Nonviolence in Islam: Jawdat Saʿid and the Path of Adam's First Son

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Abstract

This article analyzes the first work of the Syrian philosopher and political thinker Jawdat Saʿid (b. 1931), *Madhhab ibn Adam al-Awwal: Mushkilat al-ʿUnf fi al-ʿAmal al-Islami* (The path of Adam's first son: the problem of violence in Islamic action). This book, published in 1966, outlines the author's ideas regarding Islamic nonviolence and represents one of the most important modern Arabic contributions to the debate surrounding the role of violence in Islam. The first part of this article traces the methodological directives and theological beliefs that form the core of Saʿid's theory of nonviolence, what he will come to call "Habil's path." The second part focuses on Saʿid's division between the constructive and the distinctive phases of Islamic society and analyzes how his idea of nonviolence shifts during his discussion of the latter. The final part explores the revolutionary potential of Habil's path and the ways in which an espousal of *tawḥīd* and nonviolence might facilitate effective revolt against tyrannical rulers. This article concludes with a critical analysis of Saʿid's arguments in support of his theory. It makes the argument that Saʿid's work provides for an Islamic theory of nonviolence by rooting nonviolent concepts in Islamic history. It also highlights Saʿid's theorization of nonviolence as a methodology and points to the way in which this theory sets him apart from other nonviolence theorists who see nonviolence as an absolute moral imperative. This article utilizes the English translation of *Madhhab ibn Adam al-Awwal* by Munzer A. Absi and H. Hilwani (1993) as a primary source, while using the original Arabic text to verify the translation's accuracy. The ideas of other Islamic thinkers have also been presented in order to clarify Saʿid's ideas, as well as to provide the reader with a general context of the similarities and differences between Saʿid and other Islamic philosophers.

Keywords: Jawdat Saʿid; nonviolence; Islam; Habil (Abel); revolution; *tawḥīd*; Syria

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The Syrian philosopher Jawdat Saʿid (b. 1931) published his first book, *Madhhab ibn Adam al-Awwal: Mushkilat al-ʿUnf fi al-ʿAmal al-Islami* (The path of Adam's first son: the problem of violence in Islamic action; hereafter, "*The Path of Adam's First Son*"), in 1966.[1] In this work, Saʿid approached the theme of nonviolence that would become central to his writing in the following decades. By tracing ideas of peace and violence through the history of Islam, *The Path of Adam's First Son* provides for a theory of Islamic nonviolence, where nonviolent concepts are seen as an integral part of the religion. In doing so, Saʿid brings a critical perspective to the debate surrounding the inherently "violent nature" of Islam that has increasingly come to dominate public discourse about the Muslim world. His advocation for nonviolent methods for revolting against tyranny is fundamental, especially in recent years in which parts of the Muslim world have witnessed nonviolent uprisings degenerating into bloody civil wars. Alongside ʿAbd al-Ghaffar Khan (d. 1988), a Pashtun activist, and ʿAfraʾ Jalabi (b. 1969), his Syrian disciple, Saʿid is one of the most important thinkers who have examined the idea of nonviolence in Islam, making his contribution to the conversation worthy of attention in contemporary debates. In the case of Syria, recognizing his influence and the application of his theories allows for the deconstruction of the state-sanctioned narrative that popular revolt is necessarily violent, based on a dualistic confrontation between the state on the one hand, and terrorists on the other; while rarely recognized in the media coverage, ideas of Islamic nonviolence played an important role during the Syrian Civil War in 2011, where citizens like Saʿid and his students firmly advocated for a nonviolent revolt.

Despite the relevance of Saʿid's writing, there are few studies that examine his work in detail. These studies have mainly been conducted by Florence Ollivry-Dumairieh[2] and Jean-Marie Müller,[3] who have written an article and a book chapter about Saʿid's works respectively. Moreover, Naser Dumairieh has edited a collection of writings by Saʿid, *Vie Islamiche alla non violenza*, which was published after the completion of the research for this article.[4] Ollivry-Dumairieh's article is first and foremost a cursory study of Saʿid's life and main ideas, whereas Müller looks at the relationship between nonviolence and ignorance. Dumairieh likewise situates Saʿid's main ideas in the context of his life, with a special focus on the concept of jihad. This article draws on the work of these three scholars—and primarily on Ollivry-Dumairieh and Müller, as mentioned—in analyzing Saʿid's concept of nonviolence. It further explores some of the nuances around his theory of nonviolence, as well as his methodology, and adds to the existing literature the idea that nonviolence in Saʿid's work is a method to reach a precise goal and not a moral imperative. This conceptualization of nonviolence is critical, as it differentiates Saʿid's thinking from that of many other theorists of nonviolence.

The article is structured in three parts. First, I discuss the ways in which Saʿid presents a theory of nonviolence by drawing upon passages from the Qurʾan and hadith. I then analyze the way Saʿid wants to create a new kind of society, built with nonviolent means. In the end, I highlight how this nonviolent method is revolutionary and how it provides a framework for dismantling tyrannies. I conclude by summarizing Saʿid's thoughts and analyzing potential flaws in his argumentation. Indeed, the overall importance of Saʿid's first work must not keep one from highlighting some of the critical issues in his theory of nonviolence, which requires thorough study, given both its potential as a theory and as a tool to understand other situations within the context of repression and revolt. This article utilizes the 1993 English translation of *Madhhab ibn Adam al-Awwal* by Munzer A. Absi and H. Hilwani (1993) as a primary source,[5] while using the original Arabic text to verify the translation's accuracy. The ideas of other Islamic thinkers have also been

presented in order to clarify Saʿid's ideas, as well as to provide the reader with a general context of the similarities and differences between Saʿid and other Islamic philosophers.

Habil's Path: Methodological Directives and Theological Beliefs

Saʿid opens *The Path of Adam's First Son* by quoting a passage from the Qurʾan (5:27–31) which he uses as a point of departure for constructing his theory of Islamic nonviolence. The verses describe the killing of Habil (Abel) at the hand of his brother Qabil (Cain) and the stance taken by Habil, saying that he would not raise his hand against his brother even if he was planning to kill him:

> And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice [to God], and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other. Said [the latter], "I will surely kill you." Said [the former], "Indeed, God only accepts from those who are righteous [who fear Him]. If you should raise your hand against me to kill me—I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear God, Lord of the worlds. Indeed, I want you to obtain [thereby] my sin and your sin, so you will be among the companions of the fire. And that is the recompense of wrongdoers." And his soul permitted him to murder his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers. Then God sent a crow searching [i.e., scratching] in the ground to show him how to hide the private parts of his brother's body. He said, "O woe to me! Have I failed to be like this crow and hide the private parts of my brother's body?" And he became of the regretful.[6]

As the passage makes clear, Habil's decision to "not raise [his] hand" is taken out of fear of God. The connection between Habil's fear of God and his rejection of violence is seen by Saʿid as proof that Habil's behavior is to be followed by true believers of Islam. In Arabic, the author uses the word "*madhhab*" to refer to Habil's practice of nonviolence.

The word, which could be translated as "path," but also as "method," "doctrine," and "school of thought," situates this practice within a context of *fiqh*, meaning Islamic jurisprudence.[7] It suggests that Habil's path forms part of a jurisprudential school, and serves as a guide to the proper behavior of a devout Muslim. Based on this idea, Saʿid sets out on a mission to describe, or rather "rediscover," Habil's teachings. As Saʿid explains he is not building a new theory, but rather uncovering an existing school of Islamic nonviolence—Habil's path—by giving it a structure and an articulate argument.

As one of the first episodes of the early history of Semitic religions, Saʿid uses the story of Habil and Qabil to demonstrate how nonviolence is a fundamental concept in Islam, present from its very beginning. Nonviolence, according to Saʿid, is a recurring principle in the lives of all the early prophets. For instance, he cites a verse from Surah Yunus (10:71), in which Nuh (Noah) refrains from violence when faced with resistance from those who rejected his message. Instead of meeting the disbelievers with fists and weapons, Nuh merely reaffirmed his conviction of God:

> And recite to them the news of [Nuh], when he said to his people, "O my people, if my residence and my reminding of the Signs of God has become burdensome upon you— then I have relied upon God. So resolve upon your plan and [call upon] your associates. Then let not your plan be obscure to you. Then carry it out upon me and do not give me respite."[8]

Saʿid points to other Qurʾanic verses to show prophets like Hud, ʿIsa (Jesus), Musa (Moses), and Shuʿayb all demonstrated a commitment to nonviolence, even in the face of an opposition that was itself violent.[9] Finally, Saʿid locates the same call to nonviolence in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and provides his readers with several hadith on this matter:

It is reported that Saʿd ibn Abu Waqqas addressed the Prophet[...] saying, "O God's Messenger, tell me if someone comes into my house and stretches his hand to kill me?" To this the Prophet's answer was "Be like Adam's [first] son," and he recited the Qurʾanic verses [5:27–31] cited above.[10]

"God's Messenger, tell me what to do if I am drawn to rank in spite of myself, or in one of the groups and made to march, and a man strikes with his sword or there comes an arrow and kills me?' Thereupon he said, "He will bear the punishment of his sin and that of yours and he would be one among the denizens of Hell."[11]

Having shown how the call to nonviolence was repeated throughout the history of Islam, Saʿid begins to expand the scope of Habil's path by locating other principles and beliefs that form part of this school. Again, he turns to the life of Prophet Muhammad, and examines hadith in which the Prophet offers advice for proper behavior in the face of adversity, oppression, and injustice:

It has been narrated on the authority of ʿUbada Ibn al-Walid, who learned the tradition from his father. ʿUbada's grandfather said, "The Messenger of God took an oath of allegiance from us on our listening to and obeying the orders of our commander in adversity and prosperity, in pleasure and displeasure [and even] when somebody is given preference over us, on our avoiding to dispute the delegation of powers to a person deemed to be fit recipient hereof [in the eye of one who delegates it] and on our telling the truth in whatever position we be, without fearing in the matter of God the reproach of the reproacher…"[12]

A most excellent jihad is when one speaks a word of truth in the presence of a tyrannical ruler.[13]

In addition to a commitment to nonviolence, Saʿid argues that Habil's path includes the principles to always tell the truth, to fight injustice with our words, and to be ready to sacrifice ourselves for our beliefs.

Moving forward, Saʿid also describes how Habil's path entails a set of fundamental theological beliefs. Since the path represents Muslim's model of behavior par excellence, it necessitates what he considers to be the core of the Islamic faith—a profession of belief *tawḥīd*. As part of the *shahāda*, one of the five pillars of Islam, all Muslims must profess a belief in *tawḥīd*—the unity and uniqueness of God—and, for reasons that will become clear later, Saʿid highlights this as a crucial element of Habil's path:

A Muslim should have only guilt of believing in God (the Exalted in Power, the Owner of Praise) and saying, "My Lord is God (Allah)."[14]

In this way, then, the core of Habil's path is comprised both of a set of methodological directives—abstention from violence, commitment to honesty, and opposition to injustice—and a set of theological beliefs. When combined, Saʿid means that these rules will have a lasting impact not just on individual followers, but on society as a whole.

The Constructive Phase and the Distinctive Phase

At this point, Saʿid has presented us with a set of methodological directives and theological beliefs. Nevertheless, Habil's path also includes a socio-political call for reform. To explain, Saʿid describes how the path consists of two phases: a constructive phase and a distinctive phase. The constructive phase occurs when followers of Habil's path begin to adopt the aforementioned directives and beliefs. Once this is done on an individual level, Muslims should try to implement the same reform on a collective level, working towards the creation of a new society. The first step of the collective reform is to change the social and political environment: "We try to create a new environment to exchange views without weapons, guns or bombs, but by methods of ideas, logic, and dialogue."[15] Saʿid explains

how the nonviolent environment will allow the Muslim community to freely discuss the terms and conditions for a new era of governance. Through nonviolent and democratic debates, the people can come to a collective agreement on the principles they recognize to be best for them and decide the laws of their new society.[16] Once all participants come to an agreement on these principles and the method of their application they enter into the second phase of Habil's path—the creation of a distinctive (*mutamayyiz*) Islamic society—which Saʿid means has fully "embraced and accepted Islam."[17] Here, Saʿid uses the word "*mutamayyiz*" in Arabic to convey the idea that the society being created is different from what came before since it will follow a set of principles that have been chosen by the people themselves, as opposed to a ruler. Moreover, in emphasizing that the distinctive society has "embraced and accepted Islam," Saʿid indicates that other Islamic societies are corrupted by the use of violence and despotism and that Muslims, as a society, have to truly accept and embrace Islam once again, to create the distinctive society.[18]

In his discussion of the distinctive phase of Islamic society, Saʿid's perspective on nonviolence undergoes a substantial shift. Once the members of the distinctive society have agreed upon a set of principles, he posits that force could legitimately be involved in ensuring the application of those principles:

> Hence, it becomes evident that the choice of peaceful means must be applied when the society has not met the conditions of a Muslim society. When, however, the existing society is a Muslim one, which accepts the codes and norms of Islam, the act of force to sustain those rules becomes necessary;[19]

> Fighting as a concept is not absolutely prohibited or ordained.[20]

For Saʿid, nonviolence only forms a part of Habil's path insofar that it is a tool to reach a precise goal—the new, distinctive society.

Prior to the creation of the distinctive society, the use of all violence is unacceptable, since the principles which may need sustaining through force have not yet been recognized and accepted by everyone. Once the goal of a distinctive society has been reached, however, Saʿid means that the imperative of nonviolence no longer holds, should the participants of the distinctive society deem force to be an acceptable part of governance. Indeed, he even posits that when all the members of society have agreed upon the laws and principles they would like to adhere to, the use of force becomes necessary to preserve and sustain those laws and principles.[21] This distinction is also described by Naser Dumairieh in *Vie Islamiche alla non violenza*, where he defines it as the transition from "the predication to the state."[22] Here, Dumairieh further analyzes how the permission of the use of force when the society is created is a very similar idea to that expressed by Jean Jaques Rousseau.[23]

As we move deeper into Saʿid's theory of nonviolence, we learn that the legitimacy of force is contingent. When the distinctive society is not yet formed, violence is forbidden; then, when the society is created, violence can be used under specific circumstances. The difference lies in the acceptance of the laws and principles that guide the new society may warrant the use of violence. While we tend to think of nonviolence in terms of moral absolutism, Saʿid's theory suggests otherwise. To him, nonviolence is not an absolute moral imperative that remains constant over time. Instead, nonviolence is first and foremost a *methodology*—a tool to be used for a specific goal—and can thus be compromised once it has fulfilled its methodological purpose. The same logic, however, is also applicable to the practice of violence. Within the scope of Saʿid's theory, *both* violence and nonviolence come to be understood as dependent on the situation society is in. Both concepts serve as tools and methodological directives—either to create a distinctive society, as in the case of nonviolence, or to

preserve the distinctive society, as in the case of the limited use of violence. In this way, nonviolence stands in stark contrast to *tawḥīd*, which Saʿid means is a principle that can be compromised neither in the constructive phase nor the distinctive phase of Habil's path.[24] As one of the five pillars of Islam, *tawḥīd* is a prerequisite for all Muslims, even those that live in the distinctive society.

The permissibility of violence during the distinctive phase does not mean that nonviolence is a "secular" concept to Saʿid. Since the entirety of Habil's path is given by God to humanity, nonviolence-as-methodology is equally "Islamic" as nonviolence-as-imperative. To demonstrate this, Saʿid returns to Islamic history. Looking at the life of the Prophet Muhammed, he finds similar divisions of a constructive and distinctive phase in the prophetic mission:

> It [(the trial of Messenger Muhammad)] took two clear forms: before the existence of the distinctive society and after it. During the first period, Prophet Muhammad himself did not order his followers to practice any acts of violence or war. Such a procedure was practiced after the erection of the Islamic state and the society's complete acceptance of the different codes of Islam.[25]

As discussed above, Muhammed responded with patience and dialogue when faced with difficult circumstances. In the early days of the prophetic mission, he told his believers to stay clear of force, and to instead strive for an environment free of violence:

> I would like to mention what a Muslim should do if he wants to erect the distinctive Islamic community. His task is similar to that of the Prophets, as mentioned in the Qur'an. In fact, in all its passages, the Holy Qur'an, which recalls the various disputes and conflicts between each Prophet and his people, shows us that the main reason behind such disputes and the aggression upon the Prophets were because of their faithful preachings, and not because they employed some form of aggression against their people.[26]

At the beginning of Islam, believers, in Mecca, were ordered to pay ritual charity, pray and pardon and forgive the polytheists, and persevere patiently for no long at a time.[27]

> The Prophet did not allow his Companions to engage with those who rejected their call, even in self-defense.[28]

This commitment to nonviolence represents the Prophet's method during the constructive phase of the Islamic mission when he was still trying to create the Islamic society. When the constructive phase was completed, however, the phase of the distinctive Islamic society commenced. At this point, the Prophet condoned the use of violence for certain purposes, as indicated by his acceptance of the killing of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, a Jewish leader and a poet in Medina, after the battle of Badr. According to Saʿid "the Prophet accepted [the] violent act,"[29] in order to preserve the newly created society. This example, set by the Prophet, shows again how the methodological conceptualization of nonviolence (and violence) is well-rooted in the Islamic tradition.

Habil's Path and Revolt

In a context of tyrannical rule, Habil's path holds revolutionary potential. This potential is drawn both from the values espoused by its theological beliefs—in other words, what kind of society it envisions—and the effectiveness of its methodological directives. Here, Saʿid returns to the idea of *tawḥīd*, which was previously highlighted as a cornerstone of Habil's path. He points out that *tawḥīd* is not just a theological concept, but also a political one. By establishing God as the ultimate source of power, *tawḥīd* necessitates a certain political order on the human level:

> [As a follower of Habil's path] I bear witness that there is no god but Allah… I follow no rule, but that of Allah (the only God), I do not respond to any government, constitution

or legislation on Earth. I do not obey any order but that of God. I do not abide by any rule or norm whatsoever which belongs to hereditary jahilite convictions. I believe in God, I surrender myself to Him; rejecting those blasphemous tyrants and false gods. In such a case would such societies hear this call and keep silence toward it? I doubt it.[30]

To Saʿid, declaring the unity of God is like declaring the unity of humanity—as a creation of God—and the equality between people. In a true Muslim society, it is impossible for a single person to stand as a ruler since the only true ruler is God himself. In this way, the belief in *tawḥīd* necessitates a political espousal of egalitarianism. Saʿid is not the first to make this connection between revolution and *tawḥīd*. Another Islamic thinker, ʿAli Shariati (d. 1977), came to the same conclusion:

> The meta-historic fight between [Habil] and [Qabil] is also a fight between the oneness of God and polytheism, between justice and oneness of humanity on one side, and racial and social discrimination on the other. It has existed throughout human history and it will exist until the last day. It is the fight between [a] religion of deceit and stupidity and justification of the status quo and [a] religion of conscience, activism and revolution. The end of time will come when [Qabil] dies and "[Habil's] system" will be established once again. This inevitable revolution will mean the end of [Qabil's] history; equality will be restored all over the world, unity and brotherhood will be re-established thanks to equity and justice. This is the unavoidable direction of history.[31]

As both Shariati and Saʿid explain, the oneness of God necessitates the oneness of humanity. In turn, this relationship necessitates that unity, equality, and brotherhood be practiced on a political level.

If *tawḥīd* represents the political vision inherent in Habil's path, nonviolence is the means by which this vision is most effectively attained. Again, looking back to the lives of the prophets, Saʿid argues that "the last of this Islamic nation [i.e. the egalitarian society] would not be reformed but by the very means which reformed it initially."[32] In attempting to build an Islamic society, the prophets, as discussed above, responded to difficulties and persecution through nonviolent means. To Saʿid, however, this was not just for theological reasons—such as respecting the path laid out by God—but also for strategic ones. Recounting the story of Musa, Saʿid points to the fact that the Pharaoh felt his rule threatened by Musa first and foremost due to the fact that Musa did *not* call to violently overthrow him:

> In spite of the fact that [Musa] wanted to change the status quo, Pharaoh did not consider [Musa] a man that wanted to enforce change by aggression or power. Rather, Pharaoh regarded [Musa] as a man who was well capable of changing the existent condition simply because there was no force in Pharaoh's system that could face the concepts which [Musa] was spreading among the people.[33]

Instead of inciting the people to violence, Musa managed to challenge the Pharaoh by facilitating an open discussion of his abuse of power. The creation of an environment where everything—apart from theological beliefs like *tawḥīd*—can be discussed and debated freely using logic and argumentation is not convenient for a tyrannical ruler. With the ability to question power, the people are likely to make demands for limits to be placed upon it.

Nonviolent methods are also effective as they are often difficult for the ruler to counter. As Saʿid explains, rulers tend to prefer protests where participants rely on violence to make sure their demands are heard:

> If such rulers were given a chance to choose between a revolt that is based on a strong belief and promoted by peaceful means, and a revolt which is promoted by force and the use of arms, they are sure to choose the one based on force, as this would give them the excuse to demolish the rebels with the utmost ease.[34]

While rulers would normally find it much easier to retain power through the use of force rather than debate, this is a risky tactic when countering nonviolent protestors. Without an adequate justification to use violence, the ruler might further lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Since a nonviolent revolt questions power in accordance with certain principles, it also demands that answers be given according to the same principles. This was true in the story of Musa, where the Pharaoh felt incapacitated by Musa's nonviolent methods. As Saʿid points out, "[i]If Pharaoh had been capable of proving that [Musa] was a criminal, he would not have tried to ask the people to allow him to kill [Musa]."[35] Thus, if followers of Habil's path are faced with violence they should not resort to force, as this would give the ruler an advantage. In a violent confrontation, protestors are more likely to lose both the moral and the physical battle; when using violence, the followers of Habil's path would be categorized as a dangerous threat, giving any ruler the excuse to use force against them and most probably leading to their defeat. In this way, Saʿid explains that standing by one's principles is not only a matter of morality following God's path but also a necessary political strategy for winning the revolt. To him, the only way of creating the egalitarian society that is demanded by Islam—the distinctive society—is by following Habil's path, and staying true to the method of nonviolence throughout the course of the revolt.

Conclusion

While there is room for deeper analysis and description of what has been discussed, this article has provided an in-depth look into *The Path of Adam's First Son*, building on the work of Florence Ollivry-Dumairieh, Jean-Marie Müller, and Naser Dumairieh. With the description of Habil's path, the contextualization of nonviolence within the division of the phases, and the discussion of the revolutionary potential of *tawḥīd* and

nonviolence, one has a strong understanding of Saʿid's theory of Islamic nonviolence. His work, while complete and structured, does include some critical issues that should be highlighted, especially with regards to argumentation and analysis, as well as the question of practicability. Concerning the first part of this critique, when Saʿid presents passages from the hadith and the Qurʾan to develop his theory, he does not explain why he includes those specific passages. These passages support his position, but the selection is arbitrary given the number of other references from the hadith and the Qurʾan that could contradict his theory, or, at the very least, change the context in which those passages are being employed. For example, the first Qurʾanic passage that Saʿid uses to narrate Habil's story could be interpreted in another way, such as was done by the Pakistani philosopher Abu al-Aʿla al-Mawdudi (d. 1979). Instead of seeing Habil's decision to "not raise [his] hand" as a commitment to nonviolence, al-Mawdudi sees this as a commitment to not *inciting* violence:

> This does not mean, that his brother assured him that when the latter stepped forward to kill him he would keep his hands tied and stretch out his own neck to be cut down rather than defend himself. What this statement amounts to is an assurance on the part of the first brother that, even though the other was intent on killing him, he himself had no such intention. In other words, he assured his brother that even though the latter was busy planning his murder he would not take the initiative in killing him despite his knowledge of the latter's intent. Righteousness does not demand at all that when a man is subjected to wrongful aggression he should surrender to the aggressor rather than defend himself. Righteousness, however, demands that a man should not take the initiative and try to kill someone even though he knows him to be bent on killing him. He should rather wait for the act of aggression to be initiated by the other person. And this is exactly what was intended by the statement of the righteous son of Adam.36

This difference in interpretation demands that Saʿid provide a more structured explanation of the reasoning behind his interpretation of this passage. The same can be said in regard to other passages he chose to include in his argument, especially those where alternative readings suggest that nonviolence may be more of a response to circumstances than conscious adherence to Habil's path. When the Prophet Muhammad, for example, invited Muslims to be patient and not use violence against polytheists in Mecca, the reason could be connected with the equilibrium of forces specific to that moment, more than with a conscious choice of nonviolence. The polytheists in Mecca were much stronger than the Muslims and so the choice to not confront them with force could have been made by a strategic circumstantial justification.

As far as the second level of critique goes, parts of Saʿid's theory suffer from a lack of clear definitions and adequate explanations. For instance, when explaining how the distinctive society will be created, Saʿid does not define what is meant by "society." Is this society simply Islamic, or should it be defined in terms of reach on a national or global scale? It is also unclear how the debates taking place in the nonviolent environment will be concluded, and how the principles on which everybody will agree will be chosen. Will the agreement be reached by a majority vote or by other means? Another problem arises concerning permission for the use of force. Even though the author clarifies which situations warrant the use of violence, he does not explicitly explain what he means by "the act of force to sustain those rules."[37] Is he referring to the use of force against riotous members of society who had previously accepted its laws and are now resisting or revolting against them? Or is he referring to external attacks on this new society? If so, how can force be used against external attacks, since those waging the attack are not members of the society and have not accepted its principles? Yet another issue arises with regard to the efficiency of nonviolence as a method for

revolt. While Saʿid makes a strong case for the moral superiority of a nonviolent method, he seemingly idealizes the possibility of a nonviolent revolt without considering the extent of the repression that could take place. These issues are fundamental in assessing the soundness and practicability of the application of Habil's theory.

Despite the aforementioned theoretical weaknesses, the relevance of Saʿid's work is clearly demonstrated in his innovative position on, and interpretation of, the principle of nonviolence. In constructing Habil's path as a new *madhhab* modeled on the lives of the prophets, Saʿid shows how nonviolence is a recurring theme throughout the history of Islam. As such, he makes a convincing argument that nonviolence is truly an "Islamic" principle, thereby refuting interpretations of Islam as a "violent religion." Moreover, Saʿid's theorization of nonviolence as a methodology sets him apart from many other philosophers both inside and outside the Islamic world. In the current literature on nonviolence in Islam, Sa'id is often referred to as the "Syrian Gandhi."[38] This epithet, however, is largely misleading.[39] Gandhi, like many other philosophers and activists, viewed nonviolence as an absolute moral imperative, and would not have agreed with Saʿid's arguments for the permissibility of using force in the distinctive society.[40] However, the non-absolute status of nonviolence in Saʿid's theory does not mean that he was a "proponent of violence" as such. Instead, Saʿid suggests that force can only be administered when society has reached a certain stage of peaceful, democratic development—the distinctive Islamic society—and only in the case that the principles of that society should be threatened. In this way, he deems violence impermissible in any non-democratic society and proposes a strong regulation of the use of force in societies where violence is permissible.

With *The Path of Adam's First Son*, Saʿid hoped to create a distinctive Islamic society and solve the problem of conflicts

among Muslims. More than fifty years after the book was published, this dream is yet to come true. This does not mean that there is a lack of support for his ideas. Saʿid himself has been heavily involved in politics in Syria both prior to and following the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, and his work was one of the primary sources of inspiration for the movement of nonviolent protest in Syria at that time.[41] Through the teachings of his disciple, ʿAbd al-Akram al-Saqqa,[42] and in some of the writings of al-Saqqa's students, his ideas of Islamic nonviolence have been spread to new generations of political activists.[43] In 2003, al-Saqqa's students formed the group Daraya Youth to fight political injustice using nonviolent means. Its

members played an active role during the first Syrian uprisings in 2011, calling for the implementation of nonviolent principles.[44] Saʿid's work could also be a contribution to the on-going debate within the Syrian opposition, alongside that of the Syrian writer Yassin al-Hajj Saleh, about the evolution of a nonviolent revolt into an armed one.[45] While this article has provided an overview of Saʿid's theoretical contribution, more research is needed to measure the impact of his ideas on nonviolent groups such as Daraya Youth and on Islamic nonviolent movements at large. This goes beyond the scope of this article but remains a fertile ground for future stud

[1] As Naser Dumairieh points out in *Vie Islamiche alla Nonviolenza*, *The Path of Adam's First Son* was published during the same year as the death of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), who had published *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq* (*Milestones*) in 1964. *Milestones* has been a pillar for violent activism within political Islam in the second half of 20th century. In this context, Saʿid's work could be read as an answer to the school of thought in Islam which Qutb subscribed to. See Naser Dumairieh, ed., *Vie islamiche alla non violenza,* by Jawdat Saʿid, trans. Paola Pizzi (Bologna: Zikkaron, 2017), xv.

[2] Florence Ollivry-Dumairieh, "Jawdat Saʿid: Penseur de la non violence en Islam," *Ultreïa!* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 132–136, http://revue-ultreia.com/rubriques/figures-libres/jawdat-said-penseur-de-la-non-violence-en-islam/.

[3] Jean-Marie Müller, *Désarmer les dieux: Le christianisme et l'islam face à la non-violence* (Paris: Les Editions du Relié, 2010).

[4] Dumairieh, *Vie islamiche alla non violenza.* See note 1 above for full citation.

[5] Jawdat Saʿid, *Non-violence: The Basis of Setting Disputes in Islam*, 5th ed., trans. Munzer A. Absi and H. Hilwani (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993). While Absi and Hilwani translated the original title, *Madhhab ibn Adam al-Awwal: Mushkilat al-ʿUnf fī al-ʿAmal al-Islami*, as "*Non-violence: The Basis of Setting Disputes in Islam*," the literal translation is "*The Path of Adam's First Son: The Problem of Violence in Islamic Action*." In this article, a shortened version of the literal translation of the original work is used (*The Path of Adam's First Son*). Nevertheless, Absi and Hilwani's translation is used when the work is cited in the endnotes.

[6] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 12.

[7] While "*madhhab*" has many possible translations, I have chosen to translate it as "path." This is to better reflect the chronological structure of the constructive and distinctive phase of Habil's *madhhab.*

[8] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 12.

[9] Ibid., 22–26.

[10] Ibid., 12. This hadith originally appears in *Sunan Abi Dawud,* no. 4257.

[11] Ibid., 12. This hadith originally appears in *Sahih Muslim*, no. 6896.

[12] Ibid., 13. This hadith originally appears in *Sahih Muslim*, no. 4538.

[13] Ibid., 13. This hadith originally appears in *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, no. 18449.

[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Ibid., 51.

[16] In Jean Jacques Rousseau's work, *Du Contrat Social,* one finds the idea that force does not generate law. Saʿid integrates this idea into his work and ascribes nonviolence to the role of building the rule of law. See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 15. A similar argument has been made by Dumairieh, see endnote 21.

[17] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 17.

[18] See ibid., 32, on the idea that even a society that is considered a Muslim one needs reformation. See also ibid., 42–43, where Saʿid states that only by truly following Islam we can reach a distinctive society and that the society becomes distinctive for its "clear faith."

[19] Ibid., 28–29.

[20] Ibid., 19.

[21] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 28. "The enforcement of such a law can only come at a later stage, when everybody agrees on this law."

[22] Dumairieh, *Vie islamiche alla non violenza*, xxix.

[23] Ibid., xxx–xxxii.

[24] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 27. "Such a procedure (the use of force) was practiced after the erection of the Islamic state and the society's complete acceptance of the

different codes of Islam." Saʿid highlights that even after the creation of a distinctive Islamic society the members of this society need to accept completely the codes of Islam, among them, of course, is the *tawḥīd.*

[25] Ibid., 27.

[26] Ibid., 21.

[27] Ibid., 27. Here, Saʿid refers to an argument provided by the Qurʾanic scholar Ismaʿil ibn Kathir in *Tafsir al-Qurʾan al-ʿAzim* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya, 1980), no. 1096.

[28] Ibid., 68.

[29] Ibid., 48.

[30] Ibid., 45.

[31] ʿAli Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1979), 108–109. A similar argument has been made by the Islamic philosopher Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935). The work of Hanafi is not directly connected with Saʿid's work but it is interesting to examine the similarities between their perspective on *tawḥīd*. Hanafi writes that "Islam is the revolutionary religion par excellence. [*Tawḥīd*] is a process of unifying something that happened in the past with the future. It means freedom of conscience, the refusal of fear, and the end of hypocrisy and duplicity." Similar to Saʿid, he also argues that "the declaration of the oneness of God: there is no god but God is not just an expression of the language, but it is a double act of consciousness. In the first place, it denies all pseudo-gods that impede freedom of conscience, and in the second place it is a statement of oneness and transcendence of the universal principle." See Hassan Hanafi, "Des idéologies modernistes à l'Islam révolutionnaire," *Peuples Méditerranéens* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1982): 3-13, and *Islam in the Modern World: Vol 1: Religion, Ideology, and Development* (Heliopolis: Dar Kebaa Bookshop, 2000), 467.

[32] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 68.

[33] Ibid., 24.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Abu al-Aʿla al-Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qurʾan*, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation UK, 2013). See comments for Surah al-Maidah (5:27–34).

[37] Saʿid, *Non-violence*, 28–29.

[38] See Claudia Mende, "In Gandhi's Footsteps," *Qantara.de*, June 26, 2015, https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-approaches-to-non-violence-in-gandhis-footsteps*;* See also Abdessamad Belhaj, "Jawdat Saʿīd and the Philosophy of Peace" (conference paper, Islamic Peace Ethics: Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Contemporary Islamic Thought, Hamburg, Germany, October 17, 2015).

[39] Ollivry-Dumairieh also observes this trend without expressing an opinion on it. See "Jawdat Saʿid: Penseur de la non violence en Islam," 132–136.

[40] Mohandas Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance (Satyaraga)* (Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2001), 32–33. In fact, Gandhi's position is much closer to those of ʿAbdul Ghaffar Khan, who has also been referred to as the "Islamic Gandhi." See Dinanath Gopal Tendulkar*,* Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith Is a Battle (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), 93–94, and James Rowell, "Abdul Ghaffar Khan: An Islamic Gandhi," *Political Theology* 10 (2009): 591–606.

[41] See, for instance Mohja Kahf, "Water Bottles and Roses," *Mashallah News*, November 21, 2011, https://www.mashallahnews.com/water-bottles-roses/, and "Who's Who: Jawdat Said," *The Syrian Observer*, January 7, 2014, https://syrianobserver.com/EN/who/33793/whos_who_jawdat_said.html.

[42] "Abdul Akram Al-Sakka, Peaceful Activist," *Human Rights Watch*, September 11, 2013 https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/11/abdul-akram-al-sakka-peaceful-activist. See also Joey Ayoub, "An Idea called Daraya," *Al Jumhuriyya*, December 9, 2018, https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/idea-called-daraya.

[43] See Lorenzo Trombetta, *Siria: Dagli ottomani agli Assad* (Milano: Mondadori Education, 2013), 221; and Kahf, "Water Bottles and Roses."

[44] Amal Hanano, "Syria's Non-Violent Activists Were the First to Be Targeted," *The National*, March 12, 2012, https://www.thenational.ae/uae/syria-s-non-violent-activists-were-the-first-to-be-targeted1.380789.

[45] Andy Heintz, "Dissidents of the Left: In Conversation with Yassin al-Haj Saleh," *al-Jumhuriya*, August 28, 2018, https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/dissidents-left-conversation-yassin-al-haj-saleh.