

Retracing Jihad: A Comparative Study Between Said Nursi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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ABSTRACT

The dialogue about jihad has become a phenomenon that continuously fuels public conversation ubiquitously. Stigmatization of Islam as a vile religion and jihad as an act of terror are detrimental consequences of two factors: distortion by propagandists and abusing the concept of jihad by extremist-literalists. This article is an attempt at an overview of Nursi and Nasr's thoughts on the highly contentious issue of jihad. These two prominent Muslim thinkers are worth our attention, given the enormous influence that their thoughts have had on intellectual discourse and Muslim social movements in innumerable places all over the globe. Study shows both Nursi and Nasr share a common conviction that jihad has a prodigious essence which cannot be reduced to just military activity, and they repudiate all violence and coercive actions in the name of religion. Nevertheless, their thoughts do exhibit some differences particularly regarding the nature of jihad and the implementation of jihad in the modern era.

Keywords: *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Jihad.*

The return of the Taliban to power has reopened an old-aged discussion that in fact is interminable, namely jihad. The issue that rose profusely after 9/11 caused a number of serious illnesses in social interactions that crystallized in the epiphenomenon of socio-religious conflict: West *vis-à-vis* Muslim. Jihad has become a common topic that is continuously discussed not only in academic discourse, but also in public conversation. Ironically, this opportunity is being used shrewdly by the propagandist who arguably had a role in enlarging this issue. Also by a number of pragmatists who use this as a tool for their political campaign (Chomsky 2005).

Gradually, jihad and neologism "jihadist" were associated with terrorism and extremist groups. Even in Indonesia, the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world, the view that associates terrorism with Islam still exists today (Nefo 2021). Indeed, this is a big blow for the vast majority of Muslims, not only because some of them are also victims of terrorism, but also because the sanctity of their religious teachings is polluted from outside and inside—from the outside by some who blindly attack Muslims and Islam in the name of terrorism, and from within by a small minority who tarnishes the holiness of Islamic teachings in the name of jihad—which this phenomenon is a ticking time bomb with enormous destructive effects. This can jeopardize interfaith harmony with the potential for further conflict to emerge. This distortion and deviation have brought the issue of jihad into the dark room and in the same time desacralize the jihad itself, and the worst scenario of this is the emergence of Muslim extremists.

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are two prominent contemporary Muslim thinkers who have concern to this consequential issue. Both see that there are misconceptions by some Muslims with reference to jihad and its great danger that will be produced by if this understanding is not retraced and well reviewed.

This article aimed to elaborate the thought of these two great Muslim thinkers with regard to their understanding of jihad. This study focuses on text analysis of the works of Nursi

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and Nasr, as well as the philosophical approach (Mazwati & Hashim 2017) adopted to build the relationship between Nursi's and Nasr's opinion.

Tracing the Origin of Jihad

If the question of jihad is asked to several people, they would probably come up with different answers. Someone might say that jihad is the effort to be free from the shackles of the worldly life, while someone else probably say that jihad is a fight for justice, and the rest could feasibly respond that jihad is a holy war. And the latter definitely the most known and most given answers (Esposito 2002).

As a result of multifarious interpretations of jihad, which are constantly influenced by external causes—the logical consequence is the obscurity of the nature and the essence of jihad itself—the focus on tracing the substance and the original meaning of jihad is vitally important, to get a holistic perspective of its ontology rather than just examining a certain phenomenon which probably causing bias and premature conclusions.

In the Quran, the term jihad and its derivations are repeated forty-one times located in various verses and suras (al-Rashid 2016). These jihad verses are located within both *Makkiyah* verses (verses that were revealed in Mecca before the prophet migrated to Medina) and *Madaniyah* verses as well (verses that were revealed after Prophet's migration) (al-Suyuti 2008). If jihad is defined only as war, by all means, this is epistemologically contradicted to the reality, given the fact that in the Mecca period no war was found in history between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. on the contrary, the period of Mecca was a tough period for Muslims as a minority due to repression. So the nuances of the jihad verses here indicate struggle and sincerity, both in the sense of a relationship to God and the struggle to survive from Quraish's persecution. Meanwhile, the clear instructions in the Quran regarding war by using jihad diction are predominantly located in the Madaniyah verses. And it is historically accurate in consideration of the fact that during the period of the Prophet's and Muslims in Medina there were excessive amounts of physical conflicts and wars.

As the origin of the word jihad itself is rooted from *ج* *ه* *د* (*jhd*) which means *al-Masyaqqah* (struggle) (Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah 2004). Thus, from an etymological point of view jihad has a voluminous meaning that can include inward and outward, as well as individual and group struggles, or even in deeper understanding life itself is jihad (Nasr 1987). Narrowing the original and essential meaning of jihad only to physical actions or even associating the term jihad to acts of terrorism is unequivocally a biased and frail conclusion.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr explicitly criticized such a flawed view that according to him the distortion and narrowing of the meaning of jihad was a deliberate attempt by a number of pragmatic individuals who took advantage of this for personal profit. He stated:

Perhaps in modern times in the West no word in the vocabulary of the Islamic religion has been as distorted, maligned, misunderstood, and vilified as the word jihad, thanks not only to the Western media looking for demonizing epithets and stereotypes, but also to those extremist Muslims who readily provide them with examples to justify their propagation of the distorted image of this term. Now, matters are made worse by the fact that the word jihad has gained commercial appeal in Europe and America; a number of authors, seeking to attract a larger public and make their books commercially successful, have been trying hard to use the term in their titles in any way possible (Nasr 2002: 267).

Offensive and Defensive Jihad

One of the characteristics that can be found in every religion or teachings is they all have one identical value which is the responsibility to propagate virtuousness. It is commonly believed that the value of virtue will reach its peak not only when it can affect certain individuals, but also when it can give the same influence to other individuals and ultimately transformed into social morality (al-Attas 1981). Any teaching has its own dogma which encourages its adherent

to convey this moral teaching, and in Islam, this kind of action is known as a *da'wah*. For the majority of Muslims, virtuousness is something celestial that is specifically revealed in the sacred text and commonly manifested as a *shari'ah* (The Divine law). Therefore, *shari'ah* is seen as a sacred and fundamental aspect in the sense that if there is an external attempt that tries to change the sacredness of its teachings and principles, then every effort to preserve this sacred value is reckoned as a supreme virtue, and this is where the expression of jihad emanates in the form of defending the faith with the best of efforts (Nasr 1987). However, the biggest dilemma here is when the commandment of *da'wah* is considered as supreme teaching that must be performed, but there is some rejection, or in another case, if there some other belief that seems different whose potential disturb the *shari'ah*, is it legal to attack that alien teaching in the name of *da'wah* and for the sake of eschatological doctrine? is this version of jihad that Islam really teaches?

To find the answer to those problems according to Nursi's perspective, it would be purposeful to start from the life story of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi itself. It seems that most of Nursi's followers are not too interested in unraveling this issue from the whole story of Nursi's life, even though this is the key that can open the gates of Nursi's thought on jihad, particularly offensive jihad.

A careful reading of Nursi's story and works must be familiar with the terms "Old Said" and "New Said", a term that describes the significant changes in the life of a Badiuzzaman Said Nursi both intellectually and spiritually (Vahide 1995). "Old Said" is the early period of Nursi's life which is full of ambition and passionate. In this stage of his life, Nursi seemed to be relatively imminent to confrontation both intellectually and physically. And for the latter, it is narrated by his pupils that Nursi once planned to kill a tribal leader who was notoriously tyrannical. Nursi was inspired in his dream that he was ordered to advise that ruler to repent and if he refused Nursi's advice he will be executed (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). Even though his plan was ultimately canceled, but *da'wah* and jihad with an offensive approach had once been part of the "Old Said".

An extremely radical change transpired in the life of Nursi. The "New Said" is the total opposite of the "Old Said". In the new phase of his life, Nursi seemed to avoid anything related to physical confrontation. If he used to believe that despotism should straightly confronted and the perpetrators worth worldly punishment, however, in his new version Nursi has a different view:

The time for enmity and hostility has finished. Two world wars have shown how evil, destructive, and what an awesome wrong is enmity. It has become clear that there is no benefit in it at all. In which case, on condition they are not aggressive, do not let the evils of our enemies attract your enmity. Hell and Divine punishment are enough for them (Nursi 2020).

Over and above that, "New Said" believes that the nature of Islamic teachings is love. "New Said" is an extraordinary figure who affirms love as the supreme essence of Islam. He refutes all forms of violence with the name of religion. The real evidence of his statement is when the Ottoman caliphate in Turkey collapsed and Turkey became a democratic state, Nursi firmly rejected the calls for an armed resistance. For him the anarchist revolution is the cause of the decay of a civilization (Nursi 2020).

The offensive jihad approach which is seen in the "Old Said" in fact did not have a massive influence. On the contrary, the "New Said" who presented love in his jihad, even phenomenally succeeded in attracting people to appreciate Islam and learn it, and at the same time its became a strong bulwark for defending the teachings of Islam itself without physical violence. The "New Said" is a complete understanding of jihad. And it was during this period also that his *magnum opus* was born; *Risale-i Nur*, which became the greatest weapon of Nursi's *da'wah*.

Meanwhile, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has a view that is substantially identical to the "New Said" with regard to offensive jihad. Perhaps the dissimilarity is that Nasr's concept was molded

and framed by the influence of the environment in which he grew up; a diverse and heterogeneous environment.

For Nasr, the verse of the Quran which emphasizes that there is no compulsion in religion becomes an Islamic *weltanschauung* which not only prohibits imposing religion on non-Muslims but also becomes the basis for eliminating da'wah coercive and violence on the basis of religion. Nasr strongly criticized western propagandists who spread the distortion that Islam is a sword religion that spread through violent jihad. He affirms:

The view of Western orientalist and centuries of Christian polemicists on this issue is simply not correct. The principle of "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) did not allow jihad outside of Arabia during the lifetime of the Prophet to include forced religious conversion of the "People of the Book." Likewise, it is forbidden to carry out jihad against other Muslims to bring them to one's own persuasion (Nasr 2002).

However, the western misconception of jihad and Islam in general, according to Nasr, is not only caused by propagandists who have bad intentions upon Islam but also supplied by the behavior of extremists who use the sacred name of Islam to legalize their violent actions. These two reasons are the roots of distortion and vilification towards jihad and Islam (Nasr 1987).

Either Nursi or Nasr considered that offensive actions cannot simply be affiliated with jihad. However, both of them do not deny that under certain conditions, physical jihad has its own place in the perspective of Islamic law. Jihad is justified by the *shari'ah* as a defensive mechanism, not the other way around, and there are strict rules that all Muslims must adhere to. Nursi is clear evidence of this when in the first world war, he was directly involved to defend his nation against Russia (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). As for Nasr, although in practice he did not experience exactly what Nursi had experienced, however, he thinks that if physical jihad is needed as a defensive act against tyranny and injustice, then the battle itself is essentially the means of establishing justice (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020).

Literalist and the Sacred Text

One of the contributing factors that motivate Muslims to commit jihad is the fact that holy text is literally conversing about this issue. External jihad or physical jihad is seen as something transcendent as per Islamic tradition the reward for this kind of jihad is the highest level of heaven and those who die for the sake of this cause considered as a *shahid* (martyr).

The matter that has become an ageless debate and enigma in Islamic history is not about whether the jihad and war (*qital*) texts exist or not, but more around how to read those verses and how to understand and put context into the text. For some Muslims, what is written in the sacred text is something absolute and independent which nothing else is needed to read and understand. While for some others, they see otherwise; to get a comprehensive understanding of the sacred text, the elaboration of the context is quintessential. Removing context from the text potentially jeopardizes and leads to errors in understanding the sacred text (Saeed 2006).

One may wonder why violence using the name of religion could really exist or in more explicit question is why such physical-offensive jihad is actually present considering that Islam essentially means peace? Perhaps the most convenient answer to this brain-teaser question is all that things happened due to an incomplete and fragmentary understanding of the sacred text. Literalists-extremists, on the one hand, perceive that information contained in the jihad verses are commands which are independent of the context and genealogy. In simple words, jihad and war verses are understood as general doctrines contained in Islamic teachings which are open for implementation without any particular consideration. Quranic verses that contain physical jihad or war such as, "But once the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them" (al-Quran, al-Taubah 9:5), at some point, abused to justify the violence. On the other hand, the consequences of preserving the sanctity of the shariah require its followers to survive from the interference of foreign teachings. And at a certain moment, this

defense mechanism could transform into an attack, as it is commonly believed that attack is the best form of defense.

Demounting a sacred text from its context, or neglecting the genealogical aspect of a text, is not only dangerous because it can distort the meaning, but also has the potential to eliminate the *raison d'être* from the sacred text (al-Qardhawi 1985). This art of understanding the context and the genealogy of sacred texts has become a major concern that traditionalist Muslims continue to preserve as a methodology for interpreting the Quran from ancient times until now (Robinson 2003). As such, some Muslim scholars have devoted their thought to this issue, amongs is al-Suyuti (d. 849 AH), a phenomenal Sunni scholar who had a specific work dedicated to this matter namely *Lubab al-Nuqul fi al-Asbab al-Nuzul* (al-Suyuti 2002). Long after al-Suyuti there were many scholars who share the same concern to this issue, and two of them were Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Despite unlike al-Suyuti who own special work, Both Nursi and Nasr in many of their works still pay great attention devoted to this matter.

The core of Nursi's thinking which according to him is the result of thirty years of his intellectual journey are: the *mana-i harfi*, *mana-i ismi*, *niyyah* (intention), and *nazaar* (viewpoint) (Nursi 2007). Nursi reckons that all elements in this terrestrial life have a hidden reality. To understand this is to understand the nature of reality. A material, instead of just showing the visible form, it indicating the meaning behind it. This concept of understanding the invisible from the visible is what he calls the *mana-i harfi* (Aydin 2019).

Mana-i harfi has become a hallmark of Nursi's methodology of thinking. Readers of Nursi's works will find that almost in every work, Nursi uses this *mana-i harfi* approach. As well when dealing with the look of his Quranic exegesis method, it appears that Nursi's interpretation has more or less the nuances of *mana-i harfi*. Nursi generally distinguishes two types of interpretation of the Quran; literal and ma'nawi tafsir, and he openly says that the method he prefers to use in his collection is ma'nawi tafsir, which of course is identical to the *mana-i harfi* approach (Çoruh 2019).

Meanwhile, Nasr contends that the Quran has two interrelated aspects: the outer aspect which is visible (*zahir*), and the inner aspect which is invisible (*batin*) (Nasr & Leaman 2001). This inner aspect of the Quran which Nasr also calls the inner truth (*haqiqah*) has great significance for understanding the interconnection between Islamic philosophy and the sources of Islamic revelation. Only by understanding the inner side of the Quran, the inner truth of the sacred text will be recognized.

Both Nursi and Nasr saw the significance of reasoning (*'aql*) in understanding the Divine Text (*naql*). The use of reasoning (*'aql*) is not to negate the text (*naql*), it is to decipher the hidden meaning of the literal text (*naql*) instead. Nursi and Nasr see the Quran not only as a chain of words, they both perceive that there is an inner truth hidden behind the literal text.

Understanding the Context: The Genealogy of Jihad Verses

It was mentioned in the previous session that when talking about the jihad verses in the Quran, it is significantly pivotal to also talk about the period of the revelation of the verse which is *Makkiyah* and *Madaniyah*, to comprehend a genealogical perspective and the purpose of revelation. Indeed, a number of jihad verses in the Madaniyah category entail the notion of physical jihad or warfare. But It is worth noting that the period of Muslim life in Medina historically was filled up with war. Thus, the jihad verses here must be understood not as the legalization of invasion or motivation to oppress, but rather as the legitimacy of defensive action. This statement is supported by the law from the Quran itself which explicitly states:

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged, and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid. (al-Quran al-Hajj 22:39)

Commenting on this, Ibn Kaşir narrated from Ibn Abbas that this verse was revealed to give the first authorization to fight as a means of self-defense for the Muslims who were previously attacked and expelled from their own homeland (Ibn Kaşir n.d. vol 5). This evidence

elucidates that physical jihad does exist in the Islamic tradition and whoever refuses this fact is tantamount to obscuring the history of Islam itself. However, the truth that seems to have always been sidelined up to the present is the verses or hadiths which talk about war and physical jihad have *asbab al-nuzul* (causes of revelation) along with it, and if this cause is excluded in understanding the sacred text it leads to complete misconception (Ma'bad 2017). This consideration for several Muslim thinkers is the foundation of the argument that jihad is defensive and is only used in certain conditions, not extreme offensive actions (Nasr 2002). Apprehending the sacred texts or hadiths related to jihad must not be separated from the context and the reasons of its revelation so as not to collide with the universal values of humanity which in essence are values that are guarded by Islam itself. Nasr says:

The saying of the Prophet: "Jihad remains valid until the Day of Judgment" must be understood in this universal sense of the jihad inherent in the general human condition in this imperfect world (Nasr 2002: 271).

The Object of Jihad: Nursi's Perspective

The epitome of Nursi's methodology in understanding the Divine reality is what he calls the "*ana*" or the self (Nursi 2016). Not many Muslim scholars and thinkers adopt this approach in reading the complexity of the Divine Reality and its relation to humans. Among those who also utilize this approach is Ibn Arabi with his prominent concept of "*wahdat al-wujud*". Ibn Arabi was one of the towering figures of Islamic intellectual history who has often been assessed as an infidel due to his *wahdat al-wujud* concept. Even though, Nursi has another point of view which contradicts arguably the majority on this. The way Nursi reads Ibn Arabi's thoughts particularly about the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* is quite different from most other Muslim scholars. Nursi tries to use another alternative in understanding the complexities of Ibn Arabi's thought, and he refused to claim Ibn Arabi as an infidel (Khalid & Ibrahim 2016). And this fact exhibits the moderation of Nursi's thinking.

As for Nursi's view on the object of jihad, as explained before that speaking of Nursi is speaking about two phases of a human's life; old and new Said Nursi. Be it the old or the new Nursi, the concept of the "Self" plays an important role in the thinking of a Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, including when it comes to matters of jihad.

More specifically, in "Old Said" jihad seems to be focused on the struggle to seek knowledge and its implementation in actual life. For him, knowing the supremacy and the oneness of God (*tawhid*) is fundamental in the life of a Muslim. The window of *tawhid*, he believes, is knowledge, and the knowledge to know God is through the "Self" (Nursi 2020; Ozkan 2015). Therefore, Nursi considers that seeking knowledge is a high purpose of jihad if not the highest. Nursi spent almost all of his time on this cause. Nursi's great dedication is actual proof of his jihad to preserve the sanctity of true knowledge whose ultimate goal is to protect *tawhid* and the Quran from alien ideologies storming which he believes are inimical to the spiritual and intellectual of Muslims (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). The culmination of Nursi's scholarly jihad was his idea to revolutionize Islamic education through project *Medresetüz-Zehra* (az-Zahra university). This project is Nursi's idea as a solution to the problem that Muslim facing particularly in education. Nursi assumes that Islamic education reform is significantly needed to facing the problems that are increasing swiftly not only in Turkey but also globally namely secularisation. And that exceptional revolution began with his dream to establish a university that would become the epicenter of world Islamic scholarship.

Regarding physical jihad, the "Old Said" as previously mentioned is the complete opposite of the "New Said". The story of "Old Said" who confronted an unjust leader, to the heroic story of Nursi as a volunteer force commander against Russia in the First World War are a series of arguments about Nursi's closeness to various form of physical jihad (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). And the latter is undeniably a noble effort of a Nursi to defend the honor of his nation.

The fall of the Ottoman caliphate after the First World War and the birth of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, marks the birth of a “New Said” who was in stark contrast to the old version. Life experience and contact with the outside world are perhaps among the causes that transform the way of thinking and interaction of the new Nursi. However, one thing that can be confirmed is that “New Said” is a figure who makes the Quran as the absolute direction of his thinking (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). “New Said” sees religion as a virtuousness that must be guarded and defended, but not merely with confrontation and physical jihad. “New Said” prefers to use diplomacy and an intellectual approach as a weapon rather than a physical approach (Gündüzalp & Sungur 2020). Nursi abandons any kind of physical confrontation even for a reason that the older version of him might justify. Even Nursi rejected the idea of his colleagues to carry out an armed revolution against the government, although, in principle and value, Nursi was very much at odds with the new government that was born post-Ottoman Empire (Hörküç 2004).

The Object of Jihad: Nasr’s Perspective

As for Nasr, jihad is conducted as an effort to unveil and create the equilibrium inward and outward. He believes that finding this equilibrium is the goal of the *shari’ah* itself (Nasr 1987). The equilibrium and peace that is felt within each individual must also be felt collectively as a social good, and the way to get it is by jihad.

The idea of balance which Nasr recurrently calls the equilibrium is the result of Nasr’s long involvement in the complexity and diversity of the environment in which he develops and grows both intellectually and spiritually. Nasr was born in a Shi’ite environment—although in his birthplace Shi’ites are the majority but globally are a minority—then he traveled far and lived in an environment where Islam is a minority in the United States. Got the opportunity to study at leading universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University, then met and learned directly from prominent figures from various scientific and religious backgrounds such as Giorgio de Santillana, Louis Massigon, Henri Corbin, Louis Massigon, Marco Pallis, as well as learning from prominent Muslim Sufi figures such as Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi and Shaykh Isa Nur al-Din Ahmad moderated Nasr’s perspective and the way he thinking (Nasr 1987). Nasr’s Intellectual and Spiritual side is formed from diversity and universality. From that diversity, he found the equilibrium that continuously helped him grow and mature as a Muslim intellectual. Nasr explicitly stated:

These years also set my gaze more fully upon the horizon of universal and global truth in the traditional sense of the word, embracing not only the Islamic tradition which was my own, but also the Western, both Graeco-Alexandrian and Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Far Eastern and primal, and also including esoteric Judaism associated with the Kabbala, and Zoroastrianism and other Iranian religions (Nasr 1987: 28).

As Nasr understands that the purpose of jihad is to create a balance both inward and outward, then jihad in the highest definition according to him is life itself. One will not find the glory and peace of life if he does not find balance, and all this, for Nasr, can only be obtained if every Muslim carries out jihad in every aspect of life. All forms of worship in Islam require jihad. Only with jihad, a Muslim will find beauty, peace, or even God in his worship. The five pillars of Islam; *shahada*, *prayer*, *fasting*, *alms*, and *hajj*, all are sharia commands that guide Muslims to get a balance in their relationship with themselves and society. And essentially, all the above practices require jihad to reach the highest value in its practice. Put it simply, jihad is an effort to achieve a balance both internally and externally (Nasr 1987: 30-34).

When it comes to physical jihad, Nasr strongly criticizes the distortion of some groups, especially the west, which according to him deliberately deprived the most essential meaning of jihad by simply portraying jihad as an act of violence. Likewise, Nasr also criticized the violence conducted by a group of Muslims by abusing the name of Islam. Nasr’s position on physical jihad is crystal clear, he reckons that physical jihad is only valid if it meets the standards justified by the Quran.

In the Islamic world, because religion remains a powerful force, its name is still used in support of whatever causes arise that lead to contention and conflict, although the Quran emphasizes that war must be only for defense of one's homeland and religion and not be offensive and aggressive (Nasr 2002).

According to Nasr, violence in the name of religion happened because some people who he calls "fundamentalists" always interpret the Quran according to their goals and desires. Ironically, from time to time their understanding of the sacred text looks bizarre and deviates from the general interpretation of the Quran (Nasr 1987). Moreover, Nasr rejects the idea of modernizing Islam in the same manner that he also controverts the western version of a truth value, for instance when the west arbitrarily distorts jihad as an act of violence, Nasr emphatically criticized:

Unfortunately in the Western media today, that center is usually defined as the modernizing elements in Islamic society, and it is forgotten that modernism is itself one of the most fanatical, dogmatic, and extremist ideologies that history has ever seen (Nasr 1987: 109).

For Nasr, it is not Islam and its teachings that must conform to developing values. All of these values are changeable and dynamic, while Islam and its *shari'ah* are stable and comprehensive. The reform of the Divine Law to suit human law, which in fact is constantly changing is an anomaly (Nasr 2000).

This version of jihad to find equilibrium requires Muslims to seek justice but with humility and charity not in self-righteousness. In order to find balance, there are principles that must be adhered to by each individual. Nasr is not naive either, he acknowledges that in a particular condition, physical jihad is unavoidable. However, he believes that using violence to achieve certain goals or abusing jihad to demolishing certain groups is unquestionably a mistake, and not every war can be categorized as jihad (Nasr 2000). More specifically Nasr says:

"Enjoin the good and forbid the wrong" 3:110. This does not mean that individual Muslims should interfere in the affairs of others; rather, each person has the social responsibility to make certain that moral authority reigns in the community (Nasr 2000: 170).

He added:

Muslims should be strict with themselves, but generous and compassionate toward those around them (Nasr 2000: 218).

Jihad in the Modern Age

A well-known Muslim contemporary scholar, Yusuf Qardhawi, sees that in every transition of time, there are always things that also change and adapt. Such changes are an inevitable part of this corporeal life. These changes are a necessity and for Muslims, it is believed to be *sunnatullah* (al-Qardhawi 2009).

Islam in relation to its existential realm, on the one hand, is required to be adaptive to a certain reality and to be able to deal with various existing problems, on the other hand. Islam was revealed by God through the last Prophet who was an Arab in an environment that was miserable in the perspective of a civil state. The Prophet was sent with all the Divine Messages in order to comprehensively restore and reconstruct the order of Arab society in particular, and to spread the Divine Message throughout the universe, and the latter is known as the most important part of the teachings of Islam itself, namely *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, the mercy to the whole world. In order for its existence to develop and be able to optimally manifest its values, Islam must appear close and not sporadically suppress the values and culture that already exist. A real example of this is the issue of *khamr* (alcoholic beverage) which was an inseparable part of the Arab community at that time. Islam came with a message to prohibit the consumption of *khamr*, but in its application, the order was revealed gradually. Firstly, Islam only forbade the

consumption of alcohol when going to prayer. The second prohibition is stricter, and the command came with information about the extensive damage from alcohol. And the final command is the complete prohibition of alcohol. This gradual rule makes the order easier to follow because it does not sporadically break the tradition and it makes people more adaptable to it.

The same applies to jihad in its broadest meaning. Inner jihad is a value that Islam teaches as an answer to the fundamental problems of human civilization at that time, namely the depravity of morals. While outer jihad or physical jihad is a choice that God has given as a means of preserving the greatest value of human beings which is life. As is well known, the period when Islam descended was a period when war was a common thing, not only in the Arabian Peninsula but throughout the land. War is the most logical choice that an individual or group might take at that time to defend themselves and the existence of their group. Therefore, Islam gives legitimacy to war under certain conditions, and Islam regulates it with rigorous rules so as not to be misused (al-faruqi 1982).

Commenting on the jihad verses, especially physical jihad, Nasr argues that the verse was revealed according to the conditions at that time. The choice of physical jihad or war was an inevitable choice considering the conditions at that time. Nasr frankly says:

If, like the Bible, the Quran does speak of fighting against one's enemies, it must be remembered that Islam was born in a climate in which there were constant wars among various tribes (Nasr 2002: 266).

Based on all these arguments, the confusion Muslims nowadays facing is whether physical jihad is an inevitable thing in *da'wah* considering that the existential challenges of Islam today are not caused by physical wars but ideological wars? Does the statement "attack is the best form of defense" still make sense taking into account that circumstances and times have changed? And how to interpret jihad in the modern era where ideological wars are more intense and massive than physical ones?

Nursi and Mânevî Jihad (Moral Jihad)

In almost all of his life, Nursi had experienced all kinds of violence and hatred in various forms, whether intentional or not, from numerous groups that were against him or his thoughts. Those experiences had a major impact on Nursi's transformation and led Nursi to the conclusion that Islam highly upholds the values of justice and peace, and this can be seen in the strict rules embedded in the noblest law which is the Quran. Nursi acknowledged that Islam has a history of war, but Islam has never taught barbarity, genocide, and war is only a very last choice, not the other way around.

In the modern era, there have been significant changes ubiquitously. Barbarism has been replaced by the educated and civilized. These changes require Muslims to adapt and Muslims have to interpret jihad more deeply. Educated and civilized people can only be conquered not by sword and war, but by an intellectual approach and persuasive interaction. The time of strife and enmity is over. The detrimental effect and the collateral damage of conflict are tremendous (Nursi 2020). Thus, Nursi believes that something must be changed and Muslim's responsibility now is what he calls positive action. He says:

Our duty is "positive action" not "negative action". It is solely to serve belief (in the truths of religion). [It must be] in accordance with divine pleasure, and not to interfere in God's concerns. [It is] the positive service to belief which results in the preservation of public order and security (Vahide 1995: 19).

At this stage, Nursi's greatest jihad is to form a fortress of spirituality within each individual. This aspect of spirituality, Nursi believes, can bring stability and social harmony. Instead of starting from the outside, Nursi views that self is the epicenter. Knowing oneself is the key to knowing God and all of His creation, and only by realizing this matter peace and

harmony can be manifested. This reason also brings Nursi away from politics because for him there are so much enmity and interest in politics that led to nothing except conflict and abuse (Nursi 2020).

Risale-i Nur and positive action are the manifestation of Nursi's mânevî jihad as an answer to the new existing challenges in the modern era. For him, there is no more place for violence and negative action:

To act positively, that is, out of love for one's own outlook, avoiding enmity for other outlooks, not criticizing them, interfering in their beliefs and sciences, or in any way concerning oneself with them (Nursi 2021).

Further he states:

What I am certain of from my own experience of social life and a whole life-time of study is this: the thing most worthy of love is love, and the thing most deserving of enmity is enmity. That is, love and loving, which render man's social life secure and lead to happiness, are most worthy of love and being loved. Enmity and hostility are ugly and damaging: they have overturned man's social life and more than anything deserve to be loathed and shunned. The time for enmity and hostility is over. Two world wars have shown how evil and destructive enmity can be, and what an awesome wrong it is. It has become clear that there is no benefit in it at all (Nursi 2020: 51).

The application of the concept of mânevî jihad can be seen in the final episode of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's life who responds to every single negative action against him with patience and kindness. The culmination of all those honourableness is the birth of his *magnum opus*, *Risale-i Nur*, a work that was born as a monumental gift for humanity.

Nasr and Establishment of the Equilibrium

The notion of equilibrium that Nasr focuses on, as explained in the previous discussion, according to him is a value that must be fought for, and Muslims must interpret this as jihad. Nasr believes that the establishment of the equilibrium is a reflection of the Divine Justice and it is a condition for finding universal peace. Establishing the equilibrium both outward and inward is the highest spiritual purpose of human beings. Only then they will feel peace within themselves and find peace with God (Nasr 2002).

However, preserving the equilibrium especially in this modern era is seriously challenging. The erraticism of the terrestrial realm requires continuous exertion, so at this point, the obligations and duties of Muslims in this regard are considered as a noble jihad (Nasr 1987). Given that jihad to find the equilibrium is something that requires extra effort and focus, then humans should avoid outward war except for something that is unavoidable and justified by God. Nasr states:

A Muslim's duty is to seek to establish peace and justice within, and on the basis of the Divine injunctions to establish justice in the world about him or her through an effort, or jihad, that must avoid outward war and confrontation except when absolutely necessary and in defense (Nasr 2002: 272).

For Nasr, the world we live in today is a world full of disputes, either economic, political, or cultural, which often leads to a serious and massive conflict namely military confrontation. Therefore, Muslims must be good agents for Islam by remaining vigilant, on the one hand, and trying to be spreaders of peace, on the other, because the essence of Islam is peace, and one of the highest purposes of the shariah is to integrate human relationships with themselves and with the social environment in which they live (Nasr 2000).

Nasr believes that there are universal values that all religions reckon as sacred. And conclusively from an Islamic point of view, whatever attempts to destroy this sanctity, then Muslims have a responsibility to protect it. However, the response to conserve this sacred value

should not even damage the value of Islam itself. Muslims must divine this jihad as a religious duty that must be conducted with justice and humility, neither with war, nor destruction and nor with self-righteousness (Nasr 1989: 272).

To conclude, the distortion of jihad continues to arise due to two factors that are indirectly related. Firstly caused by propagandists who deprive the most essential meaning of jihad then purposefully depict jihad only as physical action or war. Secondly, in consequence of Muslim extremists who abuse jihad as the legitimacy of their violent actions.

Two eminent Muslim figures who concern about this problem are Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Although both arguably contrast as to idea generation about jihad and the manifestation of jihad generally, however, they share the opinion that jihad can no longer be interpreted as mere war. The understanding of jihad as physical acts must be retraced and reconceptualized because of significant changes in circumstances in which we live now. Islam and its teachings must veritably be conveyed and fortified, but not with a coercive da'wah nor with a physical approach for that those times are bygone. This day jihad must be expressed with the force of intellectual and civilization.

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