Challenging Cross-Cultural Notions of Perceptions of Interstate Conflict Resolution between Arab/Muslims and Westerners

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Abstract

This article challenges the hypothesis that Western and Arab/Muslim approaches to conflict resolution are radically dissimilar. Reevaluating cross-cultural compatibility, we demonstrate that Arab/Muslim and Western conceptualizations of conflict resolution share profound similarities. We demonstrate this through two methods. First, while contemporary cross-cultural comparisons are limited to the Western structural approach, we integrate the social-psychological and spiritual approaches to contradict the current theoretical reductive tendencies. We establish that the social-psychological and spiritual approaches are more accommodating of fundamental principles and practices emphasized in Arab/Muslim literature, and address important criticisms commonly leveled at Western theory. Second, we employ survey research to qualify laypersons' perceptions of sixteen conflict resolution principles and ten conflict resolution mechanisms commonly recognized at the structural level to qualify cross-cultural comparability. Combined, our research identifies fundamental theoretical and practical cross-cultural parallels between Arab/Muslim and Western conceptualizations of conflict resolution at the theoretical and practical levels.

Background

Several Arab/Muslim scholars conclude that Western conflict resolution theories and practices are nonviable and unacceptable in Arab/Muslim culture (Irani& Funk, 2000; Irani, 1999). Numerous fundamental criticisms are observable in the literature.

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Foremost Arab/Muslim scholars emphasize that conflict resolution in the Arab/Muslim context is implemented at the familial level whereas Western practices center on the individual (Irani, 1999). The second frequently cited criticism of Western practices is its marginalization of religion, whereas Arab/Muslim practices are inextricably linked to Islam. Finally, there are particular conflict resolution practices that Arab/Muslim scholars criticize. For example, techniques including active listening and neutral facilitation are purported inappropriate in Arab/Muslim culture, with the former being perceived to indicate weakness, while the latter is hypothesized ineffectual if third parties cannot influence referents and deliver solutions (Irani, 1999). These alleged theoretical divergences compromise the applicability of Western conflict resolution conceptualizations and practices at the intrastate and interstate levels (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Gellman, &Vuinovich, 2008). At the extreme, they hypothesize that Western and Middle East theory and practices have contradictory purposes (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Bar-On, 2005; Irani, 1999).

To reevaluate cross-cultural compatibility, we first reference a theoretical framework that incorporates the Western social-psychological and spiritual approaches to conflict resolution. These approaches have been marginalized by previous comparative studies, making the framework less representative of Western theory, which, consequently, undermines the validity of findings extrapolated from these respective comparisons. The value of our wider framework demonstrates that these Western approaches mute two common critiques expressed by Arab/Muslim scholars. To reinforce our hypothesis of cross-cultural convergences when resolving conflict between two countries, our second comparative approach introduces a survey of a convenience sample of respondents from the U.S. and Iraq. Our survey permits respondents to rate various practices designed to improve relationships between two countries following violent conflict. We qualify a high degree of convergence between how our survey samples conceptualizes modes of advancing conflict resolution between states, which equally contradicts the notion of cross-cultural incompatibility. This article is organized as follows. First, we review two of the common criticisms leveled against Western conflict resolution theory as articulated in Arab/Muslim comparative research. Then we introduce the three Western approaches to conflict resolution to broaden the cross-cultural comparative framework. As we review the three approaches, we contend with the two common criticisms to demonstrate how the social-psychological and spiritual approaches mute Arab/Muslim criticism in both theoretical and practical terms.

Thereafter, our attention reverts to the micro level through the introduction of our survey methodology and research sample that qualifies laypersons' perception of ten mechanisms for improving relationships following violent interstate conflict. We believe that the incorporation of a wider comparative framework and public opinion will reinvigorate academic discourse on cross-cultural conflict resolution by testing existing theory and introducing more representative theory and perspectives.

Cross-Cultural Divergences

George Irani's (1999) "Islamic Mediation Techniques for Middle East Conflicts," provides a concise framework for comparatively analyzing Arab/Muslim and Western conceptualizations of conflict resolution. In this essay, Irani (1999) suggests several important factors that influence how Arab/Muslims define and understand terms such as conflict and conflict resolution. These include the specific historical, cultural, geographic, religious and philosophical environment and experiences unique to the Middle East that have a distinguishable effect on cross-cultural conceptualization of relationships and thereby influence how conflict resolution is conceptualized and practiced (Gartzke & Gleditsch, 2006; Irani, 1999; Reimann, 2004). Appreciating these cultural divergences is fundamental, as they can facilitate misunderstanding, produce conflict, and distrust during cross-cultural interaction (Ashki, 2006; Gartzke & Gleditsch, 2006). The salience of cross-cultural divergences are compounded by historical experiences which not only affect individual/collective behavior and the quality of bilateral interaction, but equally impact the manner in which conflict is perceived, negotiated and resolved (Ashki, 2006; Briggs, 2003; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, &Miall, 2011).

Unfortunately, such distinguishing characteristics and nuances were largely ignored by Western conflict resolution researchers until the 1990s (Avruch, 2003), nonetheless, our argument is that when contemplating conflict resolution at the intrastate and interstate levels, Arab/Muslim and Western approaches share more commonality in terms of theory and practice than the narrowly constructed comparative analyses conducted hitherto qualify. We begin by revisiting two prominent criticisms emphasized by Arab/Muslim scholars. Firstly, Irani (1999) argues that one primary cross-cultural variances between Arab/Muslim and Western approaches is the former's robust patriarchal and tribal associations.

In this frame, scholars generalize that inhabitants of predominantly Arab/Muslim countries frequently identify themselves according to kinship and clan membership as opposed to the Western tendency toward individualism or nationalism (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). Communal association in the Middle East is a long-standing tradition since historically "it was from the tribe that protection of interests was obtained" (Al-Ramahi, 2008, p. 3). These identity-based cultural divergences affect how social relationships are cognitively, effectively and behaviorally formulated, interpreted, and applied, and consequently influence how conflicts are managed or resolved (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). More specifically, conflicts between individuals or groups in the Arab/Muslim tradition are automatically transferred and managed at the community (family or tribal) level (Irani, 1999). Such incompatibilities are usually resolved utilizing intermediaries such as family representatives or tribal elders (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999), with Irani (1999, p. 11) postulating that conflict resolution originates in "local religious or political zaim (leaders)". These representatives manage or resolve a dispute through their decisions and actions, which are guided by religious and social norms (Irani, 1999; Soliman, 2009).

Combined, both the level at which conflict is resolved in the Arab/Muslim tradition and the preferred practices utilized prompt scholars to criticize the applicability of Western-associated conflict resolution norms at the intrastate and interstate levels for two distinct reasons (Irani, 1999). Firstly, as alluded to above, contemporary Arab/Muslim culture does not have a strong association to state citizenship, defined here as the practice of identifying oneself as a member of a particular country, by comparison to that found in the West (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). Because Arab/Muslim identity markers center on familial or clan ties, traditional Arab/Muslim macro level conflict resolution is suggested to function contrary to conflict resolution structural principles favored in the West that are hypothesized to be centered on micro level identity-association while being applied at the macro level (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). The theoretical and practical importance of the Arab/Muslim community based approach to conflict resolution is that there are no traditional Arab/Muslim techniques available for resolving conflict at the intrastate and interstate levels (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Gellman & Vuinovich, 2008; Irani, 1999). Since conflict resolution is focused at the community level, practices for resolving conflict at the higher level has failed to develop.

While scholars argue that the same principles and practices applicable at the community level are relevant at the higher levels, the theoretical and practical void found in Arab/Muslim culture has given rise to the imposition of Western structural techniques when resolving conflict at the intrastate and interstate levels in predominantly Arab/Muslim countries (Irani, 1999; Gellman &Vuinovich, 2008). Imposition of Western techniques, consequently, has undermined the success of these imposed conflict resolution programs, while simultaneously marginalizing and devaluing indigenous conceptualizations of conflict and conflict resolution, which might otherwise be more appropriate in context (Briggs, 2003; Irani, 1999). The tendency is problematic because Western structural methods concentrate on social and political elites, while institutionalizing conflict termination, management, or resolution within a state's governing framework (Gardner Feldman, 2008). Such practices, however, are inadequate in the Arab/Muslim context since they do not involve or infiltrate society for reasons including popular rejection of the methods utilized compounded by the limited influence of centralized governing authority over many Arab/Muslim communities at the micro level (Gellman &Vuinovich, 2008; Irani, 1999).

The last frequently cited cross-cultural divergence addressed here is the role of religion in conflict resolution (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). Although Islamic religious interpretations and practices are hermeneutic (Abu-Nimer, 2000), the respective literature presents Islam as an inextricable component of Arab/Muslim culture and society (Abu-Nimer, 2008; Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999; Safa, 2007; Soliman, 2009). Within this frame, Arab/Muslim scholars assert that Islam has a deeply rooted tradition of conflict resolution (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Safa, 2007; Soliman, 2009). The combination implies Islam cannot be extracted from conflict resolution as understood and practiced in predominantly Muslim societies (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). This hypothesis is advanced because Islam regulates human's relationship with Allah, in addition to human-to-human relationships (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). Accordingly, Islam is not exclusively perceived of as a religious belief system, but a set of guidelines for managing daily affairs (Al-Ramahi, 2008). The literature emphasizes Islam's authority (traditional and legal) in conflict resolution (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Al-Ramahi, 2008), with two sacred manuscripts informing Muslim understanding (Gulam, 2003). "The main source of Islamic law (Shariah) is the Qu'ran, which, according to Muslims, is the embodiment of the Divine word that was revealed in stages to Prophet Muhammad […] by the Angel Gabriel."(Gulam, 2003, p. 5).

The Sunna is the second influential resource (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Gulam, 2003). "The Sunnarefer[s] to the normative behaviour, decisions, actions, and tacit approvals and disapprovals of the Prophet. The Sunna was heard, witnessed, memorized, recorded, and transmitted from generation to generation" (Al-Ramahi, 2008, p. 7). Amalgamated, all Muslim approaches embrace the Qu'ran and the Sunna, which inspires conceptualizations of conflict, conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Al-Ramahi, 2008; Ashki, 2006; Gulam, 2003). These sacred references have likewise influenced which principles and practices have become institutionalized in contemporary Arab/Muslim culture (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Al-Ramahi, 2008; Ashki, 2006; Gulam, 2003). In instances where Islamic sources do not provide direct insight, religious representatives "resort to extrapolating and deducing from the" principles found in the Qu'ran and the Sunna (Al-Ramahi, 2008, p. 8). By comparison, Arab/Muslim scholars suggest the incorporation of religion is largely absent from mainstream Western approaches (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). For instance, Gulam (2003) argues that Western approaches are dictated by regulations and punishments designed and enforced by a secular state whom the law is understood to represent. In this framework, individuals who commit transgressions against state-established laws are punished accordingly (Gulam, 2003). Moreover, in cases of dispute management between parties in the West, third parties or intermediaries are encouraged to execute their duties in a manner that is beneficial and mutually acceptable to those belligerents involved (Irani, 1999).

Inversely, Islam influences laws and regulations in Arab/Muslim society, meaning transgressions are managed in the name of Allah because He has given the law (Gulam, 2003). In arbitration, for example, Islamic law and local traditions guide and inform juridical proceedings (Al-Ramahi, 2008). Simultaneously, conflict management or resolution in the Arab/Muslim context is implemented to preserve harmony among the collective rather than to advance individual interests (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Gulam, 2003). Clearly stated, in Arab/Muslim culture "the interests of the individual are protected only in so far as they do not come into conflict with the general interest" (Al-Ramahi, 2008, p. 9). Summarizing cross-cultural discrepancy, Al-Ramahi (2008, p. 2) tersely deduces: "Whereas, westerners know the primacy of law, the Arabs know the primacy of interpersonal relationships". For these reasons and others, Irani (1999) argues that Western conflict resolution practices are viewed as an imposition on, or alien to, Arab/Muslim citizens and are therefore insufficient or inappropriate in context.

We, however, argue that this assessment is unrepresentative because the comparative framework is largely restricted to comparisons of Western structural theory with Arab/Muslim traditional theory. This comparative framework fails to consider the Western social-psychological and spiritual approaches to conflict resolution. We overcome this theoretical weakness by referencing the latter two approaches. In this manner, we are able to demonstrate that the two prominent criticisms of the Western structural approaches to conflict resolution are accommodated when other Western approaches are juxtaposed with Arab/Muslim principles and practices.

Three Western Approaches of Conflict Resolution

Prior to comparatively analyzing principles and practices across cultures, it is essential to establish a holistic theoretical framework to overcome a previous weakness in cross-cultural comparative discourse. Hitherto, cross-cultural comparisons of Arab/Muslim and Western conflict resolution theory have been predominantly limited to comparing Arab/Muslim approaches with the Western structural approach. However, this is theoretically problematic as Valerie Rosoux (2009) identifies three prominent Western approaches to conflict resolution found in the literature. These include the structural, social-psychological, and spiritual approaches. Although these classifications are subject to lexical and theoretical fluctuation (Amstutz, 2005), this essay references these three approaches to widen the framework whereupon Arab/Muslim and Western theory and practices are compared. As demonstrated below, incorporation of the two latter approaches reduces the number of cross-cultural incompatibilities when comparing Arab/Muslim and Western theory and practice. We begin our review with the Western "structural," or top-down, approach which prioritizes resolving conflict among social and political elites by establishing constructive formal relations through representative and institutional interaction and interdependence (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Gardner Feldman, 2008). Structural approaches objectively seek to increase constructive formal political, economic, and security interaction among belligerents (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Gardner Feldman, 2008; Rosoux, 2009). This is achieved by altering perceptions and behavioral patterns at the highest levels so that the quality of relations between representatives and institutions (or structures) are improved (Bar-Tal &Bennink, 2004; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, &Miall, 2011).

By concentrating efforts at the structural level, it is argued that intrastate or interstate relations can be (re)constructed and rooted more rapidly by comparison to approaches implemented at the societal level (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Gardner Feldman, 2008). The effects of conflict resolution processes, thereafter, are projected to filter from these official governing structures into the respective societies over a period of time (Bar-Tal &Bennink, 2004; Gardner Feldman, 2008; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, &Miall, 2011). The structural approach is the most recognized technique for resolving conflict at the higher levels, although it is not the only approach. The second recognized Western approach to conflict resolution is the "social-psychological" approach that utilizes a bottom-up strategy (Rosoux, 2009). Its advocates contend that the individuals creating society, or a state, are essential stakeholders who must be engaged in a conflict resolution process to produce, root, and proliferate congenial relations (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Bloomfield, 2006; Kriesberg, 2004; Lederach, 1997). The projected outcome can range from positive peace (Bloomfield, 2006) to non-violent coexistence defined as negative peace (Kriesberg, 2001). To this end, the social-psychological approach centers on transforming the cognitive and emotive aspects, which generate a conflict among a majority of stakeholders in each affected society (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2000; Lederach, 1995).

Finally, other Western scholars advocate a "spiritual" approach to conflict resolution (Rosoux, 2009, p. 545). This approach parallels the social-psychological in that it embraces a bottom-up strategy with greater society being its primary referent. However, the spiritual approach pursues deep change, or transformation, among referents by emphasizing principles associated with Christianity including healing, forgiveness and reconciliation (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Lederach, 1997; Rosoux, 2009). Everett Worthington (2006, p. 267), for example, asserts that: "When conflict has resulted in hurts being inflicted on group members, people need to heal from those hurts in order to move past the hurts and live in peace." However, the incorporation of religiously influenced concepts such as forgiveness and healing in conflict resolution discourse at the intrastate and interstate levels engenders a significant degree of debate in Western literature (Bloomfield, 2006; Wohl & Branscombe, 2009). With the three Western approaches to conflict resolution delineated, it is possible to observe that the criticism of Western approaches for not including society and failing to incorporate religious influence are muted hen all Western approaches are considered.

More specifically, both the social-psychological and spiritual approaches are focused at the societal level, and the spiritual approach contains and accommodates religiously influenced principles and practices. As a consequence of expanding the comparative framework, we have demonstrated that the hitherto narrow comparisons of Arab/Muslim approaches marginalizes alternative Western approaches that address two fundamental critiques offered by Arab/Muslim scholars. In short, contemporary critiques offered by Arab/Muslim comparisons are weakened when all Western approaches are considered. Notwithstanding the similarities qualified, we argue that Western stakeholders should respect cross-cultural diversity by querying and accommodating Arab/Muslim societies politically, culturally and religiously when designing and implementing conflict resolution processes, whether directly or indirectly involved (Irani, 1999; Stover, Megally, & Mufti, 2005). Sharing this assumption, Irani (1999) recommends that conflict resolution techniques utilized in the Middle East should be rooted in, or at minimum accommodating of, practices found in Arab/Muslim societies. Rephrased, conflict resolution theories and practices implemented in the Middle East must be cognizant of, and acclimatize to, local needs and particularities to accommodate the unique cultural, historical, and religious nuances (Irani, 1999). As a result, our attention now turns to examining how laypersons conceptualize conflict resolution at the interstate level. Through querying, we are able to examine laypersons' opinion of conflict resolution mechanisms. Amalgamated, our research findings demonstrate that there are important cross-cultural similarities in how Arab/Muslim and Western culture understands the practices explored for resolving conflict between two countries. This finding reinforces our hypothesis that Arab/Muslim and Western approaches to conflict resolution at the interstate level do not converge to the degree that the contemporary literature suggests. The remainder of this text qualifies how ten conflict resolution mechanisms are perceived among scholars and laypersons across cultures.

Methodology

Our research was conducted utilizing an online questionnaire between September 2013 and December 2013 in which we queried a convenience sample of 109 adult citizens from the U.S. and Iraq. These participants were reached through social networking and personal contacts.

Although two notable weaknesses of this research are the small sample size and its biased nature (Norman, 2010), we wanted to analyze conflict resolution across Arab/Muslim and Western cultures at the micro level. Research findings, therefore, have to be interpreted with caution as they provide an imperfect snapshot of opinion from a small, unrepresentative sample (Kelley, Clark, Brown, &Sitzia, 2003). Nevertheless, concerning the demographic composition of our samples, the U.S. sample population contains 58 participants of whom 21 are males (36%) and 37 females (64%). Its ethnic composition includes 69% Caucasian (n = 40), 10% African-American (n = 6), 7% Native American (n = 4), 4% Hispanic (n = 2) and 10% claimed multiracial or no distinction (n = 6). Age distribution comprises 8 respondents between the ages of 18-25 (14%); 13 between 26 and 35 (22%); 21 between 36 and 45 (36%); 3 between 46 and 55 (5%); 12 between 56 and 65 (21%); and one between 66 and 75 (2%). Comparatively, our Iraq sample contains 51 adults. Of those, 27 are refugees from Iraq currently residing in Italy who were engaged with the assistance of NGO Centro Salute MigrantiForzati. In addition, the sample includes citizens from Iraq living, studying and working in Europe (n = 18) and the United States (n = 1) solicited through social networking. Finally, 4 citizens living in Iraq participated in the research and one respondent did not specify his location. Combined, this sample contains 36 male respondents (70.5 %), and 15 female (29.5 %). Their ethnicity is distributed as follows: 51% are Arab (n = 26), 45% are Kurd (n = 23), 2% are Assyrian (n = 1) and 2% claimed no affiliation (n = 1). In terms of age, our sample distribution is as follows: 21% are 18-25 (n = 11); 63% are 26-35 (n = 32); 14% are 36-45 (n = 7); 2% are 46-55 (n = 1).

The religious affiliations of both samples are distributed in the following manner. U.S. respondents are predominantly (64%) Christian (n = 37), followed by 26% who claimed no affiliation (n = 15), 5% which claimed an amalgamation (n = 3), 2% Jewish (n = 1), and 3% other (n = 2). Respondents from Iraq associated themselves as follows. Thirty-nine percent of the participants affiliate themselves with Shi'a Islam (n = 20), 19% with Sunni Islam (n = 10), 18% with Sufi Islam (n = 9), 18% claimed no religious affiliation (n = 9), and 6% with Christianity (n = 3). Finally, we requested the highest completed level of education from our respondents. Education level of each sample is distributed in the following manner. Fourteen percent of the U.S. sample has a high school degree (n = 8), 9% has an associate's degree (n = 1), 34% has a Bachelor degree (n = 19), 33% has a Master (n = 19), 9% has a Ph.D. (n = 1), and 2% an M.D. (n = 1).

By comparison, 27% of the respondents in our Iraq sample completed middle school (n = 14), 31% has a high school diploma (n = 16), 4% a technical degree (n = 2), 20% has a Master (n = 10), 12% a Bachelor (n = 6), and 6% a Ph.D. (n = 3). Combined, both population samples are well educated. Following closure of the survey, the data were transferred and analyzed using R programming language (http://www.r-project.org). Due to the sample's small size the data was analyzed descriptively and processed in sets. Since we treated the data as ordinal, non-parametric tests were utilized to measure reliability using several methods (Gadermann, Guhn, & Zumbo, 2012). First, Cronbachs Alpha, which is the most widely utilized test to measure internal reliability, based upon the covariance (Gadermann, Guhn, & Zumbo, 2012; Revelle, 2013) returned a 0.85. Next, standardized alpha whose measurement is based upon correlations was utilized (Mehra, 2003; Revelle, 2013) returned a 0.85. Finally, Guttman's Lambda 6 was utilized since it "considers the amount of variance in each item that can be accounted for the linear regression of all of the other items" (Revelle, 2013), returned 0.87. All tests indicate the data is reliable.

Perceptions of Principles

Next, we measure laypersons perceptions of principles that Arab/Muslim and Western scholars emphasize. We hypothesize that respondents will embrace these principles across cultures. Reliability of the question set regarding 16 conflict resolution principles is 0.851 with both Cronbach's raw and 0.866 standardized Alpha. Finally, Guttman's Lambda 6 returned 0.909. All tests indicate the data is reliable. To begin our analysis, we recall that scholars assert that Arab/Muslim societies prefer the principle of religion as a component of conflict resolution while the West minimizes it (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). As expected, when conceptualizing conflict resolution in general, a majority of US (57%) respondents (n = 33) rejects the influence of religion. Comparatively, the Iraq sample is polarized with 51% of respondents (n = 26) stating that religious values should not guide conflict resolution. Similarly, when rating religious values as a principle of conflict resolution, a minority of US respondents (43%) supports its influence (n = 25). Contrary, 38% of our US sample (n = 22) opposes the principle of religion in conflict resolution and 19% are undecided (n = 11). By comparison, 65% of respondents from Iraq believe that religion is a fundamental principle of conflict resolution (n = 33), with 23% opposed (n = 12) and 12% undecided (n = 6).

These findings demonstrate that our Iraq sample is more inclined to support the principle of religion in conflict resolution, while the US sample rejects it as Irani (1999) surmises. The second principle qualified is forgiveness. This principle was tested due to the dissension it produces in Western literature, and in order to introduce laypersons' opinion into the discourse. Recalling the critiques proffered by Western scholars, forgiveness is suggested to be a religiously laden concept (Bar-On, 2005) that invokes a sense of idealism (Rosoux, 2009) and/or a "forgive and forget" attitude (Bloomfield, 2006, 23-25; Rothfield, 2008, 559). However, our US sample does not appear to be adverse to forgiveness at the interstate level contrary to the theory offered by Bloomfield (2006) and others (Lerche, 2000; Rothfield, 2008). Instead, a majority of respondents from the US (72%, n = 42) agrees that showing forgiveness is essential to resolving a conflict. Their endorsement suggests that some Western scholars, such as Bloomfield (2006), may be misrepresenting laypersons' openness to forgiveness and thereby may be undermining the relative utility of this principle. Our US sample therefore advocates forgiveness as a principle and practice of conflict resolution similar to Western scholars such as John Paul Lederach (1995) and others (Avruch, 2010; Parent, 2012; Wohl & Branscombe, 2009; Worthington, 2006).

By comparison, 80% of the Iraq sample (n = 41) supports forgiveness. The prioritization of this principle among our Iraq sample confirms Arab/Muslim scholars' theory that forgiveness is an essential component of conflict resolution in the Arab/Muslim context (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Soliman, 2009). Affirming our collective findings on the issue of forgiveness, when forgiveness is rated as principle of conflict resolution, eighty-one percent of US participants (n = 47) advocate its use. Comparatively, an overwhelming majority (98%) of respondents from Iraq (n = 50) embraces the principle. Combined, our findings indicate that a clear majority of our US and Iraq samples embraces forgiveness as a component of conflict resolution. The next principle measured was honor. As noted in chapter seven, section two, Arab/Muslim societies place a significant amount of weight on individual and family honor as it impacts individual and collective identity and social status (Gellman & Vuinovich, 2008; Irani, 1999; Pely, 2009). It was simultaneously conjectured that while honor is not directly referenced in Western literature, it is implied in principles and practices such as regard. Nonetheless, according to our survey findings, honor is an esteemed principle in terms of conflict resolution across cultures.

Combined, 84% of participants from the US (n = 49) and 88% from Iraq (n = 45) favor the principle. Interestingly, nearly thirty-eight percent of US respondents (n = 22) give honor the highest ranking on the Likert scale versus twenty-three percent of those from Iraq (n = 12). Overall both samples largely support its application. Dignity (Gellman &Vuinovich, 2008; Pely, 2009) and respect (Irani, 1999) are also venerated principles in Arab/Muslim conflict resolution literature, and were likewise included in the survey. Our findings indicate that 90% of participants from Iraq (n = 46) and 86% of US respondents (n = 50) agree that dignity is an valuable principle, with response distribution of the Iraq sample (39%, n = 20) weighing more favorably than the US (29%, n = 17) in absolute terms. Concerning the principle of respect, majorities from both sample populations agree that respect is crucial to conflict resolution. An overwhelming 98% of US (n = 57) and 100% of the Iraq sample (n = 51) positively rate the principle, with more than fifty percent from each sample group qualifying respect as absolutely imperative. Thus, both samples overwhelmingly support respect and dignity as principles of conflict resolution.

Thereafter, we explored the principles of satisfaction of interests and needs of stakeholders as advocated by Western scholars (Adelman, 2005; Briggs, 2003; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011; Reimann, 2004). It should be recalled that Arab/Muslim scholars express diverse views toward these principles, as they must be considered in relation to Islamic teachings and norms. On the one hand, a clear majority of respondents from our US (78%, n = 45) and Iraq samples (86%, n = 44) asserts that satisfaction of the "interests" of those involved in a conflict is indispensable for resolution. On the other hand, 92% of respondents from Iraq (n = 49) prioritize satisfaction of stakeholders' "needs" versus 84% of US participants (n = 47). Hence clear majorities across both sample populations support the satisfaction of stakeholders' interests and needs when resolving a conflict, with our Iraq sample expressing more support than our US sample. Then, Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Bekdash, 2009) and Western (Anderlini, Conway, &Kays, 2004; Kriesberg, 2004; Rouhana, 2004) scholars prioritize the principle of justice. Unsurprisingly, a clear majority from both samples favors the principle of justice in conflict resolution. There are, however, notable discrepancies across cultures. Foremost, 88% of U.S respondents (n = 51) favor the pursuit of justice compared to a plurality (96%) of those from our Iraq sample (n = 49).

There is also a notable distribution difference, with forty-five percent of those from Iraq (n = 23) making justice an absolute priority versus twenty-seven percent among respondents from the United States (n = 16). Amalgamated, our data illustrates that our Iraq sample is more inclined to embrace justice than our US sample. Subsequently, perceptions of truth as a principle were qualified. Truth, or the establishment of a detailed account of what has occurred in the past, is hypothesized as essential to conflict resolution according to Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Bekdash, 2009; Said & Funk, 2001) and Western scholars (Adelman, 2005; Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Kelman, 2004; Rosoux, 2009). Our research confirms this hypothesis. A plurality of respondents from Iraq (96%, n = 49) prioritizes the principle of truth when resolving conflict. By comparison, a clear majority of US respondents (88%, n = 51) equally favors the inclusion of the principle of truth. Both samples therefore embrace truth as a principle, while our Iraq sample expressing increasing degrees of support.

Similarly, we measured respondent perceptions of accountability when resolving conflict. We found overwhelming majorities across cultures advocate this principle, with 95% of participants from the US (n = 55) and 96% from Iraq (n = 49) favoring accountability. Our Iraq sample ranks this principle higher than their US counterparts, with forty-three percent of respondents from Iraq (n = 22) ranking accountability as an absolute priority versus thirty-two percent of respondents from the US sample (n = 19). Nevertheless, a clear plurality of respondents from both samples embraces accountability in conflict resolution. The next principle explored was the protection of individual rights, which Abu-Nimer (2000) suggests is essential to Arab/Muslim conceptualizations and practices of conflict resolution. Our data illustrates that absolute majorities from both countries positively rate the protection of individual rights. Ninety-five percent of participants from the US (n = 55) and 100% from Iraq (n = 51) claim that the protection of individual rights of stakeholders should be prioritized when resolving conflict. Hence this principle is likewise shared across cultures. The most noteworthy difference in perceptions of principles qualified between our US and Iraq samples revolve around the importance of compensation extended to those who have suffered during a conflict. Although compensation or restitution is a recognized principle and methodology of conflict resolution in Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Bekdash, 2009) and the Western theory and practice (Bar-Tal &Bennink, 2004; Kriesberg, 2004; Rosoux, 2009), there is a noteworthy discrepancy between how our respondents rate this practice.

Although a plurality (94%) of participants from Iraq (n = 48) support the payment of reparations, only 67% of US respondents (n = 39) express the same opinion. US respondents are not only less supportive of the method, 22% reject the principle (n = 13) compared to two participants from our Iraq sample (4%). Thus, although a majority from both samples approves the principle of restitution, our Iraq sample is more inclined to embrace the principle and practice compared to our US sample. Thereafter, empowerment was explored. Empowerment is a principle embraced by Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000) and Western (Lederach, 1995; Reimann, 2004) scholars, and support for it was measured using multiple scenarios. First, respondents were asked whether the opinion of those involved in a conflict should be consulted when constructing conflict resolution between two countries. A plurality of participants from Iraq (98%, n = 50) agrees that getting the opinion of those involved is crucial when resolving conflict. Comparatively, 86% of US respondents (n = 50) share this sentiment. Next, respondents were queried about the importance of listening to the other. Once again, a plurality from both samples agrees on the importance of listening with 97% of US (n = 56) and 96% of our Iraq sample (n = 49) expressing support.

Linked to the above, respondents were then asked if practices and methodology acceptable to affected stakeholders should be incorporated into conflict resolution. As outlined in part two of this thesis, consultation to identify methodology utilized in conflict resolution is advocated by Western scholars such as Stover, Megally and Mufti (2005). Our data show a majority of US participants (93%, n = 54) agrees conflict resolution practices should be acceptable to affected stakeholders. By comparison, 86% of respondents from Iraq (n = 44) believe practices should be mutually acceptable. Therefore, we found that our samples think citizens should be consulted on conflict resolution, they felt that listening to the other was important and that practices utilized to resolve a conflict should be mutually acceptable. Finally, we explored the principle of mutual benefit. Although Arab/Muslim culture is suggested to minimize the importance of mutual benefit vis-à-vis their prioritization of collective interests during the resolution of a conflict (Irani, 1999; Irani & Funk, 2000; Said & Funk, 2001), this research measured respondent openness to mutual benefit. Our data illustrate that 88% of US (n = 51) and 82% of respondents from Iraq (n = 42) perceive mutual benefit as an essential principle of conflict resolution at this level. Thus, both our samples advocate mutually beneficial resolutions.

Combined, our analysis of principles demonstrates that most respondents in the US and Iraq samples esteem similar principles. Only the principle of religion is rejected by a majority of US respondents.

General Perception of Practices

Turning attention to recognized practices for advancing conflict resolution, our questionnaire requested respondents to rank the perceived usefulness often conflict resolution practices for resolving a conflict between two countries. Since scholars suggest inclusion of society in conflict resolution (Hinds & Oliver, 2009), this line of questioning makes a theoretical contribution to cross-cultural discourse by providing insight into micro-level opinion of particular practices. To enhance survey validity across cultures, brief descriptions of each technique were provided. In terms of reliability, Chronbach's alpha returned a 0.851. Next, standardized alpha returned a 0.851. Finally, Guttman's Lambda 6 returned 0.867. All tests indicate the data is reliable. Our survey finds that structural practices are overwhelmingly supported by both samples for resolving conflict between two countries. In particular, a plurality of respondents supports political cooperation, defined as government representatives from two adversarial countries agreeing to work together, for example by holding joint meetings to resolve issues. Ninety-six percent from the Iraq sample (n = 49) and 93% from the U.S. (n = 54) rate this practice positively. Forty-eight percent from the U.S. rank it in the two highest categories (n = 28) versus 49 percent of those from Iraq (n = 25).

Similarly, economic cooperation, defined as two states agreeing to work together to improve economic relations and increase dependency, is espoused by 84% of U.S. respondents (n = 49) and 88% of those from Iraq (n = 45). Finally, security cooperation, defined as two states working together to increase mutual security, is favored by an absolute majority of respondents from the Iraq sample (96%, n = 49) compared to 86% of those from the United States (n = 50). While 19 percent of U.S. respondents ranks this technique at its highest, only 10% from the Iraq sample rates it at the maxim. In conclusion, while clear majorities support these three structural-based practices for resolving conflict between two countries, the U.S. sample is slightly less likely to support military cooperation than the sample from Iraq, although those who do are more inclined to prioritize it. Retributive and restorative justice mechanisms were also incorporated into our survey.

Concerning the former, 94 percent of respondents from the Iraq sample (n = 48) support retributive justice through court (or judicial) proceedings, defined as the prosecution of criminal wrongdoing according to state or international law. By comparison, 78 percent of their U.S. counterparts (n = 45) approve criminal prosecution. Fifty-three percent of those from Iraq (n = 27) rank judicial proceedings in the two highest categories on the scale compared to 21 percent of U.S. respondents (n = 12). Concerning the later, restorative justice mechanisms score comparatively well across multiple practices. For instance, 90% of respondents from Iraq (n = 46) advocate truth telling, defined as a process where individuals who have committed wrongdoing are asked to tell the truth before a committee in exchange for amnesty or reduced sentencing. Comparatively, 76 percent of those from the United States (n = 44) express the same opinion. Combined, our Iraq sample is more likely to embrace judicial proceedings and truth telling compared to the U.S. sample although a majority of the latter support both techniques.

Similarly, 90 percent of those in the Iraq sample (n = 46) embrace an apology, where one or more representatives publicly apologize for wrongs committed against another group. Comparatively, 66 percent of U.S. respondents (n = 38) express the same opinion. Next, reparation payments, demarcated as one state paying compensation to citizens of another state for wrongdoings committed, are supported by 88% of from Iraq (n = 45) and 67% of our U.S. sample (n = 39). Of those, 47% of respondents from Iraq (n = 24) ranks this technique with the highest two ratings versus 17% of U.S. respondents (n = 10) doing the same. That a majority of the sample from Iraq express support for reparations was expected as this mechanism was embraced in the context of transitional justice in Iraq (Stover, Megally, & Mufti, 2005). Combined, both samples approve public apology and reparations, nonetheless, these techniques are increasingly supported by our Iraq sample.

Third party intervention, identified as representatives from another country or organization assisting two states to improve their relations likewise receives widespread support. Eighty-four percent of the Iraq sample (n = 43) support the practice compared to 78 percent from the United States (n = 45). While this finding suggests openness to third party intervention at the international level, it was beyond the scope of the survey to more deeply evaluate how third party intervention was conceptualized. Nevertheless, pluralities from both samples agree that stakeholders should be empowered, or permitted to decide on how conflict resolution is pursued.

A clear majority of respondents from the U.S. (90%, n = 52) and Iraq (86%, n = 44) favor empowerment for guiding conflict resolution. This finding reinforces scholars' emphasis on (third parties) popular inclusion and consultation when designing and implementing programs (Hinds & Oliver, 2009). Next, the questionnaire asked participants to rank techniques purported to increase bilateral awareness. These are represented first by cultural exchanges, defined as the act of facilitating work, study or travel to another country for a period to increase mutual knowledge of other cultures. Ninety-six percent of respondents from Iraq (n = 49) support this practice versus 83 percent of those from the United States (n = 48). Correspondingly, respondents were also queried about positive media coverage, defined as the dissemination of positive news, reports and documentaries to enhance public awareness. Once again, clear majorities from the U.S. (86%, n = 50) and Iraq samples (88%, n = 45) embrace this practice in general.

Conclusion

This article contradicts previous comparative studies of Western and Arab/Muslim conflict resolution approaches that emphasize a vast degree of cross-cultural incompatibility. Utilizing two methods, we disprove this theory, and qualify a high degree of cross-cultural similarities. First, we construct a more representative Western framework when comparing Western theory with that of Arab/Muslim scholars. Rather than limiting our analysis to the Western structural approach, which is predominantly the case in previous comparative research, we incorporate the social-psychological and spiritual approaches. As demonstrated, these approaches accommodate religion into conflict resolution theoretical discourse and practice, and simultaneously advocate the incorporation and engagement of society resolution when implementing conflict resolution at all levels. We have demonstrated that research which reduces Western conflict resolution theory and practice to the structural approach alone are unrepresentative of Western theory, and simultaneously, that conclusions deduced from comparisons utilizing this narrow framework are unreliable. There are three recognized, Western approaches to conflict resolution, two of which, the social-psychological and spiritual, correspond to Arab/Muslim theory and practices. In this manner, two of the largest Arab/Muslim criticisms leveled against Western conflict resolution practices, namely the marginalization of religion and society, are isolated. To reinforce our conclusion, we deploy a second method, a questionnaire, to qualify laypersons' perceptions of conflict resolution between two countries.

This methodology introduces laypersons' opinion into scholarly discourse, a practice that has been overlooked by scholars and policymakers alike. We find that our samples from the United States and Iraq agree on sixteen principles for directing conflict resolution between two countries. In addition, we find that they widely agree on ten practices that advancing interstate conflict resolution. Amalgamated, we conclude that there is a higher degree of cross-cultural comparability than is generally recognized in comparative studies, and we believe that further research should be conducted to better qualify convergences and divergences between Arab/Muslim and Western approaches to conflict resolution at the higher levels.

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