

**Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq: From Hate Language to Reconciliation**

**A framework for reconciliation based on the works of Mohammed Hussein Fadhlallah and  
Mahmood Shaltout on de-escalating sectarian tension**

**By**

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## Acknowledgments

Dedication

*To my father, for his words of wisdom, overwhelming support and for teaching me the greatest lessons in life, I just owe almost everything to him. I want to express my deepest appreciation to him but fall short of words; I am forever grateful. It is to him that this thesis is dedicated.*

*and*

*To the loving memory of Sayed Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah, for his spiritual guidance that taught me how to be a better person, and continues to do so.*

*Millions of thanks to:*

It would have been next to impossible to write this thesis without the help and support of my supervisor, by whom I have been inspired and instructed, and from whom I have learned so much, Dr. Vern Neufeld Redekop, who has been a constant source of encouragement.

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My loving parents, for their overwhelming love and support, and for teaching me honesty, care and kindness and their constant reminder, to make a difference in the world, even if it is one person at a time. Today all that I am, and all that I have become, is due in large part to both of you.

My siblings, especially Zari, for cheering me up with joy and laughter, always.

And my better half, Akil, for his loving heart and caring personality that lightens up my life every day.

## ABSTRACT

For almost 14 centuries, religious bigotry led to violence and conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites around the world, creating sectarian tension between them regardless of the immense commonality that they share within their belief systems. The division between them created a rift of mutual stereotypes and isolation as time went by. This reality of schismatic conflict raises the question of whether or not Islam holds the key to transforming the conflict so that positive relationships can be established. As a minor step towards reconciliation, a framework for reconciliation among the two sects will be presented by focusing at the work of two scholars that played a major role in de-escalating the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites; as they have both worked on a common principle of reconciliation and coexistence. The Shiite scholar intended for this study is Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadhlallah and the Sunni scholar is Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot.

Hence, the aim of this study is to follow the trail they left behind, hoping to implement their ideology of peace and reconciliation in a modified, effective framework that could generate a change in attitude and perceptions. The idea is to provide an effective reconciliation proposal that seeks common goals and interests in unity and coexistence between the two sects. This framework has its roots in the thoughts and teachings of Fadhlallah and Shaltoot and is developed by theories in Conflict Resolution. The framework was eventually analysed using the expertise and knowledge of some of the prominent religious leaders from Iraq and Lebanon in order to finalize and conclude the applicability of the framework as a conflict resolution strategy on de-escalation of sectarian violence; aiming for coexistence.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Question and Purpose**

For almost 14 centuries, religious bigotry led to violence and conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites around the world, creating sectarian tension between them regardless of the immense commonality that they share within their belief systems. The division between them created a rift of mutual stereotypes and isolation as time went by. This reality of schismatic conflict raises the question of whether or not Islam holds the key to transforming the conflict so that positive relationships can be established. As one step towards reconciliation, a framework for reconciliation between the two sects will be synthesised, drawing on the work of Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadhlallah, a Shiite, and Sunni scholar Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot.

They have played a major role in de-escalating the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, as they have both worked with their respective sects of Islam on the common principle of reconciliation and coexistence.

Hence, the aim of this study is to follow the trail they left behind, hoping to implement their teachings of peace and reconciliation in a modified, effective framework that could generate a change in attitude and perceptions. The idea is to provide effective workable reconciliation proposal that seeks common goals and interests in unity and coexistence between the two sects. This framework has its roots in the thoughts and teachings of Fadhlallah and Shaltoot and is developed by using reconciliation concepts from the theories of Vern Neufeld Redekop.

The framework was eventually analysed using the expertise and knowledge of some of the prominent religious leaders from Iraq and Lebanon in order to finalize and conclude the applicability of the framework as a conflict resolution strategy on de-escalation of sectarian violence, aiming for coexistence.

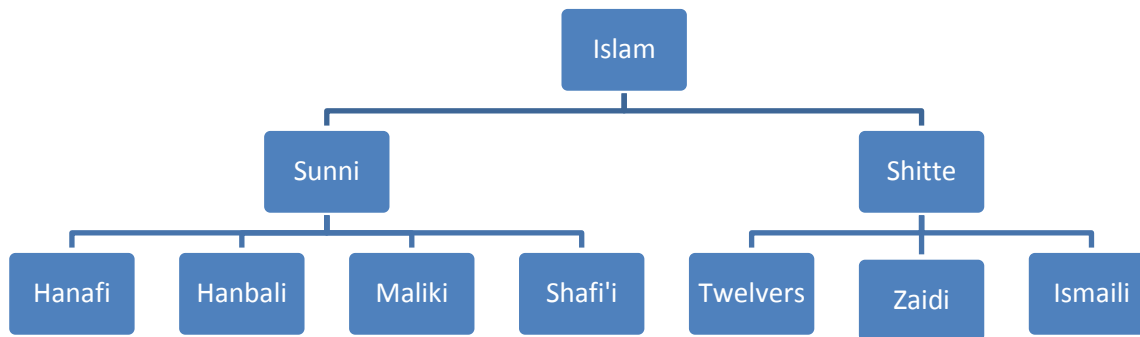
## **1.2 Problématique**

The tension is severe among the Shiites and the Sunnis within the Islamic world; sectarian conflict between them intensifies the largest division in the Muslim world. Recent political events in the Middle East have clearly shown that this sectarian tension is the most common element of friction in the Middle East and Muslim countries. The majority of the world's Muslim population follows the Sunni branch of Islam, and approximately 15 percent of all Muslims are Shiites. Shiites are mainly found in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen<sup>1</sup>. For the purpose of this study, considering the current sectarian tension in Iraq, and in the light of my personal background as a Shiite Iraqi, the focus and the research conducted is specifically done on Iraq and the framework that will be developed throughout aims to provide solutions to the de-escalation of sectarian violence explicitly in Iraq.

Within Shiite and Sunni Islam there are various different schools of thought or religious jurisprudence. Under the Sunni school of thought, there are currently four recognized schools; Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi'i and Maliki. Within the Shiite there are currently three widely known schools of thought which are: Twelvers, Zaidi and Ismaili. The differences between these schools of thought are mainly philosophical; each individual chooses to follow any one of them based on personal preferences, convictions, and historical connections. In Iraq, the Sunni population of Iraq is predominately Hanafi and the Shiite population of Iraq follows the Twelvers school of thought. The diagram below shows the branches of Islam and their particular schools of thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher, M Blanchard. "Islam: Sunnis and Shiites." *CRS Reports for Congress*. January 28, 2009. <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21745.pdf> (accessed 2011).



(Figure1.)

The main distinguishing feature of Shiite belief is the doctrine of the *Imameh*, or the spiritual leadership specifically regarding the appointment of Ali as the rightful successor after the prophet; Shiites believe that an Imam is supposed to be infallible. The Sunnis on the other hand believe that the succession after the prophet is a question to be decided by the Muslim community and that the elected Imam or caliph does not have to be infallible.<sup>2</sup>

The Shiite – Sunni rift is the oldest within the Muslim community. The relationship between them through the ages has been shaped by the political events of the initial historical division. The division between the Sunnis and the Shiites began right after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The Shiites believed that the prophet had assigned Ali, his companion, to be the leader of the community after his death; the Sunnis however, believed that Abu-Bakr was to be the first caliph after Prophet Muhammad to guide the Muslim community at that time. The disruption of unity among Muslims began in that instant. The Shiites believed that Ali was deprived of his right to the Caliphate. For Ali however, this did not matter as long as the Muslim

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<sup>2</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer. *Islam and Muslims*. (Jaipur: Printwell Publisher. 1985, (103-105).

community was united. In the *Nahjul-Balagha* (Peak of Eloquence), which is the most famous collection of sermons, letters, and narrations attributed to Ali for its eloquent content, considered a masterpiece of literature for the Shiites, it reads:

I suddenly noticed,  
people surrounding Abu Bakr to swear him allegiance. I, therefore,  
withheld my hand till I saw that many people were reverting from  
Islam and trying to destroy the religion of Muhammed. I, then,  
feared that if I did not protect Islam and its people and there  
occurred in it a breach or destruction, it would mean a greater blow  
to me than the loss of power over you, which was in any case to last  
for a few days of which everything would pass away as the mirage  
passes away or as the cloud scuds away. Therefore, in these  
happenings, I rose till wrong was destroyed and disappeared and  
religion attained peace and safety. (Narrations of Ali: Nahjul Balagha, sermon 66)

Therefore the analysis of his decision would be that he stepped down because it was for the best interest of the community.

Triggered by emotions and fuelled by ignorance<sup>3</sup> many missed the point as to why Ali reacted the way he did in response to the injustice when he was not given the leadership of the community after the death of Prophet. They insisted and focused on the issue of lost leadership of Ali, ignoring what Ali truly wanted. The division began and a gap within the Muslim community widened; those with Ali identified themselves as Shiite, and those who swore allegiance to Abu-Bakr as the first caliph, Omar as the second, Othman as the third and Ali as fourth were hence called the Sunnis. Ali's worst nightmare, the disruption within the Muslim community was now a bitter reality. Since that incident, Muslim unity became impossible to attain. The gap widened more as years went by; the focus was on how the "other" was wrong and mistaken.

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<sup>3</sup> *The word ignorance is the most equivalent word to the Arabic word Jahal (The term is commonly used by both Fadhlallah and Shaloot within their writings, it mostly refers to those who are unwilling to learn or the lack of knowledge.*

As Heinz Halm explains in his book, *Shi'ism*, the Shiites emerged “as a party in a political power struggle” and have since then experienced the struggle for political power and recognition. For the major part of their history the Shiites remained a political opposition as exemplified in the current situation in Bahrain and Iraq up until 2003. According to Halm, “the political dynamism of Shiite Islam lies principally in its self-awareness as champion of the cause of the ‘downtrodden’ against the powerful”<sup>4</sup>. This highlights the feeling of victimhood that Shiites have lived with emotionally, having experienced persecution physically at the hands of the majority of the Muslims, the Sunnis.

With the emergence of Shiite power in Iraq, suddenly the political struggle that they had for so long endured changed. The Shiites currently have the majority of seats in the parliament due to the fact they are the majority. For many, especially the Sunni extremists this seemed like a sudden change of fate, since they had for the longest time, under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the power to rule and the prosperity that Saddam had bestowed them based on their sectarian affiliation. This political ideology of who should rule turned extremely violent, as has been shown by the recent bloody and violent situation in Iraq. The sectarian strife in Iraq suddenly grew bigger than ever before. Many religious leaders played a major role in this separation through their Friday sermons and publications. Sermons by many religious leaders began criticizing the ‘other’, reviewing the incident each from a different perspective to create hate and animosity. Some religious leaders began to ignite hate and deceit through their sermons; books were published; hate speeches each claiming the other as a ‘non-believer’ became a norm. Religious leaders began by publically announcing the “infidelity” of the other and specifically

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<sup>4</sup> Heinz Halm. *Shi'ism*. (New York: Columbia University Publication). 2004, 1-15.

focusing on the “us” and “them” concept, during their sermons, even though the Quran clearly rejects this blatant attitude.

And hold fast by the covenant of God all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of God on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it, thus does God make clear to you His Communications that you may follow the right way. (Quran 3:103)

It is important to note that there is a significant emphasis placed on differentiating “us” and “them” among followers of each sect. This mutually exclusive mentality continues to be reinforced in various different forms, in a formal and an informal manner; formally, through the language used in rituals, sermons and liturgy that denigrates the other group and the weekly speeches that use discriminatory language to address the other. It is also reinforced informally through countless acts of discrimination and informal table truths shared among friends that show stereotypical thinking and hatred for the other.

The mutually exclusive mentality is also manifested politically through violent actions that are clearly based on sectarian distinctions. Recent conflicts in the Middle East especially the conflict in Bahrain and the violence in Iraq for instance, could serve as an example that validates this claim.

### **1.3 Role of Religious Leaders Engagement**

The conflict is in need of immediate attention by the religious leaders who are supported and treasured by millions of devout followers. There is a strong sense of attachment and respect granted to Muslim religious leaders around the world; religious leaders are considered experts in religious matters due to the complexity of Islamic jurisprudence. The conformity of Muslims to

their religious leaders is unimaginable. Muslim religious leaders have the power to change minds and hearts of their followers as they have been doing for centuries.

Religious leaders are trusted and respected figures in their communities around the world. They play a vital role in the lives of their communities. People turn to them for guidance in almost all matters of life. In various communities, especially within the Muslim world, where there tends to be a high degree of religiosity, religious leaders can have a major influence on the interpretation and implementation of religious teachings.

A common element that exists among Muslim religious leaders is the issue of “*Fatwa*”<sup>5</sup> that is an essential element throughout this thesis. According to Jamal Badawi, professor of religious studies at St. Mary's University in Halifax, a “*Fatwa* is a religious opinion coming from a scholar, who is qualified to give an opinion on a matter.”<sup>6</sup> The *Fatwa* serves as a clarification statement on an issue usually to eradicate a misunderstanding or a misconception within the Muslim community. Linda Clark, a professor of Islam at Concordia University in Montreal, adds that “[p]eople are continually asking their scholars for *fatwa(s)*,”<sup>7</sup> illustrating the need that many Muslims have for the guidance of religious leaders. “Muslims are also compelled to accept them,” says Clark, “if they follow the particular cleric who issued it.” *Fatwa(s)* are generally issued by highly qualified religious scholars who are considered experts in Islamic jurisprudence.

The significance of this matter exemplifies the power that religious leaders could have in resolving conflictual issues. Issuing *fatwas* that eradicate violence and hate language could play a

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<sup>5</sup> *Fatwa* is an Islamic religious ruling or a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law issued usually by a recognized religious authority.

<sup>6</sup> "News Indepth: Islam." *CBCnews*. Ed. CBC News. CBC/Radio Canada, 15 June 2006. Web. 08 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/islam/fatwa.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*4.

significant role in a reconciliation process. This powerful tool was used by both Fadhlallah and Shaltoot whom I will be discussing in detail throughout this study.

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

This study aims to investigate the role of religious leader engagement in the de-escalation of sectarian violence by examining the works of two religious scholars that have for many years worked extensively on the idea of reconciliation and unity among Muslims. The study will shed light on what conceptual framework would enable religious leaders to address and effectuate change in attitudes and teachings of blessing amid tension and conflict? The works of Fadhlallah and Shaltoot serve as a backbone to the framework that this study aims to develop. They have been chosen for this study due to the fact that they have worked on a common theme of promoting unity and coexistence, demonstrated through how they lived their lives and by their various published works. They were also accepted and respected not only by their respective community but also by the ‘other’ sect which makes them good models for a reconciliation framework between Shiite and Sunnis. The proposed framework in this thesis promotes concepts and values for reconciliation that could result in positive change in attitudes and de-escalation of violence among Shiites and Sunnis. The hypothesis is that the reconciliation theories of Vern Neufeld Redekop along with vision and values promoted by Fadhlallah and Shaltoot can be used to develop a framework for Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis that includes the following factors for reconciliation: awareness, recognition, dialogue and coexistence.

Thus, the framework could play a significant role in the de-escalation of violence by collaboration of religious leaders in raising awareness within their communities, which will eventually enable recognition of the ‘other’ which is a necessary factor in identity formation that

enables individuals to realize their self-worth and self respect. It is only through recognition that opportunity for dialogue is born; a factor that is essential in harmonious co-existence and reconciliation.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted to examine the possibility and the applicability of a framework for reconciliation between the Sunnis and Shiites. The focus of the study is to construct a framework that is applicable to de-escalate tension between sects. Using Redekop's idea of recognition as a "human identity need" which is also central to the success of the framework, three other interrelated elements are essential to the success of this project. The three elements are awareness, dialogue and coexistence. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that each of the above mentioned elements is a prerequisite for the next element. They are all intertwined factors in the success of the study.

Within this study, I am an analyst in the field of conflict studies drawn to examine the potential for reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites because I care about the future of my own community and more broadly, I wish to address the sources of deep-rooted violent conflict. As such, I am using the analytical and research tools of my field in this endeavour. My own observations are not meant to privilege one particular side; rather the point is to underscore the depth and pervasiveness of the conflict.

My method of data collection for this research consisted of conducting ten semi-structured interviews with religious leaders from both Sunni and Shiites sects from Lebanon and Iraq. Iraq was a perfect example amidst all the sectarian violence that is going on currently and at the time of my research. Also, I had the privilege to be a researcher who spoke Arabic and shared their culture, because of my Iraqi background. Lebanon, however, was chosen since there was a vast number of Shiites and Sunnis living together and there is significant interaction among religious leaders of Iraq and Lebanon. At times, it did occur to me that the violence targeting

Shiites in Iraq is so enormous and the conflict among the two is so tense that no reconciliation framework would be able to heal it. However things changed as I began to realize that there are people who are still working on reconciliation and coexistence amidst all challenges.

Throughout this study, the works on reconciliation by Fadhlallah and Shaltoot were thoroughly examined, which prepared the ground to implement what they preached throughout their lives on a broader spectrum. As a result, what I planned to do was to test their methods and formulas for reconciliation with other religious leaders and to see if there were people who still live with that mindset. The purpose of this research therefore was to establish a common ground for a framework for reconciliation between the two sects by comparing and evaluating each response from each religious leader and to validate the possibility of a reconciliation process between Shiite and Sunnis similar to what Fadhlallah and Shaltoot preached.

### **2.1 Why Fadhlallah and Shaltoot?**

The Shiite scholar chosen for this study is Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadhlallah (1935 –2010) and the Sunni scholar is Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot (1893 - 1963). They have both worked on a common principle of reconciliation and coexistence. Within this study, the focus was on the framework that was offered by both scholars by closely examining their writings, sermons and the perception that the community around them had about them. Focusing on what differentiates them from other religious scholars among their own sects helped in establishing a route that can eventually lead to a new path in introducing a framework for reconciliation since the role of religious leaders in resolving conflict has been a very positive and powerful force in many conflicts.

Fadhlallah and Shaltoot seem to have reached a point of certainty in terms of unifying the Muslim community. Essentially they have specifically focused on reconstructing the Islamic

ideology of social cohesiveness, using the Quranic components of unity by overlooking the historical animosity in exchange for a much more unified Muslim community.

Although Fadhlallah and Shaltoot lived at different times, what is significant is that they both used similar concepts and approaches in de-escalation of tension within sects. This claim only reinforces the success of this framework. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot heavily focused on three major themes throughout their lives. The first is the importance of dialogue in resolving a conflict, a concept that will be thoroughly developed within the proposed framework for reconciliation throughout. Second is their constant focus on the responsibility of religious leaders in working towards unity by constantly raising awareness. Third, and most important element was their ultimate aim which was to unite the Muslim community by both issuing *fatwas* which significantly focused on the concept of unity and proximity, a major step towards recognition and eventual peaceful coexistence.

Fadhlallah and Shaltoot introduced a modern and progressive aspect of Islam that did not seem acceptable to the traditionalist sects of the Muslim community. Various religious leaders of both Shiites and Sunni strongly opposed both scholars. Many fellow Shiites in the Muslim world, mainly their religious leaders, considered Fadhlallahs' thoughts as un-Islamic and unacceptable. Many religious leaders accused him of being a non-believer that should not be followed and accused him of infidelity. Regardless of the various other accusations that Fadhlallah faced during his life, he continued his sustained criticism of the narrow-mindedness of some religious leaders in every sermon.

Fadhlallah's progressive views on women's rights and family law and the unstoppable passion to join Sunnis and Shiites by putting an end to hate language in all the Shiites prayers and supplication seemed an indigestible idea to most of the Shiites religious leaders. The role of

religious leaders of each sect became heavily focused on the importance of understanding the difference and focusing on it. When Fadhlallah and Shaloot introduced their teachings that mainly focused on minimizing such differences among the two sects, their ideas seemed totally foreign and unacceptable.

Change is feared among many preachers of Islam. A majority of Shiites as well Sunnis view change and progress in religious matters as an ideology that was perpetrated through the western world. Religion and tradition therefore could in no matter change since the time of prophet. To some extremists, the only way of life is following the exact same things that the prophet and his companions did 1400 years ago; anything new and progressive is considered an innovation that is against the teachings of Islam. Technology and higher education up until a few years ago were considered an innovation and invasion of the west that threatened Islam.

By looking at the works of Fadhlallah and Shaloot, it is safe to say that their *fatwas*, which will be analyzed in chapter XX , enormously contributed to the de-escalation of violence between Sunnis and Shiites by looking at examples from their own communities. Their work, their lifetime efforts on proximity, and the resultant inter-sect relationships serve as the ultimate evidence that reconciliation is possible through the positive involvement of religious leaders in the peace process.

Their work continues to be controversial, for example in an interview, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who now serves as chief religious scholar in Egypt and who is considered one of the most influential scholars living today, who has also shown clear opposition to the sectarian reconciliation, stated in an interview that was conducted on April 16, 2009, “Shaloot’s fatwa on acknowledging the Shiite sect as an acceptable school of thought similar to the other Sunni

schools of thought, does not exist and is invalid.”<sup>8</sup> Even though the actual fatwa by Shaloot is now circulating online along with the journal that was published and could be found in the “Islam Journal” published in Cairo, Al-Azhar publication on July 1959, page 227-228. (also a copy is included in Appendix 1) Qardawi’s claim can be seen as an indication to how radical the issue seemed to some, that although all evidence proves that the fatwa did exist, some still question the reality and doubt the already proven facts. This sparked a major debate which was followed by mass circulation of the fatwa electronically.

Hence, Fadhlallah and Shaloot launched their vision of blessing, through their authoritative voice as religious leaders, their sermons and their fatwas which focused on the importance of dialogue and the engagement of religious leaders. The actions both of these scholars took in transforming the conflict are going to be analyzed in detail in order to demonstrate the significance of their work in the reconciliation process.

## **2.2 Redekop’s theory of Human Identity Needs and its significance**

In his book, *From Violence to Blessing*, Vern Neufeld Redekop, argues that Human Identity Needs are interrelated categories that act as need satisfiers. Human Identity Needs include meaning, security, and recognition, connectedness and action which surround the self and the absence of any of these categories cause immediate threat and dissatisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

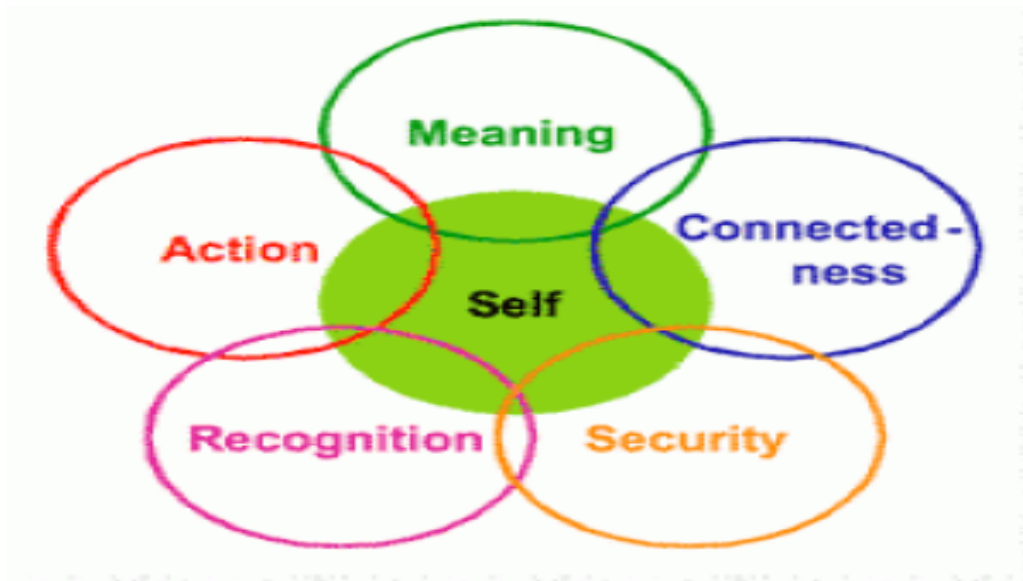
The tension that exists among the Sunnis and Shiites around the world is mainly due to the failed Human Identity Needs satisfiers. In Iraq, for instance, all elements of Human Identity

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<sup>8</sup> "The Debate on the Permissibility of Acknowledging the Shiite School of Thought as an Acceptable Sect with in Islam, a Fatwa by Shaloot." *Alsharq al-awsat*. April 16, 2009  
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=515321&issueno=11097> (accessed April 08, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Vern N, Redekop,. *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation*. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 2002.

Needs have been threatened by the sectarian tension and every individual feels threatened because of their sectarian affiliation.



(Figure2)

A significant element of Human Identity Needs according to Redekop is *meaning*. Meaning is the result of the world of our own that we develop solely based on our insights and our way of life, culture and language. Hence, meaning is the creation of "our own unique" worlds within our own context. According to Human Identity Needs theory, a sense of justice and fairness is essential to our worlds of meaning and if in any case we feel threatened by sense of injustice and unfairness our human identity need is also equally threatened.

Another important aspect of Human Identity Needs is the issue of *Security*. Security and self identity play a significant role in formation of human identity needs satisfiers. Security in this case implies to all forms of emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual safety.

The next category that is another essential entity of Human Identity Needs is *Recognition*. Self-worth is an essential dynamic in human identity. Recognition is directly associated with self-worth and respect that one needs for satisfaction; it is a desire that fulfills our sense of self

worth. It is an incredible inner power of appreciation and respect. The need to be recognized and appreciated is essential in formation of human identity. If this satisfier is not met, the dignity is severely violated.

*Connectedness* and the sense of belonging is another important aspect of our Human Identity Needs. A sense of belonging and the need for social identity is a necessity in every community. Connectedness and the sense of belonging is another important aspect of our human Identity need. The sense of belonging and the need for social identity is a necessity in every community.

*Action* is another important entity of the Human Identity Needs. Its aim is to control and realize the potential in taking significant action to meet the demands of self-identity. The self during this stage becomes an agent that takes action to express self-control and confidence. Action in case of human identity needs is a form of taking control in the environment one lives in to establish a higher self-esteem. Any opposition towards this important entity of human identity needs can result in depression and despair.

The analysis of the human identity needs of both sects served as a mean to elucidate the severity and the depth of conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites. As an active participant, I have witnessed the profound hatred these two groups have for one another. The tension is severe among the Sunnis and the Shiites, since each group views not only their life in this world but even the eternal life threatened by the other group which makes peace and reconciliation among the two a very difficult process. Compromise in the affairs of religion is in some cases impossible as the eternal salvation could be at stake.<sup>10</sup> However, the only possible solution is the

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Brahm. "Religion and Conflict." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. November 2005. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/religion-and-conflict> (accessed 2011).

engagement of religious leaders, in influencing the minds of the followers by reconstructing the religious driven structures of violence to teachings of blessing and forgiveness. Influencing the mind and the psychology of the followers regarding the “other” can be a significant step forward in the reconciliation process between the Sunnis and the Shiites.

As Redekop suggests, “hegemonic structural analysis of deep-rooted conflict exposes hidden patterns that have a strong psychological impact on individuals and groups.”<sup>11</sup> Historical enmity, dehumanization and victimizations are the psychological impacts that are fuelling the deep-rooted conflict of the Sunnis and the Shiites.

As it was discussed above, both sects use religious reasoning to promote hate against the other, referencing sources that are unreliable and unauthentic to legitimize the violence they are inflicting and not once referencing to a single verse of teachings of blessing from the Quran that they both highly respect and admire.

Human Identity Needs are not met for many individuals within the Sunni and Shiite community. I will use myself as an example to illustrate this issue.

### **2.3 My role as an active participant**

My own past experience as an active participant were the main motivation for this study. According to Robson , when conducting a research “important contributions are more likely to result from a genuine curiosity [and] excitement about doing research.”<sup>12</sup> He distinguishes between motivations that produce successful and unsuccessful research. For me, the conflict was an everyday issue. The violence and the atrocities that happened, especially in the recent years in Iraq, moved me to take a step, regardless of how small , to contribute to de-escalation of this sort

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<sup>11</sup> Redekop, Vern. *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can Open Paths to Reconciliation*. Novalis: Saint Paul University, 2002, p. 120

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Druckman. *Doing Research : Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage, 2005.

of violence.

Within the thesis, my primary role is a conflict analyst and researcher. However, having grown up within the Muslim community I have observed first hand many practices and particular exchanges that corroborate trends that are evident at a wider level. These observations become a secondary source of data to augment the argument. I will clearly signal when I am interjecting evidence based on my firsthand experience.

Here, I share my own personal experiences, hoping that my voice as an active participant draws a clear picture of the severity of the conflict based on an interpersonal dimension. As a Shiite, differentiating ‘us’ and ‘them’ was the case since I was a child. I grew up with holidays, symbols and stories that affirmed and highlighted the boundaries that existed between the sects. Everything around me insisted on the ideology that ‘we’ were different from ‘them’. The categorization of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ felt good as I was told, taught and formed an identity based on the idea as a young child that we were different. To differentiate Muslims and what sect they belong to was a very simple task. Names, the country of origin, even the posture while praying could identify which sect one belong to.

The teachings of blessing and conciliation are immense in the Quran, the single entity within the Muslim faith that both sects respect and accept and surprisingly agree on. Having that in mind, the question of why such teachings of blessings are forgotten or forsaken when they could have the power to change the entire deep-rooted conflict within the Muslim community, has occupied my mind for a while. There was a strong sense of contradiction between the Quran teachings of conciliation and unity and the severe tension between the Muslims – Shiites and Sunnis.

As I grew up, I began to understand the severity of tension between us and them. Our

mosques, places of worship are different. There are Sunni mosques and Shiites mosque, even in Ottawa. We don't pray together, as each group considers the prayer of the other unacceptable and improper. We don't read their religious books and they don't read ours and intermarriages are still frowned upon.

As an active participant, I have witnessed the profound hatred these two groups have for one another. A dear friend of mine, for whose knowledge and intellect I have a deep respect, shook the world within me when he said that "watching Sunni Libyans getting killed does not upset me, if anything, they deserve it." This was his response to the violent images we were watching on the news, right after we had watched the devastating news on Bahrain where the oppression of Shiites in that region was continuing as the Arab world, mainly Saudis, continued to send troops to Bahrain to take violent opposing action toward the peaceful Shiites protestors of Bahrain. As John Mack argues, "...Victims left unattended can lose their ability to feel for others."<sup>13</sup>This was the issue with my friend, he had lost any sense of sympathy for the "other" as the result of continuous victimhood as a Shiite. According to Montville, victimization is a series of events of aggression and loss that one has suffered at the hands of the enemy, which cannot be justifiable by any standards. This eventually leaves one with a sense of constant fear that the aggressor's violence is going to continue and that the world is indifferent to their plight.<sup>14</sup>

My personal experiences, through my interactions with my friends from the other sect have many times proved to me that there is an immense amount of misconception and misunderstanding on both sides, providing a context for the rapid escalation of conflict. The need for dialogue is immense. The longer it takes for someone to realize the depth of the crisis

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<sup>13</sup> Vern N, Redekop,. *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation*. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph V. Montville, "Psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the Greening of Diplomacy" *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 37, no. 2 (1987) <http://abrahamicfamilyreunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/psychoanalytic-enlightenment-and-the-greening-of-diplomacy-joseph-montville.pdf> (accessed 2011).

between them and start taking constructive action, the harder the process of reconciliation. The tension between them has escalated dramatically; political events in both Iraq and Bahrain have clearly demonstrated this tension in the recent years. The tension seems to be ascending, based on biases and an unwillingness to come together to initiate dialogue.

This deep rooted conflict fed on and resulted in hate, confusion, narrow mindedness and victimhood, which are primary elements that will be developed in detail within this thesis. This study aims to argue that the most important and essential element for reconciliation of this very deep-rooted conflict lies in the power of positive engagement and dialogue among the religious leaders of both sects.

#### **2.4 Research and Recruiting participants**

My method of data collection consisted of what were initially 20 semi-structured interviews with prominent religious leaders from Lebanon and Iraq. The number of interviews conducted however changed to ten interviews due to both the security reasons as well as the length of each interview and the realization that I had gathered a sufficient amount of information. Security as well was a major issue; hence most of the interviews that were conducted were conducted inside the Green zone in Baghdad. Baghdad's Green zone, officially known as the International zone is a heavily guarded area in the heart of Baghdad that includes the main offices of the government including the Iraqi parliament, and it is the home to many Iraqi members of the government.

My entire stay in Baghdad was inside the Green zone with the exception of two very short trips outside. All the interviews were done with those religious leaders who had the badges to enter the green zone, either because of their jobs or because they were invited by the religious

leader who is the chairman of the southern branch of Iraqi Scholars Group and who is also the Adviser to the presidency of Iraq for Religious Affairs. The recruitment of the participants was done by him and some were done by my father, the current Vice President of Iraq, who has worked extensively on the issue of reconciliation between the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq.

It is important to address the fact that some of the religious leaders that were interviewed were members of the High Council of Religious Leaders in Iraq (HCRLI), a council that aims to denounce sectarian violence by meeting regularly. This Council was first convened in 2007 by FRRME (Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East), which was founded by Canon Andrew White, who is the vicar of St George's Church, Baghdad, the only Anglican church in Iraq, whom I also met with during my stay in Baghdad.

The ten members HCRLI include both Shiite and Sunni religious leaders. During their regular meetings they work collaboratively together to influence and persuade their people to refrain from violence and respect and support the rule of law. They all agreed on action plans to condemn violence in the hope of de-escalating sectarian tensions in Iraq. One important action of the Council was to issue the first joint Fatwa that they produced together against all sectarian violence.

As was mentioned earlier, the recruitment of some of the participants was done by one of the members of the High Council of Religious Leaders in Iraq, who is also the religious advisor to my father. This religious leader kindly introduced me to 3 other members of the HCRLI who also happened to know my father both on a friendly basis and had previously met with him on various occasions, including conferences on reconciliation between sects. It is important to highlight the fact that the religious leaders that were interviewed in Iraq have all in one way or

another worked on the reconciliation and peace building and were familiar with the aim of the study that was being conducted.

The interviews that were done in Beirut were conducted with three Shiite religious leaders who are well known scholars that have played a significant role in their lifetime to highlight and raise awareness about the harm of sectarianism and violence. Proximity and reconciliation were the basis of their work and this was the reason as to why they were chosen.

The opportunity that I had as a researcher was quite unique because of my father's role as it enabled me to interview the religious leaders inside the Green Zone. This research and the interviews would have been impossible to conduct without the security that was provided within that zone. It would have been very difficult to travel and arrange a meeting with them in their offices, since some of them were from other cities. In addition, due to the fact that they were well known religious leaders who were working on issues of reconciliation and unity between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq, their lives were always threatened by religious extremists and spoilers. There was nothing to indicate to others that they were participating in this research; even if it were to be known it would not have increased the risk to them since they have already proclaimed publicly the gist of what they said to me. All the interviews were conducted in the meeting hall, inside the presidential palace which also includes some of the government offices.

The times and the exact date and the location of the interviews were unknown prior to my travel, as the exact day of my arrival in Baghdad was still unclear, since I could only book my ticket to Iraq from Beirut, Lebanon. Upon my arrival in Lebanon however, I contacted the office of Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah, which is currently a well known Shiite religious organization that arranges meetings and is actively working on promoting unity and Islamic values to the public, and was given two sets of appointments to meet with each religious figure separately on

two different days. Likewise, the times and the dates in Iraq were also not given to me until a day or two prior to the interview. In Baghdad things were slightly different as an exact time could not be very accurate due to the many security reasons that impairs a timely scheduled time for a meeting, delays at checkpoints, sometimes for hours, were some of the main reasons. With the help of my father, I was able to find out a day before my interview, roughly about whether the interview was going to be conducted in the morning or the afternoon.

It is important to note that the fieldwork that was done was a unique kind of situation. This study could only be validated by having a balanced number of religious leaders from both the Sunni and Shiite sects as experts to identify the common themes that could be used to eventually lead to reconciliation on a broader spectrum to de-escalate sectarian tension. Their willingness to participate as religious leaders and experts in the reconciliation process and the precious opportunity that, I, as an investigator, had because of my connections and the golden opportunity of being able to be at the Green Zone, where the religious leaders always met, contributed greatly to the success of the framework overall.

## **2.5 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Due to the circumstances in Iraq as well as the length and the limits of the study, a total of ten interviews were conducted between January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012 to February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012. The participants that were interviewed were 3 Shiite religious figures from Beirut, Lebanon, 4 Sunni Religious figures, originally from Baghdad, Fallujah and Al-Ramadi and 3 Shiite religious leaders figures from Baghdad. All participants were male, middle aged religious leaders within their own communities. The interviews ranged from 35-55 minutes. All participants were asked the following four loosely structured questions and were asked to add any additional information that they deemed essential or relevant to the topic.

1. In your opinion, what are the most significant and major causes of the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites?
2. If you were asked to create a framework for reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis, what would you consider to be the first step in creating this framework?
3. What would you say to the Shiite (Sunni) extremists? (e.g. member of their own group)
4. If you were asked to give a lecture on rapprochement and reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis to a large audience from both sects, what would you say to them?

All questions were asked in Arabic and were translated into English afterwards. The interviews were all recorded using both my cell phone as well as my voice recorder in case one failed. I also took notes throughout the interviews. The most difficult part of the interview was the transcription into English afterwards as finding the exact words to convey meaning and translation was very time consuming and in many cases some words were not translated quite well since the equivalent words in Arabic and English were not found. Only 2 of the participants were helpful as they used a bit of English throughout the interviews since they spoke a little English.

## **2.6 Confidentiality, anonymity and safe storage of data**

Although all the religious leaders that were interviewed are very well known and active figures in the peace building process and reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis within their own communities, I cannot however, for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity divulge their names within this study.

Prior to every interview I explained to every participant that they were free to withdraw

from the study or skip any of the questions they did not want to answer. They were all also told that their anonymity would be protected and their participation was completely voluntary. Although many of the participants gave their consent to have their names revealed, I rather chose not to and kept their identities strictly confidential. Also, they were fully aware of the voice recording device that I used during each interview and they were also fully aware that all gathered data will be securely stored, after transcription and translation, and as per regulation of the Research Ethics Board of Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies will be kept for at least 5 years with the supervisor.

### **2.7 Risks and benefits**

Due to the tense sectarian violence in Iraq, well known religious leaders who are active and publicly known as peace makers are usually at risk due to their situations and the positive role they play in aiming to reduce sectarian tension within their communities. They are fully aware of their life threatening situation because of the role they play in aiming to bring Sunnis and Shiites together to put an end to the sectarian violence. Their lives are always threatened by religious extremists who cannot fathom the idea of reconciliation and mutual coexistence. This being said, my study did not increase these risks for any of them, as they were very familiar with the purpose of my interviews. Also it is important to point out that these religious leaders met regularly inside the Green Zone as it is the safest place for their meetings and the interviews that were done were not made public and were strictly confidential. Even the data that was gathered was not disclosed to anyone; not even to the closest people to me, including my father.

It is important to stress the fact that the religious leaders that were interviewed—both the ones in Lebanon and Iraq—were experts in the field of reconciliation and were publically known figures who had worked continuously on the issue of reconciliation by promoting coexistence

throughout their work. Thus it is important to note that their responses to the questions that were asked during the interviews were derived from their understanding of Islamic faith and their expertise in that field and that the research that was done could not be labeled as a research that was done on human subjects, per se, since the questions that were asked were not aimed at getting information on their personal lives and experience but rather solely based on their expertise as religious leaders.

### **2.8 A Narrative Approach in Qualitative research**

What I have analyzed and examined within my research is the way that participants are describing and defining the conflict. Each participant's method of creating a framework for reconciliation served as a case study that helped me analyse and detect the way and the method each participant used. Each participant designed a method for resolving the conflict which allowed me to analyze and examine every case as a possibility for improving my own framework for reconciliation. Their suggestions and their personal experiences as experts and religious leaders enabled me to create a firm and a concrete idea of the causes and the roots of the conflict. In response to every question that they were asked, they also gave me a detailed response as to why and how the conflict came about. Since many of the participants were well known figures within their own communities, their opinions and the subsequent refinements will mean that there is a better chance that my framework will resonate within Sunni and Shiite communities.

In this qualitative research my aim was to grasp an in-depth idea about my research topic, with the people who are directly involved with the conflict itself every day. Qualitative research allowed me to gather an in-depth understanding of social behaviour within the Muslim community. Creswell defines qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The

research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in natural setting."<sup>15</sup>

This is why the issue of Shiites and Sunnis conflict was studied in Iraq and Lebanon. Especially during the present time amidst all challenges and the constant danger and violence that is so ripe among them. The first hand experience itself created a closeness to the challenges and dynamics at the centre of this study. Being right in the heart of the conflict and interviewing people who are directly involved with the conflict adds more credibility to the study.

Using the Interpretive approach,<sup>16</sup> each interview and the gathered data from each interviewee showed how each participant defines and gives solutions to the conflict. Since in an interpretive approach the researcher works towards finding meaning from research performed based on the interpretation of participants of certain events or behaviours, "Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them."<sup>17</sup>

The stories and the description that each participant contributed to this study were used as a support to my own framing of the framework. Many of the issues that were discussed throughout the interviews were parallel to the very basis of my own framework, which I believe adds more strength and integrity to it. After all the interviews were completed I now had a collection of useful data that I used in order to illustrate the validity of my hypothesis. Although

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<sup>15</sup> John Creswell W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: London: Sage Publications, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> 'Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them'(Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991)

<sup>17</sup> Orlikowski, W. J. and J. J. Baroudi. "Studying information technology in organizations: Research approaches and assumptions." *Information Systems Research* 2, no. 1 (1991):1-28.

some had slightly different opinions when answering some of the questions, the data showed a holistic picture of the current conflict. In this regards, Geertz argues “What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, I have approached my research with the belief that the data that I have gathered is not an absolute claim attempting to prove cause and effect, it is only my own interpretation , informed by my own past experiences.

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<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

## CHAPTER 3: Building a Conceptual Framework

The aim of this chapter is to layout the foundation that the proposed framework for reconciliation is found based on. The anticipated framework is derived from the interaction of Fadhlallah and Shaloots' works on reconciliation along with Vern Neufeld Redekop's theory of human identity, especially the need for recognition. This chapter will examine all the contributing factors followed by a description of the proposed framework for reconciliation.

### **3.1 Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah (November 16, 1935 – July 4, 2010)**

Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah was born in Iraq's holy city of Al-Najaf on November 16, 1935 and was raised and influenced by his father Sayyed Abdul Ra'ouf Fadlallah. He completed his religious education which was mainly Islamic theology at Najaf, which is considered the third holiest city of Shiites. There he continued his studies and became a religious authority capable of issuing *fatwas*. After 21 years of studying under the prominent teachers of the Najaf, Sayyed Fadlallah concluded his studies in 1966 and returned to his homeland, Lebanon. During that time he used the mosque as his centre for holding daily prayers and educating people and giving lessons in Quranic interpretations. Fadhlallah's thoughts and ideology were influenced by Iraq's most important Shiite cleric, Mohammad Baqir Al-Sadr who was executed by Saddam Hussein in 1980. He taught Mohammed Hussein Fadhlallah during the time he spent in Najaf. Al-Sadr, just like Fadhlallah, was known as a reformist and a revolutionary Islamic thinker.

Within the Muslim world, it is rare to find a religious leader who is loved and respected by both Shiites and Sunnis. However, Fadhlallah, who was a revolutionary thinker and a devout religious scholar from Lebanon, proved that this was possible. His life mission was devoted to unity of the Muslims and in that path he took every possible measure to reinforce the importance

of unity within the Muslims nations. His message in almost every sermon on every Friday reinforced this belief, calling Muslims by saying “Join us in love, away from personal, regional, partisan and sectarian considerations. Let us all meet and gather under God's shade instead of disagreeing in His name. Life cannot bear hatred, for hatred is death and love is life.”<sup>19</sup>

Fadhlallah, was a prominent Shiite religious scholar from Lebanon. Loved and respected by thousands of Muslims, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, around the world. He was an activist of unity with a moderate and revolutionary ideology that seemed very foreign to the mainstream religious leaders as he was known as a progressive religious figure. In every sermon and in every public preaching Fadhlallah made it his mission to focus extensively on the importance of unity. He regularly preached on the subject of unity to the tens of thousands of followers at his Friday Prayer, and published his sermons and clerical writings on the Internet, in different languages. Fadhlallah made it his mission to enforce the idea that unity is only attainable through constructive dialogue, which was the only possible route to bridging differences according to Fadhlallah; he argued that such an endeavour “would start by getting to know one another in order to reach mutual understanding and then cementing agreement on the points they concur upon.”<sup>20</sup> He insisted that the most important element in any dialogue is to “listen to the viewpoint of the other.”<sup>21</sup> Fadhlallah strongly argued that dialogue on its own is not enough in the de-escalation of violence between the Sunnis and the Shiites: “there is not much

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<sup>19</sup> *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah* (www.bayynat.org). All quotes are from this extensive source - consisting of his Friday *sermons, fatawa*, interviews, insights, etc. – and can be found using a search of the bayynat.org internet domain

<sup>20</sup> Zaid Almousawi. “Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah: a Lifetime in the Call for Unity.” *Al-Taqrīb: A Journal of Islamic Unity*. 8, no. 150 (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Mohammad H. Fadhlallah. *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*. Translated by Najim Al-Khafaji. Beirut, Lebanon: Almalak Publication, 2003.

good in much of our talk if it does not contain a call for performing good acts which include the reconciliation between people.”<sup>22</sup>

He believed that acts of reconciliation and moving beyond just uttering words on unity is essential by encouraging people to “intervene and reconcile those who differ and to remind those who incite strife that they will be punished by God.”<sup>23</sup>

Throughout his life, Fadhlallah tried to raise awareness among his fellow religious leaders that, as the guiding figures of the Muslim community, it was their responsibility to enjoin and unify the Muslim community by discouraging sectarian differences. He strongly opposed and criticised religious leaders who focused on magnifying the minor issues that both sects disagreed on since, according to Fadhlallah, such differences only escalate violence and disunity. Fadhlallah believed that these scholars need to be told: “Fear God. You are about to lose the community and plunge it into instinctive sectarian mazes that wipe out everything everywhere.”<sup>24</sup> Fadhlallah believed that such incitement could be resolved only when religious leaders decide to end the pejorative tone of their sermons by inviting their followers to tolerance and understanding the other by listening and opening their mind and hearts to the other; he believed that by issuing *fatwas* that condemn any actions that ignite hate and revulsion that could be possible.

Fadhlallah himself astonished the entire Muslim world when he issued a *fatwa* on condemning the use of offensive language and slandering of the Caliphs: “As for the issue of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid19.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Quranic Storytelling in Dialogue(II)”, Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Doctrines/q2d6.htm> (accessed November 2011).

cursing, I have always deemed it forbidden for any Muslim, and I state in all the relevant religious inquiries I receive that it is forbidden to curse and slander any companion including the Caliphs.”<sup>25</sup> . For years, the Shiites used slandering as a mean to express their deviation from the Sunnis. This technique was used in various religious benediction and prayers to show their disapproval of the first, second and the third Caliph who usurped Ali’s right to succession after the death of the prophet. Fadhlallah recognized the plight of disrepute that the Sunnis felt every time such pejorative terms were used in Shiite religious ceremonies. This recognition itself served as the main reason why Sunnis in Lebanon began to show interest and respect to Fadhlallah, since he practiced what he preached and never used such language in his sermons and writings. Fadhlallah’s funeral included thousands of mourners; both Shiites and Sunnis paid him respect which could be seen as the outcome of his tremendous hard work on unifying Muslims community: “glowing praise and condolences from such figures as Amr Mousa, head of the largely-Sunni Arab League, who lauded him as a patriot and conciliator, and from Lebanon's Sunni Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, who called him ‘a voice of moderation and an advocate of unity’.”<sup>26</sup>Such kind tributes in remembering Fadhlallah by many could serve as an example that he succeeded in effectuating change in minds of millions of Muslims. Fadhlallah was known as a voice of moderation with a strong progressive social views; he spent a life time as an advocate of unity and peaceful dialogue among religions and sects.

The inner sectarianism of Islam according to Fadhlallah was the main threat to the religion and the unity of all Muslims in general. He strongly believed that Shiites and Sunnis are

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Those who do not open their hearts are cowards”. Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Issues/99cowards.htm> (accessed November 2011).

<sup>26</sup>Mixed legacy of Ayatollah Fadlallah, *BBC News*. July 4, 2010. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/10500869.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/10500869.stm). Retrieved July 5, 2010

both at fault for magnifying the minor differences among them, which caused Fadhlallah to work extensively in minimizing such differences. He strongly believed that fear plays a major role in such conflict which caused dialogue and facing the “other” who differs from us an impossible mission. Unlike other religious leaders, Fadhallah saw progress and modernity as a requirement in every aspect of religion, using religious examples and Quran verses in every sermon that he held on Fridays, he significantly prompted the idea of change and reform . He was able to successfully stretch the concept of traditional views of religion to a more revolutionary and progressive phase that appealed to modern minds without breaking it. Youth, the new generation, were main supporters of Fadhallah as a religious leader and a spiritual guide.

### **3.2 Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot (23 April 1893 - 13 December 1963)**

Mahmood Shaltoot was born in Buhayra, a province in South of Egypt on April 23 April 1893. At the age of thirteen was enrolled in Maa’had dini of Alexandria, an Al-Azhar- affiliated religious institute and completed his studies in 1918. Al-azhar is an educational institute in Cairo, Egypt, founded in 970, it is the chief centre of Arabic literature and Islamic learning in the world. Shaltoot began teaching right after he received his degree in the same institute in 1919. He was invited to lecture at the Higher division of Al-Azhar various times throughout his stay at the Maa’had dini of Alexandria institute until he was transferred to Cairo in 1927. Shaltoot became known as a reformist in the Alazhar, which was a revolutionary step at the time. His openness and willingness to accept other’s religious beliefs, beside the Sunni sect of Islam during his time at Al-Azhar was quite revolutionary. He insisted on his belief that People of the Book should not be called unbelievers. He strongly condemned sectarianism and promoted Islamic unity by strongly focusing on tolerance, reason and moderation. In October 1958, Shaltoot was appointed

by the President of Egypt as the president of the University of Al-Azhar; Shaltoot was known as a moderate and reformer. His beliefs and ideas were quite revolutionary during his time.

Just like Fadhlallah, Mahmud Shaltoot was a voice of moderation and served as a unifying mentor of the Muslim community. Shaltoot was a prominent Egyptian Sunni religious scholar who took an incredible route in bringing together the various sects of Islam.

Just like Fadhlallah, Shaltoot recognized that the most important element at the time was the issue of unity among Muslims. He worked extensively in this regard by encouraging harmonious interactions between the two sects regularly through speeches and sermons during his time at the Al-Azhar. He maintained close relations with prominent Shiite figures and worked extensively on building trust and reconciliation between the two groups. As the president of Al-Azhar, Shaltoot respected every Shiite religious ceremony and he announced that Shiites at the Al-Azhar had the right to commemorate all their religious ceremonies, such as Aushora, a religious ceremony which is commemorated by Shiite as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Karbala on 10 Muharram in the year 680 CE.<sup>27</sup> Just like Fadhlallah, Shaltoot recognized the need and the necessity of constructive dialogue among Shiites and Sunnis for the exchange of ideas and clarifying misunderstanding among them. Shaltoot believed that forming dialogue among the two sects acts as an emotional support in a brotherly atmosphere that could eradicate misconstructions and avoid quarrels between the two sects.<sup>28</sup>

Shaltoot also identified the positive role that religious leaders have from both sects in de-escalation of sectarian tension. He believed that Muslim religious leaders had the potential to put

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<sup>27</sup> World Assembly for the Reapproachment of Islamic Sects. Al-Taqrīb = al-Taqrīb (Tehran, World Forum of Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought), pp. v. [www.taqrīb.info/persian](http://www.taqrīb.info/persian)

<sup>28</sup> World Assembly for the Reapproachment of Islamic Sects. Al-Taqrīb = al-Taqrīb (Tehran, World Forum of Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought), pp. v. [www.taqrīb.info/persian](http://www.taqrīb.info/persian)

an end to the sectarian tension that existed among Sunnis and Shiites and he argued that they played a key role in the conflict.<sup>29</sup> Hoping for an immediate unity among Muslims, Shaltoot went as far as to issue a *fatwa* which essentially declared that following the Shiite school of thought was valid. With a declaration of permissibility of the Shiites school of thought Shaltoot took an enormous step in unifying the Muslims community around the world. Although he faced several internal, external, and political complications right after the declaration, the *fatwa* up until today serves as a symbol of hope for reconciliation and unity between the sects. The following quote describes in his own words the measures that were taken by him towards unification of the Islamic *Ummah*:

I believed in the idea of bringing together Islamic schools of thought as a correct principle...Al-Azhar has agreed on the basic rule of various Islamic schools of thought and has decided to teach the jurisprudence of various Islamic schools of thought, based on convincing evidence, proof and a lack of prejudice favouring this group or that.<sup>30</sup>

Shaltoot worked on the modernization and progress that was quite revolutionary during his time in the 50s and the 60s. Just like Fadhlallah, Shaltoot believed in Muslims' unity and regarded the split between the Shiites and the Sunnis as a step backward and strongly denounced sectarianism. Mahmood Shaltoot was the only religious scholar of the time, who included the Shiites as a 4th sect within Islam and he publicly announced that in a verdict at Al-Azhar.

### **3.3 The theory of Recognition and its relevance to the proposed framework**

According to Vern Neufeld Redekop, human identity needs are interrelated categories, some need satisfiers are well developed and entrenched; some might shift in time, as they tend to function powerfully when they are threatened. Human identity needs include meaning, security,

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<sup>29</sup> World Assembly for the Reapproachment of Islamic Sects. *Al-Taqrīb* = al-Taqrīb (Tehran, World Forum of Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought), pp. v. [www.taqrīb.info/persian](http://www.taqrīb.info/persian)

<sup>30</sup> Fathi Shaqaqi. "The Sunni-Shia Ruse" *Al-Taqrīb: A Journal of Islamic Unity*. 2 (2008): 115-118.

connectedness, action and recognition which surround the self and the absence of any of the categories cause immediate threat and dissatisfaction. Sectarian tension, similarly, occurs when both sides feel threatened by the other's beliefs, goals and values. The crisis in this case is that each party feels that the core of their individual being is violated by the other.

Following up on Vern Redekop's fourth element within the theory of human identity needs, a complementary examination of the theory of recognition developed by Axel Honneth, which Redekop also examine within his theory, proved to be a worthy study. According to Honneth, the very basis of the social life is dependent on the acts of mutual recognition, which enables a person to view oneself through the perspective of the 'other' in an interactive process.<sup>31</sup> He established his theory of recognition based on three phases. Recognition through *love* which creates the basis for *self-confidence*; 2) Recognition through *rights*, which creates the basis for *self-respect*; and 3) recognition through *solidarity* that creates the basis for *self-esteem*.<sup>32</sup> An important issue that needs to be addressed here is that Honneth sees human integrity directly linked with patterns of approval and recognition. A concept that Redekop develops within the human identity needs theory. Redekop describes recognition as a "sense of acknowledging one's identity and appreciating what we have done, who we are and how we experience the world"<sup>33</sup> a crucial entity in the formation of our identity.

Honneth's essential phases of recognition which include self-confidence, self respect and self-esteem are hence interrelated concepts that when combined together can illustrate and define

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<sup>31</sup> Axel Honneth. *The Struggle for Recognition : The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Carl-Göran Heidegren. "Recognition, Redistribution, and Justice" *Acta Sociologica*. Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd. 47, no. 4 (2004): 365-373 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4195050>. (accessed 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Redekop, Vern. *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation*. Novalis: Saint Paul University. 2002

and highlight the basis of conflict between Shiites and Sunnis and provide possible solutions to the crisis.

Self-confidence, self respect and self esteem are all absent within the relationship that the Sunnis and the Shiites have together. Love, which creates the basis of self confidence, is a missing entity, both groups have used provocative and offensive language when describing the other. Books that have been published for the sole reason to degrade the other are a normal behaviour. Words and language that are used as a mechanism to dehumanize the other have been published in variety of books. The term *Rafidi* (meaning "Rejecter of Muhammad's tradition") has been applied by a majority of Sunnis to dehumanize and belittle the Shiites. The following excerpt is taken from a Sunni religious collection of Hadiths (Prophets' sayings and interpretations of Sunni religious scholars): "[Rawfid] are not to be greeted, nor are they to be visited, nor are they to be married, nor is their testimony to be accepted, nor are their sacrifices (zabiha) to be eaten."<sup>34</sup> - (Khalq Af'al al-Ibad, p.13)

Although a small number of Shiites abstain from this type of attitude, the majority of Shiites find self relief by cursing the 'ones responsible' for the big division within Islam. The following excerpt is taken from a Shiites source that is known as a fervent prayer or supplication referencing the Sunnis: "O my God condemn and damn the first tyrant who unjustly and wrongfully usurped that which rightly belonged to Mohammad and the children of Mohammad, and bring curse upon those who, after him, followed in his footsteps."<sup>35</sup> ( Ziyarat Aushora pg.2)

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<sup>34</sup> Khalq Af'al al-Ibad, p.13(original text is in Arabic).

<sup>35</sup> Ziyarat Aushora pg.2( Original text in Arabic- translated version < [http://www.duas.org/ashura/z\\_ashura.htm](http://www.duas.org/ashura/z_ashura.htm)>

Such a form of insults and degradation, according to Honneth, “is injurious because it impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self—an understanding acquired by intersubjective means.”<sup>36</sup> The Intersubjectivity theory states that the invulnerability and integrity of human beings depends on the approval of being forth-coming with others.<sup>37</sup> Language that is used in their everyday life is therefore a constant destroyer of the image of the other, a denial for recognition.

Language in this case is used as a means to destroy the image of the ‘other’ by disregarding and disrespecting the other. The experience of disrespect poses the risk of an injury that can cause the identity of the entire person to collapse.<sup>38</sup> The sense of disrespect and humiliation used by each sect to identify the other fails to satisfy the desire for recognition as “self consciousness could only be realized intersubjectively as the self depends on the presence of another desiring consciousness to affirm its own self image.”<sup>39</sup>

Hence, begins the attitude of rejecting and alienation as each begins to see the treatment of the other against them. The destruction of self worth and image only produces more hatred among the two as both have now lost their sense of worth in regards to what the other thinks of them.

Recognition is simply a confirmation of our self worth and human dignity, which according to the doctrine of Islam was given to the Children of Adam by God. The Quran states that Self respect is fundamentally needed to the existence of our individuality.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid30.

<sup>37</sup> Axel Honneth, and Charles W. Wright. *The Fragmented World of the Social : Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, Suny Series in Social and Political Thought. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid31

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Schaap. “Political Reconciliation Through a Struggle for Recognition?” *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 4 (2004): 523–540.

The story of creation in the Quran speaks highly of the value and the honour that was bestowed on human kind, God has honoured human beings: “And surely We have honoured the children of Adam...We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created.”(Quran 17:70) God asserts that he has dignified them as his “vicegerent on earth so they may know each other, since their differences was a choice made by God himself”.(Quran 49:13)

The story of creation of Adam in the Quran pays the outmost respect to the value and worth God has bestowed human beings. Giving them so much value and honour to a point where when Iblis (the devil) chose to show disrespect he was branded as those who rejected faith and was forever banned from heaven, “When your Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust. . . (Quran 38:71)So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down making obeisance to him (Quran 38:72). . . But not Iblis: he was proud and he was one of the unbelievers. (Quran 38:74)” Fadhlallah used this verse in various occasions and within his writings to highlight and emphasise the importance and the honour that God has given to human beings. He strongly criticized those who have allowed themselves to brand some as true Muslims and false Muslims on the pretence of religiosity; those who have disregarded the value and self-worth that God has bestowed humanity.

In 2006, during the most rife sectarian tension among Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq, many had to give up their names to spare their lives. ‘ID Cards’ killing based on sectarian identity became a form of retaliation. First names, last names, license plate and residing neighbourhood, could give out a person’s sectarian allegiance which if it was to fall in the wrong hands could

have been an easy death sentence.<sup>40</sup> Common names among Shiites and Sunnis were also easy identifiers of which sects one belongs to. Militias, insurgents and death squads sometimes in police uniform serving as a check point officers used ID killing strategy amidst the sectarian tensions. During that time period a name not even the person's belief system could endanger one's life. The crisis was based on retaliation, not a belief system. Each group considered the other unworthy of living. They recognized the 'otherness' of their fellow citizens; recognition was found based on all the wrong principles. The Muslim Sunnis and Shiites failed to recognize one another as "your brother in faith." The Quran states "whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind."(Quran 5:23) So then why is there a sense of contradiction with the very essence of Islam when it comes to sectarian conflict and how should it be dealt with?

For many, known as *takfiris* (Arabic for "those who accuse others of apostasy") denouncing individuals who don't accept a narrow interpretation of Sunni Islam as non-believers is a norm. Allowing themselves to legitimize killing of other people who differ from them since they do not recognize them as real Muslims.

In this regard, Fadhlallah believes that "[t]he value of dialogue is that it opens the door of understanding with each other. I think that some of the problems in our country or the Arab and

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<sup>40</sup> Edward Wong. "To Stay Alive, Iraqis Change Their Names." *Nytimes*. September 6, 2006. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/06/world/middleeast/06identity.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/06/world/middleeast/06identity.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) (accessed August 13, 2011).

Islamic worlds are because we do not understand one another and that each of us wants to have everything for himself. This viewpoint is far away from reality and human wisdom.”<sup>41</sup>

### **3.4 Transforming Violence to Blessing**

My aim in this section is to examine Vern Redekop’s human identity needs theory with a focus on the idea of transforming a mimetic structure of violence to a mimetic structure of blessing. In his book, *From Violence to Blessing*, Redekop introduces a conflict transformation module that begins with what he refers to as “mimetic structure of violence” to “mimetic structure of blessing”(Figure1). Redekop argues that reconciliation is a movement from the mimetic structure of violence to mimetic structure of blessing.<sup>42</sup> He defines a mimetic structure of violence as “a relationship that builds up in such a way that the parties in the relationship say and do things to harm one another.”<sup>43</sup> A mimetic structure of violence, as Redekop argues, is always confined and violent, it draws many into a violent situation and forces them to say or do violent forms of actions that they consider completely against their basic beliefs and values when they are outside this structure. Mimetic structures of violence control minds and hearts of people and pushes them towards negative emotions, anger and violence.

On the other hand, a mimetic structure of blessing is life-orientated and open—a movement towards self-development and generosity. Within the structure of mimetic structure of blessing, “mutual well being takes precedence over a survival of the fittest, fight to death mentality”<sup>44</sup>. Within the mimetic structure of blessing the sense of otherness, diminishes and is

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<sup>41</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Dialogue and Dispute”,Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. [http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/dialogue\\_dispute.htm](http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/dialogue_dispute.htm) (accessed November 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Redekop, Vern. *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation*. Novalis: Saint Paul University. 2002

<sup>43</sup> Ibid,42.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid42.

replaced by mutual giving and receiving.

The key to transforming this conflict therefore is to provide the means and the tools of an applicable framework that assists the two parties involved to come together, to listen to one another and give the other the opportunity to defend their side. This transformation requires a powerful procedure that pulls together the two sides to acknowledge, recognize and respect the other for the sake of a better and more fruitful outcome that could benefit both parties involved.

Therefore, the proposed framework for reconciliation would encompass Vern Neufeld Redekop's theory of human identity needs from an Islamic perspective which can be incorporated with the possibility of transforming a mimetic structure of violence to mimetic structure of blessing from an Islamic perspective. Each factor will be presented by having verses from the Quran and the Islamic tradition that no Muslims defies.

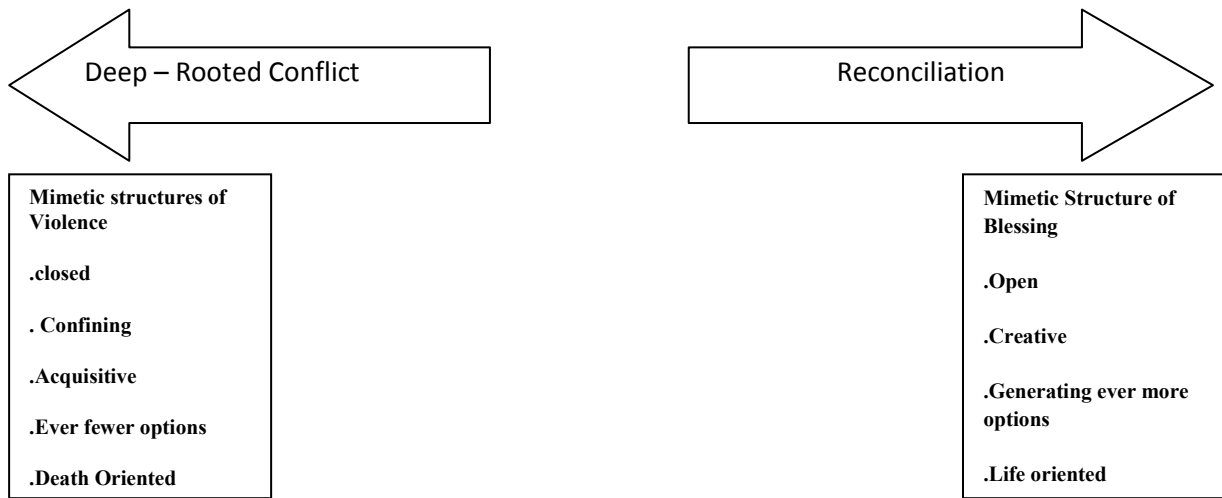
While developing this framework the works of Fadhlallah and Shaloot will serve as an example to prove the possibility and the success of this potential framework, as most of their work supports both theories of human identity needs along with the transition of the mimetic structure of violence to blessing. I believe that an Islamic framework for reconciliation appeals more to the minds of moderate practicing Muslims especially when I incorporate the works of both a Sunni and a Shiite scholar who spent a lifetime working towards reconciliation and proximity among sects. For instance Fadhlallah heavily focused on the verses from the Quran in promoting unity since both sects believe in the Quran as the direct word of God. Elements of reconciliation, dialogue and peace are very important in the Quran and what Fadhlallah decided to do was to show how the actions of some contradicts the fundamental teachings of Islam and therefore his writings on unity and reconciliations were backed up with verses of the Quran that no one could deny or refute.

They essentially saw the core of the division as an extension of religious leaders and their teachings and interpretations of the Quran and the Prophet's tradition.<sup>45</sup> Fadhlallah and Shaltoot used an incredible route in illuminating the possible ways to reduce sectarian tension. What Fadhlallah and Shaltoot carried out was simple; they recalled the pure teachings of blessing, clear of any enmity, grudge and biases. They fully based their writings on the teachings of the Quran; they paved a path clear of animosity of the past, driven by a sense of responsibility and concern for the sectarian conflict. They realized that the transformation from what Redekop labels as the mimetic structure of violence to mimetic structure of violence.

Fadhlallah and Shaltoot both acknowledged that animosity and tension cause backwardness, closed mindedness and alienation and isolation which causes a blockage to any transformation or openness and acceptance of any things that differs; a parallel idea to what Redekop explains in the diagram shown below:

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<sup>45</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, "On Islamic Unity", Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Issues/islamicunity.htm> (accessed November 2011).



(Figure3.)

Both Fadhlallah and Shaltoot began to gain support not only from their own sect’s followers but by the other sect as well. This clearly demonstrates that they began to achieve elements of unity that they strived for so hard. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot have people from both sects who follow and respect them highly since they both recognized the “other” as human being who’s capable of change and transformation.

Emotions play a serious role in the tension that exists among the Sunnis and the Shiites. Like Redekop, who argues that all conflicts are ignited from people who feel that their fundamental identity is somehow threatened, the sectarian conflict is based on a set of destroyed identities. The escalation of tension among them stems from the mutual disrespect they both share for the other, this, Redekop argues that forms a cycle of violence that “does not stop, for pride, hurt or anger gets in the way of forgiving.”<sup>46</sup> The cycle of violence starts with a victim wanting a revenge, which eventually continues to an endless, continues violence. The only mean for this vicious cycle to end however is only if someone among the victims decides to abandon the self-destroying cycle of revenge by realizing and believing that revenge is no longer needed. This change opens up an enormous possibility for reconciliation. What’s needed is that this cycle

<sup>46</sup> Redekop, Vern. From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation. Novalis: Saint Paul University. 2002

of violence needs to be stopped for a moment to ends the ongoing violence. In terms of the Sunnis – Shiites conflict, the cycle of violence for a long time was continues and unfortunately it is still ongoing. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot are the example of “someone” who decided to abandon the need for revenge, enabling the reconciliation to be a reality one step at a time.

"We don't naturally feel like reconciling when we start," says Redekop. "But we see others do it and we know it's possible. Reconciliation involves mastering our emotions. You need to bring in another level of consciousness that catches you when you make behavioural choices that could result in distress."<sup>47</sup>

As it was mentioned before, the tension that is escalating between the Sunnis and the Shiites is constructed on misconceptions and misunderstandings since tension is so severe, the chance for a peaceful dialogue in hope for resolving such issues has becomes almost impossible. Peace process and dialogue could be a success if religious leaders influence their followers to participate by moving them and preparing them emotionally to move from fear and distrust towards greater understanding and tolerance. The involvement of religious leaders gives credibility to the peace process and these forms of dialogue since they are trusted and respected by their followers.

The only possible means however to transform the conflict and effect reconciliation comes through burying the fear of confronting the “other” and accepting and welcoming dialogue. These are all essential elements of change which is the solution to the conditions of oppression that exists solely based on minor belief differences in the Islamic world. The major

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Gearey. "Vern Redekop and the Practice of Reconciliation." *Peace Magazine*. July 24, 2002. <http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v20n3p22.htm> 08 (accessed December 08, 2011).

obstacle however is in how to get both sects to join in a peaceful dialogue if the level of animosity hinders their ability to confront one another, paralyzing the entire purpose of a dialogue. Fear plays a major role in this regard, and without overcoming this obstacle of having both groups coming together to confront one another in a civilized manner; which can potentially enables both sects to clear the countless number of misconception that exists among both sects that only fuels conflict between them on regular basis, this would be an impossible mission. The only possible component of unity in this case is the Quran that is accepted by both sects.

This concept of transformation is what Redekop identifies it as the transformation of mimetic structures of violence to mimetic structures of blessing:

The transformation of mimetic structures of violence to mimetic structures of blessing includes both the reduction of violence and the hold that violent impulses have on people, on the one hand, and the development of a context in which creative new options can emerge that enable all parties to both thrive and contribute to the thriving of one another, on the other. This transformation is the goal and the process of reconciliation.<sup>48</sup>

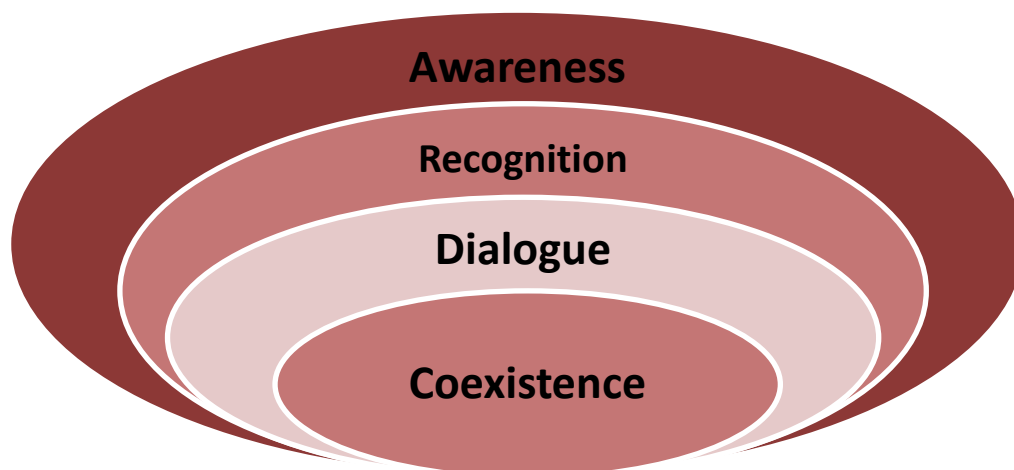
Thus, an effective and sustainable reconciliation framework between Sunnis and Shiites can be constructed by merging Redekop's theoretical work with the teachings of blessing from the Quran that are highlighted and interpreted by Mohammed Hussein Fadhlallah and Mahmood Shaloot through their extensive work on proximity; the framework will eventually be validated through semi-structured interviews with a number of the most prominent religious leaders from both sects from Iraq and Lebanon.

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<sup>48</sup> Vern N Redekop, and S. Pare. *Beyond Control : a mutual respect approach to protest crowd-police relations*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010.

### **3.5 The Proposed Framework**

The proposed framework emerged or is synthesised from studying the works of Shaltoot and Fadhlallah with an awareness of Redekop's work. The significance of this framework is that it could serve as a point of reference to both Shiite and Sunni readers as they could find all four factors within the works of Fadhlallah and Shaltoot as each factor is derived from studying their works carefully. It is important to highlight the fact that Redekop's idea of need for *recognition* serves as the backbone to this framework. All evidence based on the works of Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah and Mahmood Shaltoot show that need for mutual recognition is the key to the reconciliation process between the two sects. Now that the importance of this factor has been established it is important to note that recognition on its own as a factor is not sufficient. Recognition needs to be accompanied by other essential factors that create a powerful model for reconciliation. Thus, the success of this framework depends on the implementation of 4 imperative factors linked together in a hierarchical chain whereby each factor depends on the preceding factors. A comprehensive and a careful description of each factor will be given throughout this study in order to determine the significance and the role they play in the success of the framework.



## Awareness

The first vital factor within this framework is raising *awareness* about the biases, prejudices and misinterpretation that have all played a role in the escalation of violence and conflict among the Sunnis and the Shiites. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot dedicated a life time to bring tolerance and awareness to their communities. Many intolerant attitudes that ignite conflict are result of bias and prejudice of one to another. The violent history of the Sunnis and the Shiites has clearly showed that there is a high degree of intolerance between them. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot both believed that the biases and the misinterpretations of religion by the *ulama*<sup>49</sup> and certain *hadiths*<sup>50</sup> that are originated from unreliable sources are the main causes of this devastating misunderstanding. The idea of each sect claiming that the other's belief and religious principles are heresy ignited the conflict initially. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot therefore became the pioneers in wanting to transform the sectarian tension that was fuelled by biases and misunderstanding the other. According to Fadhlallah animosity and dehumanization of each sect of the other basically comes from lack of awareness of one another or knowing each other.<sup>51</sup> Shaltoot similarly believed that the basis of the division within the Muslim *ummah* is the penetration of ideology of those who feed on biases and facts with no principles. Both scholars strongly believed that a huge bulk of responsibility falls on fanatical ideologies that suppress the mind and soul. Fadhlallah insists that Islam as a religion mandates unity and harmony as stated in the Quran numerous times: how can we then claim to be Muslims while disregarding the basic principles of unity and harmony among ourselves? Within his writings he would focus on the

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<sup>49</sup> *Ulama*: Muslim religious scholars who are the interpreters of Islamic laws, doctrine and are the chief guarantors of continuity in the spiritual and intellectual history of the Islamic community.

<sup>50</sup> Hadith: a tradition or a report of sayings and actions of Muhammad or his companions.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, "Dialogue and Dispute", Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. [http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/dialogue\\_dispute.htm](http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/dialogue_dispute.htm) (accessed November 2011).

question of how can we be united when we have inherited fragmentation and disunity, passing it on from generation to the next.<sup>52</sup> The reality is the lack of awareness. This suppression as the result produces a sense of intolerance to anyone whose beliefs and doctrine differs even though the very basis of the Islamic principles focuses on the importance of unity. In here the theme of awareness invites Muslims to think and reflect once again thoroughly and carefully through the teachings of Islam and Prophet Muhammad on unity and brotherhood. Raising awareness is a method that calls for changing attitudes and reviewing the ideology that has been inherited from the past. Fadhlallah and Shaloot emphasized the importance of raising awareness about the permissibility of differing; preaching about holding opposing views is not against the teachings of Islam. Islam in fact teaches that holding different views is permissible, differing opinions is the norm and is not against any doctrine.

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which God (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth God make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided. (Quran :3:103)<sup>53</sup>

Learning to live with our differences while respecting those who differ from us is not frowned upon in Islam. “And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned.” (Quran30:22) Difference of opinion is acceptable because no two are alike. Fadhlallah and Shaloot both strongly believed that the religious doctrine that both sects differed on were minor differences

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid 19.

<sup>53</sup> The verses used within this study are taken from Sayyed Mohammed Fadhlallah's tafsīr, "interpretation" which is the Arabic word for exegesis. All verses used within this study are verses that are examined by Fadhlallah in his book 'Interpretation of Quran'.

since they both agreed on the fundamental doctrine of Islam which are : believing in the oneness of God, Muhammad as God's messenger, prayers , the pilgrimage to Hajj and helping the needy.

The second form of awareness needed is to be aware that unity of Muslims is what the Quran preaches, “verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me (and no other) (Quran 21:92). Also “be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving Clear Signs.”(Quran 3:105)

Comprehending the religious teachings requires insightfulness and openness of heart and mind. Reason and logical thinking forms the basis of awareness that eventually leads to changing attitudes. We should learn that not everything that we hear about the ‘other’ from those who claim to be experts in religious matter is a concrete fact, we should begin to realize that each individual is gifted with a power of mind and insight and use that towards our judgement of others who differ from us.<sup>54</sup>

In fact the Quran warns those who spread seeds of sedition among believers: “Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them; their affair is only with God, then He will inform them of what they did.”( 6:159) Therefore we can see that the Quran serves as a constant reminder of unity. The Quran reminds them that “The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) God that mercy may be had on you.(Quran 49:10)

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<sup>54</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Dialogue on the nature of the Qur'an”, Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Doctrines/Dialogue1.htm> (accessed November 2011).

Awareness here is realization that there is a sense of contradiction between what's clearly stated in the Quran and the fanaticism that has spread vastly within the Islamic world. The commonalities are fully disregarded and empty accusations about the other have been spreading widely. Raising awareness and bringing together differing views in this case could be done on large scale by the religious leaders of both sects, as each one could preach and focus on the commonality that they share and remind their followers and the public that the fire of sedition that many have sparked are the result of fanatical ideology that its very basis contradict the true doctrine of faith. "Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving Clear Signs: For them is a dreadful penalty."( Quran 3:105)

Hence, awareness serves as a method of enriching and enlightening the *ummah* of the biases and fire of sedition that has been ignited by fanaticism, which serves as a elements to distort the message of God and Prophet Muhammad. Both Fadhlallah and Shaltoot warned on the threat of sedition within the Muslim *Ummah* they put out before them the verse "If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Messenger, if ye do believe in God and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final determination."(Quran 4:59) The tradition of prophet Muhammad and his way of life and his method in resolving disputes as it has been stated in both Shiites and Sunnis interpretations and texts as well as the Quran serve as a constant reminder of a unified *ummah*. Hence, awareness, allows people from both sects to begin to 'see' the other as a individual who shares a vast amount of commonality with them. This as a starting point, enables individuals from each sect to begin to see and notice the 'other'. This opens door

to a greater route to reconciliation, a route in which a person opens up his heart and mind to recognize the “other”<sup>55</sup>.

## **Recognition**

*Recognition* as it was mentioned before, serves as the back bone to this framework. To acknowledge and accept the other is the most important step in reconciliation. Acknowledging someone according to Shaloot is to value him/her as an intelligent human being, human beings whom God has bestowed a great admiration for, “And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them of the good things, and We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created.” (Quran 17:70) Therefore to accept and recognize the other as human being in which God has bestowed great honor upon is a basic principle within the teachings of Quran. The Quran also clearly illustrate that it was God’s plan for us to be part of the diversity within his creation so “we may know each other”.

O you humankind! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with God is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely God is Knowing. (Quran49:13)

Recognition is prerequisite for dialogue, according to Fadhlallah who focused his entire life on the incredibility and the positivity of dialogue with the ‘other’ whom we differ from, stresses the

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<sup>55</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Dialogue on the nature of the Qur’an”, Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Doctrines/Dialogue1.htm> (accessed November 2011).

fact that a dialogue without recognition is a failed attempt to reconciliation.<sup>56</sup> A successful and fruitful dialogue takes place only when what “I, who differ from him talk about who I am and he in response talks about who he is” only in this matter we can begin to know one another. Fadhlallah believed that the conflict is based on the unwillingness of each party to know one another, “I and him [sic] do not accept each other and therefore what I say and what he says are similar to a what he calls a deaf dialogue.”<sup>57</sup>

The problem in this case is that being unable to recognize the other as a ‘human’ or an individual who deserves to be listened to is the main downfall of the reconciliation process. According to Fadhlallah, once “you decide to ignore and not recognize the other, you create a concrete wall between you and him.” Fadhlallah insisted that “by you eliminating this ‘other’ as a unrecognizable entity, you are not able to eliminate him from existence, as he is a human being with intelligence and he is capable of thinking, and mind is not something you can eliminate if you just not recognize it.”<sup>58</sup>

Fadhlallah believed that to eliminate the other from the reality is not a realistic approach. The practical and most reasonable thing to do is to accept the other for who he is by opening our hearts and minds to him; only then we could say that we are close to the reconciliation process. Recognition is a sense of empowerment and self worth for the parties involved in a conflict. According to Redekop, recognition is a combination of acknowledgment, appreciation,

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<sup>56</sup> Muhammed Hussien Fadhlallah, “Peaceful coexistence Islamic Insight, *Bayynat: The Official Website of the Religious Authority Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah*. [http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/insight\\_coexistence.htm](http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/insight_coexistence.htm) (accessed November 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid,54.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid,54.

significance, dignity as self-worth and saving face.<sup>59</sup> To acknowledge and appreciate is to accept the other as human being with needs and intellects, emotions and feeling like ourselves. According to a very well known *hadith* from Ali, “Know that people are of two types: they are either your brothers in religion or your equals in creation.”<sup>60</sup> This only stresses the importance of accepting the other regardless of the difference in opinion. Mutual Recognition creates a sense of dignity and self worth, aspects much needed within human identity needs.

## **Dialogue**

Recognition opens up a window of opportunity for a constructive *dialogue*— a transformative power that can shift a conflict into resolution. Dialogue is therefore the third imperative factor within this framework. According to Plato

Dialogue determines a subject to be investigated, not necessarily for the aim of finding a solution for it; it is designed to make us better equipped to handle argument on all topics. The aim of dialogue is, therefore, not providing us with information and knowledge about the subject matter insomuch as it lends us support in the process of mastering the art of argument.<sup>61</sup>

Dialogue according to Fadhlallah and Shaloot is constructive and worthy when both parties decide to sit together by bringing up the commonality that they share, the starting point is to invite both parties to accept the other for the sake of the common thing they both believe in. Debate and dialogue must be in a civilized manner, the dialogue must be initiated with commonalities that both parties involve share, if a dialogue is opened up on the basis of the conflict, each party’s focus would be to ‘win’ the debate. The Quran teaches and promotes constructive dialogue: “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching;

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid41.

<sup>60</sup> In Nahjul-Balagha (Peak of Eloquence) .sermon #53

<sup>61</sup> Ibid19.

and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knows best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.” (16:125)

Dialogue is an essential and a highly effective method in a conflict resolution if the two parties involved recognize and respect one another. The Quran emphasizes that argument is a trait within every human being, one that is intrinsic to human nature: “We have explained in detail in this Quran, for the benefit of Mankind, every kind of similitude; but man is, in most things, contentious.”(18:54) Shaltoot in this regards stresses that differing opinions and views under no circumstances should be justification for violence and conflict<sup>62</sup>.

According to Fadhlallah and Shaltoot the underpinning of a Sunni – Shiite dialogue must be based on the commonality that they share as Muslims, on the basis of “our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.” (Quran 29:46) We differ yet, we are close to one another based on the very doctrine and the pillars of Islamic faith. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot believed that the Quran is the ultimate sources of knowledge and Islamic principles; matters ought to be referred to it or the tradition of the Prophet in case we face argument among ourselves: “and if ye have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the messenger.” (Quran 4:59). In another verse the Quran states: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God. If then they turn back, say ye: ‘Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's Will)’.” (Quran 3:64) “And do not dispute with the followers of the Book except by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our

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<sup>62</sup> Mahmood Shaltoot, *Asbab al Bidaa- causes of innovation* , Cairo: Egypt. 1988- (In Arabic)

God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.”(Quran 29:46) Fadhlallah and Shaltoot spent a life time encouraging dialogue and civility, seeing the ultimate power of constructive dialogue and the influence it could have and how it could prevent and provide solutions to any conflict. As an active participant who is of the Shiite sect, I have been personally confronted in the past and was asked by another Muslim as to why we have a different Quran, a question that was awkwardly shocking. This only proved to me that in that particular instant, myself, my community and my belief system was a victim of false fabrication because the other failed to search for truth. The countless biases that both sects feed on every day because they fail to learn and know about the other serves as a major obstacle within the reconciliation process; making coexistence very hard to achieve. With dialogue these can be overcome.

## **Coexistence**

*Coexistence* requires a set of careful evaluations as to how and when it actually happens. Coexistence requires objectivity, openness and willingness to accept the other which eventually leads to acquaintanceship; it is to exist together (in time or place) and to exist in mutual tolerance.<sup>63</sup> In the very first edition of the monthly journal of proximity within the Islamic sects, in Cairo, a group of religious leaders, *ulamah*, issued a statement insisting on the power of unity and the threat of sectarian division by focusing on the common aspects that they both share within the Islamic faith.<sup>64</sup> The statement encouraged and invited by what has been named as the Golden theory, “to get together and meet based on what we have agreed and share in common with one another, and each one of us to excuse the other for the matter in which we have

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<sup>63</sup> Mahmood Shaltoot, *Asbab al Bidaa- causes of innovation* , Cairo: Egypt. 1988 (In Arabic)

<sup>64</sup> Mahmood Shaltoot. *10 reminders- Alwasaya Al Ashr*. Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al-Shoroq, 1984 (In Arabic).

different opinion on.”<sup>65</sup> This is the attitude in which the conflict needs to be dealt with; it is to accept the other who has different opinion for who he or she is, a human being, with emotions and intellect. According to the journal of ‘Taqrib’ that was published in Cairo’s first edition editorial,” for all of us to be alike and not to have different opinions is an impossible task, even the Quran states and stresses on the tolerability to have different opinions: “And if your Lord had pleased He would certainly have made people a single nation, but they will not cease to dispute.”(Quran 11:118) According to Fadhlallah and Shaloot the Quran itself has introduced us to accept the idea of difference in opinion, tolerate and respect those who differ

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (Quran Therefore coexistence is introduced, created and originated by God so we “may know each other”

Hence, coexistence is the very last stage of this framework; it depends fully on the success of the three above factors. Coexistence is simply a destination that two conflicting parties reach once they have accepted the other based on mutual recognition and understanding on the basis of respect.

The proposed framework is applicable with the help and positive engagement of religious leaders. They are able to create changes just like Fadhlallah and Shaloot who are highly respected by people from both sects. They managed to maintain positive and constructive themes on reconciliation by endorsing values and teachings of blessing from the Quran. Fadhlallah and Shaloot shared a single vision for a harmonious Muslim community, regardless of any affiliation

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<sup>65</sup> Mahmood Shaloot, *Fatwa*, Dar al shorooq. Cario: Egypt. 1987-( In Arabic)

with a particular sect. Both scholars had a vision of blessing which aimed to transform conflict into coexistence by promoting harmony and teachings of blessing. This framework similarly seeks to find a framework that transforms violence into blessing. The very first stage of this framework requires an intense awareness program that includes television shows and sermons; books are a mandatory requirement that enables recognition to be effective and existent. Clearing misconceptions and creating opportunity for knowing one another is only possible through a constructive dialogue, where people begin to learn about one another. This opportunity, however, is only probable when both parties involved begin to recognize the 'other'; it is only then reconciliation and coexistence becomes a possibility.

## CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEWS

### **4.1 Findings from the Field**

In order to organize the findings in the most efficient way, the data collected will be divided into four main parts. Each one of questions will be followed by ten answers gathered from the ten interviewees to provide a holistic approach to what was gathered throughout the interviews. Eventually my own framework for reconciliation that is based on 4 factors of *awareness*, *recognition*, *dialogue* and *coexistence* will be re-examined using some of the recommendations for improvement that some of the interviewees had made in their responses.

Here, a brief and concise introduction is given for each participant. My first 3 interviews were done in Beirut, Lebanon and the rest were all conducted in Baghdad, Iraq)

Participant 1. A Shiite religious leader from Beirut, Lebanon. Date of interview: January 17.2012 the interview was conducted in his own office. (will be referred to as P1)

Participant 2. A Shiite religious leader from Beirut, Lebanon. Date of interview: January 20.2012. He is a religious leader with a PhD in sociology (will be referred to as P2)

Participant 3. A Shiite religious leader from Beirut, Lebanon. Date of interview: January 20.2012. He is a religious scholar who had worked with Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah in the past (will be referred to as P3).

Participant 4. A Shiite religious scholar. Interview was conducted in Baghdad, Iraq. Date of interview: January23.2012. A religious figure who has worked extensively within the Shiite community. He has worked with many NGO's in Iraq and his main objective and frame of work

is building and creating mosques and community centres. He is highly involved with social/religious activities and public outreach programs (will be referred to as P4).

Participant 5. A Sunni religious Leader from Baghdad, Iraq. Date of interview: January 28.2012. He is currently the chairman of the southern branch of Iraqi Scholars Group who is also the Adviser to the presidency of Iraq for Religious Affairs. HCRLI member (will be referred to as P5).

Participant 6. A Sunni religious Leader. Baghdad, Iraq. Date of interview: January 31.2012. A religious leader within the city of Fallujah, Iraq, also a HCRLI member (will be referred to as P6).

Participant 7. A Sunni religious Leader. Baghdad, Iraq. Date of interview: January31.2012. A religious leader within the city of Al-Ramadi, Iraq, also a HCRLI member (will be referred to as P7).

Participant 8. A Sunni religious leader. From Baghdad, Iraq. Date of interview: January31.2012. (will be referred to as P8).

Participant 9. A Shiite religious Scholar. Interview was conducted in Baghdad- Iraq February 3.2012. He is a well known author and an intellectual Muslim thinker. He currently works in Iraq and has worked extensively on the issue of proximity of Muslim sects. (will be referred to as P9).

Participant 10. A Shiite religious leader. He currently resides in Baghdad. (will be referred to as P10).

Reverend Andrew Canon White- Baghdad, Iraq. Date of the meeting January 28, 2012. He is Anglican Chaplain to Iraq, an expert on Shiite Sunni relations, and the President of Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East.

The following are the questions and the response of each participant:

**Question#1. “In your opinion, what are the most significant and major causes of the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites?”**

**P1:** He believed that the basis of the conflict is the historical events of succession. The conflict over the years however, was shaped as a political conflict, the issue of the religion and faith was replaced by power and politics. He saw a fraction of fanatical individual with a closed minded ideology responsible for the raise and the escalation of sectarian violence. He believed that the conflict is no longer a theological and conflict of ideology, rather it was a political game that used religious affiliation as a vehicle to gain power in the region. He saw the conflict as a crisis between two categories. He referenced Imam Ali and how he categorized people into two segments :“With regard to me, two categories of people will be ruined, namely he who loves me too much and the love takes him away from rightfulness, and he who hates me too much and the hatred takes him away from rightfulness. The best man with regard to me is he who is on the middle course. So be with him and be with the great majority (of Muslims) because God's hand (of protection) is on keeping unity. You should beware of division.” and this is narrated in the *Nahjul balagha*, sermon 126.

**P2:** He believed that rigid rules and closed mindedness that exists without evolution or any sort of advancement or improvement, which he referred to as a cultural crisis, were the causes of the conflict. Many have created a frame of thought that encompasses no or a very limited knowledge about their religious beliefs, however this frame becomes so sacramental and divine that no opposition to it is acceptable. In this case what could be observed is that the frame around the ideology becomes more sacred than the ideology or the doctrine itself, to a point where only

affiliation or the allegiance to it becomes sacramental. It is in this stage where fanaticism raises; any sort of opposition to the sacredness becomes unacceptable and deprival.

The conflict is based on the image that we have in mind, an image that we each have created of the “other” in our minds. For instance “I alienate or am repelled by you because of an image that I have of you and you as well, alienate or are repelled by me because of an image that you have of me in your head and this image is not going to change through a dialogue exclusively, rather it requires a set of other factors such as knowing you, your thoughts based on a civilized dialogue that are based on fact and not distorted ones. This image needs to be clarified before I could sit with you, whom I feel so alienated and different from. “Our biggest problem is that we cannot learn to respect those who have different opinion from us; not knowing that to have a difference in opinion is permissible and religiously permitted. If only we begin to realize, believe and see that diverse opinion is acceptable and not a taboo. If we could begin to learn that “my opinion” and “your opinion” are both valid and respectable, it is only then we could develop a thoughtful and fruitful dialogue, with my thought and your thoughts that have the power to create a mutual recognition and an atmosphere for civilized dialogue.

**P3:** He believed that the basis of the current tension and conflict within Islam is that each party still dwells in the historical events of the past, thinking that is the right way in dealing with the issue. The issue of sentiments and the idea of oppression and disrespect by the other causes and ignites more conflicts. Both parties need to accept one another as Muslims, their differences should not cause them to contradict the teaching of blessing of the Islamic doctrine.

**P4:** He defined the conflict in political terms and strongly believed that the extremists are the key players within this sectarian crisis. Fanaticism and the belief that “this way is the true path has created a crisis within the Muslim community”. He saw the biggest cause of the current conflict in the issue of how many still cannot accept those who have different opinions. He quoted a religious figure Waeiz Zadeh Khorasani, who had also significantly worked on the issue of proximity among Shiites and Sunnis by saying “the Quran itself reminds us all that Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me (and no other)”.(Quran 21:92) meaning that the unity that must exist among you all is a reflection of that you have all accepted me as your one God whom you worship. For him therefore, the issue of unity is parallel to the worshipping of One God. Khorasani also, insists that those *takfiris* who announce the apostasy of a segment of a society are nothing but ignorants who have underestimated and disrespected the doctrine of Islam, by giving themselves the permission to set the permissibility of killing those who differ from them on religious grounds and false pretence of faith. Those who have closed their minds and heart to the core beliefs of Islam, are responsible for the violence that exists among Muslims today. Who are we to decide who is on the true path and who is not, The Quran reminds us all that “Verily thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Judgment as to those matters concerning that wherein they used to differ.” (Quran 45:17)

**P5:** He believed that the main reasons of the conflict are political reasons and the other is the impartiality and being unable to attain objectivity in matters that opposes our opinion of certain issues around us. Achieving objectivity is our main issue. We lack the nature of being objective in dealing with circumstances that requires us to avoid being judgmental with totally impartiality

towards the other. A great example is “when I was a student , I began to read a book authored by a Shiite scholar called “Alghadeer” and had one of my teachers who was also a religious scholar came to my house one day, as soon as he looked at the book that I was reading in my living room, with an offensive tone of voice asked me about why was I reading a Shiite book? And my reply to him was that I am a Religious Studies student and I am going to need to look at the “other” sects beliefs to learn about them. He left my house and told me that he would never come to me again unless I get rid of the book. The Next day I asked him to come back by telling him that I had placed the book in the bedroom , so it is no longer in the living room where we could sit together. He explained to me that there are still people out there who think just in the same way.

**P6:** He defined the conflict as a difference in opinion and not a conflict. He focused on the issue that the religion is one and both sects follow the same five pillars of Islam.He defined fanaticism as a disability where there is a significant reduction in comprehension of an individual.

**P7:** He believed that the basis of the conflict is ignorance. Having different opinions regarding the jurisprudence can never be the cause of a violent conflict, therefore it could be only justified by ignorance. In other words they are lingering over a conflict that occurred 1400 years ago, a conflict which Ali himself states that he overlooked because of the unity of Muslims. He argued that many individuals are not open to the idea of dialogue and tolerance which leads many to take a much revengeful act towards those who differ from them.

**P8:** He believed that the main cause of the conflict goes back to the historical story of succession, however the current conflict is only a political one and is run by religious zealots who are brainwashed and are puppets of those master minds who benefit from the conflict as a political paradigm.

**P9:** The conflict by him is seen as differences of thoughts and opinions in regards to the social, fundamental and political aspects of life. The violence and conflict that we see in Iraq today is nothing but a political strife, a conflict over who can rule. His views were considered slightly different, as a Muslim scholar more than a leader, he focused on the issue of coexistence as a social issue and a phenomenon. He strongly believed that freedom and human rights, which are the basis of civil liberty, are what is required for this conflict.

**P10:** The conflict has its roots in the past; historical events that up to this date are seeking retaliation. Followers of the two sects in the current time stress their affiliation to one of the sects as a desire to be recognized. For instance, the affiliation of one's sect has become more sacred and important than their affiliation to their religion, Islam. It is a sense of wanting to be recognized or categorized by the other sect. This shows that the conflict is a conflict about recognition, about wanting to prove to the other that "I" exist as a Shiite or as a Sunni. The recent years have seen a greater tendency towards sense of belonging. The affiliation to a sect has become so important that sometimes even those who are not religious at all, take an extra step to show that they belong to this sect or the other.

**Question #2. If you were asked to create a framework for reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis, what would you consider to be the first step in creating this framework?**

**P1:** In regards to a framework for reconciliation he believed that the procedure was only a potential success if each person begins to reevaluate his knowledge of the other within him or herself. He added that we are required to purify our minds and thoughts from the defects of extremism in order to be able to move forwards towards civilized dialogue of thoughts and discourse. Those who engage themselves with open minds and spirit of change and improvement are the segment of the society that dialogue would be fruitful with them. Our problem is with the

extremists who have built a concrete wall between logic and their own interpretation of religious doctrine which eventually creates an impossibility to communicate with the other based on reason and intellect.

Our problems are the bigoted ones who cause conflict not only between the two sects but also within their own sects, they consider anyone who has a different opinion than themselves to be deviant. They fail to see the other because they are afraid of anything that is different than them.

**P2:** In regards to the framework for reconciliation, He suggested that the first step that he will be using is to ask participants from both parties to write about the image that they have about the other, following that we can begin to discuss these images and clarify the misunderstanding through a constructive dialogue.

**P3:** He believed that the first step in creating a framework for reconciliation would be to bring the religious leaders of the two parties, who can have a major influence on their community members, together. They need to know one another by having a face to face dialogue. The issue with both parties is that what they despise about the other is known to them only through some probably unreliable sources. Who forbids them to communicate and talk to the 'other'. The issue is that unfortunately the conflict is based on certain thoughts and images that have been engrained in each parties mind, without ever thinking of re-examining this image that they have about one another. Therefore, when religious leaders decide to meet on the basis of intellectual and mature dialogue, it will instantly opens a wider opportunity for their followers to begin to accept the other, since they would realize that their own religious leaders, who are the role

models and spiritual guides as the pioneers in the reconciliation process. Such events must be televised and publicly announced so it could influence a greater number of people.

**P4:** He believed the first step towards the reconciliation process should be a wide spread of mass media, promoting the issue of proximity, starting with the commonality that they both share. TV channels, journals, news papers are all vehicles to send a constructive message to a wide array of people about the truth and the misunderstandings that exists among the two sects. He strongly believed religious leaders are responsible in the eyes of God to raise awareness about the current escalation of violence among the followers of both sects.

**P5:** He believed that the first step in reconciliation should be highlighting our commonality, believing and realizing that our belief doctrine is common. It is permissible to disagree among ourselves, to have different opinions, to accept one another as humans, worthy of living and respect. He used the following quote to stress on that value that God has bestowed on human beings, “And surely We have honoured the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them of the good things, and We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created.”(Quran 17:70) Who are we to deny that and disrespect and wage war against the other. “Let there be no compulsion in religion.”(Quran 2:256) Isn't that what the Quran preaches?

The best means for the implementation of a reconciliation framework is to gather in a dialogue , but to first recognize that to have differing opinions is permissible and acceptable. He believed that TV channels, the school curriculum and the mass media are all responsible in raising awareness among Muslims.

**P6:** When asked about the framework for reconciliation, he suggested that conferences and dialogues are very crucial , however, the religious leader engagement and the mass media needs to take the first action in preparing the public for such conference and dialogues. Religious leaders and mass media has the power to change minds of so many with the constant reminder of the doctrine of Islam that is based on peaceful coexistence.

**P7:** “If I was to work on a reconciliation project I would definitely choose to start with the religious leaders, whom people highly respect and obey, especially here in Iraq today. They have a major influence”. I, myself, as a religious leader who has regular Friday sermons during all my sermons I stress on the importance and the benefits of unity. I highlight the importance of coming together during these difficult times. As a Sunni religious leader I use examples and stories of the progeny of Prophet Muhammad in every sermon as a constant reminder that Ali and Ahlul Bayt’s position ( the progeny of Prophet Muhammad ) are important in Islam and loving them and showing them respect as our Shiite brothers and sisters do is a beautiful thing.

**P8:** He believed that to raise awareness by the help of religious leaders about the threats of sedition and conflict. Bring the two parties to meet and to get to know one another by having religious leaders as initiators since they could play a major role in this regard.

**P9:** He believed that the only possible route to coexistence is to establish a system of government that gives every citizen established civil rights. Every individual must enjoy freedom of religion, thought, and choice, a notion that is still very foreign in the minds of extremists. He believed that the fanatical religious movement are moving in total opposite direction of the

realities of the present time. They dwell in the past and move backward in their ideology. The past must be treated as a heritage, a legacy that took place. It is only then where we could move forward. Objectivity in debates and disagreements must be treated normally and not be frowned upon. When everyone within the society begins to realize the other's civil liberty and freedom to choose, it is only then where they can live in peace.

**P10:** He believed that raising awareness using the media is the golden key to the transformation of violence to peaceful coexistence. How many TV Channels every Iraqi household has access to? On average the number of satellite channels exceeds 500 channels and about ¼ of those channels are religious; which promote either the Sunni or the Shiite sect, there is not even a single channel that calls for unity yet there are so many channels that aim to expand and promote sedition within the *ummah*. The aim should be raising awareness about the true doctrine and beliefs of each sect, clarifying to the people that what they know about the other could be reevaluated.

**Question # 3. What would you say to the Shiite (Sunni) extremists? (e.g. member of their own group)**

**P1:** He believed that the main obstacle in the face of reconciliation and co existence is the rise of fanatics and extremists who have distorted the principles of faith and created a gap within the Islamic *ummah*. He stressed that theological differences exist among every religion and the fact that we disagree in how we interpret theological issues should not in any way cause conflict and violent clashes. He strongly believed that there is a need for a moderate and a balanced thought, distant from what he refers to as 'extravagance bigotry'.

**P2:** He believed that this conflict has its roots in the past, a historical conflict if you may, we strive on the issues from the past and not the present. He defines extremists as segment of individuals who have created a blocked circuit and dwell in the history, keeping away from advancement and development under the banner of Islam, using it as an excuse for their laziness.

**P3:** He believed that the extremists are of a closed and blocked mindset. Dialogue with them is just a pointless process. This closed mindedness does not leave any place for improvement and progress. Their mindsets are hard to change and the transformation of their mindset is quite difficult. He believed that potentially raising awareness using TV satellite channels, news papers, and many other media could probably have a positive effect and a power to transform in long run for them.

**P4:** He strongly criticized those who had in recent years claimed the lives of many innocent people as the sectarian violence in Iraq was raising. “ those who, following a terrorist’s attacks, would go on TV and publically announce that their actions will send them to heaven to “have dinner with the prophet” a common phrase that was widely spread by a segment of the extremists Sunni sect, with the believe that after killing or causing a death of a Shiite one would be rewarded in heaven “to dine with the prophet”. It is these kinds of absurd statements that was used to brain wash the youth who joined the extremists movements.

**P5:** He explained that this fanaticism and the belief that the “other” is a non believer exists among people, he strongly believed that the political arena plays a major role in the lives of

extremists and how they look at things, fanatical thoughts grow in such atmosphere, retrograde and blindness as the result of ignorance. He pointed out a new terrorist organization named “Birds of Heaven” that recruits children aging from 7 to 12 years old, mostly children from poor urban areas, luring them into a fanatical religious belief, brainwashing and injecting them with false and fabricated religious teachings that promote intolerance to anyone who differs from them, ideas and events that any logical and adult mind rejects. The brain washing begins at a very young age where the child grows and is nurtured on violence and intolerance.

**P6:** He believed that religious fanatics are a retrograde class of the society, where lingering to the conflicts and traditions of the past with no improvement or progress. There is a sense of phobia associated with them, where any changes to their mental mode of thinking is considered a danger to their existence. They tend to leave out logic and blindly follow their preachers without thinking or rationalizing their words and orders. Just as what is happening in Iraq today, those who kill innocent lives are only puppets for their leaders whom aim of escalation of violence is for political winning and no more. For him, the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis is also just a political issue.

**P7:** He believed that extremism would end only through raising awareness. My way of raising awareness is to show to my own community that the voice of extremists unfortunately is too loud and they have used all possible mass media means to intrude in people’s minds and try to change their minds into a dark path full of ignorance.

**P8:** He believed that they need to review the teachings of Islam, the true doctrine that prevent killing and aggression. They need to begin to open their eyes and see the contradiction that there is with what the teachings of Islam and their actions; to wake them up from ignorance that they dwell in.

**P9:** He believed that we need to learn to respect those who differ from us and live together in harmony as it is the case in western societies. He mainly viewed the conflict as a social dilemma that people in this society still cannot comprehend or understand those who differ from them in beliefs. His focus was on issue of freedom of choice that is still vague for Muslim extremists. He believed that the conflict itself is a political game that hires ignorants who are puppets in the hands of the *Wahabi* movements. The reaction is obviously aggressive when the Shiites feel dehumanized by the Sunnis and the clashes among them begins.

**P10:** Extremists are aggressors, they destroy and demolish, they are not considered Muslims and they do not represent any of the sects in my opinion. They are just a group of confined and violent group who are brainwashed by a supremacy they follow; they are usually affiliated with political organizations like that of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Dialogue and reconciliation with them is almost an impossible mission as they have locked themselves and their minds from anything that differs from their death oriented characters.

**Question#4. If you were asked to give a lecture on rapprochement and reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis to a large audience from both sects, what would you say to them?**

**P1:** He believed that the first step to reconciliation is to come together on the basis of commonality that they both share. "we need to meet based on what we both agree on". He heavily focused on the role of religious leaders in raising awareness, through their sermons, writing and in every opportunity they find to raise awareness within their community about the threat of sedition and violence conflict.

**P2:** He saw the possibility of reconciliation and the transformation in the smallest things. One of the highlights throughout the interview was how he brought up the language each sects uses to refers to the "other". He said that we do not recognize each other as Muslims in the first place, look at how we address one another, a Shiite, a Sunni, instead of a Shiite Muslim and Sunni Muslim. He believes that even a change in attitude on such a small matter could make huge changes towards reconciliation. Calling the other by his sectarian allegiance, only reinforces the idea that "we do not accept them as Muslims" calling them Shiite Muslim and Sunni Muslim, opens up a sea of opportunity where the other feels a sense of recognition and worth.

**P3:** He believed that unfortunately many have created a mental image about the other without actually knowing the other. The image is a creation of biases and misinformed and distorted facts. These image are not going to change by themselves. There is a need to actually go out there and meet with the other to examine and reevaluate the picture that others have drawn in our minds. This kind of action is much more fruitful if each religious leader begins to denounce sectarianism and seclusion. The idea of accepting the other, like that of Muhammad Hussein Fadhlallah, will open great opportunities for progress and development and harmony that are so needed among Muslims. The need for dialogue and awareness by religious leaders is immense; the power of authority could change and transform the conflict in to a positive outcome. My

message is therefore to the religious leaders, to just remind them of their religious duty of creating harmony and peace.

**P4:** He believed that religious leaders must begin to promote the notion of proximity in their every day sermon, away from their political affiliation that unfortunately so many of them are currently inclining to in Iraq. He believed that only then, we could raise awareness about the other which could eventually change attitudes and behaviour

**P5:** He believed that religious leaders play a significant role, by their sermons that could be devoted to raising awareness. The current generation is in need of such enlightenment which will eventually lead to progress and moving forward towards a more civilized and with an accurate comprehension of doctrine of faith. The past conferences on proximity have sparked a change and I have witnessed that myself. Although they were not as effective since they weren't widely announced and known by everyone. The need to raise wider awareness could only be done on a larger scale such as a TV channels, radio, mass media, and net working communication tools because there is a need for it to be widely publicised. It is only through these methods that we could raise awareness about the other. He also focused on another aspect that could create opportunities for change in attitudes and behaviour that is by beginning to recognize the other.

**P6:** He believed that the solution given to educate the present generation is by raising awareness of the doctrine of Islam away from the misguided teachings of the fanatics. School curriculum and the media were the focus of his talk. Peaceful coexistence for him meant a mutual understanding and mutual respect and mutual recognition.

One of the main issues that he stressed on was the issue of religious leader engagement and the positive role they could have on the enlightening the present generation. Providing them with a perfect image of what a Muslim community, when united, could be like. Religious leaders and their weekly sermons are the first step in reconciliation. If each one of them decides to dedicate a portion of his weekly sermon on the verses from the Quran that invites us all to be a unified community, that could have a significantly positive contribution to the de-escalation of violence. If we decide to overlook the historical enmities that we have and move forward with a new aim which is to coexist based on the pillars of Islam that we share and practice every day of lives, things could dramatically change.

**P7:** He explained “I try to clarify to my own community that the extremists have crossed hate line long ago, when they began contradicting the doctrine and the teachings of Islam by their superstitious and illogical statements and beliefs”. He believed that they have committed violation to their religion, to their fellow brothers and sisters in Islam. They have contradicted every religious teachings of Islam and they will be held responsible on the day of judgement.

**P8:** He explained “Educate yourself and be aware of the true Islamic doctrine. Accept the other for what and who he or she is, do not be fooled by what the media portrays about the “other”, be aware that there are hidden arms that are controlling this game of sectarianism for their own benefits”.

**P9:** In his opinion the issue of reconciliation has failed in the past and it will fail in the future due to the absence of mutual recognition. For many Sunni extremists and Shiites extremists as well, the idea of sitting and meeting for a dialogue is unacceptable as they consider the Shiite,

apostate and untouchable, how then can dialogue exist with a mentality as such. He quoted “the extremists movements are currently strong and are benefiting from resources of rich country such as Saudi Arabia . these countries will continue to brainwash the masses into the notion that the true path is to get rid of all those who differ”. He added “their ideology feeds on elevating their beliefs system and disregarding whatever that differs”. This mentality has been going on for the past 14 century and will continue to go on.

**P10:** To review and read more, to look for truth themselves and not only blindly follow anything that is told to them. The sense of awareness is established when all the parties involved begin to give the other a chance of defending and defining him or herself. One of the reasons and that many peace building initiatives have failed is that people are not ready to accept the other with the differing opinion. For many, anyone with a different mindset is an enemy and wrong, a perception that is very incorrect and false both logically and based on the Islamic principles as well.

**P11:** Reverend Canon Andrew White is the president and CEO of the Foundation for Reconciliation in the Middle East (FRME), launched in 2005. His foundation supports the Iraqi Institute for Peace which regularly arranges meetings and dialogues between Sunni and Shiite leaders to help them work towards dialogue. He has been able to gain trust of key religious leaders in Iraq , both Sunnis and Shiites. I met Rev. White in Baghdad and talked to him many times over the phone as well. During my stay in Iraq, he kindly shared his work on reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites and he definitely saw improvement in their relations. Reverend White regularly met with both religious leaders and some of the prominent religious leaders in Iraq.

Rev. Andrew White was very kind to tell me about the meeting he had earlier with some of the most senior clerics in Iraq under the auspices of the Society of Iraqi Islamic Scientists (the senior Sunni Clerics Society). He stated that the main issue on the agenda was finding ways to stop the sectarian violence against the Shiite in Iraq recently. They also delivered a Fatwa (Islamic) injunction against all sectarian violence and publicly declared that most sectarian violence was coming from the Sunni community.

*The Fatwa*

*THE IRAQI SOCIETY OF ISLAMIC SCIENTISTS FATWA*

*In the name of God the Merciful*

Under the conditions experienced by Iraqis and many Middle Eastern people at the present time and in the light of the increase in the level of Iraqi sectarian violence and the volatile situation, we believe that the deteriorating political condition calls upon us as Sunni religious scholars to together as a group to issue a Fatwa.

We wish to declare the sanctity of all Iraqi blood whether Shia, Sunni or Christian. We call for a mechanism to educate the Iraqi Society in order to renounce all sectarian violence and instead create an environment of cooperation with civil society organizations and institutions of civil jurisdiction so not to allow our people in Iraq to divide into sectarian conflicts. We must work towards national unity amongst all Muslims (Sunni and Shia) and Christians; we all have the duty and right to live together in unity in our country Iraq.

Signed by:

Dr Sheikh Khaled Abdul-Wahab Mullah, Leader, Sunni Cleric Baghdad + Basrah

Shekh Saadi Mehdi Qutaiba Alindaoui Sunni Leader Al Anbar

Sheikh Maher Al Jubori Sunni Cleric Fullujah

Dr Sheikh Kubaisi Jalal Sunni Cleric Rammadi

Sheikh Marwan Al Araji Sunni Cleric Baghdad

Sheikh Hasham Al Dulami Sunni Cleric Fullujah

Interestingly, the *fatwa* was signed by three of the religious leaders that I had interviewed a few days before. The issuing of *fatwa* by religious leaders serves as a major support for the de-escalation of violence. In 2006 following the bombing of the golden-dome of Samarra's al-Askari shrine, one of Shiites most revered sites, Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Al-Sistani, the highest ranking Shiite religious leader, issued a *fatwa* on the sanctity of all Iraqi blood, calling for Shiites to protect Sunnis in Iraq—a move that prevented a catastrophic series of retaliations and killings. This shows clearly that the role religious leaders play in the de-escalation of violence is immense and could be used as the top preventative measure in the de-escalation of violence.

#### **4.2 Re-evaluation of the framework for reconciliation**

Throughout this study the framework that was introduced at the very beginning was thoroughly examined and evaluated for further improvement. The finding from the field work, can contribute to its success and applicability significantly. Using the findings from the field work, the responses will help with the implementation of the framework as a proposal for the current sectarian tension in parts of the Middle East. For the purpose of this study, Iraq will be used as an example in this study. As it was mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, the success of the framework depends on 4 imperative factors: awareness, recognition, dialogue and coexistence and each factor is fully dependent on the implementation of the other factors. Below each factor is being re-evaluated using the proposals and the responses of each of the religious leaders interviewed.

In regards to the *awareness* factor it is now safe to say that the initial step must and ought to be taken by religious leaders. Almost everyone confirmed the positive and hugely influential

role religious leaders play in the de-escalation of violence. In Iraq where sense of religiosity is more evident, religious leaders act as spiritual and highly respectable figures that are obeyed and the greater example would be the *fatwas* that were given out to people various times on condemning the killings , in Iraq. Following the initial process of religious leaders enlightening people, the media could play a significant role in the de-escalation of violence as well. The proposed initiative could be that a T.V channel, dedicated to only broadcast shows that promote and encourage co-existence of Shiites and Sunnis. This is feasible if the groundwork of the channel is fully dedicated to the tension reduction between the two sects. This channel could: raise awareness, implement recognition as a needed and a mandatory factor within Islam, demonstrate continues and successful dialogues between the two sects by having prominent religious leaders to conduct dialogue live for everyone to see and eventually endorse peaceful co-existence.

One of the important elements that was highlighted in regards to *Recognition* is what (participant 2) proposed about “beginning to acknowledge the other firstly by the way we address them” . The fact that we address the other as a Sunni or a Shiite is in itself a negative concern. He believed that if we begin to call the other as a Shiite Muslim and Sunni Muslim we begin to at least recognize the other’s self worth, which could serve as a reminder that we are both Muslims regardless of our sectarian affiliation. The language that is used to address the “other” could have significant influence on regaining self worth and dignity, since it is only through recognition that we are able to give the ‘other’ a chance of worth and respect.

The idea of beginning to appreciate the other raises when there is a chance or an opportunity given to the ‘other’ to speak or defend him/herself. *Dialogue* is a window of opportunity so the people involved begin to re-evaluate and re-examine their knowledge of the

'other'. As it was mentioned within the responses, the conflict by many religious leaders was seen as a distorted image that each set has about the other. This distorted picture that causes endless misunderstanding and misconception could only be re-evaluated ,when each of the parties involved give the 'other' the opportunity to defend themselves and clarify the distorted image that the ether has of them. These distorted images that each sect has about the other could only be reshaped when we begin to “listen” to the other face to face. Misunderstanding and misconception could never clarify themselves with no actual face-to face debate.

Hence, *coexistence* is a product of sense of awareness about the other which allows recognition to implement respect and self worth within that opens up a window of opportunity for peaceful coexistence. As important element that needs to be mention in this section is that during my interviews I realized that the term reconciliation and the term co-existence are intertwined concepts. For many reconciliation only means to peacefully co-exist. The term reconciliation has been replaced by peaceful coexistence for many of the religious leaders that were interviewed. None of the people that were interviewed mentioned the term reconciliation as it has been replaced by coexistence for many, since the terms reconciliation and peace are given concepts when coexistence takes place.

## CHAPTER 5: FINAL SYNTHESIS, VISION AND CONCLUSION

It was shown that the deep rooted conflict between the Sunnis and Shiites could be examined by Redekop's Human Identity Need Theory, which interprets the conflict and the tension between the two on the basis of failed need satisfiers. Acknowledging the failed need satisfiers of both parties involved, what is needed is a concrete reconciliation module that could be accepted by religious leaders who are respected by their respective sects. The likelihood of such a framework being adopted would be enhanced if it could be shown to be based on the teachings of well-regarded religious leaders. Hence, after thoroughly examining the works of Fadhlallah and Shaloot, four common factors of awareness, recognition, dialogue and coexistence were synthesised, that were both examined and, to an extent, implemented during their lives. These have proved to have the potential to create a module for reconciliation if they are carefully understood and implemented. The significance of Redekop's human identity needs theory is that it could be incorporated in the proposed framework that is derived from the works of Fadhlallah and Shaloot. Having Redekop's Human Identity Needs, as a defining concept of causes of the conflict, along with the proposed framework of two religious leaders that are both respected by the respective sects, empowers this collective module and increases the chances of its success if it was to be implemented in the future.

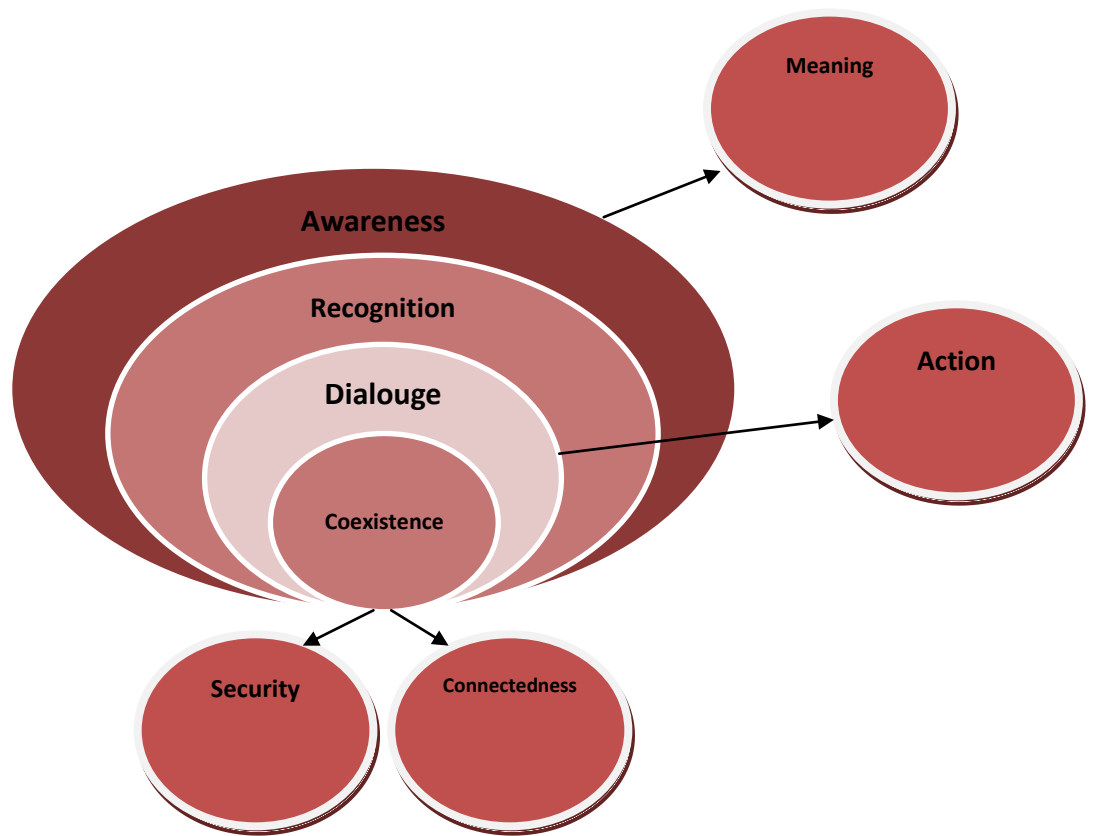
In the first category, Redekop's concept of Meaning is parallel to the awareness factor of the proposed framework. Redekop defines meaning as "the result of the world of our own that we develop solely based on our insights and our way of life."<sup>66</sup> It is done solidly through being aware of the world around us. Meaning is the sense of being aware of what goes around us which

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<sup>66</sup> Vern N, Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict can open path to reconciliation*. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 2002.

includes our living environment and everything and everyone around us. In the second category we have the recognition factor, which serves as a congruent element with Redekop's human identity need and this is why within the framework, the theme of recognition is the back bone of the module for reconciliation for the enormous role it plays. As it is defined by Redekop, it is associated with self worth and respect and is essential in the formation of human identity and our dignity. Action as Redekop states is taking a significant action to meet the demands of self-identity. It is to express self and the ability of establishing a higher self esteem. This is essentially the very sole aim of dialogue with the other. Dialogue within my proposed framework is taking a significant action to establish confidence and higher self-esteem in relation with the other; it is the notion of taking positive action to meet the demands of self identity.

Redekop also highlights the importance of security and connectedness around the self, a parallel concept to the final and the core factor within this framework which is coexistence. Redekop argues that security in this case implies to all forms of emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual safety, an element that this framework desires, a sense of security by being able to coexist. Coexistence in Iraq today, is dependent upon the issue of security, where individuals need to feel safe physically, spiritually and intellectually. The current conflict is simply caused by the absence of this important factor in Iraq today. Redekop also highlights the importance of connectedness, a sense of belonging and again an important element that is vastly missing in Iraq today due to the sectarian tension. Being able to coexist results in a sense of belonging and as Redekop argues the need for social identity is a necessity in every community. The diagram below aims to illustrate this module for reconciliation that could have a positive impact if it is implemented.



(Figure4.)

### **5.1 Vision for Reconciliation**

The solution to this tense circumstance is that religious leaders are in need of reminders of what their religions are supposed to preach. They are able to put an end to the revolting attitudes they hold against everyone who opposes them by organizing dialogue that could assist in clarification of the basis of their beliefs and the ‘others’ beliefs. The only time however this could be fruitful and successful is when they decide to open their minds and hearts to the other and to listen and learn to respect others who differ from them. Organizing dialogue is not only a performance act, where leaders from both groups gather together to agree and respect one another only at that instance and soon forget about the ideals that they agreed on as soon as they dialogue or the unity

conferences ends. The Quran specifically addresses those who pretend and act as if they believe in a certain action, but in truth they don't do so.

When they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe;' but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: 'We are really with you: We (were) only jesting'." (Quran 2:14)

A belief in the concept of unity and the true principles of Islam is needed for these dialogues to be a success. Belief needs to be accompanied by action otherwise it's worthless. The vision that I have is that my framework for reconciliation between the Sunnis and the Shiites could be a potential success.

The vision that this study could argue for is that the possibility of reconciliation is immense. There are religious leaders who are willing to work towards this cause and that in itself is a great step towards coexistence of Shiite and Sunnis peacefully. The framework that was developed through this thesis could be implemented through a satellite Television Channel. The aim and the guideline for it could be based on my framework for reconciliation. The foundation of the channel will be based on the attainment of the four goals.

The first and the most important goal is to raise awareness, this could be done through broadcasting live religious weekly sermons, performed by prominent religious leaders that heavily focus on the value and the significance of unity. This must be done by the collaboration of both, Shiite and Sunni religious leaders.

Although this proposal seems very difficult and challenging to implement, the results could be astonishing. As I spent some time in the Middle East, I noticed the number of TV channels that each family can access using their satellite dish, on average it is between 400-600 satellite channels. A very large number of channels are religious based; meaning it is dedicated to Islamic

teachings. It was not surprising to see how half of those channels were Shiite based and the other half Sunni based and to differentiate between the two is not a very difficult task for someone from that region. Unfortunately the issue was that many of those TV channels have taken a very extreme sectarian direction; either promoting only Shiite ideology or promoting the Sunni sect by devaluing and rejecting the other sect, or using derogatory language to address the other. Tens of live shows, interviews, debates and sermons are broadcasted every day. Not a single time was I was able to see any call for unity or coexistence. Many shows were fully dedicated to denounce and disrespect the other, causing much rage and humiliation for the 'other'. One time, I experienced that first hand and the humiliation and the sense of unworthiness was quite severe. I did know that some of the things that one of the shows was broadcasting were false fabrications and were not true about what I, as a Shiite or my community believed in, issues such as having a different Quran, which was a complete distortion of facts and biases. I knew that the image was not true and I felt quite helpless watching the show and thinking about the many viewers who were being brainwashed and wrongly informed about us, the Shiites. The case was very same and quite similar when I watched the Shiite channel, their stress on the historical events of the past and cursing 'those responsible' for the initial conflict was just igniting more grudge and hate.

My proposal for launching a channel on Muslim unity aims to educate the public through raising awareness and advocating for change by promoting tolerance and recognition in regards to those who differ in opinion. It seeks methods to ease the process of getting together in a peaceful and civilized dialogue, and promote and advocate peaceful coexistence that benefits everyone involved.

## **5.2 Mission Quest and the procedure:**

*“The power of media in warfare is formidable. It can be a mediator or an interpreter or even a facilitator of conflict. If only by editing away facts that do not fit the demands of air time or print space, many wars would be avoided,”*

*Elizabeth Rehan and Eln Sirleaf*

The first step in initiating a TV channel must be the representation of a clear message of what it wants to say or promote. This could include: the type of content intended for broadcasting, strategies used to promote the call for unity by prominent religious leaders from both sects, recruiting influential religious leaders and scholars who could influence their followers.

The aim of the channel would be to encourage community building and trust, educate the public and advocate for change; all feasible with the implementing the framework for reconciliation that was introduced earlier.

The satellite TV channel on unity would serve as a third party whose aim is to bring together two parties that are in conflict by promoting awareness and reconciliation. One of the roles of the third party is to focus on the issue of ‘humanizing the other’. According to Potapchuk, the focus on face-to-face interaction, the concern and focus on individuals and the recognition of good in everyone could be a significant approach in conflict resolution.<sup>67</sup>

The argument that could be made here in this case is that learning and educating oneself about the real factors and the issues behind what initiated the spark of conflict could help in the process of reconciliation. Christopher R. Mitchell in “Conflict , Social change; Conflict

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<sup>67</sup> William R Potapchuk. *The third party role: A comparative examination of Burton, Curle, and Laue*. 1990.

resolution” argues that one universal factor that can lead to change in a conflict situation is learning; “the fact that human beings learn and, through learning, change.”<sup>68</sup>

According to Redekop’s theory of human identity needs therefore, the crisis of sectarian tension between Shiite and Sunnis is that each party feels that the core of their individual being is violated by the other. A concept that was familiar to Fadhlallah and Shaltoot who worked as mediators and religious analysts to solve the conflict between Muslims. Fadhlallah and Shaltoot saw the immediate need for intervention as they felt the need as experts in religious jurisprudence to educate and guide people. Their role could be seen as mediators of the conflict. They used a method similar to the ‘Mutually Hurting Stalemate’, a theory introduced by William Zartman, a situation in which neither side can win or back down or in any case accept loss.<sup>69</sup> Conflict, as the result continues and the damage therefore increases; leaving both groups in a greater loss. Zartman argues that once both parties have reached a ‘Mutually Hurting Stalemate, the positive outcome is the ‘ripe moment’ a concept that he defines as “characterized by a mutually hurting stalemate, with either an impending or just-avoided catastrophe producing either a deadlock or decline in fighting, and the presence of a valid spokesperson(s) for the parties creating a perception to both parties that there is a way out.”<sup>70</sup> What is required by both parties is to accept the other for who they are, it is only through mutual recognition that mutual respect is born and this was a lifelong message of both Fadhlallah and Shaltoot. What is needed immediately for de-escalation of violence is peaceful coexistence.

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<sup>68</sup> Mitchell, C.R., 2005, 'Conflict, Social Change and Conflict Resolution. An Enquiry', Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, Berlin

<sup>69</sup> William I Zartman. "Ripeness." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. *Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder*. August, 2003. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/ripeness/>(accessed 2011)

<sup>70</sup> Landon E. Hancock. “To Act or Wait: A Two-Stage View of Ripeness.” *International Studies Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2001): 195–205.

Raising awareness in regards to this matter could be done in a way that educates the public that they do not need to convert or change their belief system, rather all they need to do is to coexist peacefully by recognizing the rights of one another and respectfully accept the other.

This study aimed to develop the most essential factors required in building a framework for reconciliation by heavily focusing on religious leaders' engagement and the positive role they could have in effecting a change in attitudes and de-escalation of violence.

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## مكتبة شيخ الجامع الأزهر

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

نصر القسوي

التي أصدرها السيد صاحب العقيلة الأستاذ الأكبر

الشيخ محمود شلتوت شيخ الجامع الأزهر

في شأن جواز التعمد بذهب الشيعة الإمامية

.....

قبل لفضيلته :

ان بعض الناس يرى أنه يجب على المسلم لكي تقع عباداته ومعاملاته على وجه صحيح أن يقلد أحد المذاهب الأربعة المعروفة وليس من بينها مذهب الشيعة الإمامية ولا الشيعة الزيدية ، فهل توافون فضيلتكم على هذا الرأي على ما طرأه فتضمنون تقليد مذهب الشيعة الإمامية الاثناعشرية مثلا .

فأجاب فضيلته :

١ - ان الاسلام لا يوجب على أحد من أتباعه اتباع مذهب معين بل نقول : ان لكل مسلم الحق في أن يقلد بادي ذي يد أي مذهب من المذاهب المنقولة نقلا صحيحا والدونة أحكامها في كتبها الخاصة ولمن قلده مذهباً من هذه المذاهب أن ينتقل الى غيره - أي مذهب كان - ولا حرج عليه في شئ من ذلك .

٢ - ان مذهب الجعفرية المعروف بمذهب الشيعة الإمامية الاثناعشرية مذهب يجوز التعمد به شرعا كسائر مذاهب أهل السنة .

فينبغي للمسلمين أن يعرفوا ذلك ، وأن يتخلصوا من العصبية بغير الحق لمذاهب معينة ، فما كان دين الله وما كانت شريعته بتابعة لمذهب ، أو مقصورة على مذهب ، فالكل مجتهدون مقبولون عند الله تعالى يجوز لمن ليس أهلا للفتوى والاجتهاد تقليدهم والعمل بما يقررونه في فقههم ، ولا فرق في ذلك بين العبادات والمعاملات

محمد رشيد

السيد صاحب المساحة العلامة الجليل الأستاذ محمد تقي القمي

السكرتير العام

لجماعة التقريب بين المذاهب الاسلامية

سلام الله عليكم ورحته أما بعد فيسرنى أن أبعث الي مساحتكم بصورة موقع عليها باضائي من الفتوى التي أصدرتها في شأن جواز التعمد بذهب الشيعة الإمامية ، وأجبا أن تحفظوها في سجلات دار التقريب بين المذاهب الاسلامية التي أسبنا معكم في تأجيرها وفضا لله لتخفيف رسالتها .

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله «

شيخ الجامع الأزهر

محمد رشيد