

Pacifism and Nonviolence in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

In *Pacifism and Nonviolence in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy*, Tom Woerner-Powell combines historical analysis and contemporary interviews with Muslim peace advocates in an effort to develop an empirically grounded survey of Islamic philosophies of nonviolence and a general analysis of the phenomenon. The first monograph on Islamic nonviolence to engage substantively with contemporary debates in the field of moral philosophy, his study is critical and descriptive rather than apologetic and polemical. His approach is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Drawing on methods from the fields of peace studies, Islamic studies, and moral philosophy, he identifies, critiques, and addresses the shortcomings within the dominant approaches in these fields regarding the question of pacifism and nonviolence in contemporary Islam. Woerner-Powell's book sheds new light not only on Islamic cases of nonviolence but also on the manner in which Islamic thought might play a larger role in secular and inter-religious debates. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Tom Woerner-Powell is Senior Lecturer in Modern Islam at the University of Manchester. He is a recipient of the Foundation Ousseimi Prix de la Tolérance. His book *Another Road to Damascus* won the BRAIS-DeGruyter Prize in the Study of Islam and the Muslim World.

Pacifism and Nonviolence in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

Mapping the Paths of Peace

TOM WOERNER-POWELL

University of Manchester



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-57398-6 — Pacifism and Non-Violence in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

Tom Woerner-Powell

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009573986

DOI: 10.1017/9781009573993

© Tom Woerner-Powell 2025

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, with the exception of the Creative Commons
version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009573993 under a
Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution
and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit
to the original work is given and any changes made are indicated. To view a copy of this
license visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009573993

First published 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Woerner-Powell, Tom, 1981– author.

TITLE: Pacifism and nonviolence in contemporary Islamic philosophy : mapping the paths of
peace / Tom Woerner-Powell, University of Manchester.

DESCRIPTION: New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2025] | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2024042970 (print) | LCCN 2024042971 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009573986
(hardback) | ISBN 9781009573962 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009573993 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Pacifism—Religious aspects—Islam. | Nonviolence—Religious aspects—Islam. |
Islamic philosophy.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BP190.5.P34 W64 2025 (print) | LCC BP190.5.P34 (ebook) |
DDC 181/.07—dc23/eng/20241024

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024042970>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024042971>

ISBN 978-1-009-57398-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-57398-6 — Pacifism and Non-Violence in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

Tom Woerner-Powell

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

*This book is dedicated to my mother,
who passed as it arrived.*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	i
<i>Peace and Islam: Heterogeneous and Contested</i>	3
The Study of Islamic Nonviolence: A Quixotic Quest?	8
Violence and Logocentrism in Islamic Studies	12
Unspectacular Peace and Escaping Imaginaries	15
Themes, Harmonies, and Leitmotifs	19
1 Hierarchy, Community, and Nonviolence in Senegal: Amadou Bamba [1853–1927]	24
Marginalisation, Racialisation, and Disputation	27
A Nonviolent Confraternity under Violent Colonialism	33
Spiritual <i>Jihād</i> and Nonviolent Resistance	39
Peace as a Pedagogy of Productive Service	44
Recognising Gaps and Reconciling Contradictions	48
2 Nation, Nonviolence, and Service in Pakistan: Bacha Khan [1890–1988]	54
Escaping the Shadow of the Mahatma	56
Pathan Ways	64
Service and Disobedience	70
Against the Scholarly Class	74
Divergent Paths	83
3 Peace, Love, and Harmony in Sri Lanka and the United States: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen [d. 1986]	88
Ecumenism, Syncretism, and Adaptation	90
The Perfection of Man	93

	Cosmic Nonviolence	98
	Against Violence in the Abstract	104
4	Nonviolence, History, and Self-Sacrifice in Iran: Ali Shariati [1933–1977]	106
	Changing Contexts and Transforming Ideas	108
	Monotheism as Nonviolence	116
	Class Dialectics without Marx	119
	Quranic Text and the Systems of Cain and Abel	121
	Revolutionary Martyrdom and Altruistic Self-Transcendence	129
5	Peace, Justice, and Progress in India: Wahiduddin Khan [1925–2021]	136
	Emergence and Emergency in a Major Minority	138
	Interpolating the Scriptures	143
	The Hudaybiyyah Principle and the Virtue of Concession	151
	Cosmic Conciliations	155
	Between Religious Quietism and Liberal Conservatism	166
6	Nonviolence, Duty, and Compulsion in Syria: Jawdat Said [1931–2022]	174
	Upheaval, Autocritique, and Civil Disobedience	175
	Return to the Scriptures: Power and Dissent	179
	The Absolute Moral Obligation of Witness	186
	Cain and Abel as Moral Exemplars	188
7	Conversations on Islamic Nonviolence with Thinkers and Activists: Amina Khouli, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Haytham Alhamwi, John Muhammad Butt, and Rabia Terri Harris	199
	What Is Peace?	201
	Peace, War, and Justice	208
	Personal and Interpersonal Nonviolence	212
	Nonviolence and the Non-human World	215
	Dynamics and Developments	220
	Conclusion: Islamic Nonviolence as Ethic and Orientation	222
	The Inadequacy of Philological Taxonomies	223
	Islamic Nonviolence as Peace History?	227
	Islamic Nonviolence, Secular Theory, and the Role of <i>Niyyah</i>	232
	Community and Communion as Nonviolent Praxis	238
	<i>Appendix: Jawdat Said's Letter of Rejection to Shaikh 'Abdallāh bin Bayyah</i>	245
	<i>Bibliography</i>	249
	<i>Index</i>	265

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council for generously funding the research project Patterns of Principled Pacifism and Nonviolence in Contemporary Islam which informs this volume. I likewise thank the University of Manchester for providing a congenial environment in which to carry it out. I would furthermore like to thank my Co-Investigator and Post-Doctoral Research Associate on that project, Professor Andrew Fiala and Dr Walaa Quisay. Both of their insights have been as invaluable as their patience has been immeasurable. Special thanks is also due to the proponents of nonviolent Islam who very kindly agreed to be interviewed at length as part of this book's composition: Amina Khouhani, Rabia Harris, Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand, John Muhammad Butt, and Dr Haytham Alhamwy. I would like to thank Dr Paula Pizzi both for fascinating conversations on the late Syrian peace activist Jawdat Said and for making some of his letters available to me. I also offer thanks to those speakers at the conference on Pacifism in Islam held at the University of Manchester in May 2022 who have not already been mentioned: Tawakkol Karman, Abdullah Aloudh, Abdulrahman Abdullahi, Abla Hassan, Alexandre Christoyannopolous, David Warren, Iymon Majid, Juan Cole, Juliane Hammer, Mohammad Affan, Safoora Arbab, Seif Alislam Eid, and Tazeen Ali. Thanks also to reviewers at Cambridge University Press and to colleagues at conferences of the Middle East Studies Association and the American Philosophical Association who responded to presentations of elements of this research. Thanks are due to Ahmad Ghassab for his calligraphic renderings of Quran 5:16 which adorn this volume.

Finally, I as always thank my wife, Abby, and our beloved daughters, Beatrix and Ottilie.

English translations from the Quran follow the Yusuf Ali version. All other translations from Arabic, French, and German are the author's own unless otherwise attributed. Translations from Persian, Pashto, and Wolof languages are those of the authors cited. Transliteration from Arabic follows the conventions of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.

All errors, both of omission and of commission, are of course my own.