



Deontological Islamic Pacifism: 'Abdallāh Bin Bayyah on Jurisprudence of Peace, Sufism and Covenants

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Abstract

'Abdallāh Bin Bayya (born in 1935) is probably the most significant voice of Islamic pacifism in the Middle East today. His deontological pacifism (maintaining peace is both a duty and a right), which emphasizes ethics of Islamic law, a commitment to state authority in matters of war and peace, and a critical attitude toward Islamist violence, was overlooked in academic research. In the context of the Arab Spring, some critics contended that his pacifism is a legalization of the authoritarian state in the Middle East. We challenge this claim here and argue that Bin Bayya, prior to the Arab Spring, considered safety, peace, and order as higher objectives of Islamic law. In particular, his earlier work on Sufism, jurisprudence of peace, covenantal concepts of *'ahd* and *mithāq*, and safety provides the foundation for his pacifism. In terms of method, we conduct a textual study of Bin Bayya's written works, published between 1996 and 2014, paying particular attention to his pacifist arguments and critique of Islamist violence. We conclude that Bin Bayya's pacifism is based on the idea that the ultimate measure of law and ethics is the benefit of mankind as individuals and society, a principle that takes precedence over any political system or ideology.

Keywords: *Pacifism, Peace, Islamic Law, 'Abdallāh Bin Bayyah, Covenants*

INTRODUCTION

Political violence undermines various Muslim nation-states and societies, costing Muslims many lives and decades of development and stability. Some movements commit violence in the name of Islam, while International and regional geopolitical actors use various militias and movements to incite and advocate for violence in the Middle East. To counter these violent groups and discredit Islamist violence, Muslim states, movements, and intellectuals have been exerting efforts to promote a Muslim discourse on peace, taking initiatives both at the religious and political levels.

Discourses of anti-violence are relevant to social peace (between individuals and groups) as well as to the existence of state, law, and order; the illegitimate use of violence outside the institutions of the state and law destroys the foundations of any nation-state and society. Rather than being an idealistic or utopian project carried by a small number of intellectuals, Islamic pacifism emerged as a response to colonial or Islamist violence. Thus, Islamic pacifism opposes violence and, at the same time, appeals to moderation and change of realities created by excessive violence.

Although Islamic pacifist movements and intellectuals have been active in the Islamic world since the first half of the 20th century, facing colonial violence, scholarly attention to Islamic pacifism has only recently started, especially in the post-9/11 environment. A growing body of literature has grounded pacifism in Islamic ethics (Abu-Nimer, 2003; Huda, 2010; Halverson, 2012; Shadi, 2017; Afsaruddin, 2020; Cole, 2021; Lohlker, 2022; Mokrani, 2022; Dragovic, 2023; Overbeck, 2024; Pizzi, 2024; Moussa, 2024; Abdulaev, 2024; Woerner-Powell, 2025).



Pacifism as mutual acknowledgment, reconciliation, and conflict resolution can also be observed in the growing body of work on covenants in Islam. Morrow argues that, in contrast to the practices of subsequent Muslim empires, the Prophet's covenants with Christians portray Islam as a religion of peace that aims to promote social, political, and spiritual harmony and is always receptive to dialogue (Morrow, 2013, p. 371).

Zein and El-Wakil demonstrate instances of peaceful coexistence in the Prophet's covenants with the Monks of Mount Sinai, the Christians of Najrān, the Samaritans, the Jews, and the Magi (Zein & El-Wakil, 2022). Rane maintains that the Qur'ān and Sunnah's covenants established human security and peaceful coexistence as the normative basis of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

As for the use of military force, it is allowed in self-defense in reaction to armed aggression and treaty violations that endanger peace and security, even though Islamic covenants uphold the concept of nonviolence (Rane, 2024). More recently, Rane and Zein reclaimed the importance of covenant (*'ahd* and *mīthāq*) in Islam and its necessity for maintaining justice, fostering trust, assuring accountability, and preserving peace and security, highlighting that covenants are not incidental but rather fundamental to Islam's theological and ethical framework as they influenced Muslim awareness, diplomacy, and interreligious relations (Rane & Zein, 2025).

The majority of studies, however, focus on the ideas and trajectories of few pacifists, namely Abdul Ghaffar Khan (d. 1988) in India-Pakistan, Wahiduddin Khan (d. 2021) in India and Jawdat Sa'īd (d. 2022) in Syria, leaving aside many other Muslim pacifists whose writings and initiatives have not yet been examined such as the work of the Mauritanian scholar 'Abdallāh Bin Bayya (born in 1935). Muslim Pacifists have unique intellectual paths to pacifism. This variable influences the arguments they make to win over Muslims and the solutions they support. Here, it is argued that 'Abdallāh Bin Bayya evolved towards pacifism via the legal gate.

While in the 1970s and 1980s, his efforts were turned to address Muslims' contemporary issues through the instruments of Islamic law, its higher objectives, adopting a balanced approach between texts, ethics, and practical applications, in the late 1990s, and especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (2011), he adopted pacifism as an Islamic approach to religion, society, and politics. In this latest phase, Bin Bayya envisaged the goals of sharia and other national and international legal sources as aiming, above all, to promote and uphold peace, safety, and tolerance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has mostly ignored Bin Bayya until the recent decade, when he took a critical stance on the Arab uprisings. Usaama al-Azami has addressed Bin Bayya's critical position towards the consequences of the revolutions, the context of this stance, and his relationship with Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī (al-Azami, 2019). Yomna Helmy has argued that Bin Bayyah used a *maqāṣid*-oriented approach to satisfy utilitarian-political objectives, shifting the theory's objective from effectively reforming legal theory and adopting an ethics-oriented basis to result-oriented, utilitarian reasoning and support for authoritarianism (Helmy, 2021).

David H. Warren studies the connection between al-Qaraḏāwī's and Bin Bayya's rival projects and the development of Qatar's and the UAE's competing state-brands and foreign policies, raising questions about how Muslim scholarly elites (the 'ulamā') shape or serve the nation-states (Warren, 2021). Safwan et al. (2022) examined Bin Bayya's jurisprudence of emergency (*fiqh al-ṭawāri'*) which he coined in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on considerations of relief and necessity.

Beka (2024) studied Bin Bayya as a reformist-realist jurist who adapts to modernity, seeks a more reconciliatory role for the umma, and rejects Islamism. Fadhil (2024) analyses the contribution of Bin Bayya to the development of minority fiqh in the West, which is based on

considering communal welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) and optimizing the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*) over analogy and literal understanding of legal norms (Fadhil, 2024).

Overall, thus, the above literature represents two sides of Bin Bayya's work: 1. An anti-revolutionary and conservative voice against the Arab uprisings. 2. A key jurist of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*. However, no study has been dedicated to his pacifism as a coherent intellectual and political project that pre-dates the Arab Spring, builds on his expertise in Islamic law, and transcends it.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, we conduct a textual analysis of Bin Bayya's printed books on safety, terrorism, and law, focusing especially on his key concepts, justifications for pacifism, and perspective on Islamist violence. We also use some of his speeches, media interviews, and articles that address issues of peace, justice, and excommunication. Additionally, we situate this discussion within current Muslim debates about war and peace in Islamic law and ethics.

We thus pay particular attention to the context as the political and intellectual setting of a particular Islamic perspective. In this regard, we situate his ideas in the struggle of states in the Muslim world with Islamist violence since the 1990s, and in the civil wars that followed the Arab Spring. We also put his ideas in relation to Western scholarly discussions in political and ethical theory about the boundaries and extent of pacifism.

Bin Bayya, who is currently 91 years old, has written 15 books on Islamic ethics and law. Six books address issues of violence, coexistence, tolerance, and peace; they will serve as the foundation for our examination of his pacifist ideas. Thus, the selection of study texts is based on their relevance to peace.

Bin Bayya's other nine works cover topics related to Islamic law, including transactions, illness, Islamic legal theory, and charity. We also included two of his articles about excommunication and Sufism because they are pertinent to peace. To guide the analysis, we used the deontological pacifist interpretive framework, as Bin Bayya's pacifism depends on a proper understanding of Islamic law.

Deontological pacifism states that peace is both a duty and a right (Fiala, 2023). Inspired by Islamic law and ethics, Bin Bayya's deontological pacifism builds on the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*, which hold that violence is damaging to people and property and ought to be prohibited unless specifically authorized by law and only in exceptional cases, and under the authority of a legitimate state.

Bin Bayya's pacifism thus derives from a combination of Islamic public law, which gave states the authority to decide on matters of war and peace, and the ethics of *maqāṣid*, which stipulate the preservation of life and property as higher goals of Islamic law. As a result, Bin Bayya's deontological pacifism, in which the preservation of life and property, safety and peace are high objectives of Islamic law, meets Kant's idea that "man and, in general, every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will" (Kant, 1959, p. 46).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

'Abdallāh Bin Bayya was born in 1935, in the eastern region of Mauritania (which was a French colony until 1961). His father, Maḥfūz Bin Bayya, was a key Mauritanian religious scholar and judge in the 1960s. 'Abdallāh Bin Bayya studied the traditional Islamic curriculum (Quranic studies, *ḥadīth*, Arabic grammar and rhetoric, and Mālikī law mainly) in traditional Mauritanian schools. In 1961, he attended the Faculty of Law in Tunisia to study modern law and received training in Tunisian courts.

After his return to Mauritania, he occupied a number of positions as a judge in Mauritanian

courts at the highest level. In the 1970s, he was appointed Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Education. After relocating to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s to work as a Professor of Islamic law at the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, he became a prominent figure in Islamic law throughout the Middle East and Europe.

He held positions as Vice President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, a significant member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, Chairman of the Global Center for Renewal and Rationalization (GCRG) in London, and Chairman of the French Council of Islamic Finance. He published several works, although the most well-known and influential remains his *Ṣinā'at al-fatwā wa-fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (The Making of Fatwa and the Jurisprudence of minorities, published in 2004), which demonstrates his adaptability and interest in interpreting Islamic law in light of ethics and context, and reflects his influence on the evolution of contemporary Islamic law (Bin Bayya, 2026a).

A second phase in the intellectual trajectory of Bin Bayya occurred in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (2011–2013). He disagreed with Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and his group of pro-Islamist jurists and revolutionaries, issuing conciliatory, moderating views on reform and on attitudes towards the authorities. He was particularly critical of the violence that accompanied the uprisings, and moved to the United Arab Emirates, where he turned his attention from law to peace, establishing the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (now known as the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace) in 2014.

In reaction to the enormous violence and destruction that were sweeping through the Muslim world, some of which were committed by Islamist movements, Bin Bayya expressed clear views about gradual reform rather than revolution (Bin Bayya, 2012). Many of his critics have highlighted that his peace project aligns with the anti-Islamist agenda of the United Arab Emirates (Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022).

Still, his pacifism is independent of its political use, as it results from his personal beliefs, experiences, and observing Islamist violence in the Middle East in recent decades, which he opposed since the 1990s, and way before the Arab Spring (Bin Bayyah, 1996). Bin Bayyah has published the foundational books of his pacifism, *Khiṭāb al-amn fī l-Islām wa-thaqāfat al-tasāmuḥ wa-l-wi'ām* (The Discourse on safety and the culture of tolerance and harmony) in 1999 and *al-Irhāb: al-tashkhiṣ wa-l-ḥulūl* (Terrorism: A diagnosis and solutions), in 2007, while in Saudi Arabia, expressing his rejection of violence and endorsement of pacifism.

It can be said that his engagement with Middle Eastern politics in the 1990s and 2000s shaped his rejection of violence rather than his support for authoritarianism. In a sense, Bin Bayyah's evolution from law to pacifism seems natural. His approach to law focused on the law's ethical objectives, adapting it to public interests, embracing a perspective of moderation and leniency, and rejecting radical and rigid interpretations of the law. Furthermore, Bin Bayya has been involved in humanitarian work for many decades. His rejection of violence is thus a core idea in his project, which led him to part ways with al-Qaraḍāwī, who supported the Arab Spring uprisings, while Bin Bayya advocated pacifism, dialogue, and reconciliation.

Peace as a higher objective of Islamic law

Let us begin with safety, *amn*, as the foundation of Bin Bayya's pacifism. In his work *Khiṭāb al-amn fī l-Islām wa-thaqāfat al-tasāmuḥ wa-l-wi'ām* (The Discourse on safety and the culture of tolerance and harmony), published in 1999, he asserts that:

Safety is one of the objectives of Islamic law. A person's safety regarding their life, property, and honor is a prerequisite for fulfilling religious obligations. Preserving life and limbs to uphold the

pillars of religion takes precedence over risking their loss in acts of worship that would jeopardize similar obligations. The Muslim community, and indeed all faiths, agree that religious law was established to protect religion, life, lineage, property, and intellect. These objectives are the broad gateway to maintaining safety. They are essential for the proper functioning of both religious and worldly affairs; if they are lost, worldly affairs will not proceed smoothly but will descend into corruption, chaos, and loss of life - Bin Bayyah (1999, pp. 21-22).

Bin Bayya's pacifism is based on the idea that both the fulfillment of religious responsibilities and the proper operation of society depend on peace or safety. He sees peace as a prerequisite for all personal and societal responsibilities since the preservation of life and religion depends on peace, and maintaining the latter become obligatory. It follows that fighting a war would put people's and societies' safety at danger, making it impossible to serve public interests and fulfill one's religious obligations.

Bin Bayya thus agrees with proponents of world peace, arguing that since violence and war are immoral, then pacifism is ethically required and those who engage in combat are immoral (Fiala, 2023). Maintaining peace has practical outcomes as well. In other words, violence undermines public interest and thus worldly matters cannot be carried out in the best interests of people. For instance, when property is destroyed, the harm would be irreversible.

Since family, honor, and life are organic for a given society, the loss of any of these elements has an impact on other members of the community. In the same way, all members of society should cooperate to maintain peace because it enables everyone to build society together, pursue careers, and thus create conditions for economic development that benefit everyone. Without peace and stability, economy cannot function, and so thriving depends on peace (Bin Bayyah, 1999, p. 26).

Following Ibn Khaldūn and Rousseau, Bin Bayya considers that the most optimal model of society is cooperative society, in which each member depends on the others, working together to create a prosperous economy and society. This organic structure is cemented by religion, whose main purpose is to ensure that every member of society reaches their full potential and serves the common good.

However, this is only possible if transactions are secure and people are safe. For instance, growth plans cannot succeed in an atmosphere of dread and devastation, and investments can only proceed if safety is guaranteed. Independently of the applied law, customs or conception of justice, providing safety for people so that they are alive and safe is an essential function of the state (Bin Bayyah, 1999, p. 26).

A few other Muslim jurists, particularly the Egyptian Sa'd al-Dīn al-Hilālī and the Jordanian 'Abdallāh Zayd al-Kilānī emphasized recently the principle of safety as an objective of Islamic law. Al-Hilālī argued for this principle from the Prophet's Farewell Sermon "Your blood, your wealth, your honor, and your bodies are sacred to you, just as this day of yours is sacred in this month of yours in this country of yours" (Hilālī, 2011, p. 81).

As for al-Kilānī, he argued that one of the goals of creating a state is to provide protection so that people can live in harmony, prosper, and find safety as an end in itself because safety comes from the absence of injustice and the disappearance of fears (al-Kilānī, 2019, p. 187). Prior to Bin Bayya, the Egyptian jurist Ḥusnī Jindī has asserted in 1990 that safety is one of the objectives of Islamic law and a noble mission the Islamic government should strive to achieve (Jindī, 1990, p. 83).

The idea of safety as a higher objective presupposes another idea much more discussed in Islamic law and ethics: the preservation of life, *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. In 2013, al-Azhar attempted to apply the preservation of life in addressing political violence in Muslim societies through *Wathīqat al-Azhar*

al-waṭaniyya li-nabdh al-ʿunf (Al-Azhar national document to abandon violence) issued amidst clashes between Mohamed Mursi's supporters and counter-revolutionaries, which asserts in its articles 1 and 2 that "the human right to life is one of the highest objectives in all laws, religions, and legal systems.

There is no good in a nation or society where the blood of its citizens is shed, human dignity is violated, or just retribution under the law is lost. The sanctity of life and public and private national property, and the decisive distinction between political action and sabotage should be emphasized" (Al-Azhar, 2013).

In his *Tanbih al-marāji' ʿalā taʾsīl fiqh al-wāqi'* (published in 2014 in the heat of the Arab Spring), Bin Bayya states that "it is not permissible to expose oneself to death or physical harm. We said that people going out into the squares should be allowed for the purpose of enjoining good and forbidding evil. So, is it permissible for a mufti to issue a fatwa permitting them to go out in demonstrations, knowing the possibility of their lives being lost or their injuries occurring during the demonstrations, without the mufti bearing any sin or committing any wrongdoing?" (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 243).

He adds that the great challenge facing scholars, intellectual elites, thought leaders, and party leaders is "how to find a way to eliminate injustice without the oppressed becoming, legally and rationally, an oppressor of themselves, resorting to methods that harm them, exacerbate the injustice, multiply suffering, and inflict deep wounds on the community" (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 243). He criticized Muslim jurists "who joined the revolutions amidst escalation, mostly to condemn the oppressor, but without addressing the plight of the oppressed or healing the wounded.

He may even add to their suffering, urging them down an endless path of bloodshed. Scholars used to forbid the general public from carrying weapons, limiting themselves to advising the authorities on the proper application of Islamic jurisprudence through preaching, and instructing the general public to disapprove in their hearts" (Bin Bayyah, 2014, pp. 244-245).

Therefore, safety takes precedence over commanding good and forbidding wrong, a principle widely accepted by the majority of Muslim jurists. In line with this principle, one should not prohibit wrong if doing so will result in a larger wrong, death, or bodily harm. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 1277) states unequivocally that "If one fears for himself, his property, or others because of forbidding wrong, then he is discharged from denouncing it with his hand or tongue, but he must still dislike it in his heart.

This is our doctrine and the doctrine of the majority of jurists" (al-Nawawī, 1972, vol. 12, p. 230). This stance fits into Bin Bayya's Sunni background in terms of political thought, which emphasizes restraint during periods of rebellion (Abou El Fadl, 2001, pp. 32-61). His prudence also corresponds to the legal principle that "preventing harm takes precedence over bringing benefits" (Muhsin et al., 2019).

Through this juristic rule, and other similar rules, Islamic law aims to eliminate harm before bringing interests. In Bin Bayya's understanding, the deaths and property losses that accompanied the Arab Spring were too great a cost for the little that was accomplished, and as such, they should be considered as harm rather than benefits for the community's good.

A Jurisprudence of peace (*fiqh al-silm*)

In his Concept Paper for the First Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace in March 2014, Bin Bayyah proposed for the first time his project of *fiqh al-silm* (jurisprudence of peace). He defines the jurisprudence of peace as "the resolution of disputes amicably, without the intervention of the judiciary, and which aims to promote reconciliation, coexistence and harmony, correct misconceptions, foster love and concord, and curb the excesses of excommunication, defamation,

and discord” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 45).

This jurisprudence of peace, Bin Bayyah asserts, is “based on three legal principles: Considering the consequences and outcomes, preventing harm takes precedence over pursuing benefits and considering the hierarchy of benefits and harms, prioritizing the more important over the less important” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 45).

He also maintains that Islamic jurisprudential heritage contains a rich and abundant body of material for the jurisprudence of peace that can be transmitted “through various communication channels and educational platforms, fostering a culture of reason and jurisprudence, considering benefits as attainable and harms as preventable, and adopting wisdom. This allows Muslims to live according to their faith in this world without feeling alienated, and without experiencing anxiety, distress, or turmoil...” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 46).

Bin Bayyah identifies 12 values that constitute the main themes of jurisprudence of peace, developing each of them and referring to their sources in Islamic law: moderation, dialogue, love, tolerance, patience, mercy, justice, common good, wisdom, human brotherhood and mutual understanding, reconciliation, cooperation, and solidarity (Bin Bayyah, 2014, pp. 68-75). He contends that “to the extent that a society adheres to shared moral values, its harmony, cooperation, and positive outlook on life will be.

Conversely, to the extent that it fails to adopt such values and is stripped of any transcendent theory of life, its relationship with others will deteriorate” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 67). A society without these values, he sustains, “will wage wars without restraint. This is what fundamentalism represents, regardless of the religion it cloaks itself in or the beliefs it adopts. It manifests itself in violent organizations and currents of aggression and racism” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 67).

He concludes that “the values of reconciliation and forgiveness must be revived, not those of domination and rivalry; the values of peace and harmony, instead of hostility and conflict and only the values of reason, justice, moderation, and centrism, can revive humanity and instill the spirit of love” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 67). He argues that “the values of conflict and strife are not Islamic values, even if some try to cloak them in piety. They are Western, Hegelian values. Hegel believed that destruction is the foundation of construction and that society exists only through the struggle between master and slave” (Bin Bayyah, 2014, p. 67).

Bin Bayyah’s jurisprudence of peace builds on his previous juristic work on priorities and public interests which reject extremism and advocate for considering public good in the interpretation of religious texts, connecting rulings to reality and the objectives of Islamic law. We can see clearly this effort unfold in his work on the jurisprudence of Muslim minorities in the West (*Shin’at al-fatwā wa-fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*) which was published in 2004. Herein he bases his answers on the principle the outcomes and the consequences, *al-naẓar fī al-ma’ālāt*.

As he puts it: “This principle of considering the outcome of matters is, in reality, a principle of weighing between a benefit that takes precedence, or between benefit and harm. However, it generally means that the benefit or harm that outweighs the benefit is expected. This balance is a fundamental principle of *ijtihād* and *fatwā*, given that benefits and harms are not of equal weight” (Bin Bayyah, 2018, p. 229). He thus reached the same conclusion he would reach ten years later in his jurisprudence of peace which is that in the domain of human relations with non-Muslims, Muslims are enjoined to endorse good conduct, show kindness to them and deal justly with them (Bin Bayyah, 2018, p. 427).

This consistent approach of peace as priority and the best outcome can be found in his earlier work on human rights entitled *Hīwār ‘an bu’d ḥawla ḥuqūq al-insān fī al-Islām* (A Dialogue from afar on human rights in Islam) which was published in 2006. In this work, he asserts that “Consultation (*shūrā*) and democracy converge on the search for a peaceful solution: the consultative system

flows into a single stream, namely justice in Islam, which can provide humanity with what it values and what we believe democracy seeks in terms of human happiness” (Bin Bayyah, 2006, p. 81).

Also, in his *al-Irhāb: al-tashkhiṣ wa-l-ḥulūl* (published in 2007), he asserts that “the Muslim world is ready to implant the culture of peace, *thaqāfat al-salām* (Bin Bayyah, 2007, p. 149) and calling to moderation, *wasatīyya* as the law of the universe which deals with texts in lights of realities following the *fiqh* of weighing priorities, *fiqh al-muwāzanāt*, that is the balance between constants and variables” (Bin Bayyah, 2007, p. 104).

The only scholars in the West who responded to Bin Bayyah's *fiqh al-silm* were Baycar, Rakipoglu and Warren, who viewed it as a project started to support the United Arab Emirates' religious soft power and counter al-Qaraḏāwī's Jurisprudence of Revolution, *fiqh al-thawra* (Warren, 2021, p. 2; Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022, p. 15). In the Arab world, the only response I am aware of (beyond his circle of followers in Abu Dhabi) is that of the Sunni Iraqi scholar Muṣ'ab Salmān Aḥmad, who views *fiqh al-silm* as an example of renewal in Islamic law (Aḥmad, 2020).

As shown above, Bin Bayyah's peace jurisprudence is neither a result of the United Arab Emirates' policy, nor is it a response to al-Qaraḏāwī's revolutionary vision. It follows logically from his earlier ethical and legal project of priorities, moderation, and ethics of Islamic law. It may eventually be related to the Arab Spring, the devastation that ensued, and the UAE's backing for counter-revolutions, but Bin Bayyah has consistently opposed violence and advocated for peace in all of his earlier works before founding his Peace Forum in the UAE in 2014 at the age of 79. It is more consistent to conclude that he came to his pacifist views because of the same realist ideas that led him to moderation and minority jurisprudence.

Sufism

None of the scholars who have studied Bin Bayyah's ethical and political thought has focused on the element of Sufism, even if the latter is a major source of his Islamic pacifism. For Bin Bayyah, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is the study of Islam as it is expressed in the limbs, while the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) deal with questions of faith; the pursuit of moral excellence (*iḥsān*) has given rise to a discipline known as Sufism, and each of these disciplines play a proper function in the whole edifice (Bin Bayyah, 2026b).

Consequently, he supports the traditional Sunni understanding of the religion of Islam as the complementarity of law, faith, and moral excellence, which has justified Sufism for centuries, and which also implies that one's faith and practice are incomplete without moral excellence, as together they form the three pillars of Islam. Beyond the dimension of moral excellence, Bin Bayyah takes *iḥsān* to a deeper spiritual meaning: that of the road of love and the quest for enlightenment. Sufism, he asserts, provides the practitioner with a unifying principle or a guiding context for visions, longings, love, transparency, soul yearnings, inspirations, mystical experiences, and secrets, while acknowledging the interdependence of each, just as the body cannot exist without the soul and the soul cannot exist without the body.

Sufism is a radiant space with light and overflowing with love (Bin Bayyah, 2026b). Furthermore, he argues that the pursuit of this spiritual life is a high goal that can only be attained by spiritual elites (Bin Bayyah, 2026b), establishing Sufism as superior to jurisprudence in terms of moral and spiritual standing. This argument is unacceptable for the detractors of Sufism, whether they be Islamists or jurists.

Bin Bayyah is apologetic about Sufism in front of criticism from Islamists and jurists who deny the role Sufism plays in Muslim society. Bin Bayyah replies that Sufism is not a distinct religion but rather a type of functional specialization to address the inner aspects of sin and the states of the heart in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunna, the interpretations transmitted from the pious, and

the approval of Sufi masters. He is mainly apologetic about Sufism because of Salafi criticism of Sufism, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula where he spent the last forty years of his life.

As a devout Sufi living in the Gulf, he must have found it extremely difficult to withstand Salafi assaults on Sufism. To counter Salafi arguments against Sufism, Bin Bayyah upholds the legitimacy of the main beliefs and practices of Sufism, including the Sufi claim to discover and access secrets and miracles, the practice of spiritual ecstasy and presence, visiting the graves of the righteous, obedience to the sheikh, asking the Prophet for intercession, reciting litanies of remembrance and recitation, organising sessions of group remembrance, and the use of prayer beads (Bin Bayyah, 2026b).

All things considered, Bin Bayyah is a prime example of Sunni Sufism with roots in the North African tradition, which, until modern times (and the arrival of Islamism and Salafism from the Middle East), did not recognize any complementarity between law and Sufism. He himself traces this complementarity back to Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 1493) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), two voices that have argued for the perfect harmony between law and Sufism.

Political critics of Bin Bayyah's Sufism put up the argument that his initiatives are supported and hosted by the UAE government, which was quite prominent in its efforts to defeat the Islamist government in Egypt, charging him with guilt by association and support for oppressive rulers, one of the most serious charges in Muslim historical imagination (Sinani, 2019, p. 168). His opponents have also interpreted his Sufism as political quietism, opposition to Islamism over the meaning of true Islam, and an alignment with regional autocracies, especially the United Arab Emirates, which funded his Forum of Peace in 2014 as subordination to the UAE's foreign policy interests (al-Azami, 2019, p. 231).

Nonetheless, Bin Bayyah's Sufism is but an element of his overall ethical project which serves as the basis for his pacifism and rejection of violence. The fact that the Egyptian or UAE governments can use this project does not prove that it was meant for this use. In the 1980s in Mauritania and then in the 1990s in Saudi Arabia, he pursued a lifelong goal of ethicizing the practice of Islam through Sufism and the higher objectives of Islamic law. During these two decades, he clearly condemned Islamist violence and showed his disagreement with Islamist movements and *takfīrī* groups.

Given these beliefs and initiatives, he advocated for way before the Arab Spring, it appears more reasonable to look at his stance of supporting states against violence and disorder during the Arab Spring as logical consequences of prior convictions rather than an endorsement of oppressive policies out of opposition to Islamism or ad hoc political considerations.

Covenants of peace

This section will examine Bin Bayyah's use of covenant-based reasoning to advocate for peace with non-Muslims. According to Bin Bayyah, the division of the world in Islamic jurisprudence into *Dār al-Islām* (the abode of Islam), *Dār al-ḥarb* (the abode of war), and *Dār al-'ahd* (the abode of covenant) is out of date, unique to the Middle Ages, and only applicable in the exceptional circumstance of a state of war. All that Islamic jurisprudence said about the consequences of this division of abodes and the legal decisions that followed from it are determined by the circumstances that existed at the time between the Islamic state and the rest of the world. It cannot be generalized (Bin Bayyah, 2018, p. 405).

Another kind of covenant, that of citizenship and contract responsibilities, defines the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. According to him, Muslims in Europe currently live in nations that are pluralistic in terms of religion, culture, and ethnicity and are founded on peace and security. Muslims in Europe are either citizens or residents. All

citizenship rights are legally guaranteed to citizens, including freedom of religion, the right to practice it, and the right to maintain it. These citizens are required to uphold the terms of the citizenship contract and abide by national laws (Bin Bayya, 2018, p. 406).

Muslims are therefore required to respect the contract of citizenship and fulfill their obligation of maintaining peace and security. As residents, Muslims are not granted residency except by way of an entry visa, as they enter into a pledge and contract that necessitates adherence to the laws of the country. They should also fulfill the covenant since all covenants are first oaths with Allāh (Bin Bayya, 2018, p. 406). He concludes that it is incumbent upon all Muslims to adhere to the ethics of Islam, including the rulings on what is permissible and forbidden, whether they reside in Muslim lands or elsewhere (Bin Bayya, 2018, p. 406).

As an implication of upholding the covenants of peace with non-Muslims, by virtue of Islamic law and ethics, terrorism and violence are prohibited in European countries (and elsewhere). Yet, hundreds of Muslim young people in Europe have committed acts of terrorism or violence in the last 20 years or so (in the name of retaliating against non-Muslims or considering non-Muslim states engaged in Middle Eastern conflicts as aggressors).

These acts of violence clearly conflict with the duties of citizenship and residency. They also contradict the Qur'an and Sunna's covenants, which establish human security and peaceful coexistence as the normative foundation for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, thereby casting these young Muslims as aggressors. Islamic covenants uphold an ideal of nonviolence, while the use of force is permitted in response to armed aggression and treaty violations that endanger peace and security (Rane, 2024).

The significance of these findings

Thus far, we have focused on the origins of Bin Bayya's pacifism, particularly his views on Islamic law, Sufism, and contracts. To understand the importance of these elements for an Islamic deontological pacifism, we shall now move beyond discussing his approach and consider the significance of deontological pacifism in general for peaceful relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

To begin with, one relevant principle that emerges from this discussion is that deontological pacifism is universal because it requires all members of society to uphold the duty of peace through a contract, a law, or a rule. Violating the covenant is the first step toward violence. Deontological pacifism helps the development of a more universal ethical reasoning, which explains how Muslim jurists take increasingly a *maqāṣid*-based approach when dealing with matters of violence and peace.

For instance, Islamic law, international law, and state laws agree on the universal ideal of life protection. Human dignity is widely acknowledged, and the sanctity of life is unquestionable in all religious and nonreligious traditions. Additionally, life protection serves as a crucial link between modern legislation and religious traditions, each of which independently promotes the safety and peace of human communities and societies.

Another significant element of deontological pacifism is the principle of security. The latter is both a right and a duty, and everyone in a society must uphold safety and security in order to ensure everyone's security, regardless of their identities, beliefs or political opinions. Therefore, when a Muslim conducts a terrorist attack, Muslims also lose out on security and protection. In non-Muslim countries, Muslims are typically the ones who suffer the most when governments start surveillance, repression, and Islamophobic policies.

Muslims in a given Western city frequently lament that their lives have changed since a terrorist attack occurred there. They were no longer able to feel secure and stable. In addition to being good (*iṣlāḥ*), peace (*ṣulḥ*) is also beneficial (*maṣlaḥa*). All these terms share the same root, *ṣ-l-ḥ* expressed in the verse Q4:128 (reconciliation is preferable). For this reason, maintaining safety, security, and order is also a public interest, or *maṣlaḥa*, that encompasses

both Muslims and non-Muslims, and an obligation for all. In modern societies, the public space is now everyone's property, both materially and non-materially, and everyone should defend its safety.

CONCLUSION

This article explored Bin Bayyah's deontological pacifism as he bases his peace perspective on Islamic law and Sufism. It also unveils the foundations of his deontological pacifism in *maqāsid al-sharī'a*. Bin Bayyah specifically emphasizes safety as a goal of Islamic law and the necessity to protect life and property. Furthermore, he mobilizes the concept of covenants in Islam to call Muslims to respect the contracts of citizenship and residency in non-Muslim countries and fulfill their obligation of maintaining peace and security. Therefore, Bin Bayya's pacifism is an effort to protect people and society from bloodshed and devastation rather than a defense of authoritarianism. It is a continuation of the Sunni general rejection of sedition and civil conflicts.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite the potential and promises of Islamic pacifism, extreme violence has characterized Middle Eastern politics in recent years. Thus, one limitation of this study is the fact that pacifism does not prevent aggression, committed by Muslims or non-Muslims. It will take a long history of violence for Middle Eastern states and societies to understand that violence cannot lead to any progress or development.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses on a single case of a Muslim pacifist, Bin Bayyah, who, albeit being widely influential in intellectual and religious circles, his impact on Middle Eastern politics is deficient. Another limitation of this study is that it is text-based, which means that the study explains Bin Bayya's writings through the interpretive subjectivity of the author. This study may also be constrained by its pursuit of coherence in reading Bin Bayya's writings, which cover a wide range of topics.

One area of future investigation could be exploiting further the potential of Islamic law and ethics on covenants to foster an additional basis for Islamic pacifism all the more that an ethics of covenants is compatible with contemporary laws and obligations of citizenship in democracies and nation-states. Future studies could also focus on the principle of preservation of life, or *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, as a higher goal of Islamic law and ethics, without which no other goal can be accomplished. This affects the lives of both Muslims and non-Muslims since the protection of life is consistent with the principles of human rights and dignity in various religions and philosophies.

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