

Promoting Inclusivity and Multiculturalism: The Role of Muslim Scholars in Cape Town's Community Peacebuilding

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Abstract

Religion plays a significant role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as demonstrated during the July 2021 riots in South Africa, when religious leaders actively contributed to reducing violence, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. This study investigates the responses of Cape Town Muslim clerics and imams to the crisis through their sermons, focusing on their contributions to South Africa's peacebuilding initiatives and the promotion of multiculturalism. Specifically, this study examines the Friday Nasiha (advice sermon) titled "Prayer Reflections on the Political Crisis of Our Country", delivered by Imam Rashied Omer on Friday, 30 July 2021 (19 Dhul-Hijjah 1442) at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town. Nasiha is analyzed within the framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) to evaluate its role in advancing peacebuilding efforts during the July 2021 unrest. Qualitative thematic analysis is used to explain how Islamic principles such as *zakat* (almsgiving) and *ṣadaqah* (charitable giving) address immediate socio-economic challenges and long-term structural justice. The findings underscore the role of religious leaders in times of conflict. The study concludes that Islamic teachings, when effectively applied in crisis situations, can significantly enhance peacebuilding efforts and support structural reforms in diverse societies.

Keywords

Community Peacebuilding; Muslim Scholars; *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah*; Political Crisis; Multiculturalism; South Africa

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1. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is profoundly embedded in Islamic history, theology, and society. The early Islamic society of the 7th century was inherently multicultural, as early Muslims originated from diverse tribes, regions, nations, and ethnicities. Islamic civilisation emerged in the Arabian Peninsula and later expanded across vast territories spanning Africa, Europe, and Asia. This expansion exemplifies Islam's capacity to embrace, coexist with, and integrate multiple ethnicities, languages, and religions (Robinson, 2016). Islamic theology places significant emphasis on the value of multiculturalism. The Noble Quran highlights the unity of humanity and the importance of diversity, mutual understanding, and respect



for various cultures. For instance, Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) states that humanity was created in diverse nations and tribes to foster mutual acquaintance and understanding. Furthermore, Islam advocates for respect towards the "People of the Book," namely Jews and Christians, promoting coexistence and interfaith dialogue. Historical accounts demonstrate that Jews and Christians lived harmoniously alongside Muslims and continue to do so in many regions today (Griffith, 2007).

Muslim communities worldwide contribute to vibrant multicultural societies by bringing their religious and cultural practices to new contexts. These communities often prioritise interfaith dialogue and cooperation (Sachedina, 2009). However, Muslim populations, particularly in non-Muslim-majority countries, frequently face challenges in preserving their cultural identity and harmonising religious practices with local customs. These challenges underscore the importance of addressing stereotypes and misconceptions (Van Gorder, 2014).

This study defines multiculturalism as the coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups within a single society, necessitating inclusive strategies to promote social harmony and cohesion. Examining multiculturalism and peacebuilding requires exploring how these principles extend beyond Islamic contexts. For example, in parts of Africa, indigenous traditions emphasise social cohesion and human dignity (Murithi, 2006). African peacebuilding initiatives often foster solidarity through combating corruption, implementing power-sharing mechanisms, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and promoting education (Murithi, 2006).

The South African peacebuilding sector comprises diverse non-governmental organisations, ranging from small grassroots initiatives to large-scale national movements. Many of these organisations are expanding their efforts across Africa (SaferSpaces, 2006). Peacebuilding, in essence, can be defined as establishing enduring peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, advancing social justice, and developing systems that support societal stability and resilience.

Religious leaders and institutions play an indispensable role in peacebuilding, particularly in regions characterised by weak governance. Religious actors wield considerable influence at various levels of society, as religious practices continue to be central to the lives of many individuals in conflict-affected areas (Prieto Pérez, 2023).

Religious actors have functioned as facilitators and obstacles in their community engagement with peacebuilding efforts (Kloster, 2022). In South Africa, where over 80% of the population adheres to Christianity, religious leaders assumed diverse roles during the nation's struggle for liberation and subsequent transitional periods (Esack, 2002; Punt & Peace, 1999). Faith-based communities underscored the significance of religion in fostering a healing presence at the communal level. Within this framework, the current study investigates the role of Islamic scholars in addressing the socio-political instability that has impacted South Africa. This research explores the effects of the July 2021

unrest, which occurred from July 9 to 18, following the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court. These riots exposed South Africa's entrenched socio-economic issues, including acute economic inequality, high unemployment, and persistent racial tensions, all of which contributed to the widespread unrest (Murithi, 2006).

Centered in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, the unrest led to widespread looting, arson, and violence, resulting in 354 deaths and 5,500 arrests, and highlighted issues such as economic inequality, unemployment, and exacerbated racial tensions.

During this unrest, disruptions occurred in logistics, food distribution, fuel availability, and medical supplies, significantly affecting the nation's economy and security. The government has deployed military forces and is considering the implementation of a basic income grant to support impoverished communities in addressing the situation.

The South African Property Owners Association (SAPOA) estimated that the unrest caused economic losses exceeding R20 billion. At the same time, Acting Minister in the Presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, cited SAPOA's assessment, suggesting the total losses could surpass R50 billion. Specifically, the economic impact in KwaZulu-Natal was assessed at R20 billion (\$1.4 billion), with substantial damage reported to 161 shopping malls, 11 warehouses, and eight businesses. Approximately 40,000 firms and 50,000 merchants were affected, incurring stock losses of R1.5 billion and placing an estimated 150,000 jobs at risk (Phungula, 2024).

This study examines the role of religion in fostering peacebuilding and multiculturalism in South Africa, particularly in addressing and mitigating the violence and trauma associated with the events of July 2021. It focuses on the contributions of Capetonian Muslim scholars in promoting justice, social cohesion, and conflict resolution during the crisis. The analysis is grounded in the framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, which represents the higher objectives of Islamic law. This framework prioritises safeguarding fundamental values such as life, intellect, property, family, and faith (Auda, 2008). By emphasising justice, compassion, and social welfare, *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* offers an ethical approach to addressing South Africa's socio-political challenges through religious peacebuilding. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did Muslim scholars respond to the violence of July 2021?
2. What role does *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* play in strategic community peacebuilding?
3. Why is religion significant in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in South Africa?
4. How does the discourse of Muslim scholars contribute to promoting multiculturalism in South Africa?

Utilising a qualitative methodology, the study employs a thematic analysis of sermon content to explore peacebuilding principles and Muslim scholars' role in fostering social cohesion. Historically,

religion has played a pivotal role in South Africa's multicultural society, often addressing racial and social divides, particularly during apartheid and the country's subsequent transformation. In this context, Islam and the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* have advanced justice, compassion, and community welfare, positioning Cape Town as an exemplary case study due to its diverse population and history of interfaith collaboration.

Extant literature highlights the interplay between religion and peacebuilding. For example, Clark (2011) underscores the evolving role of South African churches, contrasting their complicity during apartheid with their current focus on empowering communities, developing anti-violence strategies, and addressing systemic injustice. Similarly, Onsati (2014) investigates the contributions of Christian and Islamic organisations, particularly women, in reconciliation and trauma healing in Kenya, advocating for enhanced global support. Chepkorir (2019), drawing on Montville's (1998) and Burton's (1990) theories, explores religious peacebuilding strategies in Kenya, including mediation and problem-solving workshops. A critical insight from these studies is that while religious efforts are compelling, persistent ethnic conflicts underline the necessity for continued engagement. This analysis highlights the unique contributions of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* to peacebuilding and underscores the potential of religion in fostering justice, social cohesion, and multicultural harmony in South Africa.

Steen-Johnsen (2020) examines how religious leaders engaged in peacebuilding efforts often invoke love as a religious ideal to encourage peaceful coexistence among conflicting groups. The study posits that such appeals to love can foster social capital—defined as the building of social relationships among adversarial parties. However, it argues that relying solely on love as a peacebuilding tool offers limited effectiveness, as it fails to address issues of justice, which are critical in violent disputes. An analysis of a religious peacebuilding initiative in Ethiopia highlights how leaders inspired love but overlooked the justice dimension, yielding insufficient contribution to sustained peace.

In an Asian context, Syarif and Herlambang (2023) explore peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict West Kalimantan, Indonesia, focusing on Muslim communities affected by ethnic violence in 1999. Their study underscores the critical role of religious leaders, whose charismatic authority significantly influences followers' adherence and mediation in ethnic conflicts.

The role of religion, particularly Islam, in fostering peace and multiculturalism has been widely explored. Abdurrahman (2017) investigates the evolution of multiculturalism in Islamic civilisation during the classical era, revealing how Islam respected and integrated diverse cultural practices under Umayyad and Abbasid rule. Islamic governance actively promoted cultural pluralism by accommodating and incorporating different traditions. Similarly, Tohirin (2022) analyses multiculturalism in foundational Islamic texts, emphasising the Quran and Sunnah's advocacy for human dignity, equality, and societal harmony. These texts affirm recognising and valuing cultural,

religious, and ethnic diversity, fostering inclusive societies.

Conversely, Muslims often face challenges under non-Islamic governance. Mondal (2008) examines multiculturalism in Britain, critiquing the narrative that blames multicultural policies for social division. The study contends this view oversimplifies complex issues, overlooking systemic factors such as racism, economic disparity, and political neglect.

This study distinguishes itself from prior research by focusing specifically on the role of Muslim scholars within the unique socio-political landscape of South Africa during the July 2021 unrest. While existing literature has examined the general influence of religious leaders on peacebuilding across diverse regions and faiths, this research employs an interdisciplinary framework. It integrates the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law) with strategic peacebuilding methodologies.

The term *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* refers to the overarching purposes or goals of Islamic law. These objectives aim to ensure the well-being of society by regulating various aspects of life, as articulated by scholars like Auda (2008). They encompass principles designed to uphold communal welfare and safeguard human interests on earth (Kamali 2008). Notably, jurists, including Al-Ghazali and Al-Shaṭībī, have explored the concept extensively. Al-Ghazali is credited with the original formulation, while Al-Shaṭībī advanced the idea into a distinct theory, particularly in his seminal work *Al-Muwāfaqat Fi Usul al-Sharī'ah* (Al-Shatibi 2004). Other scholars, such as Al-Juwayni, Al-'Izz Ibn Abd Al-Salam, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Al-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, have also contributed to this discourse (Ghafari 1992).

The framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* emerges from a comprehensive analysis of Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and Hadith (Al-Zarqa 1995; Kamali 2017). It underscores the primary objective of Islamic law: to promote welfare and mitigate harm. Al-Ghazali identified five essential foundations—preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth—as core components of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. Actions safeguarding these elements align with Islamic objectives, whereas those undermining them constitute *mafsadah* (harm), necessitating intervention. The categories of *wajib* (obligatory), *mandub* (recommended), *mubah* (permissible), *makruh* (discouraged), and *haram* (prohibited) serve as mechanisms through which Sharī'ah seeks to balance societal welfare and prevent corruption (Kamali 1989).

Traditional interpretations further categorise *maqāṣid* into three hierarchical levels: *ḍarūrāt* (necessities), *hājiyāt* (needs), and *taḥsīniyyāt* (luxuries) (Al-Zarqa 1995; Kamali 1989). These classifications reflect the prioritisation of objectives in Islamic law, aligning with its overarching mission to enhance human well-being. This conceptual framework underpins the study's exploration of peacebuilding strategies, providing a nuanced understanding of the interaction between Islamic jurisprudence and socio-political challenges. The following reflects the hierarchy of the purposes of the

Islamic law.

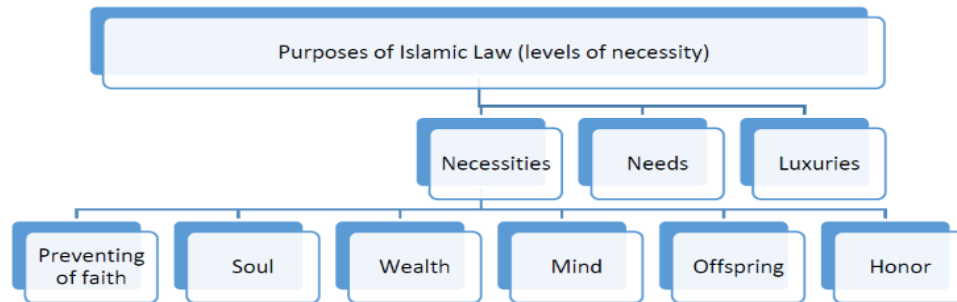


Figure 1: *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* Hierarchy (Auda, 2008)

According to Auda (2008), neglecting *ḍarūrāt* (necessities) and *ḥajīyyāt* (needs) does not lead to a complete breakdown or chaos in daily life but instead imposes significant hardships. Conversely, *taḥsīniyyāt* (luxuries) refer to activities and items that enhance the quality of life and contribute to achieving desirable aspects. Examples include jewellery, harmless hobbies, courteous behaviour and speech, adherence to Islamic etiquette on cleanliness, and practising moderation while avoiding extravagance.

One of the core objectives of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* is *ḥifẓ al-naḥs* (the preservation of life), which aligns closely with peacebuilding initiatives. This objective underscores the sanctity and protection of human life by advocating for actions and policies that promote safety, security, and the well-being of individuals and communities. Through the promotion of justice, harm prevention, and fostering societal harmony, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* supports efforts to cultivate and sustain peaceful societies.

The community peacebuilding approach, grounded in sociology, addresses conflict's multifaceted social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. Its goal is to promote peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development by preventing, responding to, and transforming violent conflict while advancing justice and structural reform. As Lederach and Mansfield (2016) elaborated, strategic peacebuilding emphasises human rights, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

This study identifies three critical domains of peacebuilding: violence prevention, justice promotion and healing, and institutional transformation. The integration of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Islamic legal objectives) with community peacebuilding reveals critical synergies, particularly in advancing justice, equity, and social cohesion. Islamic principles advocate for conflict resolution through peaceful dialogue and mediation, prioritising human dignity and well-being. By aligning *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* with community peacebuilding methodologies, this study demonstrates how these principles can address the unique challenges of the South African crisis and contribute to sustainable peace.

2. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, employing an in-depth content analysis of a sermon delivered by Imam Dr. Rashied Omer. Specifically, the study utilises thematic analysis to investigate the contributions of Muslim scholars to peacebuilding within the South African context, with a focus on the violence and looting that occurred in July 2021. The analysis centres on Imam Omer's khutbah, titled *"Prayerful Reflections on our Country's Political Crisis,"* delivered on 30 July 2021 at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town.

This sermon was selected due to its pertinent exploration of the political crisis, providing valuable insights into the role of Muslim scholarship in addressing socio-political upheaval. Imam Rashied Omer, a prominent figure in South African and international academic and religious circles, serves as the imam of the Claremont Main Road Mosque and is a recognised scholar of Islamic studies and peacebuilding affiliated with the University of Notre Dame. His reflections in this khutbah emphasise principles such as the sanctity of human life, governmental accountability, and communal solidarity. These perspectives offer a nuanced critique of religion's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, positioning the sermon as an essential case study.

Data collection involved accessing publicly available transcripts and audio recordings of the sermon. This approach ensured a comprehensive and accurate analysis of its content, preserving both the context and delivery of the khutbah, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify underlying themes, messages, and strategies related to peacebuilding, Islamic principles, and the socio-political crisis addressed in the sermon. This process entailed a meticulous line-by-line review of the sermon content, with significant phrases and concepts systematically coded to reveal patterns aligned with *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law) and peacebuilding paradigms. A word cloud, presented in Figure 2, illustrates the frequency and prominence of key terms within the sermon, visually representing its thematic elements.



Figure 2. Word-cloud of the sermon

The visualisation facilitated the identification of specific codes within the dataset. These codes were subsequently categorised into overarching themes, such as justice, compassion, and structural reform, reflecting the core principles Imam Omer emphasised in the crisis context. To ensure the validity of the findings, cross-researcher verification was conducted, involving independent reviews by multiple researchers to confirm consistency and accuracy in the interpretation of codes and themes.

The selection of qualitative thematic analysis as the primary methodological approach is justified by its suitability for interpreting religious texts and examining their broader societal implications. Sermons, particularly those delivered during crises, are tailored to address spiritual and socio-political concerns, making them rich sources for understanding how religious leaders apply Islamic teachings to foster justice and social cohesion. This method enables the study to illustrate how the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* align with peacebuilding strategies, addressing both immediate societal challenges and longer-term objectives of structural justice within South Africa's multicultural context (Rosengren, 1981).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Response of Muslim Scholars to Violence in July 2021

This section explores peacebuilding through an analysis of Imam Omer's *khuṭbah* (Mondal, 2008) within the framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and strategic peacebuilding approaches. Departing from the conventional practice of addressing complex moral dilemmas primarily through consequentialist and factual perspectives, the author integrates religious ethics as a central component. Imam Omer

offers insights into the role of religion, particularly Islam, in responding to the significant events of July 2021.

He refrains from reiterating the numerous analyses by commentators on the root causes of violence and looting, instead contributing a distinctive perspective to the discourse. By focusing on the overarching objectives of *Shari'ah* (*maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*), which emphasise the preservation of faith, life, wealth, intellect, and lineage, the author underscores religion's ethical framework for community regeneration and social aid. As noted by Samodien and Al-Sowaidi (2022), neglecting these principles can lead to disorder and adverse consequences.

3.2. The Preservation of Wealth and Property

From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, Imam Omer addresses the principle of *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of wealth and property) in his sermon. He laments the significant economic loss—estimated at approximately 50 billion Rands—resulting from infrastructure damage and the looting of businesses. Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) unequivocally prohibits the destruction of wealth, emphasising its preservation as an embodiment of divine grace. Wealth must be safeguarded from wasteful acts, including arson, theft, deception, and treason. Furthermore, it discourages extravagance and financial waste.

The Qur'anic injunction supports this principle: "And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers so that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful]" (Q2:188). Another verse states: "And give to the orphans their properties and do not substitute the defective [of your own] for the good [of theirs]. And do not consume their properties into your own. Indeed, that is ever a great sin" (Q4:2). This discourse situates *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* as a critical framework for understanding the ethical imperatives of Islam in promoting community welfare and mitigating societal disruptions.

These verses provide unequivocal evidence that **Shari'ah** strictly prohibits unjust destruction or damage to wealth and property. Consequently, the imam invoked the principle of **ḥifẓ al-māl** (protection of property) to address the severe economic repercussions caused by widespread looting. He urged South African citizens to hold President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration accountable, advocating for the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for incitement.

The principle of **ḥifẓ al-māl** also emphasises the equitable distribution of wealth. Allah, in the Holy Qur'an, states: "Wealth should not merely circulate or be concentrated among the wealthy or rich among you" (Q59:7). By promoting equitable opportunities, **Shari'ah** seeks to narrow the disparity between the affluent and the impoverished. It mandates that individuals who accumulate a certain level of wealth share it with those in need, including people experiencing poverty, promising abundant rewards for this act of generosity.

In this context, the imam underscored **zakāh** as a pivotal tool for addressing poverty. Zakāh involves the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor and can potentially drive socio-economic transformation. Collecting and administering effectively ensures a more just distribution of national wealth, alleviates poverty and addresses the root causes of social unrest. Imam Omer further applied the principle of **maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah**, precisely its poverty-eradication objectives, to advocate for sustainable solutions to the persistent inequality and deprivation that fuelled the July 2021 unrest. He called on the government to confront these systemic issues, often pushing vulnerable populations toward anarchy.

3.3. Preservation of the Life

Ḥifẓ an-nafs, or the protection of human life, represents a foundational value in Islamic ethics, as evidenced by numerous Qur’anic verses and Prophetic teachings. Islam has instituted comprehensive regulations to safeguard life, including the provision of essential needs such as food, shelter, water, and clothing, while discouraging behaviours that lead to self-harm or neglect. This principle underscores the sanctity of life and its precedence over all other considerations. Imam Omer expressed profound sorrow over the tragic loss of 337 lives during the recent violence, calling upon South Africans to hold President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration accountable. He further emphasised the duty of authorities to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of these innocent individuals.

The imam reiterated that *ḥifẓ an-nafs* should be prioritised above all else, as affirmed by the Qur’an, which emphasises the sanctity of human life. Allah Most High declares: *“Whoever kills a human being unjustly, it is as though they have killed all of humankind, and whoever saves a life, it is as though they have saved all of humankind”* (Q5:32). Similarly, Allah states: *“It is not permissible for a believer to kill another believer except by mistake. If a believer is killed unintentionally, the perpetrator must emancipate a believing enslaved person and provide blood money to the victim’s family unless they forgo this right. If the victim belonged to a hostile group yet was a believer, the penance was to free a believing enslaved person. If the victim was part of a covenant-bound community, blood money must be paid along with the freeing of an enslaved person. For those unable to do so, fasting for two consecutive months serves as penance. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise”* (Q4:92).

Imam Omer highlighted the ethical-moral imperative articulated in these verses: the sanctity and preservation of life (*ḥifẓ an-nafs*) supersedes all other considerations in Islam. According to a Prophetic saying (*ḥadith*), a single human life's value exceeds even the Ka’bah's sanctity (Al-Qazwini 1436). The imam further emphasised the role of zakāh (obligatory charity) and ṣadaqah (voluntary almsgiving) in preserving life. He noted that charitable initiatives during the unrest, such as food distributions by organisations like Gift of the Givers, alleviated food scarcity caused by vandalised shops and supply chain disruptions. These efforts not only addressed immediate hunger but also mitigated racial tensions

that might have otherwise escalated into further violence and loss of life.

3.4. The Preservation of Religion

Religion encompasses the beliefs, rituals, and ethical guidelines established by Allah, the Almighty, to regulate human interactions with their Creator and one another. Numerous Qur'anic verses encourage faith, advocate for its protection, and underscore the importance of *ḥifẓ ad-dīn* (the preservation of religion). One such verse states: "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion - never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers" (Qur'an 3:85).

On an individual level, the preservation of religion is the responsibility of every Muslim, who must safeguard their faith against negative influences that might lead to confusion or spiritual weakness. At the collective level, religion is protected through efforts to counter any threats to Islam and its core practices, such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*), almsgiving (*zakāh*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*), as these rituals are fundamental to the sustenance of faith.

Imam Omer underscored the significance of this principle, known as *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, by emphasising the importance of *zakāh* and encouraging believers to uphold this critical pillar of Islam actively. He argued that those who fulfil their obligations of *zakāh* contribute directly to preserving religion. James (2021) also highlighted the role of Islamic organisations, such as the Gift of the Givers, in supporting individuals and communities. Religious organisations are encouraged to follow the model set by the Gift of the Givers by establishing structured and strategic responses to communal needs through *ṣadaqah* and *zakāh*, which uphold the dignity of the most vulnerable members of society.

3.5. Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Imams and scholars play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing the underlying causes of conflict, as well as in facilitating the peaceful resolution of disputes and establishing frameworks to prevent future violence. In his khutbah, *Prayerful Reflections on Our Country's Political Crisis* (Omer, 2021), Imam Omer discusses three essential dimensions of strategic peacebuilding. His sermon is focused on preventing violence, particularly in the context of the July 2021 conflict, responding effectively to it, transforming violent conflict, and fostering justice, healing, and systemic institutional reforms. Through their contributions, Imam Omer and other Muslim scholars emphasise the long-term strategic significance of peacebuilding at all societal levels, aiming to foster locally and globally sustainable partnerships.

3.6. Preventing Violent Conflict through Immediate Response

In his khutbah, Imam Omer offers several recommendations, one of which underscores the importance of preventing violent conflict through enhanced community engagement, open dialogue, and strengthened social cohesion. He advocates for inclusive and transparent discussions to address

disputes and promote communication among diverse societal groups. This engagement, coupled with unity and tolerance, enables South African Muslims to cultivate a sense of belonging and address the socio-economic inequities that often underlie violence and discord. Imam Omer emphasises,

We, as conscientious Muslims and responsible South African citizens, should be responding to the harrowing and traumatic events that occurred during July 2021, as a response to the tragic loss of human lives and the immense damage to the country's economy resulting from violence and looting," (Omer, 2021: p.3).

He further highlights the *"supremacy and sacredness of human life"* (Omer, 2021). In this context, Imam Omer calls upon South African charitable and service organisations to take proactive steps to alleviate the suffering and hardship experienced by community members.

3.7. Transforming Violent Conflict

Imam Omer addressed the root causes of violence, such as inequality, "deep-seated poverty", and "socio-economic inequities" that fuel tensions and contribute to violence. He added that there is a need to deepen Muslims' understanding and praxis "zakāh (obligatory alms) and ṣadaqah (voluntary charity)" and transform the existing culture of covetousness, self-entitlement and greed, to that of selflessness, altruism, and compassion" (Omer, 2021: p.5).

He holds those in positions of authority accountable for the deaths of 337 individuals who tragically lost their lives. Imam Omer's approach to inclusive governance, citizen engagement, accountability, and addressing poverty and inequality reflects his vision of fostering trust, social cohesion, and reducing violence within communities. By championing inclusive governance, he aims to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making processes, cultivating a sense of ownership and empowerment among citizens.

Imam Omer's emphasis on accountability for human rights violations and his support for transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, highlight his commitment to acknowledging historical injustices, promoting healing, and achieving reconciliation. By holding individuals accountable for their actions, these mechanisms contribute to restoring justice and serve as a deterrent against future violations.

Additionally, Imam Omer underscores the critical importance of addressing systemic poverty and inequality in building a peaceful and prosperous society. By tackling the root causes of social unrest—such as economic disparity and lack of access to resources—he seeks to alleviate grievances that may lead to violence. This approach prioritises equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, fostering a more just society where individuals are invested in its progress. By integrating inclusive governance, citizen engagement, accountability, poverty reduction, and transitional justice

mechanisms, Imam Omer envisions a society founded on trust, strengthened social cohesion, and a significant decrease in violence. His focus on truth, accountability, and inclusive justice underscores his dedication to building a society that prioritises the rights and well-being of all individuals (Syarif and Herlambang, 2023).

3.8. Promoting Justice and Healing

Imam Omer also expressed gratitude for the compassionate efforts of South African citizens and relief organisations, such as Gift of the Givers, for their invaluable support to affected communities during the traumatic events of July 2021. He recognised their role in alleviating the suffering and hardship faced by the most affected individuals (Imam Omer, 2021).

In alignment with victim-centred approaches to addressing trauma, Imam Omer advocated for the transformation of counselling and legal aid services to more fully incorporate the broader ethical and moral teachings of Islam (Imam Omer, 2021). By embedding these principles, these support services can adopt a more holistic and compassionate approach, better addressing the multifaceted needs of those impacted by traumatic experiences.

To foster reconciliation and healing, Imam Omer underscored the critical role of facilitating dialogue and reconciliation processes at the grassroots level. This entails establishing secure and inclusive spaces where affected individuals and communities can convene, share their experiences, and collaboratively strive toward forgiveness and mutual understanding. Furthermore, he emphasised the pivotal role of *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah* in cultivating acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion, essential for healing and rebuilding trust within fragmented communities. Imam Omer also commended the exemplary philanthropic efforts of *Gift of the Givers*, an organisation dedicated to providing sustenance and support to those in need.

He highlighted their altruistic approach, driven by a selfless commitment to act solely for the sake of God, as articulated in the Quranic chapter *al-Insān*. This spirit of giving, devoid of personal gain or recognition, is a model for transformative charity. Imam Omer further acknowledged the necessity of addressing the suffering of affected communities through victim-centred approaches. He advocated for initiatives prioritising reconciliation and healing, grounded in Islamic principles and teachings. His emphasis on the transformative potential of community dialogue and charitable acts reflects his dedication to fostering a compassionate and inclusive society that prioritises forgiveness, restoration, and trust-building among individuals and groups.

3.9. Promoting Structural and Institutional Change

Promoting structural and institutional change requires addressing systemic discriminatory policies, practices, and institutions that perpetuate violence and inequality. Central to this effort is

developing inclusive communities that actively support and value marginalised individuals. Imam Omer (2021) argued that impactful change can be achieved by combining monetary contributions with meaningful personal engagement, such as spending quality time with disadvantaged communities. This holistic approach enhances the quality of life for poor South African citizens and underscores the transformative power of solidarity and compassion.

Engaging in humanitarian and solidarity efforts not only provides immediate assistance but also has the potential to bridge racial and class divides within any fractured society. By physically being present and offering support, Muslims send a powerful message to recipients that their lives matter and that we genuinely care about their well-being.

The debates following the July 2021 violence and looting in South Africa underscored a harsh reality for many Muslim businesspeople. Despite their substantial acts of philanthropy and charity, they faced profound loss and frustration as the communities they had supported turned against them during the unrest. Nevertheless, Muslims are encouraged not to let such experiences deter them from pursuing righteousness. Instead, these challenges should inspire a proactive approach to addressing the intricacies and obstacles of fostering inclusive and equitable societies.

3.10. Islamic Peacebuilding and Multiculturalism in South Africa

Multiculturalism and peacebuilding are integral to cultivating harmony by acknowledging cultural diversity and fostering reconciliation. The sermon explores Islamic peacebuilding principles, emphasising collaboration, mutual respect, and understanding among diverse communities. It underscores the sanctity of life, asserting the equal value of all individuals regardless of background, and advocates for justice and accountability to address harm caused to communities.

The sermon further promotes empathy, compassion, and collective action during crises, as demonstrated by community clean-up initiatives that strengthen social bonds. It advocates for sincere and transparent dialogue to tackle the root causes of social tensions and foster collaboration across cultural divides.

This study illuminates the vital role of Muslim scholars in peacebuilding during the July 2021 unrest in South Africa, contributing to the broader discourse on religious peacebuilding and multiculturalism. Specifically, it highlights how Capetonian Muslim scholars employed the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* to guide their communities through a period of significant social upheaval. These efforts align with South Africa's larger strategic peacebuilding objectives and resonate with prior studies, such as those by Clark (2011) and Onsati (2014), which demonstrate the pivotal role of religious leaders in conflict mitigation and social cohesion in diverse and politically fragile contexts.

The study also underscores the effectiveness of religious peacebuilding strategies, including

dialogue and mediation, in resolving conflicts, consistent with findings by Chepkorir (2019). Imam Omer's approach, emphasising dialogue, justice, and the sanctity of life, aligns with strategies discussed in Steen-Johnsen (2020). Unlike Steen-Johnsen, who noted a potential overemphasis on ideals such as love at the expense of justice, Imam Omer integrates justice as a foundational element, holding the government accountable for violence and advocating for economic equity.

While the study highlights positive contributions, it also acknowledges potential challenges. Resistance may arise from other religious or cultural groups questioning the relevance of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in South Africa's multicultural context. Additionally, divergent interpretations within the Muslim community could limit the uniform application of these principles, as varying schools of thought and individual beliefs may lead to different approaches to peacebuilding.

In a related context, Imam Omer's application of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in his sermon during the July 2021 unrest illustrates the critical importance of effectively utilising Islamic principles to address contemporary crises. Islamic teachings provide a framework that is both theologically robust and socially pertinent. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Hinkel and Traore (2020), Shihan, Zaroum, and Amanullah (2021), Suprpto (2015), Syarif and Herlambang (2023), and Umubyeyi, Mtapuri, and Naidu (2020), who emphasised the pivotal role of religious leaders in conflict resolution and post-conflict settings.

By emphasising the role of Islamic teachings in advancing social justice, economic fairness, and the sanctity of life, this study highlights how these principles can foster multicultural cohesion in diverse societies such as South Africa. These findings correspond with prior studies that have explored the discourse on multiculturalism within Islamic contexts, including works by Abdurrahman (2017), Akbarzadeh and Roose (2011), Clarke (2006), Modood and Ahmad (2007), and Tohirin (2022). Consequently, this research not only corroborates existing scholarship on the role of religion in peacebuilding, inclusivity, and multiculturalism but also offers fresh insights into the strategic application of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in addressing modern social challenges. The findings further suggest that religious leaders, drawing on profound theological principles and actively engaging with their communities, can serve as pivotal agents in promoting peace, justice, and multicultural harmony across conflict and peacetime settings.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges significant challenges in implementing the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* effectively within South Africa's complex cultural and socio-political milieu. A primary challenge is the country's cultural heterogeneity, characterised by the coexistence of diverse religious and cultural traditions, which sometimes may conflict. This plurality could constrain Islamic peacebuilding principles' broader acceptance and applicability, particularly in contexts where secular ideologies or differing faith traditions predominate.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examines the role of Muslim scholars in promoting community peacebuilding in South Africa, employing the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* as an analytical framework. By exploring the perspectives of religious leaders during the July 2021 unrest, the research addresses a significant gap in the literature, offering an analysis of how Islamic principles contribute directly to peacebuilding in multicultural and conflict-prone societies. The findings reveal that *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, with its emphasis on justice, compassion, and social welfare, aligns seamlessly with strategic peacebuilding approaches aimed at fostering social cohesion and addressing systemic injustices. Notably, the study highlights the pivotal role of Muslim imams and scholars, whose moral authority, rooted in justice and social welfare, is reinforced by their integration within trusted grassroots institutions. This enabled them to effectively address community needs during the crisis, delivering immediate relief and fostering long-term social harmony.

The study's implications extend beyond the South African context, suggesting that applying the principles of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* can provide valuable insights for peacebuilding in other multicultural and conflict-affected societies. This framework, grounded in Islamic ethics, promotes human dignity, justice, and community solidarity, offering potential solutions for addressing social tensions and cultural divides globally. By presenting an innovative perspective on faith-based peacebuilding, the study provides practical strategies that emphasise inclusivity and mutual respect. Furthermore, it underscores the adaptability of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* principles, enriching the global discourse on religious frameworks for conflict resolution and social cohesion.

Despite its significant contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. A primary challenge lies in the subjective nature of sermon analysis, as interpretations may vary depending on researchers' perspectives. Additionally, limitations in data availability, particularly regarding detailed community responses to Imam Omer's sermons, posed challenges. The qualitative design of this research further restricts generalizability, as the findings are closely tied to the specific cultural and socio-political context of South Africa. Future research employing broader quantitative methodologies could complement these findings, offering more profound insights into the reception of Islamic peacebuilding principles across diverse demographic groups.

To advance the application of Islamic peacebuilding principles in South Africa, the study recommends the development of educational initiatives integrating *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* principles—such as respect, justice, and compassion—into school curricula and community workshops to foster mutual understanding and tolerance. Community-driven initiatives, such as collaborative projects like community gardens and neighbourhood clean-ups, are proposed as mechanisms for building trust and

unity among diverse populations. Additionally, interfaith dialogues are essential for dispelling stereotypes and cultivating mutual respect. Addressing socioeconomic inequalities through targeted support for marginalised communities—via economic empowerment programs, improved education, and healthcare access—can further reduce tensions and foster inclusivity.

These recommendations provide a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing social cohesion, mutual respect, and harmony within South Africa's multicultural society and beyond. By positioning Islamic peacebuilding frameworks as a valuable resource for local and global contexts, the study underscores their potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainable peace and social justice efforts.

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