

## **Towards Quality Education for All: In Defence of Universal Justice**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to show as to how a notion of universal justice, the rationale behind quality education, can be achieved through actions such as *ummah* (communal engagement), *shūrā* (public deliberation) and *jihād* (just striving which includes the recognition of the rights of others). Thereafter, it is argued as to why and how these acts of justice are linked to various conceptions of Islamic education, namely, *taʿlīm* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *taʿdīb* (good action). In the last part of the article, the author draws on an empirical study to show as to how virtues of Islamic education can be used in an institution of higher learning to stimulate discussions about achieving universal justice.

### **Keywords**

Education, quality, justice, Islamic education, humanity.

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## Introduction

Any discussion of quality education should not be remiss of drawing on understandings of universal justice. The seminal position being argued for in this article, relates to a defence of higher education commensurate with a cultivation of quality education. In turn, quality education cannot be attained without invoking discussions in and about the cultivation of universal justice. The theme of this article is about the latter and the author, in defence of such a view, has organised his justifications as follows: Firstly, he introduces a discussion about the conceptual interrelationship between quality education and universal justice; secondly, he offers some thoughts on conceptions of Islamic education; and thirdly, he shows as to why and how Islamic education provides an adequate response to crimes committed against humanity.

## Quality Education and Universal Justice

The Qur’ān is replete with verses (*āyāh*) which emphasise the significance of achieving justice for all human beings wherever they might be. The most prominent of these verses is the one which is recited during the Friday prayers when the *imām* (congregational leader) renders the compulsory *khuṭbah* (sermon): “Surely Allāh enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred. And He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful.”<sup>1</sup> Also, in another verse: “O you who believe! Be upright for Allāh, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of people incite you to act inequitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) Allāh; surely Allāh is Aware of what you do.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Al-Nahl* (16): 90.
  2. *Al-Mā'idah* (5): 8.

Likewise, it is stated in the Qur'ān:

O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allāh's sake, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; if he [she] be rich or poor, Allāh is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow your low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allāh is aware of what you do.<sup>3</sup>

Considering that the Qur'ān is one of the primary sources of quality education—another being the *Sunnah* or life experiences of the Prophet Muḥammad—and that it clearly emphasises the importance of achieving justice for all, it would be plausible to claim that the rationale for quality education is the achievement of *'adl* (justice) in relations among people. What the aforementioned verses also foreground is an understanding that justice is not the domain or proprietorship of individuals, but that justice is done to others and in relation with others. These others might not necessarily be of the same religious, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, political, cultural or social milieu of the one or the groups enacting justice. In simpler terms, justice is not reserved for a particular group, but rather for all people wherever they might live. In this sense, the enactment of justice is a universal or global enterprise.

The question arises: What does it mean to be treated justly? Firstly, universal justice is conceptually linked to being non-offensive, non-subversive and decent towards others. If so, then one should treat others with dignity and respect without inflicting physical and emotional harm on others. In an educative sense, this makes sense because learning and teaching cannot take place without people (learners and educators) being made to feel that they deserve one another's respect as dignified persons. Secondly, being just requires of one not to

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3. *Al-Nisā'* (4): 135.

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act unequally (perhaps through bigotry and resentment). In other words, people should be treated equally and not some as “strangers” in an unfair manner. One specifically thinks of the challenges that educators in world universities face not to treat students from immigrant communities, for instance, as if they do not deserve our equal and symmetrical attention. Thirdly, justice is linked to recognising the rights of others (and not just being consumed with asserting one’s own rights) and that their (others’) rights should be assured. One thinks of the rights that students from all communities have to higher education and how university educators all over the world should go about ensuring that their rights to education are secured. This brings the author to a discussion of how treating others with decency (civility), equality and the recognition and assurance of others’ rights, can possibly be achieved through the acts of *ummah* (communal engagement), *shūrā* (public deliberation) and *jihād* (just striving which includes the recognition of the rights of others)—all considered by the Qur’ān as acts of justice.

### **Cultivating Acts of Justice as a Manifestation of Quality Education**

In the Qur’ān, Allāh declares the differences in the creation of the human beings: “O humankind! Surely we have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families [communities] that you may know each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allāh is the one most careful of his [her] duty; surely Allāh is Knowing, Aware.”<sup>4</sup> The verse points to the fact that people ought to be recognised not only as having commonalities and differences but they should actually share these on the grounds of acting responsibly (with duty, that is, justice). Hence, the idea of community is aimed at getting people to share with others what they have in common and what they disagree about, that is, a matter of

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4. *Al-Hujurat* (49): 13.

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getting to know one another—to experience one another. In another Qur’ānic verse, it is stated: “And people are naught but a [global] community, so they disagree; and had not a word already gone forth from your Lord, the matter would have certainly been decided between them in respect of that which they disagree.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, although people are different, the sense of community which ought to exist among them is one whereby they share commonalities and disagreements. However, the fact that humanity is considered as a global community (*ummah*) means that people need to learn to live with the otherness of others, whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own. And, through the idea of *ummah* (community), people endeavour to find a civil space whereby they can enact what they have in common and at the same time make public their competing narratives and significations. As such, people might develop a real opportunity to coexist. Moreover, in such a way, they would not only establish a community of conversation and interdependence, that is, by sharing commonalities, but also one of disagreement, that is, they do not share commonalities without holding in disrespect others’ life-worlds.<sup>6</sup> In other words, when people are engaged in community underpinned by interdependence and disagreement, they engage in an educative process with a collective identity—they share commonalities. Educating people to become members of a global community involves creating civil spaces where they can learn to share commonalities and respect the differences of others. Only then would people be acting justly, which would in turn position them favourably to engender quality education. In this regard, the Qur’ān states:

You are the best of peoples raised up for the benefit  
of humanity; you enjoin what is right and forbid

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5. *Yūnus* (10): 19.

6. Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 35 and 41.

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the wrong and believe in Allāh; and if the followers of the Book had believed it would have been better for them; of them (some) are believers and most are transgressors.<sup>7</sup>

In essence, when the Qurʾān enjoins people to work as a global community (*ummah*), it, in fact, does so on the grounds that people ought to engage communally with one another’s differences and commonalities. If they did so, their actions would be just because they would be for the advancement of humanity, that is, for enhancing the quality of life of all human beings. Following such an understanding of *ummah* (communal engagement), one can claim that quality education aims to establish opportunities whereby people engage with one another and in so doing they share commonalities and differences in the interest of advancing human relations. In this way, they would act justly, because participants of a global community remain respectful towards one another despite their differences and disagreements.

In different terms, *ummah* (communal engagement) demands that individuals actively engage with the unending struggle and responsibility for the improvement of the economic, social and political aspects of life.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, *ummah* is concerned with a long-term and inconclusive commitment to the improvement of human conditions. Such a community is concerned to maintain “the freedom and duty of criticism and monitoring of government”, to “accept criticism in good spirit”, to facilitate “peaceful change”, and to remain united through consensus and disagreement—a clear indication of such a community’s obligation to be critical, to develop self-critical attitudes, and to live peacefully.<sup>9</sup> Also, communal engagement or *ummah* is also concerned with a

7. *Āl-ʿImrān* (3): 110.

8. Ahmed Alibasic, “The Right of Political Opposition in Islamic History and Legal Theory: An Exploration of an Ambivalent Heritage” in *Al-Shajarah* 4, no. 2 (1999): 234.

9. *Ibid.*, 237, 240, 242 and 292.

plurality of human ideas and not denying the rights of others, thus indicating its recognition of difference.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the Qur'ān not only encourages people to act justly as a global community, but also suggests a way of *shūrā* (public deliberation) as to how people ought to engage. What does the Qur'ān say about *shūrā*? In fact an entire chapter (*sūrah*) of the Qur'ān is devoted to a discussion of *shūrā*. The core verse which relates specifically to *shūrā* is as follows: “And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and their rule is to take counsel [*shūrā*] among themselves and spend out what we have given them.”<sup>11</sup>

The value attached to *shūrā* is so profound that Allāh Almighty connects the practice to prayers (*ṣalāh*) and alms-giving (*ḥaḍq*). Throughout the chapter, Allāh speaks about the importance of engaging others justly, that is, with patience, forgiveness and courage.<sup>12</sup> Such qualities constitute virtues of public deliberation (*shūrā*), which would hopefully encourage and persuade people to act justly. In the first instance, public deliberation cannot happen without the patience required for listening to the viewpoints of others, even if they are in conflict with one's own. The point is that public deliberation cannot happen unless we listen attentively to others' justifications and, in turn, give to others an account of our own justifications. Only then can we safely talk about deliberation. Moreover, in the second instance, the Qur'ān also states: “Call [engage others] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from his path, and He knows best those who follow the right way.”<sup>13</sup>

Whereas public deliberation ought to involve different and contending parties listening to one another's views, it also needs to invoke disputations. This means that people should

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10. Ibid., 249 and 271.

11. *Al-Shūrā* (42): 38.

12. Ibid., verses 15 and 43.

13. *Al-Nahl* (16): 125.

also have the courage to take one another's views into some kind of systematic controversy. In other words, we should not be concerned merely with listening to what others have to say and then agree with them, but also to treat one another's truth claims critically without, of course, exceeding the limits.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, exceeding the limits refers to insulting and demeaning people. However, it does not mean that one cannot fervently disagree with another person's view. In this sense, disputations do not only have to be dull. Rather, arguments can be articulated ardently without alienating others, more specifically without excluding them from public deliberation. For this reason, one is somewhat hesitant to equate courage in public deliberation with belligerence, as proposed by Eamon Callan. For him, people in deliberation engender doubt about the correctness of their moral beliefs or about the importance of the differences between what they and others believe (a matter of arousing distress) accompanied by a rough process of struggle and ethical confrontation—that is, belligerence.<sup>15</sup> If this happens, belligerence and distress give way eventually to moments of ethical conciliation, when the truth and error in rival positions have been made clear and a fitting synthesis of factional viewpoints is achieved.<sup>16</sup> The problem with Callan's standpoint is that he assumes that all people are necessarily confrontational, which might lead to excluding others who might not be non-confrontational from the deliberation. One can also arrive at defensible justifications without engaging with someone else belligerently.

However, in the third instance, what is more crucial for the public deliberation to be ongoing is the virtue of forgiveness. When people deliberate, they do not have to argue for a specific point of view after others' views have proven to be more plausible than theirs. The virtue of forgiveness can mean

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14. *Al-Aḥādīf*(7): 55.

15. Eamon Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 211.

16. *Ibid.*, 212.



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that a previously held view can be dismissed if implausible, and that the proponent of such a view should not be considered as intellectually “slow”, but rather be freed from being associated with an indefensible viewpoint. This also implies that people should not ridicule others for a previously held indefensible view.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, this brings the author to a discussion of *jihād* (just striving, including the recognition of the rights of the others) considered as one of the often misrepresented concepts but which can be considered as a constitutive feature of quality education. This is because Qur’ān equates *jihād* with seeking closeness to Allāh: “O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allāh and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may be successful.”<sup>18</sup> Also, the Qur’ān links *jihād* to working collectively with others in the path of virtue:

And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it, therefore judge between them by what Allāh has revealed, and do not follow their low desires (to turn away) from the truth that has come to you; for every one of you did We appoint a law and a way, and if Allāh had pleased He would have made you (all) a single people [that is, the same or homogenous], but that He might try you in what He gave you, therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds; to Allāh is your return, of all (of you), so He will let you know that in which you differed.<sup>19</sup>

17. In *al-Hujurāt* (49): 11, the Qur’ān states: “O you who believe! Let not (one) people laugh at (another) people perchance they may be better than they, nor let women (laugh) at (other) women, perchance they may be better than they; and do not find fault with your own people nor call one another by nicknames; evil is a bad name after faith, and whoever does not turn, these it is that are the unjust.”

18. *Al-Mā'idah* (5): 35.

19. *Ibid.*, 48.

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If people are encouraged to strive collaboratively to attain justice, then they have to recognise one another's rights and actually do something about ensuring that their rights are honoured. Recognising and honouring one another's rights is important in ensuring that people are treated equally, decently and humanely. Therefore, the Qur'an proclaims that people should be educated about their rights, whether civil, political or social:

O people! be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two, many men and women; and be careful of (your duty to) Allāh, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely Allāh ever watches over you.<sup>20</sup>

In essence, just striving (*jihād*) is aimed at drawing nearer to a higher good, developing one's capacities to be morally upright, and respecting the rights of others.

Thus far, it has been shown how the idea of universal justice, the rationale behind quality education, can be achieved through actions such as *ummah* (communal engagement), *shūrā* (public deliberation) and *jihād* (just striving which includes the recognition of the rights of others). Next, the author shows as to how these acts of justice are linked to various conceptions of Islamic education, namely, *ta'lim* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *ta'dīb* (good action).

### **Conceptualisations of Islamic Education**

Indeed, the striving for universal justice is a constituent element of quality education. The author has explored three different ways in which universal justice can be achieved, namely, through the acts of *ummah* (communal engagement), *shūrā* (public deliberation) and *jihād* (just striving, including

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20. *Al-Nisā'*<sup>2</sup> (4):1.

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the recognition of the rights of others). At this juncture, the author examines how these acts of justice guide particular conceptions of Islamic education, namely, *ta'lim* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *ta'dib* (good action), with reference to their implications for quality education.

Firstly, Islamic education is couched as *ta'lim* (socialisation), as illustrated by the following verses in the Qur'an: "And He taught (*'allama*) Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right;<sup>21</sup> "They said: Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us; surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise;"<sup>22</sup> and, "Taught man [women] what he [she] knew not."<sup>23</sup> Such verses foreground a particular conception of education (*ta'lim*) whereby people learn through being socialised into an inherited body of knowledge. Learning takes place when people are "taught" what they perhaps do not know. Certainly, for Muslims, this means being taught how to adhere to their faith, especially those principles associated with being a good person. For instance, being socialised means being taught what it means to believe in Allāh, His Angels, His Revealed Books, His Prophets, The Last Day of Judgment, and the separation between good and evil. Likewise, being taught about Islam involves what it means to serve Allāh, perform prayer, observe fasting, provide alms to the poor and destitute, and perform pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if Muslims have the means to do so. Socialisation is also associated with learning the Qur'an (including memorising it or passages from it), the *hadīth* (sayings related to the life experiences of Prophet Muḥammad), the *Sīrah* (The Prophet's life history and those of his companions), the Islamic sciences such as *Shari'ah* (Law), *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) and *Tawhīd* (Science of Interpretation). The problem with *ta'lim* (socialisation), at least so it seems, is that this form of education has often been associated with uncritical exegeses of what medieval scholars

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21. *Al-Baqarah* (2): 31.

22. *Ibid.*, 32.

23. *Al-'Alaq* (96): 5.

have said about Islamic knowledge(s). For instance, some Muslims in the Islamic world often confine their engagement (that is, their sense of *ummah*) with the primary sources of Islam to the exegeses of past medieval scholars, which in many cases results in a stultification of knowledge and understanding. It is for this reason that claims are often made about Islamic education's promotion of merely doctrinaire learning. This claim is supported by Bagheri and Khosravi, who argue that Islamic education has been used throughout the Muslim world to indoctrinate learners.<sup>24</sup> Such a limited view of Islamic education is not commensurate with the notion of *ummah* (communal engagement), whereby Muslims also need to be taught a form of education which invokes criticality. Hence, the author now introduces a discussion of *tarbiyah* (individuation).

Secondly, whereas, *ta'lim* (socialisation) aims to introduce people to an inherited body of knowledge (without being uncritical towards such knowledge), *tarbiyah* (individuation) specifically invites Muslims to be critical of their learning. In the first instance, the word *rabb* (literally “Lord” which this author adapts to “Educator”) occurs approximately more than 1,000 times in the Qur'ān in relation to the provision of mercy, guidance, evidence and clear proofs. Of concern to one is the use of *rabb* in relation to proofs (*bayyināt*).<sup>25</sup> In a specific verse, Allāh (as The Educator) invites people to evaluate His

24. Khosrow Bagheri and Zohreh Khosravi, “The Islamic Concept of Education Reconsidered,” in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 23, no. 4 (2006): 88–103.

25. In *al-An'ām* (6): 57, it is said: “Say: Surely I have manifest proof from my Lord and you call it a lie; I have not with me that which you would hasten; the judgment is only Allāh's; He relates the truth and He is the Best of Deciders”; Then, again in *al-An'ām* (6):104: “Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, it is for his own soul and whoever will be blind, it shall be against himself and I am not a keeper over you.” Likewise in *al-An'ām* (6): 157, “Or lest you should say: If the Book had been revealed to us, we would certainly have been better guided than they, so indeed there has come to you clear proof from your Lord, and guidance and mercy. Who then is more unjust than he who rejects Allāh's communications and turns away from them? We will reward those who turn away from Our communications with an evil chastisement because they turned away.”

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Guidance and to respond critically with “proof” of their justifications: “And they say: None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful.”<sup>26</sup>

The main point about the verse is that people are invited to come up with their own “proofs” or justifications, which suggest that a situation or argument can be taken into controversy. In essence, the notion of *tarbiyah* creates scope for critical evaluations and interpretations based on sound reasons for disagreement. The upshot of this view of Islamic education is that people can question and undermine a particular point of view, which suggests that they ought to reflect about the knowledge they receive and construct—a matter of becoming critical. Therefore, *tarbiyah* (individuation) can be considered as another phase in Islamic learning, that is, after people have acquired knowledge and they are informed, they can then begin to challenge and question prevailing understandings. Unsurprisingly, the Qur’ān invites people to contemplate and deliberate about educational matters.<sup>27</sup>

Thirdly, with reference to the author’s previous work<sup>28</sup> on the matter and in particular the seminal thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, another form of Islamic education is couched under the term *ta’dīb* (good action).<sup>29</sup> For al-Attas, Islamic education is guided by *adab* or the appropriate use of knowledge (*ilm*), reason (*nutq*), intellect (*‘aql*) and heart (*qalb*)—more specifically, one’s physical, intellectual and

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26. *Al-Baqarah* (2): 111.

27. In another article, the author specifically discusses how actions such as *tafakkur* (contemplation), *tadabbur* (critical reflection), *fahm* (rational understanding) and *‘aql* (intellectual inquiry) underscore the practice of deliberation. Refer to the following: Yusuf Waghid, (1996b) “In search of a boundless ocean and new skies: Human creativity is a matter of *‘amal*, *jihād* and *ijtihād*,” in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 13(3): 353–365.

28. Yusuf Waghid, “Ta’dib: Restatement of Islamic Education” in *Muslim Education Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1996): 32–45.

29. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1991), 23.

spiritual capacities—to perform acts (*amal*) of justice (*ʿadl*). This view of *taʿdīb* (good action) is in line with the rationale of quality education discussed earlier, namely that of producing a just person: “The *just* man [woman] is he [she] who effects such *ʿadab* unto his [her] self, resulting in his [her] being a *good* man [woman].”<sup>30</sup> The author concurs with this approach to Islamic education on the grounds that one cannot just acquire knowledge of the Islamic sciences and then begin to critically analyse and respond to particular issues without one’s actions resulting in something worthwhile or appropriate for the global community. *taʿdīb* (good action) has in mind actions which can lead to the improvement of the global community’s situation. Therefore, one requires *jihād* (just striving, which includes the recognition of the rights of others) which can invariably change distorted or improve unsatisfactory situations. For instance, one specifically thinks how *taʿdīb* (good action) can contribute potentially towards the eradication of racial bigotry, gender oppression, cultural imperialism and even terrorism for the reason that good action requires that people pursue actions which can eliminate inhumane acts perpetrated against humanity such as murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, persecution on political, racial or religious grounds, war crimes (mistreatment of civilians and non-combatants as well as one’s enemy in combat), and genocide (through ethnic cleansing, mass executions, rape and cruel punishment of the enemy. Emphatically, *taʿdīb* (good action) has an emancipatory interest in mind which can be realised through just striving that takes into account the rights of others and that others’ rights ought to be assured.<sup>31</sup>

In essence, it has been shown that the three conceptualisations of Islamic education, namely, *taʿlīm* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *taʿdīb* (good action), should be seen as complementary actions of the mind in the

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30. Ibid., 24.

31. This author uses *jihād* as referring to just actions of the mind rather than the application of brute force, which invariably leads to more violence.

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pursuit of achieving justice for every person wherever he or she might be. In turn, it has been shown how practices such as *ummah* (communal engagement), *shūrā* (public deliberation) and *jihād* (just striving, including the recognition of the rights of others) can contribute towards achieving universal justice, considered as the rationale for quality education. Since *ta'lim* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *ta'dīb* (good action) are all related to the achievement of universal justice, these forms of Islamic education can be considered as manifestations of quality education.

The final part of this article specifically deals with the potential *ta'lim* (socialisation), *tarbiyah* (individuation) and *ta'dīb* (good action) have to offer for eradicating gross forms of injustice perpetrated against humanity.

### **Islamic Education's Response to Crimes against Humanity**

The aforementioned “crimes against humanity” once again require the emergence of norms which ought to govern relations among individuals in a global civil society. This author wishes to offer some ways in which Islamic education can enhance the project of ensuring universal justice for all individuals rather than just members of our own societies.

During the previous century, our world experienced the genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany, ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo, and heinous atrocities perpetrated against Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. Personally, in South Africa, the author was subjected to racial discrimination under apartheid rule for 36 years. Such acts of human rights violations have continuously led one to ask the question: how can Islamic education contribute towards minimising and eradicating such inhumane and unjust acts against humanity? As far as the author is concerned, we should constantly educate societies to inculcate the important virtues of Islamic education in order to prevent such forms of injustice. If our societies can

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internalise the virtues of Islamic education, the possibility of injustices against human beings could be minimised or even eradicated. In simple terms, the possibility that inhumane and unjust acts against human beings can be reduced is highly likely, if people are educated to be good persons. What does this entail? Important virtues of Islamic education include, firstly, the capacity to deliberate as free and equal citizens in a democratic polity, and secondly, conducting such deliberations so that they are about the demands of justice for all individuals. If we deliberate as free and equal persons, then we first of all give an account of what we do to others, who might find our reasons justifiable or otherwise. In turn, we consider the reasons of others equally, which can lead us either to accept or reject their reasons or their understanding of our reasons or justifications. Such justifications and concomitant actions happen in an atmosphere of free and open expression, and are only hindered when our reasons embody an injustice towards others. For instance, when students deliberate among themselves about the racial discrimination experienced by South African Blacks under apartheid and begin to equate affirmative action with discrimination against Whites, then free expression can no longer remain unrestricted, because the majority Black South African government is unjustly being accused of racial discrimination. It is not suggested that governments should not be questioned critically, but rather that unjustifiable criticism should not be countenanced, because affirmative action is one way of equalising opportunities for all South Africans, especially those previously excluded from gaining employment opportunities under apartheid. One cannot imagine oneself in an academic position today if it were not because of the equalisation of opportunities for all of the country's citizens. For this reason, freedom of expression should not become "an unconstrained licence to discriminate" and should only be practised "within the limits of doing no injustice to others."<sup>32</sup> So, when all Jews are accused of perpetrating acts of aggression

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32. Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 200.



against Palestinians, or if all Palestinians are branded as potential “suicide bombers”, then such potentially dangerous statements should not be condoned, because not only are people unjustly repudiated, but such irresponsible expressions could also fuel already volatile relations in the Middle East. Similarly, if a young child in a South African school decides to dress in the military-style attire worn by a “suicide bomber”, for example, this cannot be condoned, because others might find it offensive as it might be seen as venerating “suicide bombers” as heroes, who perpetrate heinous acts of violence against other human beings. In essence, educating people to be good persons involves inculcating in them a spirit of openness and respect for the justifications of others, a recognition that others should be listened to, and that injustices should not be done to others under the guise of equal and free expression.

Moreover, if Islamic education demands that people deliberate about the demands of justice for all individuals, then doing what is right cannot be reduced to loyalty to, or identification with, any existing group of human beings. Educational institutions should teach students, on the one hand, about their duties as citizens to advance justice and not to limit performance of these duties to some individuals or groups, and on the other hand, about their responsibilities as citizens to support institutional ways to move towards better societies and a better world.

Finally, the author refers to an empirical study of his own in order to show how virtues of Islamic education can be used in an institution of higher learning to stimulate discussions about achieving universal justice. He requested a Masters class to complete an assignment for their course. Students had to identify a controversial issue which relates to quality education (He used the themes of democratic citizenship and cosmopolitanism), and then had to make presentations in groups to the class. The author selected only the following three issues which three groups presented, as these issues would clarify some of his claims about educating for quality. The first

group chose to write and speak about the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa; the second group introduced the inhumane treatment of people in the Darfur region in Sudan (Africa); and the third group raised the issue of America’s “war on terror”. The main argument of the first group was that forgiveness and starting anew are important to build future human relations, in particular for people to reconcile after racial mistreatment and the violation of peoples’ human dignity. Black and White people in South Africa should learn to live together, share their commonalities and disagreements if they want to live in peace and solidarity, this group stated. This is an important claim because quality education involves educating people to be good persons who have to take into account people’s linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious commonalities (and differences). The idea of finding a civil space for the sharing of different people’s commonalities is based on the understanding that people need to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own, as previously alluded to. Besides, educating people to become good persons involves creating civil spaces where they can learn to share commonalities and respect the differences of others.

The second group introduced the discussion that the world and the United Nations cannot look on while a government wants to starve a section of its citizens (considered as dissidents) to death. They felt that the starvation of people and the wilful destruction of the way of life of citizens who disagree with the state is a form of genocide. Indeed, the author agrees with this view because ethnic cleansing (as happened during the Holocaust and in the former Yugoslavia) is a crime against humanity in which people are considered by others as repugnant enough to be wiped out. Genocide is the supreme crime against humanity, in that it aims at the destruction of human variety, of the many and diverse ways of being human. In other words, “it aims at the extinction of their way of life.”<sup>33</sup>

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33. Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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Thus, educating students to respect and to do something about the preservation of human life becomes a necessary part of the agenda of educating for quality.

The third group raised the issue not so much of the justification of war and the pre-emptive strikes against suspected terrorists, but rather the harm any war against people causes to innocent bystanders, in particular children and women. They felt that the “war on terror” should not be waged against a suspected enemy and that dialogue should always be the only means to resolve world crises. The author will rather defend the use of limited force in curbing violence and submit that force should no longer be used when a supposed enemy has agreed to end acts of aggression.<sup>34</sup> Yet, like this group, the author does not imagine (at least at this stage) that suspected terrorists and proponents of the “war on terror” would forgo their intention of annihilating the other. Indeed, the author concurs with this group that the focus ought to be more on the innocent victims of the “war on terror”. In other words, everything possible should be done to avoid innocent bystanders from being killed. Since this is not always possible, as the latest use of precision warfare would confirm, we do the unthinkable: initiate a dialogue with those presumed to be terror suspects. This means not just abandoning them to Guantanamo Bay, where their perceived “martyrdom” breeds more resistance to their enemy, but finding a place where people can begin to talk about their rights to live in a protected and better world for all.

In simple terms, as human beings, we should begin to deepen our interconnectedness and interdependence, which requires that people should be regarded “as worthy of respect as human beings, regardless of how their values differ and

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34. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd. ed (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) in Iris Marion Young, *Global Challenges* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 80, claims in *On Violence*, “violence may sometimes be justified, but it cannot be legitimate”.

whether or not we disapprove of what they do.”<sup>35</sup> As such even those who perpetrated acts of racial bigotry, gender oppression, cultural imperialism and even terrorism should be respected as persons. This would at least leave open the door for reconciliation among contending parties, if the opportunity arises. If there is too much hatred, anger and resentment towards others, the possibility of reconciliation would be slim. In this sense, the author agrees with Hannah Arendt, who notes that, “Forgiving ... is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, respect opens the door for the enhancement of reconciliation; without respect, there can be no recognition of human dignity and, hence, no likelihood of reconciliation. In the words of Hill, “That all moral agents should be respected as human beings should stand even for perpetrators of serious crimes and moral offences. Even they should not be seen as forfeiting all respect.”<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

In essence, educating for quality does not only involve cultivating in people a sense of deliberating together freely and equally about their common and collective destiny, but

35. Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Respect Pluralism and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 69.

36. Also, Young (2006: 91), in discussing Arendt’s *On Violence*, has the following to say about violence:

Violence not only harms individuals but it makes their lives difficult to carry on as before. When rulers or resisters adopt the use of violence as a regular means of trying to elicit the cooperation of others, they tend to produce the opposite effect: flight, retreat into privacy, pre-emptive strikes, distrust of all by all. The use of violence in politics is problematic, moreover, because its consequences so easily and often escalate beyond the specific intentions its uses have. Violent acts tend to produce violent responses that radiate beyond the original acts...

37. Hill, Jr., *Respect Pluralism*, 115.

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also about achieving justice for all, including those immigrants who are victims of religious wars (Sudanese, Somalian, Rwandese and Congolese immigrants) and political alienation and suppression (Zimbabwean immigrants). Islamic education ought to cultivate in all students the skills and virtues of universal justice, including the capacity to deliberate about the demands of justice for all individuals, not only for citizens of any specific country. Deliberating about the demands of justice is a central virtue of Islamic education, because it is primarily, rather than exclusively, through our empowerment of good persons that we can further the cause of justice around the world. Indeed, this is what quality education ought to be.

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