onto others, which in turn has practical consequences.

The second theme is the one of self-other constructions and processes of othering. To engage in othering is to engage in a process of constructing discursive and social boundaries to an 'other', so that the 'other' becomes the self's opposed other.[1] This chapter makes a clear distinction between

1 Neumann, Iver B. (Ed.). Uses of the Other. 'The East' in European Identity Formation. Manchester, 1999.

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self-other constructions and processes of othering. Whereas self-other constructions are a normal part of human existence, as identity is formed in difference to an 'other', othering is here considered as negatively oriented. While some argue that the 'other' can also be portrayed as different but neutral,[2] such processes clearly involve hierarchy-building.[3] Thus, those self-other constructions that up-value the self and devalue the 'other' build hierarchies and dichotomies, and enable marginalization and exclusion in destructive processes of othering. Western thinking about Islam often illustrates negative constructions of the 'other' and othering. Thus, this chapter argues to approach the topic of Islamic peace ethics in a self-reflective manner, so that gained insights do not simply reproduce Western biases about Islam but move beyond such biases. Insights that are generated in a self-reflective manner can form the basis for thinking about how to renew the dialogue within the West on Islam, between the West and Muslims, and within Islam. Such insights may aid us in addressing existing self-other difference in a non-violent manner.

At this point, it should be said that, while this chapter raises important issues to consider when speaking about Islamic peace ethics, it will pose more questions than give answers. It is thus intended as a starting point for discussion, and it hopes to stimulate debate on conceptual dimensions of inquiry into Islamic peace ethics that are often sidelined, but that make their way into both methodology and empirical results. The chapter proceeds by discussing the issue of normative universality versus plurality. It then delves into the impact of a discourse of dominance and of threat by elaborating the effects of applying normative universality to self-other relations and Western-Muslim relations. It closes by raising the implications of such a discourse and by pointing to further questions regarding a possible balance between normative universality and cultural plurality.

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2 Diez, Thomas. 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"'. In: *Millennium. Journal of International Studies.* 2005, 33/3, pp. 613-636, here pp. 628-629.

3 Houtum, Henk van. 'Human Blacklisting: The Global Apartheid of the EU's External Border Regime.' In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 2010, 28, pp. 957-976, here p. 960; Hansen, Lene. Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War. Oxford, 2006, pp. 38-41.

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2. Universality versus Plurality of Norms

Our world shows a great variety of norms, values and ideas to guide human life, collective behaviour and political processes. Dealing with this normative variety has long been a subject of debate. Yet, there is no common – and no commonly accepted – definition of which norms should guide all, and there remain contradictions between some norms and their practice. For example, not all states accept or practice the norms that are stated in international declarations, and some provisions collide. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[4] states that, 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights... endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' Many freedoms are officially protected, among them the freedom of movement, of thought and expression, of religion, and social and cultural rights. That many governments and regimes do not live up in full or in part to these declared rights – not even democracies – is one concern. Another concern is that the rights laid down in the declaration easily illustrate potential conflict with one another. For example, how can one individual's or collective's right to free expression truly fit with that of another individual or collective? How can individual rights fit with those of collectives? What if a particular collective's cultural practices conflict with other rights set forth in the Universal Declaration? Thus, different rights and norms, as well as cultural practices and rights can collide. Of course, judgements and views on a given right or norm also differ. Which instances should or can decide in such normative conflicts? Is it not typically the dominant Western states that have the greatest judgement powers, and that often unilaterally or via international organizations set the standard? How truly universal then is the Universal Declaration? In fact, the drafting committee of the Declaration was made up of representatives from Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Lebanon, France, UK, US and USSR, with one from each of the listed countries. Most of these countries are considered Western, and the few non-Western drafters hardly represent the world's diversity. According to a UNESCO report, 'Values such as collective human survival, the primacy and protection of human life, the preservation of nature and the dignity of mankind, justice, freedom and

4 UN. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 1948, http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/ [18.07.2015].

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equity, already form the nucleus of universally accepted values', and they should also include a respect for diversity in culture and heritage. A number of years ago, this report noticed a 'growing antagonism' within many societies between new and old values.[5] The problem, however, lies in how these principles are defined in detail, how they are implemented and what it actually means to respect existing diversity.

The Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, particularly concerned with liberal values in politics and society, asks how we can achieve conditions to coexist peacefully and in freedom, despite the diversity of cultural and religious differences. The foundation sees the answer in solving conflicts based on the principle of freedom being universal. Freedom is seen as possible when no one is allowed to act violently towards another being. Tolerance is thereby seen as important but limited when the rights of others are infringed and when a particular culture, religion or lifestyle is forced upon others.[6] This seems to be the crux of the matter: how to avoid acting violently toward the 'other' when considering our own values as universal. Violence is not only violence against life or property, but also psychological. Do we not force upon the 'other' our values, even though we claim not to do so? In many ways, the West seems simply unwilling to respect diversity elsewhere, particularly when it concerns value diversity. Fears seem to motivate this position, both rational and emotional in nature – fears that other, non-Western values could enter our society and dilute our values. Such fears then enable policies to protect the self and own values.

In practice, human rights are not universally applied. Furthermore, human rights are 'not universal as a cultural artefact, a kind of cultural invariant' and 'the question of universality is a particularly Western cultural question', with human rights as a concept resting on Western assumptions.[7] In efforts to universalize human rights, for example, some scholars argue that we must 'transfer these [human rights] into known cultural pat-

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5 UNESCO. In Search of a Wisdom for the World. The Role of Ethical Values in Education. A collective investigation of the Club of Rome (February – October 1986). 1987, p. 15, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000767/076756eb.pdf [18.07.2015].

6 Bökenkamp, Gerárd/Reinartz, Armin. 'Universelle Werte? Universelle Prinzipien für eine pluralistische Welt.' In: *global + liberal*. 2014, 2, pp. 3-4, here p. 3.

7 Sousa Santos, Boaventura de. 'Toward a Multicultural Conception of Human Rights.' In: Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol (Ed.). Moral Imperialism. A Critical Anthology, New York and London, 2002, pp. 53-60, here p. 44.

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terns of a region without a loss of their substance'.[8] The Sudanese-American law professor and human rights activist Abdullah An-Na'im is cited as stating that 'only those that belong to a culture can affect a change from the inside'. It is also noteworthy that human rights cannot be forced upon others, so as not to spread the view of a value-imperialism, but that they can only be achieved by convincing others.[9] The approach advised here is generally constructive, but still leaves questions to answer. For example, does not a transfer of human rights into other cultures necessarily mean a change in the particulars of human rights, if not a dilution of their substance? When we follow the law professor's advice, should not the West then refrain from trying to bring its view of human rights to other contexts? How can the West help those inside a culture to foster human rights without some sort of force? Sousa Santos maintains that human rights policies since the end of the Second World War have mostly been used to serve 'economic and geopolitical interests of the hegemonic capitalist states.' In fact, 'The generous and seductive discourse on human rights has allowed for unspeakable atrocities that have been evaluated and dealt with according to revolting double standards.'[10] Alternative and non-Western human rights discourses that are counterhegemonic are ignored by the West,[11] which suggests a harsh critique of Western thinking and behaviour.

A stronger case for Western normative intervention may exist when there is a need to end outright physical violence in other countries. This is nothing new, and today it comes under the label of the responsibility to protect. R2P is a political-moral principle, not a legal norm. According to Rudolf,[12] justifications on the basis of R2P should also include a consideration of the concept of just war. The jus ad bellum (right to war) illustrates justifications for war, and the jus in bello (justice in war) illustrates what is legitimate in war. Justification for war can be the defense of others in the face of grave human rights violations, in practice today a legitimation of R2P. Conditions for applying just military force then relate to proportionality, a reasonable chance of success, as a means of last resort, of right in-

8 Kunze, Dirk/Abarbanell, Julius. '*Revolutionsrausch und "Wertimperialismus*".' In: *global + liberal*. 2014, 2, pp. 5-9, here p. 9.
9 Kunze/Abarbanell. *Revolutionsrausch*, p. 9.
10 Sousa Santos. *Toward,* p. 45.
11 Ibid. p. 46.
12 Rudolf, Peter. '*Zur Ethik militärischer Gewalt.'* SWP-Study 6. SWP – German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, March 2014.

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tention, and possibly legitimate authority. Rudolf recommends, also based on former high-ranking British Ministerial official David Fisher, a debate on the use of military force from an ethical angle, and that a government should present reasons for a military intervention based on just war criteria before and during an intervention. In the case of Germany, Rudolf furthermore points to the reluctance of accepting any limits to action by any testing criteria,[13] a position that should possibly be revised.

In trying to deal with 'the difficulty of finding firm foundations for human rights', there are efforts to move beyond the view that human rights are somehow natural rights predating political society; human rights result from the rights of citizens based on standards of behaviour having become more civilized.[14] Seeing human rights not as natural rights may create space and flexibility to build a truly common and shared understanding of those values we all want to live by. For this, we also have to be prepared to relinquish some of our power over others and to accept alternative views.

What does seem universal is the idea of peace.[15] All cultures refer to peace and its desirability in society or even the world, which are references we may build upon without enforcing any cultural superiority. For this, non-Western ideas of peace should be considered. Studies of peace should include the multiple ways of and towards peace, in order to arrive at a more inclusive understanding of our world and the various communities within.[16] Scholars argue that a culture's indigenous modes for conflict solution must be respected and should be seen as a rich resource to transcend conflict.[17] For example, the differentiation between individualism

13 Rudolf. Zur Ethik. pp. 21-27, 36-37.

14 Boucher, David. The Limits of Ethics in International Relations. Natural Law, Natural Rights, and Human Rights in Transition. Oxford and New York, 2009, p. 287.

15 Demenchonok, Edward (Ed.). 'Philosophy After Hiroshima. From Power Politics to the Ethics of Nonviolence and Co-Responsibility.' In: Between Global Violence and the Ethics of Peace: Philosophical Perspectives. Malden, MA and Oxford, 2009, pp. 9-49, here p. 37.

16 Said, Abdul Aziz/ Funk, Nathan C./ Kadayifci, Ayse. Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice. Lanham MD, 2001.

17 Osman, Abdulahi A. 'Cultural Diversity and the Somali Conflict: Myth or Reality?' In: *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 2007, 7/2, pp. 93-133, pp. 125-129.

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and collectivism in different cultures should be considered.[18] Whereas Buddhist thinking, for example, emphasizes the collective and limitlessness of the social and of time, Christianity emphasizes the individual. Buddhist thinking thus sees responsibility as something collective, where conflicts are collectivized and placed in infinite time with connections between all. Only in the collective can something be made right again and peace be built.[19] Also other scholars point to the collective and the individual receiving different emphases. Córdova contrasts the Western model of elected or selected authorities speaking for all with the model of indigenous communities in the Andes and their bottom-up, 'open and participatory' mechanism of decision making.[20] The achieved 'high community buy-in', due to open and transparent consultations and decision making, results in fewer conflicts.[21] The Jirga in Afghanistan and Pakistan is another collective institution for decision making and peace building. As 'a strategic exchange between two or more people to address an issue through verbal communication [it enables the involved parties] to maintain a certain level of formal communication, thus ensuring peace'.[22] In contrast to a Western system, the Jirga tries to resolve enmity between parties, address root causes and build preventive measures. In another example, Navajo peacemaking, we find a type of restorative justice that aims at treating members of a group as equals, maintaining relationships and harmony.[23] The Navajo justice system is seen as a circle, with all being equal and connected to one another and all participating (and able to do so equally). This is said to enable justice and healing, restoration and recon-

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18 Galtung, Johan. *'Frieden mit friedlichen Mitteln: Friede und Konflikt, Entwicklung und Kultur. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt von Hajo Schmidt.'* Münster, 2007, p. 222.

19 Ibid. p. 153, 156.

20 Córdova, Fabiola. 'Weaving Indigenous and Western Methods of Conflict Resolution in the Andes.' In: Akanmu G. Adebayo, Jesse J. Benjamin, Brandon D. Lundy. Indigenous Conflict Management Strategies: Global Perspectives. Lanham MD, 2014, pp. 15-31, here p. 20.

21 Ibid. p. 22.

22 Gohar, 'Ali. Jirga. 'An Indigenous Institution for Peacebuilding in the Pukhtoon Belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan.' In: Adebayo/ Benjamin/ Lundy. Indigenous Conflict Management Strategies: Global Perspectives. Lanham, MD, 2014, pp. 183-194, here p. 185.

23 Nielsen, Marianne O./ Zion, James W. (Eds.). 'Introduction to Peacemaking.' In: Navajo Nation Peacemaking: Living Traditional Justice. Tucson, 2005, pp. 3-19, here p. 3, 9.

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ciliation of the individual with his or her surroundings (including nature and cosmos), as well as group solidarity and integration into the group. Rather than finding out who is guilty, the well-being of the entire community is the goal. The Navajo Peacemaker Court, established by the Navajo Nation in 1982, exemplifies this approach.[24] Islamic thinking also centres on the concept of peace (al-Salam), which is linked to ideas of justice, human dignity and human welfare, development, harmony and ecological balance. Religious values, reconciliation rituals and practices of communal and inter-communal coexistence emphasize the connections between personal and group identity.[25]

To not simply reproduce Western thinking in considering non-Western concepts of peace and stability, one should be aware of the difficulties in comparing cultures critically. In many ways, and regarding many elements, different cultural contexts may not be comparable. A further difficulty, as argued by scholars, is that also researchers are ethnocentric and that their views are shaped by their cultural background.[26] One possibility for overcoming such biases may be more frequent cooperation with researchers from the cultural context studied. Additional problems relate to some indigenous elements in concepts of peace and stability that are not necessarily worthwhile to pursue. For example, if a particular tradition is illiberal, it may not be worth investing in it. Córdova illustrates this with the examples of a tradition affecting the exclusion of minority opinion or disenfranchising woman and older children, or when a mob forms and begins to rule against minority opinions.[27] In such circumstances, one may have to decide to take a position (of dominance) after all, but hopefully without excluding others.

The above illustrates that peace can be understood and practiced in different ways. Why should any one way be better than another? This question must be allowed, since otherwise we risk exerting violence upon

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24 Yazzie, Robert. 'Life Comes from It: Navajo Justice Concepts.' In: Marianne O. Nielsen/ James W. Zion (Eds.). Navajo Nation Peacemaking. pp. 42-58, here pp. 46-51.

25 Said, Abdul Aziz et al. 'Islamic and Western approaches to conflict resolution.' In: *The Frontier Post*. 9 October, 2013, p. 4.

26 Boulding, Kenneth E. 'National Images and International Systems.' In: Gary R. Weaver (Ed.). Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations, Needham Heights, 1996, pp. 459-470; Jervis, Robert. Perception and Misperception in International Politics. Princeton NJ, 1976.

27 Córdova, Weaving, pp. 23-24.

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the 'other'. Or can we all agree on some norms that are worthwhile to be pursued, perhaps because they bring the greatest good for all, or for as many as possible? But even this question is problematic, because who can define what is good for all, and which kind of majority is large enough to justify exerting a particular normative understanding onto people holding a different view? When only a minority – the West – discusses which norms are to be followed, other voices are marginalized. Furthermore, in inquiring into Islamic peace ethics and speaking about Islam, it means that those who are being studied take on a passive role, as if they had nothing to say and nothing to contribute. They are given an inferior position and are seen as peripheral, delimited and devalued. To counteract such divisive and exclusionary dynamics, we need the inclusion of diverse voices. Thereby, all can have a voice in what is relevant to them and their lives, and this may be a way forward to (more) peace.

3. The Impact of Discursive Constructions

When applying a Western normative approach with a universal ambition, we may engage in or facilitate various forms of violence, even if not intended. Violence should be seen in its multi-faceted forms, not only as something physical. According to Keane, a clear definition of violence is difficult, because the use of violence has been broadened and its meaning has become heavily context-dependent.[28] Ramsey sees violence as not only physical, but also psychological, for example.[29] We may then differentiate between physical and psychological violence, and add further differentiations of direct-indirect or noninstitutionalized-institutionalized violence. Even actions of a democratic government can be violent, even though a democracy is considered to exclude violence.[30] Since also liberal democracies must maintain the state's monopoly of violence to protect the democratic system and the liberal order from external and internal threats, as well as citizen rights, there is an intimate relationship between democracy

28 Keane, John. Violence and Democracy. Cambridge, 2004, pp. 30-32.
29 Ramsey, Maureen. 'Liberal Democratic Politics as a Form of Violence.' In: *Democratization*, 2010, 17/2, pp. 235-250, here p. 236.
30 Keane, Violence. p. 8-14.

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and violence.[31] Examples of violence by democracies include going to war with another nation in own defense, and applying violent policies to spread democracy and Western liberal values. Also democracies practice exclusion, either intentionally or via the unintended effects of democratic practices.

Moreover, discourse can exert violence, and violence can be discursive. An example of this is discourse by the core about the periphery, by the leading and self-claimed superior West about others, such as the Muslim world and Muslims. That this discourse constitutively shapes meaning, as well as policy and power relations, has been amply shown.[32] Thus, the articulation of someone or something as threatening affects interpretation and then creates boundaries.[33] The concepts of self and other, the need for identity maintenance in relations with the 'other', and the creation of otherness and exclusion thus deserve our attention. They have epistemological consequence as well as practical effects, by enabling forms of violence towards those seen as different and thought to be in need of our Western norms.

Violence-enabling discourse and practices towards the 'other',[34] such as towards Muslims, can be eased by the skewed Western perception and representation of Islam and, implicitly, Muslims. The partially existing Western view of Islam as inherently violent facilitates a discourse of threat vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims and shapes interaction. When, according to Flood et al., media reporting on terrorism often includes references to Islamist

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31 Ramsey. Liberal; Diamond, Larry. 'Defining and Developing Democracy.' In: Robert A. Dahl/ Ian Shapiro/ José A. Cheibub (Eds.). The Democracy Source Book. Cambridge MA, 2003, pp. 29-39, here p. 30.

32 See for example Herschinger, Eva/ Renner, Judith (Eds.). '*Einleitung: Diskursforschung in den Internationalen Beziehungen*.' In: *Diskursforschung in den Internationalen Beziehungen*. Baden-Baden, 2014, pp. 9-35, here pp. 14-15; Diez, Thomas/ Bode, Ingvild/ Fernandes da Costa, Aleksandra. Key Concepts in International Relations. Los Angeles and London, 2011, p. 168; Foucault, Michel (Ed.). 'Gespräch mit Ducio Trombadori.' In: *Der Mensch ist ein Erfahrungstier: Gespräch mit Ducio Trombadori.* Frankfurt, 1996, pp. 23-122.

33 Campbell, David. Writing Security. United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity. Revised ed. Minneapolis, 1998, pp. 3-4, 170-171.

34 Dalby, Simon. 'Geopolitics and Global Security: Culture, Identity, and the "Pogo Syndrome".' In: Gearóid Ó Tuathail/ Simon Dalby (Eds.). Rethinking Geopolitics. London and New York, 1998, pp. 295-313, here p. 309.

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violence,[35] which is supported by findings of a recent study of Western media discourse,[36] violent practices to counter the articulated threat are enabled. When some point to an existing equation of terror and Islam in parts of public discourse,[37] violent practices are even more likely. Scholars also point to the problematic Western representation of Islam as a potential problem for peace, and argue that, in contrast, Muslim writers see Islam as a possible contribution to international peace, justice and human dignity.[38] In light of such associations, but also due to Islamist radicals wanting to legitimize their violent acts with distorted Islamic teachings, the initiative by Islamic scholars for an 'Islamic Curriculum on Peace & Counter Terrorism' and similar efforts may be useful. Such curricula, directly drawn from Islamic teaching, can offer Muslim theologians helpful arguments against the misuse of theology by Islamist radicals and terrorists.

Difference between self and other is not only easily created but also constitutive for identity – on the individual, the group and the national level. National identity, due to being culture-specific and ethno-centric, colours the self positively, and this biased view informs how a state acts towards other states.[39] Whereas the belief in a shared identity with another state aids dialogue and cooperation,[40] a lack of such sharing, or the belief of a diverging identity, may promote conflict. When differentiating from others, often motivated by different normative orders, otherness can be created and a destructive process of othering initiated.[41] The lens of critical geopolitics is also of use here, for it points to the link between identity,

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35 Flood, C. et al. Islam, Security and Television News. Basingstoke and New York, 2012, pp. 189-191.

36 Reinke de Buitrago, Sybille. 'Jihadist Terrorism in Europe: What Role for Media?' In: Daniela Pisoiu (Ed.). Arguing Counterterrorism. London, 2014, pp. 160-180; Reinke de Buitrago, Sybille. 'Media Discourse on Jihadist Terrorism in Europe.' In: *Journal of Terrorism Research*. 2013, 4/2, p. 3-13.

37 Weidner, Stefan. *'Mit der Religion gegen den Terror.'* In: Quantara.de (29.06.2015). http://de.qantara.de/print/20431 [02.07.2015].

38 Said/ Funk/ Kadayifci. Peace.

39 Holland, Jack. Selling the War on Terror: Foreign Policy Discourses after 9/11. London, 2013, pp. 10-11, 24; Boulding. National. pp. 461-464.

40 Rousseau, David L./ Miodownik, Dan/ Lux Petrone, Deborah. 'Identity and Threat Perception: An Experimental Analysis.' Paper prepared for presentation at the APSA-meeting, 2001, p. 5, 15.

41 Houtum, Henk van/ Naerssen, Ton van. 'Bordering, Ordering and Othering.' In: *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie 2002,* 93/2, pp. 125-36, here p. 129.

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space, discourse, power and order. Thus, spatial constructions by political actors illustrate the building of hierarchical self-other relations, which lead to acts of inclusion or exclusion of the 'other'.[42] We should then critically consider Western spatial constructions of regions with varying levels of danger, in need of Western normative influence. When the Muslim world, and thereby Muslims, is represented as a region of danger, which the West must fortify against, how can balanced, non-divisive relations be possible? What if we rather focused resources on building bridges towards and strengthening dialogue with the 'other'? While this requires sufficient political will, it is a worthwhile aim with long-term stabilizing effects.

Any hope of avoiding seemingly automatic processes of othering may lie in the following notion: if identity is not only forms by differentiating us from others, but also by moving closer to them, as Lebow states, we may find ways to maintain identity without building harmful divisions.[43] In efforts to build bridges to the 'other', we should utilize changes on the side of self and other. Narratives of othering can also collapse, for example when dramatic events or new developments shake the underlying ideas and allow alternative views of self and other. We thus should pay close attention to any and even small changes to build constructive self-other relations. That this is possible is illustrated by the recent rapprochement between Iran and the US.

4. Conclusion

As othering in a discourse of threat has enormous effects on behaviour and policy towards the 'other', by setting the agenda and affecting organizational and political processes in many policy fields,[44] Western othering of Islam and Muslims sets relations on a downward path and enables violence. To change such a discourse, and its impact, we would need to change our views of the 'other' and our understanding of our relations

42 Agnew, John/ Muscarà, Luca. Making Political Geography. 2nd ed. Lanham MD, 2012; Albert, Mathias/ Reuber, Paul/ Wolkersdorfer, Günter. 'Kritische Geopolitik.' In: Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler (Eds.). *Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen.* 2nd ed. 2006, pp. 527-551, here pp. 531, 540-541.

43 Lebow, Richard Ned. The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves. Cambridge and New York, 2012, pp. 270-271.

44 Including development and aid policy, cultural policy, international cooperation, trade relations, and military activities.

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with the 'other'. We may ask ourselves how we can recognize the complexity of the 'other', including the diversity within Islam, and begin to accept that we all have both positives and negatives. To not reproduce Western bias when considering non-Western or Islamic concepts of peace we should attempt to reflect our own ethnocentric biases. In academia, for example, we may seek to pursue more joint research with researchers from the cultural context studied. While biases do not necessarily mean that out ideas and views are wrong, we should be aware of our biases, and their motivations. Can we then re-define our relations with Muslims, and if so, how? In efforts to build and strengthen dialogue with our constructed 'others', we should seek ways of defining what values we share. There is a dilemma about relativizing and universalizing, and it may be constructive to find a balance between the two. There is further benefit in recognizing when others employ either a relativizing or universalizing approach for their political agenda, and in working towards a balance. Agreeing on approaches to these questions may enable us to overcome the simplified representations that often facilitate violence. With that goal in mind, we should also focus on a better balance between normative universality and cultural plurality. Sousa Santos offers a way forward to change the Western hegemonic, universalist human rights conception, into something cosmopolitan.[45] Accordingly, we should, first, move beyond the limiting and divisive universalism-cultural relativism debate. Second, we should look at meanings of human dignity in all cultures to achieve a basis of common understanding. This should, third, be done by paying attention to the incompleteness of each culture's human dignity conception and, fourth, by paying attention to the different degree of openness of one culture to another. Lastly, we need to consider that existing and constructed equalities and differences contain nuances in themselves, so that equalities show difference within and differences show commonalities within. To conclude, the acceptance of at least a degree of normative plurality could be more effective in building dialogue and peaceful relations with the 'other' than insisting on only Western norms being universal. Perhaps peace is more possible by letting go of our insistence on own norms, and by seeking common ground on Islam in a dialogue with Muslims.

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45 Sousa Santos. *Toward*. pp. 46-47, 53-57.

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