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Jawdat Sa‘id and the Muslim Philosophy of Peace

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Abstract: Jawdat Sa‘id (born in 1931) is known as the Gandhi of the Arabs and Islam. He was trained at al-Azhar and influenced by Gandhi, M. Iqbal and Malik Bennabi. Nowadays, he is the foremost advocate of non-violence in modern Islam. He contested S. Qutb's ideology and led an ascetic life until he left Syria recently. Sa‘id opposed confrontation between the Syrian regime and Islamists. He developed a unique pacifist stance in the Muslim world, based on the principle of prophetic disobedience. This paper will address Sa‘id's philosophy of peace and its impact on Islamic thought. Furthermore, I will look at his historicist epistemology, the main asset of his pacifism. Sa‘id believes in causality and learning from human history, experience and science as tools for reinterpreting the Muslim tradition.

Introduction

It must be said, this is a depressing time for peace in the Muslim world. Political violence affects most of the 57 members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In addition, radical Islamic movements, all over the globe, hold a bloody and suicidal campaign of nihilist terror. As a general rule, as it stands, Muslim societies have only two violent options: repressive regimes or chaos. Over and above this, there seems to be no effective counter-movement for peace; violence and its perpetrators are condemned, but no wide and critical movement of Islamic thought is endorsed to question the anthropological, religious and political - very much interrelated - nature of violence in the Muslim world.

Yet, all is not sinister. Movements of civil society and intellectuals sustain the promise of peaceful Muslim societies. Although rarer than red sulfur, to use a metaphor from Arabic literature, Muslim intellectuals who dedicate their lifelong projects to peace do exist. Recently, M. Keshavjee and R. Jahanbegloo reminded us of some central ideas of peace to be exploited in Muslim ethics (ex. mercy, *rahma*) and figures (ex. Khan Abdul

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Ghaffar Khan).[1] In the last decade, there is indeed an active quest of pacifism in Muslim thought.[2]

Of all current Muslim pacifist intellectuals, Jawdat Sa‘id (born in 1931) is incontestably the most outspoken voice. Since 1960, he wrote and led activities that promote peace from an Islamic perspective. He is even known as the Gandhi of the Arabs. Nevertheless, there is no doubt, at least in the Arabic speaking countries, that he is the foremost advocate of nonviolence. Be that as it may, his half-century intellectual and political itinerary attracted very little attention. No scholarly study has been dedicated to him in any European language and the few discussions of his ideas in Arabic do not do justice to his project. This paper constitutes the first comprehensive attempt to present Jawdat Saʿid's thought to a scholarly public.

This study begins by presenting a few elements of Sa‘id's biography and context in order to discern the specificity of his itinerary (1). Then, I will briefly look at his theoretical foundations of peace, mainly his theory of knowledge (2). Subsequently, I will come to the core of this paper which examines Sa‘id's major ideas and arguments for peace. Finally, I will show the limits of his system of thought (4), especially in his reading of Muslim history and tradition.

1. Jawdat Sa‘id: A profile of peace

Sa‘id's context is marked by three circles of violence. The first conflict was between Syria and Israel. Sa‘id was born and spent most of his life in the village of Bi'r al-‘Ajam (the Golan Heights). The village was occupied and destroyed by Israel in 1967. After 1973, the village was returned to Syria, and a movement of reconstruction and repopulation, in which Sa‘id participated, took place. A second conflict emerged between the Muslim

1 Keshavjee, M. Dispute Resolution. In: Amyn B. Sajoo (Ed.). A Companion to Muslim Ethics. London, New York, 2010, pp. 151-166.
And Jahanbegloo, R. ‘Nonviolence'. In: Amyn B. Sajoo (Ed.). A Companion to Muslim Ethics, p. 187-199.

2 See for example:
Halverson, Jeffrey R. Searching for a King: Muslim Nonviolence and the Future of Islam. Washington, 2012.
The work of K. D. Crow, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Asghar ‘Ali Engineer deserves special attention in this regard.

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Brotherhood and the Baath regime in the sixties, leading to a bloody confrontation in the seventies and early eighties. Sa'id was very close to Islamic movements, as an observer and a critic. The major circle of violence, however, is the one that burst out in 2011, between the Syrian regime and the Syrian rebels and people, which killed hundreds of thousands. Within this context, Sa'id engaged in the heated debates about non-violence and social change in Islam.

He was trained at al-Azhar in the 40 s and 50 s where he graduated in Arabic language studies. He also lived in Saudi Arabia for a short time. He was a secondary teacher of Arabic in Damascus during the sixties, a prisoner and victim of the regime's repressive policies on several occasions. In 1973, he decided to rejoin his village and live an ascetic life as a farmer, albeit engaged in Syrian intellectual debates and politics.[3] He left Syria in 2012 after the bombing of his village by the Syrian regime and the death of his brother.[4]

Sa'id is known to be one of the earliest voices to challenge S. Qutb's Islamist ideology. In 1966, he published his *Madhhab ibn Adam al-awwal aw mushkilat al-ʿunf fi al-ʿamal al-Islami,* the first pacifist book in Islamic thought, a revolutionary step in the context of the sixties. In this book, the influence of Gandhi (d. 1948) and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) are evident. In his subsequent books, he seeks to explain the foundations of pacific change in the Muslim world, with a particular interest in the philosophy of history, society and knowledge, displaying the clear influence of the Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi (d. 1973). This can be seen in his works *Hatta yughayyiru ma bi-anfusihim*: *bahth fi sunan taghyir al-nafs wa-l-mujtamaʿ* (1970), *Fuqdan al-tawazun al-ijtima'i* (1978), *al-ʿAmal qudra wa-irada* (1983), *Iqra' wa-rabbuka al-akram* (1988) and *Riyah al-taghyir: qadaya al-insan wa-l-ʿilm wa-l-taʾwil (1995)*. His later works are engaged with the problem of violence (*Kun ka-ibn Adam, and La ikrah fi al-din : dirasat wa-abhath fi al-fikr al-Islami, 1997*) and that of law (*al-Din wa-l-qanun : ru'ya Qur'aniyya*, 1998).

In Islamist circles, Saʿid's thought was known in the eighties. In the nineties, intellectuals, both Islamist and secular, became interested in his

3 Crow, K. D. 'Nurturing Islamic Peace Discourse'. In: *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences.* 17. 2000, pp. 64-66.

4 *Jawdat Saʿid daʿiyat al-laʿunf* http://www.syriancenternews.net/ar/news/print_news/10459 [15.08.15].

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discourse as radical Islamist violence devastated Algeria and Egypt.[5] He was regularly invited to universities and academic conferences to speak about dialogue, democracy and peace. It is 9/11 that brought him to a larger audience in the Arab world. His appearances on al-Jazeera since 2004, made his voice heard.[6] In 2001, his niece 'Afra' Jalabi translated into English a long article Sa'id wrote for the Journal of Law and Religion, summarizing his ideas, thus becoming known to a Western audience.[7]

2. *Knowledge as a foundation of peace: insights into Saʿid's epistemology*

It is indeed a particularity of Sa'id to adopt one of the most rationalist, materialist and historicist views in Islamic reformism. He does not lean on the Qur'an as the source of knowledge, but as an indicator of knowledge to be acquired by reason from both our nature and history. Sa'id sees knowledge as the means to peace, and ignorance as the way to violence. There is both naivety and scientism in his thought. Let us consider this passage:

> Knowledge is the mother of peace. Through knowledge, human beings realize the possibility of human reform without disrupting or destroying humanity, because the one with little knowledge and little tricks has resort to demolition and destruction, and sometimes adopts the attitude of ('Let me die with the Philistines!') instead of heading toward knowledge that would turn enemy to a close friend.[8]

Rather than seeking the matrix of peace in divine knowledge, as Muslim reformists do, Sa'id pursues it in human knowledge in so far as it leads to reform, patience and human alliance. Conversely, ignorance results in de-

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5 The first monograph on his thought was published in 1995:
Sa'id, Jawdat/ Mahmud, Ibrahim. *al-Hijra ila al-Islam: hawla al-'alam al-fikri li-Jawdat Sa'id : hiwar, dirasat, ta'qib*. Beirut, 1995.
A Festschrift dedicated to him and his works was published in 2006:
al-Marzuqi, Abu Yaʿrub (Ed.). *Jawdat Sa'id : buhuth wa-maqalat muhdat ilayh*. Damascus, 2006.
Both studies lack any critical appraisal of his ideas.

6 For example, see his interview in the famous *al-Shari'ah wa-l-hayat* show:
Saʿid, Jawdat. *Sunan al-taghyir fi al-afaq wa-l-anfus*. May 2005.
www.aljazeera.net/News/archive/archive?ArchiveId=125687 [15.08.15].

7 Saʿid, Jawdat. Law, Religion, and the Prophetic Method of Social Change. Afra Jalabi (Trans.). In: *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2000–2001, 15, pp. 83–150.

8 Saʿid, Jawdat. *Iqra' wa-rabbuka al-akram*. Beirut, 1988, pp. 15-16.

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struction, suicide and dysfunction. It is not an idealist view. For, it is a process to which he dedicates several books to explain its minutiae. Behind the lines, one can observe an Islamic view of the world: in the Muslim imaginary, *jahiliyya* is thought to be a state of ignorance as well as of permanent violence. Thus, Sa'id endorses the reformist paradigm and glorifies early Islam as embodying knowledge and peace, only to criticise current suicidal Muslims and give full credit to science.

Probably, where Sa'id markedly breaks with the reformist paradigm, is in the link he perceives between nature and history in harmony with the Qur'an. He believes in the unity and complementarity between them at one and the same time. The Qur'an is an indicator of the laws of nature and history. It is a guide to these laws, which everyone is called to discover. As he puts it:

> Muslims fly from joy if they see something of the signs of the horizons and the selves, supporting their religion, but what they do not pay attention to accurately is that the signs of the horizons and the selves if they become a well defined approach with a solid structure and constant foundations in the verses of the book, the promised God's knowledge to overcome corruption in the land and shedding blood, and conversion to the ways of peace will turn into reality (There has come to you from God a light, and a Book Manifest whereby God guides whosoever follows His good pleasure in the ways of peace, and brings them forth from the shadows into the light by His leave) (Q. 5:16).[9]

This is a critical view of the so-called scientific miraculous nature of the Qur'an, the Muslim concordism. Sa'id diverges from Islamic reformism, which embraced concordism as an answer to the challenges modern science addressed to Islam. He is a scientist and believes science, not religion, can solve human problems. Here is what he has to say about it:

> Astronomy is a clear and close example about how the signs of the horizons and the selves unite the understanding and eliminate conflict and strife. After the signs of the horizons and the selves testify for astronomy, there is no controversy or strife and the world's understanding of the functioning of the earth and the sun, moon and stars unite. And they do not dispute over the texts and do not engage in the push and pull, misinformation and excommunication. Thus, if we have seen the horizons and the selves and we were able to show them to the others there vanishes conflict and appears harmony, and so they

9 Saʿid, *Iqraʾ*, pp. 225-226.
Arberry, A. J. The Qur'an Interpreted: A Translation. New York, 1996, p. 191.

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> can see truth (We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth) (Q. 41: 53).[10]

Obviously, Sa‘id does not endorse an apologetic attitude. Instead, he believes that religious texts, taken alone, cause disruption between humans and only science can unite them. Thus, he imagines a different future from that of the reformists. While the latter expects humanity to finally admit the truth of the Qur’an, Sa‘id looks forward to seeing humans come to realize the harmonious order they can build together on the basis of science.

It is this attitude that pushes his fundamentalist critics to accuse him of materialism. For example, ‘Adil al-Tall considers him, along with M. Iqbal and M. Shahrur, as materialists. Al-Tall bases his criticism on *Iqra’ wa-rabbuka al-akram* in which Sa‘id argues that matter is the steady existing thing to which human beings should have recourse whenever there is divergence about reason or tradition.[11]

Sa‘id is a semi-Qur’anist; he does not reject *sunna’s* authority, but his arguments are mostly based on the Qur’an. He repeatedly criticizes the ways Muslims read the Qur’an and the tools they use in their readings. Sa‘id believes that the effective reading of the Qur’an should be a contemporary Qur’anic understanding, *fahm qurʾani muʿasir*, a posture rather than a method, whereby the reader thinks about the Qur’an in terms of human knowledge today. As such, he discards the exegetical legacy because it is outdated as knowledge. Central to his Qur’anic approach is the unitary reading of the Qur’an, history and nature. He goes further, calling on an evolutionary understanding of history and nature in reading the Qur’an. He calls evolution *sunnat al-tatawwur al-ta’rikhi*. Science should not oppose religion because the Qur’an directly refers to science. All that precedes modern science should be considered outdated and unable to help reading the Qur’an. History evolves and so should the reading of the book. His understanding of the interpretation of the Qur’an, *ta’wil al-kitab* is realization. The Qur’anic meaning, even if revealed in the 7th century, finds its meaning today only with the spectacular development of human knowledge.[12]

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10 Saʿid, *Iqraʾ*. p. 226.

11 al-Tall, ʿAdil. *al-Nazʿa al-maddiyya fi al-ʿalam al-Islami : naqd kitabat Jawdat Saʿid, Muḥammad Iqbal, Muhammad Shahrur ʿala dawʾ al-Kitab wa-l-sunnah*. ‘Amman, 1995, pp. 85-100.

12 Sa‘id, Jawdat. *Riyah al-taghyir: qadaya al-insan wa-l-ʿilm wa-l-ta’wil*. Beirut, 1995, p. 99 ff.

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3. Sa‘id's philosophy of peace

In his philosophy of peace, Sa‘id finds inspiration in the Qur’anic narrative of prophetic disobedience.[13] Since Adam, the prophets taught humanity to reject violence as a way of change. He asserts, in particular, that Muhammad's experience with moral, social, and political issues was based on persuasion rather than violence. In his view, the *khilafa* (632–661) is as peaceful as Muhammad's order. Willing to idealize the early figures of Islam, he falls into a defense of *jihad*. For him, *jihad* is war for a just society and should be preceded by persuasion in a peaceful society. That is, only an elected government can wage *jihad*. He claims early Muslims did not use violence for the sake of worldly goals. They endorsed the Qurʾanic view of peace and violence that consists of fighting unjust violence with justice. Sa‘id supports his claim by citing Muhammad's refusal to use violence in the Meccan period, who wanted to transmit a peaceful message by peaceful means. Sa‘id reinterprets the Medinan prophetic *jihad* as a tool to establish justice in Medina. He does not see in Islam a universal message that should be spread, as S. Qutb does. Reason is universal and all humans should make their own peaceful and just societies.

According to Sa‘id, peace is the primary attitude Muslims should adopt; they should not initiate conflict in any circumstances. Calling to Islam should be peaceful, and peace should be the basis of an Islamic society. Violence is only permissible if a society agrees to use it to establish justice and to end persecution. In this case, violence should only be employed by a mature and rational authority. Force should be used proportionally to remove injustice. He thinks that peace creates spiritual force, science, democracy, and justice. In the field of international relations, Sa‘id criticizes Muslim attitudes toward external occupation and American hegemony. He thinks world peace is only relevant if Muslims make peace essential to their societies. Although he vehemently rejects American hegemony, based on violent policies, he focuses on building a Muslim rationalist and humanist ethos. He often calls on his followers to learn from the Japanese experience after the Second World War: coping with the American hegemony through science, democracy, and economic development rather than emotion and violence. For current Muslim societies, he preaches peaceful resistance to occupation and despotism. Naturally, this idea is

13 Sa‘id. Law. pp. 123-126.

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resisted by many opponents. However, he also dismisses the policies of current regimes. Further, he totally rejects the Islamic movements, which he compares to *khawarij*—violent Muslim dissidents in early Islam.[14]

3.1 The doctrine of the first Son of Adam

Sa'id calls pacifism the doctrine of the first Son of Adam (Abel).[15] To illustrate this doctrine, he often quotes the following Qur'anic verse 'Yet if thou stretchest out thy hand against me, to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand against thee, to slay thee; I fear God, the Lord of all Being' (5:25).[16] The doctrine of the Son of Adam consists in rejecting violence against adversaries. It is the way of the prophets and the way Muslims should follow. Muslims should not call to murder, assassination, impose an opinion by force on others, nor should they change their minds under force. One also has to endure all sorts of suffering for the sake of principle, and one should not make others suffer for their own principles. Furthermore, Sa'id highlights the sense of sacrifice in the biblical story: offering oneself in order to guide others, becoming thus an example of ethical behaviour. It is also the case that one should not commit oneself to something one cannot fulfill and be prepared to to adopt it in front of all people.[17] The mission of the prophets is to build peaceful societies of believers, as can be seen in the examples he gives of the lives of Noah, Hud, Moses, Shu'ayb, Jesus and Muhammad.[18]

Sa'id was aware that in 1966, when he wrote his book, the application of Islamic law, the quest of the Islamic state and the violence that goes with them, were generally unquestionable in the Islamist circles. Sa'id was one of the earliest voices to distinguish between two roles: that of calling to Islam (*daʿiya*) who peacefully builds an Islamic society and that of judge (*qadi*), who applies Islamic law in an Islamic society.[19] This distinc-

14 Sa'id. Law. pp. 136-144.

15 The son of Adam and Eve. Sa'id misses the opportunity here to acknowledge motherhood as equal to fatherhood, and to eliminate patriarchal biases, another form of violence in human history.

16 Arberry, A. J. The Qur'an Interpreted. p. 132.

17 Sa'id, Jawdat. *Madhhab ibn Adam al-awwal aw mushkilat al-'unf fi al-'amal al-Islami*. Cairo, 1993, pp. 93-94.

18 Ibid. pp. 103-126.

19 Ibid. p. 128.

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tion might have inspired Hasan al-Hudaybi's *Du'at la qudat*. At any rate, Sa'id takes a position against Qutb's radical Islamism. He claims that the 'deviated' society - preferring this term over that of the *jahili* society - should be reformed by way of communication, preaching and advice. Spreading Islam should be peaceful.[20] Believing that Islam is superior to other beliefs and, therefore, should be spread is one of the most violent ideas and acts, still almost unanimously accepted by Muslims. It stems from the belief that 'our sacred' is more 'sacred' than that of others. Furthermore, if every believer in a religion wishes to expand its sphere of influence, peace cannot be hoped for.

3.2 Jihad and khuruj

Still, this romantic image of the early Islamic period as a model of peace cannot erase the practice of *jihad* by the Prophet and his companions. To respond to this challenging claim, Sa'id makes here another distinction between *jihad* and *khuruj*. While he understands *khuruj* to mean the use of force and violence to reach power, *jihad*, for him, is the use of force, after reaching power with the will of people, to prevent compulsion in religion, in case no other means is possible. Sa'id considers that the Prophet called first to God, with wisdom, good preaching and disputation in the best manner, until he reached power with the will of people and their conviction. The Prophet reached power without force, save the force of persuasion and ideas. The people of Medina received him as their leader. At that moment, the Prophet started to practice *jihad* fighting those who deceive people about their religion and combating those who oblige people to follow their religion. Thus, in his understanding, fighting aims at protecting religious freedom.[21]

Sa'id states that his *jihad* has two conditions: a condition in the case of the fighter and another in the enemy. The first entails acquiring power by the will of people and the second is that the enemy should be forcing people to convert to a religion or preventing them from joining a religion, like Quraysh and all the nations Muslims fought in early Islam. So, he declares Islam innocent from violence. Moreover, it maintained the freedom of be-

20 Ibid. p. 132.
21 Sa'id. *Madhhab*. pp. 41-42.

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lief, before any other civilization.[22] In this argument, Sa‘id is no different from the Muslim reformists; his interpretation of early *jihad* as good *jihad* ignores the fact that freedom of belief is a modern notion. In pre-modernity, wars were not declared to protect freedom of belief. As the *ridda* wars and the law of apostasy show, the very notion of freedom of belief in Islam is not so evident.

According to Saʿid's conditions of *jihad*, Islamists today are dissidents, *khawarij*. They all understand *jihad* as *khuruj*. Sa‘id goes further maintaining that all Muslims are *khawarij* today: the quietist dissidents, *qa‘ada* who are dissidents in their beliefs but do not carry out violence, and the activist dissidents.[23] As he puts it, ‘Muslims consider the killers of ‘Ali as dissidents because he was a rightly guided Caliph, but call those Muslims who killed ‘Ali infidels and dissidents. Therefore, Muslims' actions are different from those of the dissidents. But what they forget and do not consider is that the dissidents considered ‘Ali an infidel and that killing him was for the good of Muslims'.[24] Here, he makes a double point: that of reciprocity (if A acts violently, B is likely to respond violently) and that of the vicious circle (as long as A acts violently, B will act violently). So, every time A kills B for the reason of dissidence, it pushes B to use violence for the same reason.

Sa‘id admits that most Muslim jurists today understand *jihad* to mean fighting disbelief. He was delighted that M. S. Ramadan al-Buti, an eminent jurist in Syria (killed in 2013), in his much debated *al-jihad fi al-Islam*, claimed that disbelief is not a reason to declare *jihad*. Sa‘id thinks that this is the first step toward reform. He also agrees with al-Buti that priority should be given to understanding and knowledge rather than force. This can change the whole direction of the Islamic movement.[25]

3.3 Misconceptions about peace in Islam

Beyond semantics, Sa‘id is conscious that pacifism challenges some fundamental tenets of Islam. One of the criticisms Islamists levied against him is that pacifism leads to abolishing *jihad* all at once. Unable to go that

22 Ibid. p. 43-44.
23 Ibid. p. 34.
24 Ibid. p. 57.
25 Sa‘id, Jawdat. *Kun ka-ibn Adam*. Beirut, 1997, p. 275.

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far, he concedes that *jihad* should stay until the end of time but should be practiced in an independent society, whose faith is clear and solid. Reaching the independence of Muslim society should not be achieved through fighting and the use of force, but through persuasion and preaching. The best *jihad* is saying the just word. It is a tool to be used in every circumstance and does not need a specific society.[26]

Another argument Sa‘id's opponents advance against him is that ethics are ineffective with persons who do not commit themselves to peace. They probably have in mind the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Sa‘id takes here an optimistic view. If that is true, he states, ‘one could not distinguish between justice and injustice or the good and the bad. In any case, doing evil because the others do the same cannot create any good, and Islam distinguishes itself from opportunism'.[27] Closely related to this argument, the promoters of violence argue that saying the truth without force has no effect. They argue that uttering the just word to a tyrant is useless as you might end up being slaughtered like a sheep. They assert that those who told the truth left no trace, and if they were killed rather than killers, their death was in vain. People are used to listen to those with the stick and force, thus, is inevitable, as they put it. Sa‘id looks for the answer to this objection in the prophetic model which suggests how the clear uttering of truth shakes the world. Sa‘id turns the argument around. Islamists today are unable to reproduce the prophetic model: their call to Islam is compromising and they believe that the call to Islam cannot change things. Thus, they worship power as much as the others do.[28]

Sa‘id considers these ‘misconceptions' as symptoms of a polluted reality which lost its balances and rules. All counter-arguments against pacifism prefer imposition over persuasion, sacralizing the use of force and giving it authority in changing human beings and societies. They commit the errors of obliging others through violence or submission to violence.[29]

In his view, the good questions are the following: Why is it that people worship? Is it fear? Or is it incapacity? Is peace a withdrawal or negativity? Sa‘id believes that pacifism is positive and effective. Every time human beings understand the meaning of humanity and truth, they realize the importance of pacifism and its effectiveness. Difficulties are possible, but

26 Sa‘id, *Madhhab*. pp. 157-159.
27 Ibid. pp. 161-162.
28 Ibid. pp. 163-167.
29 Ibid. pp. 181.

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there is much less hardship in pacifism than in using violence. The real threat to Muslims, Sa'id maintains, is that of intellectual stupidity. In fact, Muslim activists suffer as the public does not support them, except perhaps with sympathy. So, they are alone in their fight. In many cases, hearts are with the activists and swords are against them. The real reason people are afraid is that Islamic activism is related to violence. Sa'id claims that any Muslim would resist oppression and persecution much more if accused of being a Muslim, rather than of preparing a coup.[30]

It is evident that Sa'id recommends an exit from the vicious circle of violence. The dominating theology, law and history of Islam make his position sound out of place. On the whole, the 'misconceptions' are real experiences in the Muslim societies. Unless one would criticallly question the relationship between the sacred and violence (in the manner R. Girard[31] did), Islamic violence would appear 'normal' to most Muslims and 'abnormal' to Sa'id.

3.4 Does peace go by the book or by reality?

In modern times, several Muslim thinkers have developed, in divergent manners, a theology of peace in Islam. The basic idea of this theology is that peace goes by the book: the belief in Islam and the application of its laws create a *pax islamica*. In this regard, the most popular work among Muslim activists is *al-Salam al-'alami wa-l-Islam* by Sayyid Qutb (printed 15 times so far). According to Qutb, in Islam, peace is a rule and war is a necessity. However, war is continuous and should be sustained until the achievement of divine order on earth. People would be free from servitude, except to God. His idea of a link between Islamic monotheism and peace is recurrent in the modern literature on the subject. There is a necessity to sustain war, Qutb argues, because aggression towards Islam by non-Muslims is to be driven out. Qutb claims that the call to Islam, *da'wah*, is universal and should be allowed to achieve its mission. Any attempt to prevent it would be seen as war on Islam. In case enemies prevent the call to Islam, like Quraysh did with Muḥammad, war should be launched.[32]

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30 Ibid. pp. 176.
31 Girard, René. *La violence et le sacré.* Paris, 1972.
32 Qutb, Sayyid. *al-Salam al-'alami wa-l-Islam*. Cairo, 1993, pp. 169-174.

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On this matter, Sa‘id takes an opposite view. For him, peace comes from reality. Fear of God did not dissuade Muslims and did not create peace between them in 14 centuries, starting from the first Muslim civil war (656–661) until the recent Gulf wars. However, the nuclear weapon created peace between the major actors in international relations. The divine and religious dissuasion fails to create a spontaneous peace. In the final analysis, the nuclear dissuasion might be considered divine in so far as it is a divine habits (*sunan*) on earth. It is not a shortcoming of Islam if it fails to establish peace, for evidence should be sought and evidence can only be found in reality. It is then from reality that we should start to build peace and not from the book. [33] This reasoning reflects Sa‘id's epistemology which has been shown to rely on nature and history as sources of knowledge.

3.5 Peacebuilding

When it comes to peacebuilding, Sa‘id has very little to say.[34] He is aware that peacebuilding, in the modern sense of the process, is despised in the Muslim world. He goes so far as to call it the greatest craziness. However, he invites Muslims 'to think about the state of the Muslim world had it chosen to live in peace, and had they believed that the best among them is who starts peace, and that the Muslims should make peace and not God who is in the sky'[35]. One of the major obstacles against peace is the firm belief that all problems stem from external powers. No effort has been made to analyze the religious, the social and the political structures of violence.

Thus, Sa‘id is unable to formulate anything but a series of rhetorical questions about endless Muslim conspiracy theories. For example, he asks the following question: Don't we forget our external enemies when hatred comes between us? Despite this rhetorical tone, Sa‘id challenges the whole Arab political mythology, constructed by Arab nationalism and later by Islamism. He draws attention to the misrepresentation of the world,

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33 Sa‘id, Jawdat. *La ikrah fi al-din: dirasat wa-abhath fi al-fikr al-Islami*. Damascus. 1997, p. 107.

34 He signed the Damascus Declaration in 2005 and led peaceful demonstrations in 2011 in Syria, but a year later he went into exile.

35 Sa‘id. *Kun*. p. 92.

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which Muslims formulate in religious terms.[36] His criticism has the merit of shaking up the current political discourse which consists in the belief that Islam is under attack. It is certainly deficient to build peace on criticism, but it is a necessary step to liberate the mind.

3.6 World peace

Sa‘id promotes democracy and equality as the way towards world peace. If such world society comes to exist, it will realize the will of God and the wish of the prophets. Religions imagined long ago a peaceful world society. He denies any opposition between democracy and religion in the objective they seek. The call of the prophets and God's unity are best represented by democracy, Sa‘id asserts. History evolves, making it possible to reach a world society today. Back in time, the prophets called for equality between people. Evolution takes time and humans are ready now, through democracy, to establish peace. Yet, the ideal of the prophets is practiced partially in some democratic 'islands'; world peace is still under construction.[37]

However, Sa‘id argues, prophethood differs from democracy in the tools it uses to reach the objective of peace. Democracy allows for creating societies in blood while prophets insist this should be done by persuasion and non-violence. In the end, democracy acknowledges that establishing a society of law by violence is illegitimate, but the modern cultures that sustain democracy accept violence.[38] He sees the veto right in the UN's Security Council as an example of the contradictions that exist in the international system.[39] Conversely, he believes that the prophets forbade the use of violence to create the society of law because it is impossible to create an effective peaceful society with violence; there is a contradiction between the two. That is the reason the prophets forbid self-defense. Creating society with violence makes violence a cult and strengthens the law

36 Ibid. p. 93.
37 Sa‘id, Jawdat. *al-Din wa-al-qanun : ru'ya Qur'aniyya*. Beirut, 1998, pp. 137-138.
38 It seems to me that there is here an incoherence in Sa‘id's thought. As he considers nature and history as sources of knowledge, he should acknowledge that violence is a biological and cultural human behaviour. Modernity and democracy, in line with science and history, support this.
39 Sa‘id. *al-Din*. pp. 141-142.

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of the jungle where power rules. As he puts it, ‘a different world is possible the moment you stop to change society by violence and forbid this over your self. When you do that you feel you have the right to claim forbidding violence’.[40] In other words, a peaceful world society can only be ruled by law. For law assures equality between humans.

Sa‘id claims that the establishment of the European Union made the idea of equality in the face of law and on the basis of the people (of Europe) a reference. It is not Napoleon or Hitler who united Europe, but law as he said. Moreover, there is no veto in the EU. He goes on saying that the United Nations cannot be an example of world union until it endorses one law and abolishes the veto. For him, the EU bears the promise of world union and peace.[41]

Yet, Sa‘id does not explain why religions could not unite humans in any institution to date. In reality, religion can also be a source of conflict, as one can observe today in Africa and Asia. Europe also had its religious wars until recently.

4. Limits

One of the limitations of Saʿid’s philosophy of peace is that it lacks the support of history. A historical gap exists between a supposedly early period of peace in Islam and fourteen centuries of violence. It is a fundamentalist standpoint, a characteristic of Muslim reformism, to believe that the foundational moment is guiltless while the community’s historical development was anomalous. History does not back his position on early Islam either. He refers to the Meccan period as an ideal of peace. However, the Prophet took up arms in Medina. The Medinan period was not only defensive and violence was not practiced for the sole reason of implementing the law, to defend justice or protect religious freedom. Wars against the Arab tribes and the Byzantine Empire during the life of the Prophet were aggressive wars, clearly intended to spread Islam. The Rightly guided caliphs took the action of the Prophet further and conquered large areas in Asia and Africa. This was not done peacefully. Sa‘id ignores the voluminous chapters on *jihad* in the compilations of *hadith* and the *Sira*. It is then

40 Ibid. pp. 145-146.
41 Ibid. pp. 146-147.

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a double limitation: the absence of a history of peace and the prevalence of a forceful history of violence.

Apologetic bias is another major concern with Sa‘id’s thought, a result of ignoring history, as he argues that Islam did not establish itself by sword, but ‘that Islam created the sword that never commits injustice or supersedes somebody by way of falsehood. This is the result of piety, preaching and patience. The function of the sword is to overtake the transgressor, *zalim*’.[42] This relies on a distinction he makes between Islam (as a divine message) and the realities of Muslims. Thus, the reality of Muslims today should be changed and defending the divine’s Islam should not be confused with the defense of today’s Islam. He borrows this distinction from Iqbal: a revealed Islam = the Qur’anic Islam = the true Islam vs an invented Islam = false = the non-Qur’anic established by non-Arab converts to Islam, in order to falsify it.[43] His apologetic and polemic tone is particularly at work in his comment on the assassination of Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf (a Jewish rival of Muhammad) by the commands of the Prophet. He justifies the act, claiming that Muslim society was built and independent, and when war is declared by Muslim society, such is not the time of pacifism ; assassination could be such an act of resistance, executed by guerrilla fighters who enter the camps of the enemies to sabotage them.[44]

Another serious weakness with Sa‘id’s project is its minimalist theoretical and conceptual apparatus. He acknowledges this problem and calls for a more theoretical work to deepen the ideas he defends. When we examine the philosophers he quotes or relies on, we are struck by the absence of Kant, for example. The European thinker he engages with often is A. Toynbee, on his philosophy of history. More strikingly, one notices the absence of Sufis and Muslim philosophers from his references. In general, Sa‘id pays no attention to the ethics of Mu‘tazilis, Sufis or Muslim philosophers. He is not interested in the Western philosophy of ethics either. This could explain to a certain extent his limited reputation among non Islamist thinkers.

42 Sa‘id. *La ikrah*. p. 162.
43 Ibid. p. 201.
44 Ibid. p. 174.

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Conclusion

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that Jawdat Sa‘id owes his pacifism much to philosophy, especially the philosophy of knowledge. His belief in nature, reality and history as sources of knowledge, rather than the religious texts, allows him to promote universal peace. The Qur’an is an indicator of this knowledge-in-the-world, promoting the unity of prophethood, at the heart of which lies the peaceful doctrine of the first Son of Adam.

Can science, which Sa‘id perceives as the matrix of peace, solve human conflicts? In principle, modern science has much improved the human condition, but perpetuated some old and created some new ways of violence. In addition, that human beings agree on the scientific results of astronomy does not mean that they would agree on the economy, politics or religion. Quantifiable science solves only measurable problems in specific areas of human activity.

Despite his belief in historical evolution, micro history, on the other hand, seems to weaken Sa‘id’s argument. He is in difficulty arguing for his philosophy of peace on the grounds of Islamic history, while he is eloquently at ease when it comes to arguments from reason or the Qur’an. There is, therefore, a definite need for engagement with history. The problem appears at two levels: the history of pacifist views in Islam yet to come forward and the critical approach of the sacred as violence in early Islam.

Sa‘id’s ideas have the merit of questioning the Muslim legacy in law, theology and history. A wider discussion of his ideas could be one of the ways to think about the Islamic ethics of peace.

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